

# APPOLO STUDY CENTRE

## Test - 1 (Feb-2022) IV ANCIENT HISTORY & CULTURE OF INDIA (ANCIENT INDIA)

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### 11<sup>th</sup> History Volume - 1 Lesson 1

#### Early India: From the Beginning to the Indus Civilisation

#### Introduction

India experienced an early development of cultures and civilisations. Since the Old Stone Age, several groups in India had migrated multiple times and made cultural adaptations to diverse eco-zones. Each group evolved its own culture responding to their living experiences in each place, which eventually led to pluralistic beliefs and systems. From a life of foraging through nomadic pastoralism, the settlers in Indus region reached

a matured stage of living in the Bronze Age. This chapter focuses on the history of India from the first settlement of humans in the Stone Age, up to the decline of the Indus Civilisation. It dwells on the Neolithic cultures as well.

## Sources

Archaeological sources form the bedrock of information for us to understand this long span of time in Indian history. They include archaeological sites, geological sediments, animal bones and fossils, stone tools, bone tools, rock paintings and artefacts. There is no written evidence for this period. Although the Harappans used a script, it is yet to be deciphered.

The faunal (animal) and floral (plant) sources are important for understanding the relationship of the Stone Age people with their environment. Floral evidence found in the form of charred seeds, pollens and phytoliths (plant stones) helps us to gain knowledge of farming practiced by Stone Age people.

The human genes also constitute an important source for understanding prehistoric migrations. The mitochondrial DNA (mt-DNA) studies provide information on pre-historic migrations. Scientists are trying to extract ancient DNA from the bones of the pre-historic era to understand human dispersals.

Language is another important source of history. Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman language families have flourished in India. These languages developed and evolved during the various phases of migrations in Indian history.

## Pre-historic India

The period before the development of script is called the pre-historic times. It is also referred to as the Stone Age. When we talk about the Stone Age, we include the entire South Asia, the region covering India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh, as a whole.

Human ancestors are likely to have first evolved in Africa and later migrated to different parts of the world. The earliest human ancestor

species to migrate out of Africa was the Homo erectus. Till the end of the 20th century, the pre-history of India was considered to have begun within the time span of one million years (MYR) ago. But, recent investigations have produced evidence for the presence of human ancestors in India between two million and one million years ago.

Generally, the period before the invention of script is broadly divided into Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Hence, the names of materials that they used (for example, painted grey ware culture or Iron Age culture) or the geographical region (Indus) or the first site to be identified (for example, Acheulian or Harappan) are used to name the cultures.

The earliest age in history is called Old Stone Age or Palaeolithic. This period is divided into

- Lower Palaeolithic culture
- Middle Palaeolithic culture
- Upper Palaeolithic culture.

The period after the Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic) is called the Mesolithic Age. The period that followed the Mesolithic is called the Neolithic Age. This is the age in which animal and plant domestication developed, leading to food production. The classification of these cultures is done on the basis of stratigraphic, chronological and lithic (stone tool) evidence.

### **Lower Palaeolithic Culture.**

The earliest lithic artefacts come from different parts of the Indian subcontinent. During the Lower Palaeolithic cultural phase, human ancestor species of Homo erectus is believed to have lived in India. The

### **Wild and Domestic**

Wild plants and animals grow naturally and independently. When they are domesticated, their lifestyle and physical characteristics (such as self-propagation) change. Consequently, the seeds of domestic plants become smaller in size. In the case of domesticated animals, they lose their ferociousness.

first Palaeolithic tools were identified at the site of Pallavaram near Chennai by Robert Bruce Foote in 1863. He found many prehistoric sites when he extensively surveyed different parts of South India. Since then, numerous Palaeolithic sites have been identified and excavated all over India.

## Lithic Tools

The study of pre-history mainly depends upon lithic tools. Pre-historic sites are identifiable based on the presence of stone tools. Human ancestors made large stone blocks and pebbles and chipped tools out of them, using another strong stone. Hand axes, cleavers, choppers and the like were designed in this way by flaking off the chips.

The tools show well thought-out design and physical symmetry, and convey high quality cognitive (perception) skills and capabilities of pre-historic humans. They used the tools for hunting, butchering and skinning the animals, breaking the bones for bone marrow and to recover tubers and plant foods, and for processing food.

The industries of Palaeolithic cultures are divided into the Early, Middle and Late Acheulian Industries. The early Acheulian tools include polyhedrons, spheroids, hand axes, cleavers and flake tools.

The Acheulian tradition is absent in the Western Ghats, coastal areas and north-eastern India. Heavy rainfall is attributed to its absence. Uncongenial conditions and lack of raw materials might have prevented

### Acheulian and Sohanian

Based on research, two independent cultural traditions of hand axe (Acheulian) and pebble-flake (Sohanian) industries were confirmed in India. Acheulian industry mainly had hand axes and cleavers. The Sohan industry is considered to have used only chopper and chopping tools. The Sohan industry gets its name from the Sohan river valley of Pakistan. These two cultural traditions are not considered distinct any longer. Recent studies argue that there was no independent Sohan tradition as Acheulian tools are found in the Sohan industry as well.

the occupation of these areas. Perhaps there was no necessity for the pre-historic people to move into these areas. These sites are found more in Central India and in south-eastern part of India (near Chennai). These areas receive high rainfall and are therefore endowed with thick green cover and rich resources.

## **Distribution**

Lower Palaeolithic tools are found in most parts of India, except in a few regions of the Ganges valley, southern Tamil Nadu and in the hilly areas of the Western Ghats. Athirampakkam, Pallavaram and Gudiyam near Chennai, Hunsgi valley and Isampur in Karnataka, and Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh are some important Palaeolithic sites where the Acheulian tools are found.

## **Chronology**

Recent research places the beginning of lower Palaeolithic around two million years ago. This culture continued upto 60,000 years ago.

## **Hominin and Animal Fossils**

Unlike Africa, evidence of hominin [immediate ancestor of Homo Sapiens] fossil is rare in India. There is a report of a fossil fragment discovered by Robert Bruce Foote from Athirampakkam. Its whereabouts are not known now. The only well-known hominin fossil of India was found at Hathnora near Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh. The cranium is named Narmada human. A partly preserved hominid skull cap was found in a basal conglomerate deposit in 1982. It is considered to represent the Archaic Homo sapiens. It is the only existing fossil find of human ancestors in India.

Animal fossils are useful to understand the palaeo-environmental context in which people lived. In the Narmada valley, animal fossils of *Elephas namadicus* (giant tusked pre-historic elephant), *Stegodon ganesa* (a giant pre-historic elephant), *Bos namadicus* (wild cattle) and *Equus namadicus* (extinct great horse like animal) have been recovered. Teeth of *Equus*, evidence of water buffalo and nilgai as well as 17 animal hoof prints have been uncovered at Attirampakkam. They suggest an open, wet landscape near the Chennai region in the pre-historic period.

Equus refers to the genus of animals including horses, asses and zebras.

## Way of Life

The people of Lower Palaeolithic culture hunted animals and gathered roots, nuts and fruits. They fed on the flesh and bones of animals killed by predators. They lived in open air, river valleys, caves and rock shelters, as seen from evidence in Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh and Gudiya near Chennai. The pre-historic human ancestors, who belonged to the species of Homo erectus, did not have a complex language culture like us, the Homo sapiens. They may have expressed a few sounds or words and used a sign language. They were intelligent enough to select stones as raw material and used the hammer stones to carefully flake the rocks and design tools.

## Middle Palaeolithic Culture

After about 4,00,000 years BP (Before Present), changes took place in the lithic technology and the species of human ancestors diverged. The species of Homo erectus existed in this period. Some of the Middle Palaeolithic tools are attributed to behavioural modernity. Anatomically modern humans are said to have emerged around 3,00,000 years ago. In India, the Middle Palaeolithic phase was first identified by H.D. Sankalia on the Pravara River at Nevasa. After this discovery, several sites of this period have been identified. Recently, the Middle Palaeolithic of Athirampakkam is dated to be around 3.85-1.72 lakh years BP. Indian Middle Palaeolithics probably may be as old as the African Middle Palaeolithic culture.

## Industries and Tool Types

The tool types of the Middle Palaeolithic period are hand axes, cleavers, choppers, chopping tools, scrapers, borers and points, projectile points or shouldered points, and knives on flakes. Flake industry was predominant in the Middle Palaeolithic period and tools such as scrapers, points and borers were made. Scrapers were used for wood and skin working.

## Chronology

The Middle Palaeolithic culture in India is dated between 3,85,000 and 40,000 BCE. While the African Middle Stone Age is associated with the Homo sapiens, it is associated with the Neanderthals in Europe. No hominin fossil bones of this species have been found in India.

## Distribution

The Middle Palaeolithic sites are found in Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, Yamuna and other river valleys.

## Ways of Life and Main Characteristics

The Middle Palaeolithic people occupied open-air, cave and rock shelter sites. They were hunter-gatherers. The main features of the Indian Middle Palaeolithic period include the following:

- **The tools became smaller.**
- **The decrease in the use of hand axes in relation to other tools.**
- **Use of core preparation techniques in stone tool production.**
- **Use of chert, jasper, chalcedony and quartz as raw materials.**

## Upper Palaeolithic Culture

The cultural phase that followed the Middle Palaeolithic is called Upper Palaeolithic. This period is marked by innovation in tool

An Upper Palaeolithic Shrine An interesting find is of a possible shrine, indicated by a block of sandstone surrounded by a rubble circle, similar to the contemporary shrines. Found at Baghor in Uttar Pradesh, it is the earliest known evidence of a shrine in India.

technology and increased cognitive capability of humans. The modern humans, who first evolved in sub-Saharan Africa, sometime before 300,000 years ago, migrated to and occupied various parts of Asia around 60,000 years ago. They probably replaced the earlier populations. There is a possibility that these new groups were responsible for the Upper Palaeolithic culture of India.

## Lithic Tools and Industries

The lithic industry of the Upper Palaeolithic period is based on blade and bone tool technologies. Microliths (tiny stone tools) were introduced in the Upper Palaeolithic Period and these tools were made using different varieties of silica-rich raw materials. Bone tools and faunal remains have been found in Kurnool caves in Andhra Pradesh.

## Chronology

The Upper Palaeolithic culture is represented in India at several sites. A time bracket of c. 40,000 years to 10,000 years BP is suggested for this period.

## Distribution

The people of this period used caves as well as the open air space for living. Meralbhavi in Karnataka, Kurnool caves and Godavarikhani in Telangana, Baghor I and Baghor III of Son Valley in Madhya Pradesh and Patne in Maharashtra are some of the Upper Palaeolithic sites of India. Sri Lanka has evidence of microliths and hominin fossils. Incised ostrich eggshell, and shell and stone beads have been found at Jwalapuram in Andhra Pradesh, Patne in Maharashtra and Batadomba-Lena and Fa Hien Cave in Sri Lanka.

### Ostrich Egg Shells

Evidence of ostrich has been found in some pre-historic sites of India. The egg shell of this bird had been used as beads and those from Patne have been dated to 25,000 BP. They are found in Bhimbetka and Patne.

## Ways of Life and Main Characteristics

Evidence of art in the Upper Palaeolithic period appears in the form of paintings. Beads and ornaments of this period have also been found. The lithic blade industry advanced in this period. Some of the green colour paintings of Bhimbetka are dated to Upper Palaeolithic period based on style and archaeological evidence.

## Mesolithic Culture

Mesolithic sites are found in most parts of India. They occur in all eco-zones from the coasts to the hills: sand dunes, rock shelters, deltaic regions, lake areas, forested territories, hilly and mountainous areas, rocky terrains and coastal environments.

Mesolithic sites in India are found in Paisra (Bihar), Langhnaj (Gujarat), Baghor II, Chopani Mando, Sarai Nahar Rai, Mahadaha and Damdama (all in Uttar Pradesh), Sankanakallu and Kibbanahalli (Karnataka). Rock shelter sites are found in Lekhania, Baghai Khor, Adamgarh and Bhimbetka.

Coastal sites are seen at Mumbai, teri sites of Thoothukudy in Tamil Nadu and Vishakapatnam, which have microlithic evidence.

### Teri

A coastal landscape caused by sand dunes. These soils may have originated in the Pleistocene epoch of the Quaternary period.

### Climate

After the Ice Age, with the advent of global warming, human groups became highly mobile and began to occupy various ecozones. The monsoon pattern had already emerged. Some regions witnessed higher rainfall. At Didwana in western Rajasthan, fresh water lakes were known to exist between 10,000 and 3500 BP. The animal bones from this period suggest a dry deciduous type of forest during the Mesolithic period.

### Chronology

The date of the Mesolithic culture varies in different parts of the world. This culture is assigned to pre-agricultural times in certain areas. In Levant (Eastern Mediterranean), they are dated between 20,000 and 9500 BCE. In India, Mesolithic cultures appeared around 10,000 BCE. In certain parts of India including Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it continued up to 1000 BCE, till the beginning of the Iron Age. In Sri Lanka, the microliths appeared about 28,500 years BP.

### Economy

Hunting wild animals and gathering plant food and fishing were people's main occupation during this age. Agriculture was not practised in the early stages. At the end of the Mesolithic period, humans domesticated animals and paved the way for the Neolithic way of life. The rock paintings of Central India depict hunting, trapping, fishing and plant food collection.

The faunal evidence from this period shows that people belonging to this period hunted cattle, gaur, buffalo, barasingha, porcupines, sambar, chital, gazelle, hog deer, nilgai, jackal, turtle, fish, wild hare, lizard fox and monitor lizard. Bones of rhinoceros and elephant have also been found. They used spears, bow and arrow and traps. The paintings of Bhimbetka show that various animals were hunted and for this men and women went together.

The people used fire and perhaps roasted food. Domestic animal bones of cattle, sheep, goats, pig and dog have been found at Kanewal, Loteshwar and Ratanpur, and from Adamgarh and Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh sites. Camel bones have been found from Kanewal.

### **Camps and Houses**

The Mesolithic people were highly mobile. They moved in search of animals and plant foods. They made temporary huts and also used caves and rock shelters. Circular huts with postholes and burnt clay lumps bearing reed impressions have been found. Many of caves and shelters feature paintings. Circular huts are seen in rock paintings. The temporary huts were built using perishable materials. Traces of oval and circular huts and possible wattle daub are found in Chopani Mando and Damdama in Uttar Pradesh and Bagor and Tilwara in Rajasthan.

### **Burials**

The Mesolithic people buried the dead, which suggests their beliefs and humane relationships. Human skeletons have been found in Mahadaha, Damdama and Sarai Nahar Rai in Uttar Pradesh. At Mahadaha, a man and a woman were buried together. One burial had an ivory pendant as the grave good.

### **Art**

Art is an integral part of human existence. While evidence of art is found in Europe in large volume, they are found only at a few sites in India. A chert stone used as a core had geometric engravings from Chandravati in Rajasthan, bone objects from Bhimbetka and human tooth engraved with geometric design. Rock paintings are found in the rock shelters of Madhya Pradesh and Central India. They show people hunting, trapping animals and fishing and dancing. Bhimbetka near Bhopal, Raisen and Pachmarhi in Madhya Pradesh and South Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh are some of the sites. Haematite, an iron-rich stone with traces of rubbing, has been found. These people might have decorated themselves with flowers and leaves.

### **Hunter and gathers of a Historical Period**

The hunter and gatherers using microlithic tools continued to live in the later period, even after the development of Neolithic, Iron Age and historical periods. Perhaps they became part of the marginalised communities, when the people who lived in the cities acquired more wealth. Some of the people who live in the forests even today in some remote areas and also in the Andaman region could be considered as those people who prefer to live by hunting and gathering. Many such groups lived in the 19th and 20th century, as recorded in the Edgar Thurston's Castes and Tribes of Southern India. Describing them as primitive is incorrect. They should be considered as people who preferred to live by hunting and gathering. When the Indus Civilisation was in its peak, Tamil Nadu had microlithic hunter-gatherers. The Andhra-Karnataka region had the agro-pastoralists of the Neolithic period.

### **Characteristics of the Mesolithic Cultures**

- **The Mesolithic people lived in semipermanent and temporary settlements.**
- **They occupied caves and open grounds.**
- **They buried the dead.**
- **They had artistic skill.**
- **They were spread over wider geographical regions.**
- **Cultural continuity is noticed in many parts of India from this period.**
- **Their microlithic tools enabled them to hunt smaller animals and birds.**

## Early Neolithic Cultures and the Beginning of Agriculture

The Neolithic period marked the beginning of agriculture and animal domestication. It is an important phase in Indian history. Early evidence of Neolithic culture is found in the Fertile Crescent region of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the Indus region, the Ganges valley of India and also in China. Between 10,000 BCE to 5000 BCE, agriculture emerged in these regions, which led to several cultural developments.

The introduction of domestication of animals and plants resulted in the production and supply of a large quantity of grains and animal food. The fertile soil deposited by the rivers enhanced the growth of agriculture, generating a surplus of grains. Surplus food production played a major role in the rise of early civilisations. Large villages came to exist and pottery developed. Permanent residences were built. Hence, the cultural developments of this period are called Neolithic revolution.

The Neolithic cultures of India are divided into various regional cultures and they flourished in different time periods. In the north-western part of India and Pakistan, it began at a very early date. In north-eastern India, Neolithic cultures appeared at a very late date, around the early historic time.

### The Neolithic Culture of North-Western India

The Neolithic culture of north-western India is the earliest to have evidence of plant and animal domestication in India. Mehrgarh, Rana Ghundai, Sarai Kala and Jalilpur are some of the Neolithic sites. These sites are now situated in Pakistan.

The site of Mehrgarh has produced evidence of early Neolithic times, dating to c. 7000 BCE. Wheat and barley were cultivated and sheep, goat and cattle were domesticated. This culture preceded the Indus Civilisation. The first cultural period (I) of the Neolithic age at Mehrgarh dates from c. 7000 to 5500 BCE. The people belonging to this

### Early Dentistry in the Neolithic Mehrgarh

The human ancestors had knowledge of medicinal herbs and were

capable of taking care of health for survival from the pre-historic times. As their ways of life changed, new diseases appeared and they had to find remedies. From the Neolithic period, people began to eat ground grain and cooked food, which caused dental and other health problems. The earliest evidence for drilling human tooth (of a living person) has been found at Mehrgarh. It is seen as a prelude to dentistry.

age did not use pottery, but cultivated six-row barley, emmer and einkorn wheat, jujube, ilanthai and dates, and also domesticated sheep, goat and cattle. They were semi-nomadic, pastoral groups. They built their houses with mud and buried the dead. They used ornaments of sea shell, limestone, turquoise, lapis lazuli and sandstone.

The period II at Mehrgarh dates from c. 5500 to 4800 BCE and the period III from 4800 to 3500 BCE. There is evidence for pottery during these periods. Terracotta figurines and glazed faience beads have been found. Evidence for ornaments on women has been uncovered. Longdistance trade was practiced, as revealed by Lapis Lazuli, which is available only in Badakshan. The town was abandoned after the rise of mature phase of the Indus Civilisation.

### **The Neolithic Culture of Kashmir**

Neolithic culture in Kashmir region was contemporary to the Harappan civilisation. Burzahom, an important site of this culture, provides evidence for the Megalithic and Early Historic Periods. In this place, people lived in pit houses (about four metres in depth) in order to escape the cold weather. The houses were oval in shape, wide at the bottom and narrow on the top. Postholes used for constructing a thatched structure were found around the pit houses. The Neolithic period of Kashmir had domestic sheep, goat and cultivated plants. The Neolithic people of Burzahom traded with the people of the Harappan Civilisation. They used handmade pottery. They used tools such as stone axes, chisels, adzes, pounders, mace-heads, points and picks. Awls were used for stitching skins into clothes to beat the weather. Scrapers were used for working the skins.

Two phases of Neolithic culture have been identified. They are termed aceramic and ceramic phases. Aceramic phase did not have

evidence of ceramics. Ceramic phase shows evidence for the existence of pottery. In the ceramic phase, people built mud houses. They used copper arrowheads. They also used black ware pottery, beads of agate and carnelian and painted pottery. A burial at this site produced wild dog bone and antler horn. An engraving of a hunting scene is depicted on a stone here with dog and sun.

Seeds of wheat, barley, common pea and lentil have been recovered from the excavations. people domesticated animals include cattle, sheep, goat, pig, dog and fowl. Bones of wild animals such as red deer, Kashmir stag, ibex, bear and wolf suggest that they hunted animals.

There is evidence of menhirs and the use of redware pottery and metal objects in the megalithic culture. The use of lentil suggests that contacts had been established with Central Asia. These people had interactions with Harappan Civilisation.

### **The Neolithic Culture of Ganges Valley and Central India**

In the Ganges Valley, and in Central India Neolithic sites are found at Lehuradeva, and Chopani Munda. The site of Lehuradeva has produced early evidence of rice cultivation dated to c. 6500 BCE.

These sites are characterised by cord-marked pottery. Koldiwa, Chirand, Senuwar and Mahagara are important Neolithic sites in this region. These sites also have evidence of pottery and plant and animal domestication.

Evidence for the cultivation of hulled and six-rowed barley, several types of wheat, rice, pea, green gram, and gram/chicken pea, mustard, flax/linseed and jackfruit have been found at the sites of Central India. Sheep, goat and cattle bones have been found besides bones of wild animals. The Neolithic people used a type of pottery with cord impression on the surfaces. They used microliths, bone and antler tools and terracotta objects. These sites perhaps flourished till about the middle of the second millennium BCE.

### **The Neolithic Culture of Eastern India**

The Neolithic sites are found at many sites in Bihar and West Bengal. Birbhanpur and Chirand are some of the prominent Neolithic sites in this region along with Kuchai, Golbaisasan and Sankarjang. These cultures show similarities with the Neolithic complexes of east and Southeast Asia. Pointed butt celts, chisel and shouldered axes have been found in the region from the Neolithic era.

### **Neolithic Culture of South India**

The Neolithic cultures of South India have been found mainly in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and the north-western part of Tamil Nadu. These sites have ash mounds in the centre with settlements around them. More than 200 Neolithic sites have been identified as part of the Neolithic complex. These sites are found near the granite hills with water sources. These sites have been spotted in the river valleys of Godavari, Krishna, Pennaru, Tungabhadra and Kaveri. Sanganakallu, Tekkalakota, Brahmagiri, Maski, Piklihal, Watkal, Hemmige and Hallur in Karnataka, Nagarjunakonda, Ramapuram and Veerapuram in Andhra Pradesh and Paiyyampalli in Tamil Nadu are the major Neolithic sites in South India.

Some early Neolithic sites have ash mounds. Utnur and Palvoy in Andhra Pradesh and Kodekal, Kupgal and Budihal in Karnataka feature ash mound sites. Soft ash and decomposed cow dung layers are also found at this site. The evidence of habitation in the form of houses and burials are found around the ash mounds.

### **Neolithic Culture of North-eastern India**

In north-eastern India, Neolithic culture appears at to a very late period. The Neolithic cultures of north-eastern India generally date from 2500-1500 BCE or even later. Shouldered axes and splayed celts have been found at the sites in Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Daojali Hading and Sarutaru are the Neolithic sites in the Assam region. This region bears evidence for shifting cultivation. Cultivation of yams and taro, building stone and wooden memorials for the dead, and the presence of Austro-Asiatic languages are the marked features of this region, which shows cultural similarities with South-east Asia.

### **The Indus Civilisation**

The Indus Civilisation represents the first phase of urbanisation in India. While the civilisation was in its peak, several cultures, namely, Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures that we discussed earlier in the chapter, prevailed in other parts of India.

### **Nomenclature, Phases and Chronology.**

The civilisation that appeared in the northwestern part of India and Pakistan in third millennium BCE is collectively called the Indus Civilisation. Since Harappa was the first site to be identified in this civilisation, it is also known as Harappan Civilisation. This civilisation did not appear all of a sudden. The beginnings of the Neolithic villages in this region go back to about 7000 BCE at the Neolithic site of Mehrgarh. Harappan culture is divided into various phases:

**Early Harappan 3000–2600 BCE**

**Mature Harappan 2600–1900 BCE**

**Late Harappan 1900–1700 BCE**

The urban phase was prevalent in the mature Harappan period and began to decline afterwards.

The Indus valley site of Harappa was first visited by Charles Mason in 1826, and Amri by Alexander Burnes in 1831. The site of Harappa was destroyed for laying the railway line from Lahore to Multan. The seal from this site reached Alexander Cunningham, the first surveyor of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Alexander Cunningham visited the site in 1853, 1856 and 1875. But the importance of the site and the associated civilisation were not realised until Sir John Marshal took over as the Director General of ASI and initiated research at the site.

Sir John Marshal played an important role in the development of archaeology in India. Later in the 1940s, Mortimer Wheeler excavated the Harappan sites. After the partition of the Indian subcontinent, many of the Harappan sites went to Pakistan and thus archaeologists were keen to trace the Harappan sites on the Indian side. Kalibangan, Lothal, Rakhi Garhi and Dholavira are the Indian sites that have been since excavated. The explorations and excavations conducted after the 1950s have helped to understand the Harappan Civilisation and its nature.

## Geographical Area and the Settlements

The Indus Civilisation and the contemporary cultures covered nearly 1.5 million sq. km area in India and Pakistan. The settlements of Sutkagen-dor in the west on the Pakistan- Iran border; Shortugai (Afghanistan) in the north; Alamgirpur (Uttar Pradesh, India) in the east and Daimabad (Maharashtra, India) in the south are the boundaries of this civilisation. Its core area was in the regions of Pakistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana.

## The Early Beginnings

The Indus region (Mehrgarh) is one of the areas of the world where agriculture and animal domestication began very early. We do not know if there is any continuity between the Neolithic cultures of the Indus region and the later urban civilisation. The early Harappan phase saw the development of villages and towns in the entire region. In the Mature Harappan phase, urban centres developed.

## Planned Towns

Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan), Mohenjo-Daro (Sindh, Pakistan), Dholavira, Lothal, and Surkotada (Gujarat, India), Kalibangan and anawali (Rajasthan, India), and Rakhigarhi (Haryana, India) are the major cities in the Harappan period. Fortification, wellplanned streets and lanes and drainages are noticed in the Harappan towns. A civic authority perhaps controlled the planning of the towns. The Harappans used baked and unbaked bricks, and stones for construction. The towns had a grid pattern and drainages were systematically built. The houses were built of mud bricks while the drainages were built with burnt bricks. Houses had more than one floor.

The site of Mohenjo-Daro had a planned town, built on a platform. It has two distinct areas. One is identified as a citadel and another as the lower town. The houses had bathrooms paved with burnt bricks and proper drains. Some houses had stairs indicating the existence of an upper floor. The houses had multiple rooms. Many of the houses had a central courtyard with rooms all around.

The citadel area had important residential structures that were either used by the public or select residents.

In Mohenjo-Daro, a building has been identified as a warehouse.

The Great Bath is a tank situated within a courtyard. The corridors were present on all four sides and stairs are seen on the northern and southern sides. It was well paved with several adjacent rooms. Some structures are identified as granary. The bricks were laid watertight with gypsum mortar. It had drainage. It is associated with a ritual bath.

The structures identified as granary or Great Bath should be seen as archaeologists' interpretations.

### **Subsistence and Economic Production**

Agriculture was an important source of subsistence for the Harappans. The Harappans cultivated diverse crops such as wheat, barley, lentil, chickpea, sesame and various millets. Agricultural surplus was an important stimulus for a number of developments. They adopted a double cropping system.

The Harappans used ploughs. They perhaps ploughed the land and then sowed the seeds. Ploughed fields have been found at Kalibangan. They used both canal and well irrigation.

Archaeobotanists study ancient agriculture, and human and environmental relationships.

### **Animal Domestication**

Pastoralism was also practised by the Harappans. They domesticated sheep, goat and fowl. They had knowledge of various other animals including buffalo, pig and elephant. But horse was not known to them. The Harappan cattle are called Zebu. It is a large breed, often represented in their seals. They also ate fish and birds. Evidence of boar, deer and gharial has been found at the Harappan sites.

### **Craft Production**

Craft production was an important part of the Harappan economy. Bead and ornament making, shell bangle making and metalworking were the major crafts. They made beads and ornaments out of carnelian, jasper, crystal, and steatite, metals like copper, bronze and gold and shell, faience and terracotta or burnt clay. The beads were made in innumerable designs and decorations. They were exported to Mesopotamia and the evidence for such exported artefacts have been found from the excavations in Mesopotamian sites.

Certain Harappan sites specialised in the production of certain craft materials. The following table present

Material	Site or Source
Shell	Nageshwar and Balakot
Lapis lazuli	Shortughai
Carnelian	Lothal
Steatite	South Rajasthan
Copper	Rajasthan and Oman

### Pottery

The Harappans used diverse varieties of pottery for daily use. They use well-fired pottery. Their potteries have a deep red lip and black paintings. The pottery are shaped like dish-on-stands, storage jars, perforated jars, goblets, S-shaped jars, plates, dishes, bowls and pots. The painted motifs, generally noticed on the pottery, are pipal leaves, fish-scale design, intersecting circles, zigzag lines, horizontal bands and geometrical motifs with floral and faunal patterns. The Harappan pottery is wellbaked and fine in decorations.

### Metal, Tools and Weapons

The Harappan civilisation belongs to the Bronze Age civilisation and Harappans knew how to make copper bronze tools. Although they produced bronze implements, they needed various kinds of tools for agriculture and craft production. The Harappans used chert blades, copper objects, and bone and ivory tools. The tools of points, chisels, needles, fishhooks, razors, weighing pans, mirror and antimony rods

were made of copper. The chert blades made out of Rohrichert was used by the Harappans. Their weapons include arrowheads, spearhead, celt and axe. They did not have the knowledge of iron.

### Rohri chert

The chert, a fine grained sedimentary rock, was found in the region of Rohri in Pakistan. It was used by the Harappans for making stone blades and tools.

## Textiles and Ornaments

The Harappans wore clothes and used metal and stone ornaments. They had knowledge of cotton and silk. The image identified as a priest is depicted wearing a shawl-like cloth with flower decorations.

The terracotta images of women are shown wearing different types of ornaments. The image of dancing girl found at Mohenjo- Daro is shown wearing bangles in large numbers up to the upper arm. They made carnelian, copper and gold ornaments. Some of them had etched designs and they exported them to the Mesopotamian world. Faience, stoneware and shell bangles were also used. The ornaments produced were either sold or exchanged as part of the trade activities.

## Trade and Exchange

One of the sources of Harappan economy was trade and exchange activities. Harappans had close trade contacts with the Mesopotamians and also with various cultures of India. The Harappan seals and materials have been found in the Sumerian sites in Oman, Bahrain, and Iraq and Iran. The cuneiform inscriptions mention the trade contacts between Mesopotamia and Harappans. The mention of "Meluhha" in the cuneiform inscriptions refers to the Indus region. A Harappan jar has been found in Oman. Harappan seals, weights, dice and beads are found in Mesopotamia. Carnelian, lapis lazuli, copper, gold and varieties of wood were exported to Mesopotamia. Harappans also interacted with various regions of India and acquired raw materials and processed them.

## Weights and Measures

Harappans had developed proper weights and measures. Since they were involved in commercial transactions, they needed standard measures. Cubical chert weights have been unearthed from Harappan sites. The weights exhibit a binary system. The ratio of weight is doubled as 1:2:4:8:16:32. The small weight measure of 16th ratio weighs 13.63 grams. They also used a measuring scale in which one inch was around 1.75 cm. Weights made of chert were cubical. They used binary numbering system (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, etc.). They might have been used for weighing jewellery and metal.

### **Seals, Sealings and Scripts**

The seals from various media such as steatite, copper, terracotta and ivory are frequently found in the Harappan sites. The Harappan script has not yet been convincingly deciphered. About 5,000 texts have been documented from the Harappan sites. The longest text has about twenty six signs. Some scholars are of the view that it is Dravidian. Seals might have been used as an identity marker on the materials that were transported. They might have indicated the ownership.

### **Arts and Amusement**

The terracotta figurines, the paintings on the pottery, and the bronze images from the Harappan sites suggest the artistic nature of the Harappans. "Priest king" of steatite, dancing girl of copper (both from Mohenjo- Daro), and stonesculptures from Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Dholavira are the important objects of art. Toy carts, rattles, wheels, tops, marbles and hop scotches exhibit the amusement of the Harappan people.

### **Faith and Belief System**

The Indus people worshipped nature. They worshipped the pipal tree. Some of the terracotta figures appear to be mother goddess. Fire altars have been identified at Kalibangan. They buried the dead. Burials were made elaborately and evidence of cremation is also reported. The Harappan burials have pottery, ornaments, jewellery, copper mirrors and beads. These suggest their belief in an afterlife.

### **Polity**

Uniformity in pottery, seals, weights and bricks reveals the existence of a polity. Labour mobilisation may also suggest the existence of a political system. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro might have had a citystate like polity. The uniformity in the cultural materials and measurement units point to a central authority during the Harappan times.

### **Authorship and the Making of Indian Culture**

One school of thought argues that the authors of Harappan Civilisation were speakers of the Dravidian languages. The archaeological evidence shows movement of the Harappans to the east and the south after the decline of their civilisation. Some of the Harappan people could have moved into different parts of India. However, only the decipherment of the script would give us a definite answer.

### **Contemporary Cultures of the Indus Civilisation**

Several groups including pastoral people, farmers and hunter-gatherers lived in the Indus region. The Indus region had villages and large towns. The population of that time was mixed. Innumerable communities of hunters-gatherers, pastoral people and farmers, from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Gujarat to Arunachal Pradesh could have existed during this period. Their history is also equally important, as cultural and ecological knowledge of all these groups contributed to Indian culture.

While the Indus Civilisation was flourishing in the north-western part of India, several cultures were developing in different parts of India. In the southern part of the subcontinent, Kerala and Sri Lanka were given to hunting and gathering. The Harappans who had knowledge of water crafts might have had connections and interactions with South India, but no clear archaeological evidence on this is available. The northern part of South India, i.e. the Karnataka and Andhra region, had Neolithic cultures, engaged in pastoralism and plough agriculture. Similarly, the Chalcolithic cultures were prevalent in Deccan and western India, while Neolithic cultures permeated northern India including Kashmir, Ganges valley and central and eastern India. Thus India was a cultural mosaic during the time of the Harappans.

### **Decline**

The Indus Valley Civilisation declined from about 1900 BCE. Changes in climate, decline of the trade with the Mesopotamia, and the drying of the river and water resources due to continuous drought are some of the reasons attributed by historians for the decline. Invasions, floods and shifting of the river course are also cited as reasons for the ruin of Indus civilisation. In course of time, the people shifted to the southern and eastern directions from the Indus region.

## Indus Civilisation and Tamil Civilisation

- The Indus Civilisation represents the first urbanisation of Indian history. The origin and authorship of the Indus Civilisation are keenly debated historical questions. The Indus script has not yet been conclusively deciphered and hence the authorship is not certain. The graffiti found on the megalithic burial pots of South India and the place names presented are cited to establish the relationship between Indus and Tamil cultures.
- The archaeological evidence points to several groups of people living in Tamil Nadu and South India continuously from the Mesolithic period. One cannot rule out the migration of a few groups from the Indus region. More research is necessary before arriving at any definite conclusion.
- The towns of ancient Tamizhagam such as Arikamedu, Keezhadi and Uraiyur that flourished are part of the second urbanisation of India and these towns are quite different from the Indus cities.

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## Unit - 2

### Early India: The Chalcolithic, Megalithic, Iron Age and Vedic Cultures

#### Introduction

- A conventional view of the timeline of Indian history would simply shift its themes from the Indus Civilization through the Vedic Culture to the Age of the Mahajanapadas. But, if we consider the time after the decline of the Indus Civilization, covering from c. 2000 BCE to 600 BCE and the space stretching from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, it is clear that diverse cultures and people who spoke different languages lived in ancient India. This chapter focuses on the Late Harappan, Chalcolithic, Iron Age and Vedic Cultures and the Aryans, except for the Indus Civilization which was covered in the previous lesson. Essentially, it deals with the history of India from about 3000 BCE, up to the emergence of the Mahajanapadas, with a focus on social and economic changes.

#### Sources

- The history of India, after the decline of the Indus Civilization around 1900 BCE, is characterised by the presence of nomadic microlith-using hunter-gatherers and pastoral, semi-sedentary and sedentary agro-pastoral communities of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Iron Ages and Vedic Cultures. We have two main types of sources for this long span of time (c. 3000 to 600 BCE) in Indian history. One source is the archaeological sites and material culture including pottery, plant remains and metal objects. The other is Vedic literature. There are no written documents for this period, since the Vedic texts were transmitted orally. At this point of time, people had not developed a script in India, except the symbols of the Indus script which are yet to be deciphered. Correlating the archaeological cultures and the information related to various groups of people from the Vedic texts is not an easy task. There are various theories on the identity of the originators of the Indus Civilization, and various other archaeological

cultures. We are dealing with diverse cultures and communities with different modes of living in this space-time unit.

- The Early Vedic culture is correlated with some of the Chalcolithic cultures of India, while the Later Vedic culture is correlated with the Painted Grey Ware Culture of the Iron Age in North India.
- Unlike the age of Indus Civilization, when the urban sites and farming cultures were in a limited area, we notice cultural, agricultural and technological expansion and developments in many parts of India in this period accompanied by the growth of craft production and population. A strong cultural foundation was laid across India during this period, which finally culminated in the Early Historic period. The extensive foundations for the village settlements of India were laid during this period.

### Literature of the Vedic Age

- The Vedas (*Vid* = to know, *Vidya*) are one of the earliest known texts to have been composed in India. The language of the Vedas is described as Vedic Sanskrit. The Vedas are four: *Rig* is the oldest, and the others being *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*. The Vedic texts were memorized and orally transmitted by Brahmins from generation to generation. They were written down in the later period, after the introduction of writing. The earliest known written manuscripts of the Vedas date to the 10-11th century CE. They contain information about the polity, society, religion and philosophy, and hence they are a source for writing history
- The main collections of Vedic hymns are called *samhitas*. The *Rig Vedicsamhita* is the earliest text. The *Rig Veda* is dated to between 1500 and 1000 BCE. The *Rig Veda* contains 10 books. Books 2 to 7 are the earliest and the Books 1, 8, 9 and 10 are assigned to a later period. *Samhitas* are ritualistic texts, and they explain the social and religious importance of rituals. Each *samhita* has added texts called *brahmanas*, which have commentaries on the hymns and rituals. Each *brahmana* has an *aranyaka* (forest text) and an *upanishad*. The *aranyakas* contain mystical ritual instructions to be undertaken in secret by the sages who live in the forests. *Upanishads* deal with philosophical enquiries.

- The *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva Vedas* are dated to a slightly later period. The *samhitas* of the *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva Vedas*, and the *brahmanas*, *aranyakas* and *upanishads* attached to the Vedas are the Late Vedic texts. The *Sama Veda* was composed in musical notes which are considered to constitute the basis of Indian music. The *Yajur Veda* has rituals and hymns. The *Atharva Veda* contains charms and magical spells.

### **Pre-Aryan, Late Harappan and Chalcolithic Cultures of India**

- The Pre-Harappan cultures are the earliest Chalcolithic cultures of India, and they are found in the time before the beginning of the mature phase of the Harappan culture, and continued to exist in the later period. The other Chalcolithic cultures of India are more or less contemporary to this phase of Harappan culture and they continued even after its decline. Unlike the mature urban phase of the Harappan civilization, Chalcolithic cultures were pastoral and based on farming, generally rural in nature. They used copper and stone blades and pottery and also low grade iron in the later period. Their settlements were sedentary or semi-sedentary. In the northwestern and western regions of India, the early farming cultures are associated with the Chalcolithic cultures rather than the Neolithic cultures.
- The Chalcolithic people also began to domesticate animals in addition to agriculture. They had cattle, sheep, pigs and goats and buffaloes. Evidence has been found of turtles and fowls in their settlements. The houses were made of stone, mud bricks, mud and perishable wooden materials, and built on a stone foundation. Silos (well prepared pits) meant for storage of grains have also been found. The walls were made with bamboo frames. People used black and red ware and black on red ware pottery. These sites have produced a large quantity of copper objects. They used copper objects such as flat axes, bangles rings, antimony rods, knives, blades, socket-less axes, barbed and tanged arrow heads, choppers and chisels.

### **Ochre Coloured Pottery Ware Culture**

- Ochre Coloured Pottery Ware culture is found in northern India dating to the Chalcolithic period. The OCP pottery has red slip and appears ochre in colour (the ochre colour comes off when the pottery is touched) and hence, it is called Ochre Coloured Pottery. It has black painted

designs. The OCP comes in the form of jars, storage jars, bowls, and basins. The OCP culture dates to 2600- 1200 BCE and is found in the Indo- Gangetic plain and may have had some associations with early Vedic culture.

- The OCP culture is seen as an impoverished Harappan culture and some scholars see it as unrelated to the Harappan culture. The OCP sites produced copper figures and objects and therefore it is also known as “copper hoard culture.” It is a rural culture and has evidence of the cultivation of rice, barley, and legumes. They also had pastoralism with evidence of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, and dogs. The villages had wattle-and-daub houses. They used copper and terracotta ornaments. Animal figurines have also been found.

### **Chalcolithic Cultures of South India**

- The southern part of India has not produced cultural evidence of a fullfledged chalcolithic culture. Perforated and spouted vessels have been found in some sites. Copper bronze tools like chisels and flat axes occur at these sites. Stone tools continued to be used in this area. Black on red ware pottery is found. These people survived through animal rearing and agriculture. Millets, pulses and horse gram were cultivated, and fruits, leaves and tubers were collected.

### **Iron Age in North India**

- The Iron Age in North India coincides with the painted Grey Ware culture. The painted grey ware is dated to from. 1100 to 800 BCE. More than 1000 sites have been identified with painted grey ware pottery in northern India, with a major concentration in the Ganga-Yamuna valley. These ceramics succeeded the Black and Red Ware Culture in the eastern Ganga valley and Central India. The pottery was fine grey in colour with painted geometric designs. The painted grey ware laid the foundation of the early political formations. It correlates with the Kuru-Panchala kingdom known from the Vedic texts. The Painted Grey Ware cultural phase is followed by Northern Black Polished Ware culture (NBPW), which is associated with the Mahajanapada and Mauryan periods. The Painted Grey ware sites reveal the development of agriculture and pastoralism, and the settlements of this period grew in dimension. They show a large scale population increase in the northern

part of India. The Iron Age in North India was coeval with Painted Greyware Culture, and in South India it was associated with Megalithic burial mounds.

### Megalithic/ Iron Age in Tamilnadu

- The burial system followed by the people of Neolithic period continued into the Megalithic period. A circular tomb using big stone slabs built upon the place of burial is known as a megalith. Such megaliths have been found in many parts of Tamilnadu . The urn burial system was another type of practice and is evidenced in Adichanallur (present Thoothukudi district). Black-ware is peculiar to burial sites in Tamilnadu. Interestingly, black-ware is found mostly in burial mounds and not in human habitations. In a majority of urn burials, the use of stone is almost non-existent. However, urn burials are grouped under megalithic because the materials - the pottery, iron objects, beads of semi-precious stones kept in them - are identical to those found in the stone burials.
- The end of Megalithic burial practice is assigned to third-second centuries CE. During this period Brahmi writing akin to Ashokan Brahmi has been discovered in Kodumanal (Erode District). There is also evidence of the megalithic tradition continuing into later centuries. During the Sangam period people still remembered urn burials. The four primitive hero-stones with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, datable to third to second centuries BCE found in the upper part of the Vaigai valley, support the authenticity of the hero stone tradition described in the Sangam Tamil literature in the context of cattle raids. Scholars infer, based on such evidence, that the some of the Sangam poems could be assigned to the early first century BCE or a little earlier. The tradition of erecting hero stones in memory of dead warrior-heroes is considered to be an extension of the menhir type of megalithic tradition. Menhirs, upright monumental stones, and dolmens made of big slabs or boulders are megalithic tombs found in Tamilnadu.

Black and red ware, along with partial human remains and iron objects, were unearthed recently at Vadamalkunda in Krishnagiri, Tamilnadu. A few stone slabs were also found at the site. A centuries-old menhir at Singaripalayam excavated near Kundadam in Tiruppur district points to

the existence of an ancient settlement along the banks of River Uppar.

## Megalithic Sites in Tamilnadu Adichanallur

- Adichanallur, 22 km from Tirunelveli, is located in Thoothukudi district. In 1876, a German ethnologist and naturalist, Andrew Jagor conducted an excavation at Adichanallur. He carried with him samples of backed earthenware, utensils of all sizes and shapes, a considerable number of iron weapons and implements, and great quantities of bones and skulls. These are now housed in a Berlin Museum. Burial Site-Adichanallur The then district Collector of Tirunelveli A.J. Stuart and the famous linguist Bishop Robert Caldwell visited Adichanallur subsequently, found it was a quartz site. Quarrying was immediately banned and archaeological excavation commenced under the supervision of Alexander Rea. Rea prepared a comprehensive account of his findings, illustrated by photographs, and was published in the annual report of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), 1902-03. Nearly a hundred years later, the ASI carried out another excavation and brought out more information. The report is awaited.

The burial mound at Adichanallur yielded the following:

- **Urns and pottery of various kinds in large numbers.**
- **Iron implements, including spades and weapons (daggers, swords, spears and arrows). Some stone beads and a few gold ornaments**
- **Bronze objects representing the domestic animals such as buffalo, goat or sheep and cock, and wild animals like tiger, antelope and elephant.**
- **Traces of cloth and wood.**
- The engraving of animals on bronze and on ornaments is indicative of the primitive workmanship. (Caldwell could stumble upon a copper bangle during his inspection at the site.) The people were evidently skilful in moulding pottery, in casting or brassing metals, in weaving and in working stone and wood. The presence of husks of rice and millet indicates domestication of these grains. Iron weapons were used

for both war, and for animal sacrifices. The discovery of sacrificial implements prompted Caldwell to conclude that the people of Adichanallur were not adherents of Vedic religion.

### **Paiyampalli**

- Paiyampalli is a village in Tirupathur taluk, Vellore district. The Archaeological Survey of India carried out an excavation in the 1960s and unearthed black and red ware pottery in this megalithic site. A large number of urn burials were also found in this region. The date of this culture, based on radio carbon dating, is 1000 BCE.

### **Kodumanal**

- Kodumanal, 40 km from Erode, is located on the northern bank of Noyyal river, a tributary of the Cauvery. A series of excavations were carried out during the 1980s and 1990s. The most recent was in 2012. In habitation trenches and megalithic burials of Kodumanal, the goods unearthed included pots, weapons, tools, ornaments, and beads, particularly carnelian, akin to those found at Mohenjodaro. Since carnelian was not known to this region in ancient times, it may have been brought to Kodumanal from outside.
- In the Sangam work Pathitrupathu, a place called Kodumanam belonging to the Chera king, is praised for gemstones and therefore some archaeologists argue that Kodumanam is the ancient name of Kodumanal. Hoards of Roman coins have been discovered and it is believed that this is a result of the export of gemstones to the Roman world, resulting in return a huge inflow of gold from the latter into the region. Conches and bangles, remnants of furnaces, a kiln floor filled with ash soot, and potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions are other finds in the site. Pit burials, urn burials and chamber tombs of different types excavated at Kodumanal and the names inscribed on potsherds may indicate habitation by multi-ethnic groups. The graffiti etched on potsherds give a lot of information about the people and their activities. A menhir found at a burial site is assigned to the Megalithic period. According to Y. Subbarayalu, Kodumanal is coeval the Sangam anthologies (second century BCE to second century CE).

## The Aryans and Rig Vedic Society

- So far we have considered the Late Harappan Cultures, Chalcolithic and Painted Grey ware Cultures. Let us now turn to the evidence from the Vedic texts, which, unlike the archaeological evidence that tell us only about the material culture, throw light on the ethnic and cultural identities of people. Because of the references found in the Vedas, the Aryan question is one of the important issues concerning the early history of India.

## The Aryans

- The attempt to write a history of India began when the Europeans colonised India. They compiled the archaeological and literary sources, as well as oral traditions. Certain notions, for example the Aryans, were Developed and used in the colonial context, when many parts of Asia and Africa were under the influence of the European powers. The concept of race was widely prevalent at that time to classify and categorize people. Some of the views reflect the racist ideas of colonial times. The Aryan theory was linked to the blue-eyed white race and its connection with Europeans. Nazis used the Aryan concept for their political agenda, ultimately leading to the Holocaust. The recent studies have established that the word Aryan does not denote race, but only refers to the original speakers of Indo-Aryan languages.

Philologists study language in oral and written forms of languages based on historical evidence. They use etymology, comparative linguistics, literary criticism, history, and linguistics in their studies.

- Though the *Rig Veda* is in Sanskrit, about 300 words of the Munda and Dravidian languages have been identified in it, suggesting cultural mix with earlier inhabitants. From the Vedas it is evident that Aryans used domesticated horses and chariots. Their chariots had spoked wheels and they used bows and arrows. They practiced agriculture and pastoralism. They buried and also cremated the dead. The cult of fire and the use of soma drink were prevalent among the speakers of the Indo- Aryan languages.

- The home of Indo-Europeans and Indo-Aryans is still a matter of debate. Many scholars are of the view that the Aryans came to India as migrants from Central Asia. It is also believed that several waves of Indo- Aryan migration might have happened. There are several factors which support this hypothesis. The traits of the culture of Aryans cover Eastern Europe and Central Asia which is geographically interlinked with India and West Asia and Europe. One of the accepted areas of the Aryan home is Eastern Europe Central Asia, north of the Black Sea. The Bactria-Margina Archaeological Complex is closely related to Aryan culture dated to 1900 BCE-1500 BCE. Ceramics of South Central Asian archaeological sites resemble those found in the Swat valley.
- References to the names of Indo- Europeans languages are found in an inscription dated to 2200 BCE discovered in modern Iraq. Anatolian inscriptions of 1900-1700 BCE and Kassite inscriptions of 1600 BCE (Iraq) and Mittani inscriptions of 1400 BCE (Syria), Bhogaz Goi inscriptions referring to names similar to the Vedic gods (1400 BCE) have the common features of the Indo-European languages, but no such inscriptions are found in India.
- The term *asva* and several other terms in Rig Veda have common roots in various Indo-Aryan languages. In the *Rig Veda*, the term *asva* (horse) occurs 215 times and *vrishabha* (bull) 170 times. Tiger and rhinoceros, which are tropical animals, are not mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. There is no trace of the urban way of life in the *Rig Veda*. Hence, the identity of Aryans is not correlated with the Harappan culture, where there is no evidence for horse. Nowadays, DNA studies are also used for understanding ancient migrations. M17 a genetic marker (DNA) is said to have been found among the speakers of Indo- Europeans.

### Rig Vedic Culture

- Rig Vedic Samhita is the earliest text that relates to the Early Vedic period. The Early Vedic culture is placed between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE. The political, social and economic aspects of life of this period are reflected in the Rig Vedic hymns.

## Geography

- In the Indian subcontinent, the early Aryans lived in the area of eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan, Punjab and fringes of Western Uttar Pradesh.

## Dasas and Dasyus

- The Rig Vedas speak about not only the Aryans, but also about the non-Aryan people, whom the Aryans encountered in India. When the Rig Vedic people moved into India they came into conflict with people whom they referred to as Dasyus or Dasas. Evidently the Aryans differentiated themselves from the dark native people who had different cultural practices, and sought to maintain their distinction. The Rig Veda has references to several other groups. Simyu and Kikata are grouped with the *dasyus*. Sambara son of Kulitara is mentioned as a chief with 90 forts or settlements. Varchin was another chief with many troops. The *Rig Veda* mentions the defeat of a chief called Sambara by Divodasa of the Bharata clan.

## Polity and Political Clashes

- The concept of polity developed in the Rig Vedic time. Various units of habitation and divisions such as the *janas*, *vis*, *gana*, *grama* and *kula* are referred to in the *Rig Veda*. The Vedas speak about the Aryans and their enemies and the battles they fought with them. The battles were fought more for cattle and material wealth and the war booty acquired was shared. They not only fought with the non-Aryans, but also fought among themselves. They invoked the support of the gods in their battles. They strongly believed that prayers, sacrifices and rituals could offer support in their mundane life. The god Indra is called *Purandara*, which means destroyer of settlements, which were perhaps fenced or planned townships.

The term Jana means tribe

- The Bharatas and Tritsu were the ruling Aryan clans who were supported by Vasishta, the priest. The region of India was named Bharata Varsha after the tribe of Bharatas. The Bharata clan was opposed by ten chiefs and five out of them were Aryans. This battle was

known as the Battle of Ten Kings. The battle took place on the banks of the river Paurushni, identified with the river Ravi. In this battle, Sudas won and he became important leading to the dominance of Bharata clan. The Purus were one of the defeated clans. The Purus and Bharatas formed an alliance and later they formed Kuru clan. Later the Kurus allied with Panchalas and established their control over the Upper Ganga Valley.

## Social Divisions

- The Vedic people distinguished themselves from the non-Aryan people. Varna was the term used by Aryans to refer to colour and category. The *Rig Veda* refers to *Arya varna* and *Dasa varna*. The Dasas and Dasyus were conquered and treated as slaves. They came to be considered sudras in the later period. Social classes were classified as warriors, priests and common people. Sudras as a category of people appeared at the end of the *Rig Vedic* period. Slavery was common and slaves were given as gifts to the priests, but there is no reference to wage labour. Horse-drawn chariots and bronze objects were possessed by a few, suggesting social distinction. Vedic society was largely egalitarian initially, and social divisions emerged later. According to the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig Veda* the various varnas emerged thus: Brahmanas from the mouth, the kshatriya from the arms, the vaisya from the thighs and the sudra from the feet of *Purusha*, when he was sacrificed. These social divisions are considered to have arisen towards the end of the early Vedic period. Various professional groups such as warriors, priests, cattle-keepers, farmers, barbers are also mentioned. *Panis* were itinerary traders or perhaps caravan traders. *Panis* are also seen as enemies in some verses.

## Tribe and Family

- Kinship was the basis of the social structure of Rig Vedic society. People were identified with specific clans and the clans formed the tribe or *jana*. The term *jana* occurs in the *Rig Veda* 21 times but *janapada* does occur even once. The term *vis*, which refers to the common people, occurs 170 times and they lived in *gramas* (villages). The family (*griha*) was the main social unit within the tribe. It was headed by the *grihapati* and his wife was known as *sapatni*. And the family at that point of time was perhaps a joint family.

## Women

- Women had a respectable position but it is not possible to generalise about this. Society was essentially patriarchal with a preference for male children and cattle. The birth of a son was preferred perhaps because of the martial nature of the society, which required male members for their clashes to establish do over the territories. Having ten sons was considered as a blessing. Women attended assemblies and offered sacrifices. Marriage was common but primitive were also continued. Polyandry seems to have existed, and widow remarriage was also known. People married at the age of 16-17, according to scholars, and there is little evidence of child marriage.

## Economy: Agriculture

- Archaeological evidence points to the development of agriculture among the Rig Vedic people. The ploughshare is mentioned in the Rig Vedas. The field was known as *kshetra* and the term *krishi* referred to ploughing. The terms *langla* and *sura* referred to plough and the term *sita* meant the furrow created by ploughing. Water for irrigation was probably drawn from wells by cattedriven water-lifts using pulleys. They had knowledge of different seasons, sowing, harvesting and thrashing. They cultivated barley (*yavam*) and wheat (*godhuma*).

## Pastoralism

- Cattle rearing was an important economic activity for the Aryans, although they practiced agriculture. Cattle were considered wealth. The term for war in the Rig Veda was *gavishthi* which means search for cows (which is the contemporary term (*goshti*) for factions as well). The donations to the priests were mainly cows and women slaves but not land, which reveals the importance of pastoralism. There was no private property in land.

## Craft Production

- The Rig Veda mentions artisans such as carpenters, chariot-makers, weavers and leather-workers. Copper metallurgy was one of the

important developments of this period. The term *ayas* in the Rig Veda refers to copper and bronze. *minance Karmara*, smith, is mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. Likewise, there are references to *siri* or yarn, indicating spinning which was done by women and to carpenters, *takshan*. Weaving of clothes of wool is also referred to and obviously it was necessary in the cold weather. Some of the crafts were fulltime crafts, involving specialists.

### Trade, Exchange and Redistribution

- Trading activities were limited though traders were present during the Early Vedic period. *Panis* are referred to as traders and they were perhaps caravan traders. The word *pan* means barter, which was a mode of exchange. *Nishka* was a gold or silver ornament used in barter. A priest received 100 horses and 100 *nishka* as fee for sacrifices. The *danas* and *dakshinas* offered to people were means of redistributing resources. The *dakshina* was both a fee for a specific service and also a means of distributing wealth. The distribution of cows helped spread pastoral activities and economic production.

### Transport

- Bullock carts, horses and horse-drawn chariots were used for transport. There are references to the sea (*samudra*) and boats (*nau*). Boats driven by 100 oars are mentioned.

### Polity and Administration

- The polity of the Rig Vedic period was that of a tribal society. The chief of the tribe was the main political head and he was called *rajan*. The kings lived in multipillared palaces. They offered gifts of cattle, chariots and horse ornaments and gold to the priests. *Rajan* was a hereditary chief. He was perhaps elected by the assembly called *samiti*. The main duty of the king was to protect the tribe. He protected wealth, fought wars, and offered prayers on behalf of gods. The king had authority over the territory and people.
- Vedic society was militaristic. Bows, daggers, axes and lances were the main weapons of war. Tributes and booty collected from war were redistributed by the king. There are also references to gift of *dasas* or

slaves. The king Trasadasyu, the chief of the Purus, gave away 50 women as a gift. The chief was known as *gopa* or *gopati* which means, chief of cattle.

- The assemblies called *sabha*, *samiti*, *vidhata* and *gana* are mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. *Sabha* was the assembly of elders or the elites, *samiti* was an assembly of people, and *vidhata* was the assembly of tribe. They performed military and religious functions. Women attended the *sabhas* and *vidhatas*. The king sought the support of the *samiti* and *sabha* for his activities. There are debates about the exact nature of these assemblies and functions. Most of our understanding of the conditions of Vedic society depends upon the interpretations of various terms.
- Sometimes it is hard to reconstruct the original meaning. *The purohita* or priest offered advice to the king. Vedic priests advised the kings, inspired them and praised their deeds. In turn they received rewards for their services. *Senani* was the chief of army. There is no evidence of tax collecting officers. Perhaps people made voluntary contribution called *bali* to the king. Some scholars say that *bali* was an imposed tax, and not voluntary. There is no reference to the administration of justice. The officer who controlled the territory was called *Vrajaapati*. He helped the *kulapas* or heads of fighting groups called *gramini*. *Gramini* was the head of the village and fighting

## Vedic Religion and Rituals

- Religion and rituals played an important role in Vedic society. In the *Rig Veda*, the natural forces sun, moon, rivers, mountains and rains were defined as divinities. The religion was naturalistic and polytheistic. Indra was the most important god and he was called Purandara. *Agni* was seen as intermediary between god and people. *Surya* was a god who removed darkness. *Ushas* was the goddess of dawn. *Aditi*, *Prithvi* and *Sinivali* are other goddesses. *Varuna*, the god of water was next in importance. This god was the upholder of natural order. *Soma* was the god of plants and the drink was named after him. *Soma* drink was part of the ritual and the preparation of this intoxicating drink is explained in many hymns. *Maruts* was the god of strength. Interestingly there are few references to *Rudra* or Siva. Rituals

were adopted as a solution to many issues and the problems of day-to-day life and thus the priests had an important role in the society.

### Characteristics of Society

- In the early Vedic period lineage and tribes constituted society, and the king had limited power. The various tribal groups of Aryans and non-Aryans fought to control the territories. Social divisions did not take deep root, although the concept of varna and Aryan identities existed. Pastoralism was predominant and cattle centred clashes were common, although agriculture did play an important role. The archaeological sites suggest different types of craft production including metal, carpentry, pottery and clothes.

### Later Vedic Culture

- The Later Vedic culture is dated to the period between 1000 BCE and 700-600 BCE. The Painted Grey Ware Culture of the Iron Age, which has been identified by archaeologists at many excavated sites, is associated with the Later Vedic culture. This period witnessed political, social, economic complexity and developments.

### The Late Vedic Texts

- The Later Vedic texts were composed after the Rig Veda Samhitas. The Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas were composed after the *Rig Veda*.

### Eastward Expansion of the Aryans

- The Aryan speakers expanded from the Punjab to Western Uttar Pradesh in the Ganga Yamuna doab in the Later Vedic period. The history of ancient India was thus marked by the movement of cultures, and interactions and battles among various groups for territories and resources. It has been suggested that while the Aryans migrated to the region of eastern part of the Ganga valley, the Indo-Iranians migrated from the region of Iran to the region of Punjab. The later Vedic texts speak about the region of Kuru Panchala which falls in the Indo-Gangetic divide and the Upper Ganga Valley. The area mentioned as the southeastern boundary of the Aryans in Rig Veda is listed in *Aitreya Brahmana* as the midland, which indicates the movement of Aryans into

the Ganga valley in the Later Vedic period. Perhaps this expansion was induced by the need for water and land resources, fresh, less occupied territories and population pressures.

- The Kurus, Panchalas, Vashas and Ushinaras are the tribes of this period. References to the Saraswati and Dhristavati rivers occur in the later Vedic texts also. Around 1000 BCE, the Vedic Aryans moved towards Kosala region in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha in North Bihar, where the Vedic people encountered the local people following Chalcolithic material culture. In the Upper Ganga valley, the Vedas acquired Munda words indicating that Munda speaking-people lived in the Ganga valley. The region of Kosala and Videha were the easternmost territories of the Aryan expansion during this period. By the end of the Vedic period Panchala and Videha were Aryanised. The area beyond this region in the east was seen as an alien territory. In the *Atharva Veda*, the people of Anga and Magadha (Bihar) were seen as enemies. Similarly, the Pundras of Bengal and the Andhras were seen as outside the Aryan identity in the *Aitreya Brahmana*. This suggests that these regions were not influenced by Aryan culture. What we gather is that the process of Aryanization gradually spread from the north-west to the south-east mainly into the Ganga Valley.

### Later Vedic Culture and Iron

- Iron was an important metal used for implements in this period. It was called *syama-ayas* or *krishna-ayas* or the dark metal. Iron is believed to have played an important role in the conversion of the forests of the Ganga Valley into agricultural lands. By the end of Vedic period, the knowledge of iron had reached eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha. Earlier it was believed that iron originated around 700 BCE, but recent research dates the beginning of iron to around 1200 BCE or even earlier. The early views gave excessive emphasis to iron to the colonization of the Ganga Valley, but new scholarship argues that iron was not the only factor behind the expansion of the population.

### Settlements and territories

- With the intensification of agriculture, the Later Vedic people led a settled life leading to formation of territorial units. The term *janapada*, referring to territory, is found in the *Brahmanas* dated to ca. 800 BCE.

There are more than 1000 sites of painted Grey Ware culture in this area, suggesting that new settlements came up and the Upper Ganga Valley was densely populated. People lived either in mud-brick houses or houses with wattle and daub walls. The foundations for the towns must have emerged during the later Vedic period. This was a period of intense interactions. The term *nagara*, referring to commercial quarters, is found in the later Vedic texts. However, large towns appeared only at the end of the Vedic period. The sites of Hastinapura and Kausambi are considered proto urban (urban-like) settlements. The material culture of this period shows more diversity and is an improvement over the Early Vedic period. It can be surmised that there was surplus production to support various classes such as chiefs, princes and priests.

### Political Organization

- In the Early Vedic Age tribal polities were dominant. The king was elected by assemblies. In the Later Vedic period the assemblies became less important and the power of the king increased. The influence of assembly called *vidhata* disappeared, while *samiti* and *sabha* continued in the period. The development of large kingdoms reduced the power of the assemblies. The Rajan was the leader who led the army in the battle. The concepts of *Samrat/Samrajya* developed and they suggest the increase in the power and ambition of the king. The legitimization of kingship became important with the performance of various sacrifices such as *vajapeya* and *rajasuya*. The king developed more control over the territory, people and resources. *Purohita*, which means 'one who places the king in the forefront', became important in the establishment of polity and kingship. Monarchy developed.
- The Rajan became the controller of the social order. *Srauta* sacrifices (sacrifices to achieve some benefits) were carried out to control the resources. The kings presented cows, horses, chariots, gold, clothes and female slaves to the priest. The *Aitreya Brahmana* says that king has to provide 1000 pieces of gold and cattle to the Brahmana who anoints him. Thus the priest became important in the formation of polity and royalty.
- The terms such as *rashtra*, to denote a territory, and *rajya*, meaning sovereign power appeared. The king received voluntary or compulsory

contribution called *bali* from the people (*vis*). Such voluntary contributions became tributes. The Mahabharata offers clues to historical development and is suggestive of the power struggle to control the territories. The *Ramayana* too is suggestive of the Aryan expansion and the encounters with native people in the forest.

- The territorial formations and the development of lineages became stronger during the Later Vedic period. Romila Thapar characterises the developments in the first millennium BCE as the movement from lineage to state. The development of state level political organization emerged only after 500 BCE, and the Later Vedic society was therefore in transition. Several lineages became more territorial and settled in the Later Vedic Age. This is evidenced by the term *janapada*, as we saw earlier. The mid-first millennium BCE had political organisations such as *rajya* and *ganasanghas* (oligarchies) and these institutions developed in the later Vedic period.
- As we saw earlier, the clans of Bharatas and Purus combined to form the Kurus, and along with the Panchalas they occupied the central part of the Ganga-Yamuna doab. Panchala territory was in north-western Uttar Pradesh. The Kuru-Panchalas became one major ethnic group and Hastinapur became their capital. The war between the Kauravas and Pandavas was the theme of the Mahabharata and both of them belonged to the clan of Kurus. Traditions say that Hastinapur was flooded and the Kuru clan moved to Kausambi near Allahabad.
- Sacrifices and rituals gained importance in the Later Vedic society. The king became more independent. Rituals dominated kingship, and this increased the power and influence of the *Rajanyas* and the *Brahmanas*, while distancing the king from the *vis*. The *Asvamedha-yaga* involved letting a horse loose into areas where it moved freely; this was an assertion that the authority of the king was recognized, and a battle ensued when the horse was challenged. The *vajapeya* ritual involved a chariot race. Such innovative modes of rituals helped to increase the power of the king. The formation of social, distinctions became prominent.

## Social Organization

- The social transformation in the Later Vedic Period is much more clearly reflected in the references in the Vedic texts. The social divisions of varna became more established. Teaching was seen as the occupation of the Brahmanas. The wives of Brahmanas and cows were given important status. Rajanya refers to kshatriyas and they were the warriors and rulers who received bali as tax. Striking changes took place in the Varna System. There was an increase in the privileges of the two higher classes, the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas at the cost of the Vaisyas and Sudras. In the PanchavimsaBrahmana, the Kshatriya is placed first, higher than the Brahmana but in the Satapatha Brahmana, the Brahmana is placed higher than Kshatriya. In later Vedic society the importance of the purohita (priest) is stressed, as mentioned in the Vedic texts. The Kshatriyas challenged Brahmanical supremacy and their exclusive privilege of entering the asramas, a regulated four stage life namely brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and sanyasa. The outcome of this was the birth of Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivakam.
- The system of four Varnas had taken deep root and became rigid in the course of time. The popularity of rituals helped the Brahmanas to attain power. Brahmanas became important and the kings supported them, although they had conflicts with Rajanyas, the warrior nobles. The concept of dvija (twice-born) developed and the upanayana (sacred thread) was limited to the upper sections of the society. This ceremony marked the initiation for education. The fourth varna was denied this privilege and the Gayatri mantra could not be recited by the Sudras. Women were also denied upanayana and Gayatri mantra. The king asserted his authority over the three varnas. The Aitreya Brahmana refers to the Brahmana as the seeker of support and he could be removed by king from his position.
- Certain craft groups managed to attain higher status. For example, the Rathakaras, the chariot makers, had the right to wear the sacred thread. Vaisya referred to the common people. They were involved in agriculture, cattle breeding and artisans. Later they became traders. Vaisyas paid tax to the kings. Some social groups were placed in ranking even below the Sudras. However, cross varna marriages did happen.

- The idea of gotra emerged in the later Vedic period. Gotra literally meant 'cowpen' and it referred to a group of people from a common ancestor. Persons of the same *gotra* were considered as brothers and sisters and could not therefore intermarry. Several unilineal descent groups existed with common ancestors. Several related clans formed the tribe.

## Family

- The household became more structured, which means it became more organised. The family was an important social unit. The family was patriarchal with patrilineal descent. The relations within the family were hierarchical. Polygyny (taking many wives) was prevalent. Several household rituals were also developed for the welfare of the family. The married man with his wife was the yajamana.
- The concept of asramas, referring to various stage of life, was not well established in this time. While brahmacharya, grihasta and vanaprastha are mentioned, sanyasa had not developed.

## Women

- The status of women declined as the society became more structured and the patriarchal family became more important. In the family the father was the head. The right of primogeniture was strong. Though women had participated in rituals in the Rig Vedic period, they were excluded in the later Vedic period. Daughters are spoken of as a source of trouble. Their work was to look after the cattle, milking animals and fetching water.

## Economy

- The economic activities of this period were quite diversified. Agriculture, pastoralism, craft production and trade contributed to the economic development.

## Agriculture

- Agricultural activities increased during the Late Vedic period. The Satapatha Brahmana mentions rituals related to ploughing undertaken by the kings. This suggests the importance given to cultivation by the rulers, and the shift to agriculture to support the increasing population. The god Balarama is depicted with a plough, which suggests the importance of cultivation. The Vedic people cultivated barley and rice, and wheat. Wheat was the staple food of Punjab region. The Vedic people began to use rice in the Ganga- Yamuna doab. The use of rice, rather than wheat, is noticed in the Vedic rituals.

## Pastoralism

- Pastoralism continued to be important. Cattle were considered sacred. They became part of exchange and redistribution. The offering of cattle as part of *dakshina* continued. Pastoralism supplemented agriculture.

## Craft Production

- Arts and crafts proliferated during the Later Vedic age and craft specialization took deep roots, when compared to early Vedic period, since more occupational groups are mentioned in this period. Evidence of iron work is noticed from about 1200 BCE. Metals such as copper, tin, gold, bronze and lead are mentioned. These metals were smelted and worked by specialized groups. The copper objects were used for making weapons for war and hunting. Weaving was undertaken by women. Leatherwork, pottery and carpentry were well known. Terms such as *kulala* referring to potters and *urna sutra* referring to wool appear. Bow makers, rope makers, arrow makers, hide dressers, stone breakers, physicians, goldsmiths and astrologers are some of the specialized professional groups mentioned in the texts. Professions such as physicians, washerman, hunters, boatman, astrologer and cook are mentioned. References to the elephant are often found in the Atharva Veda, along with the elephant keeper. The increase in references to such groups indicates a society in transformation. The performers of Vedic sacrifices were also a type of service providers. The priest played an important role in legitimizing the role of king through various rituals. Wealth was measured in terms of cattle and animals. There is a mention

of offerings of 20 camels, 100 gold necklaces, 300 horses and 10,000 cows as dakshina.

## Trade and Exchange

- Trade and exchange had developed in the Later Vedic age. The material culture found in the archaeological sites reveals the movement of commodities and materials. Specialised caravan traders existed. No evidence of coins has been found and therefore barter must have been the medium of exchange. The introduction of coins took place after about 600 BCE.

## Religious Faith and Belief System

- During the Later Vedic period the upper Ganga Doab was the centre of the Aryan culture. This region is described as the land of Kuru-Panchalas. The Vedic gods Agni and Indra lost their importance. Prajapati became the main deity. Rudra, the god of rituals, identified with Siva, became important. The Satapatha Brahmana lists the names of Rudra as Pasunampatih, Sarva, Bhava and Bahikas. Vishnu was conceived as the protector of people. There is no reference to Vishnu's incarnations. Each varna had its own deities.

## Rituals

- Rituals became important in society. It was believed that rituals and sacrifices could solve many problems. The rituals became more complex, required more resources, and took longer time. This indirectly reflects the demand for rituals and the formation of elite groups who could spend more resources on rituals and sacrifices. The correct performance of rituals was stressed. Stress was laid on paying dakshina. Numerous rituals were prescribed for solving all kinds of day to day problems. The resort to rituals and sacrifices as a solution for problems led to the view that material wealth could achieve anything. The ideas in the Upanishads argue against such a view, and stress the importance of realising the atman or inner self. Such degeneration of rituals and the material-oriented nature of the priests created dissension and led to the development of heterodox faiths such as Buddhism and Jainism which emphasized correct human behaviour and discipline.

## Philosophy and Education

- The disciplines of philosophy, literature and science developed in this period. Various branches of learning such as literature, grammar, mathematics, ethics and astronomy developed. Education was limited to males. Teacher-pupil relationship was cultivated through person-oriented training. The development of Vedic texts and the importance given to pronunciation, grammar and oral transmission suggest training in utterances and memorization, as part of the Vedic system of education. The development of various types of texts could be considered as developing solutions for certain mundane issues and a quest for knowledge. Aranyakas are concerned with priests who were in the forests.
- Upanishads (which means to sit nearby) texts with philosophical enquiries, were composed during this period. They were also referred to as *Vedanta*, since they were attached as the last part of the Vedic texts.
- They lay stress on knowledge and the realization of the self or *atman* and *Brahman* (the Supreme Being), meditation, cycle of birth and death. They convey the ideas of karma, and good conduct, self-restraint, mercy and generosity as virtues. Despite the ritual dominated aspects of Vedic life, some seers were in pursuit of knowledge and virtuous conduct.

**Dara Shukoh, the Mughal prince, translated the Upanishads into Persian in 1657, much before the colonial scholars developed any interest in ancient Indian literature.**

## Other aspects of Life

- The Late Vedic culture has evidence of music and fine arts. Music instruments such as lute, flute and drum are referred to in the texts. With the development of cultivation and pastoralism, different types of food and drinks made of grains, milk and ghee and plants were consumed. Evidence of the use of silk and ornaments of metal, gold and copper is found. Metal mirrors were also used. The archaeological sites have uncovered beads and ornaments and the fabrication of glass beads was also developed in the later part of the Vedic period.

## Characteristics of Later Vedic Society

- Later Vedic period is marked by lineages of clans, and small kingdoms developed in many parts of the Ganga valley, leading to the development of the state after 600 BCE. The idea of janapada and rashtra as territorial units had developed. The raja wielded much power and the social divisions began to strike deep roots. The varna system had developed well and Sudra identity became more marked during this period.



## Lesson 3

### Rise of Territorial Kingdoms and New religious Sects

#### Introduction

Aryans began migrating eastwards from about 1000 BCE. As they moved eastwards, they encountered thick forests. Iron played a significant role in the clearing of the forest. The fertile soil of the Gangetic valley and the use of iron ploughshares improved agricultural productivity. Iron also played a big role in improving craft production such as pottery, carpentry and metal working. This in turn paved the way for urbanization. In the meantime, a spirit of scepticism began to pervade questioning every custom and orthodoxy in the belief system in the society leading to rise of new ideas and faiths. Of the several competing alternate beliefs, only Jainism and Buddhism touched the earts of the people. In this lesson we focus on the territorial identities and the new heterodox religious sects that emerged during this period.

#### Impact of Iron Technology: Differing Views

The movement of the Indo-Aryans towards the east was aimed at accessing the iron ore of south Bihar and gaining a near monopoly over it. The iron ore was responsible for the political dominance attained by the state of Magadha. -D.D. Kosambi.

Iron axes and iron ploughs led to the expansion of area under cultivation in the Ganges valley. -R.S. Sharma.

That the use of iron axe and iron plough facilitated clearing of forests and generation of agricultural surplus is a myth because even as late as 16th and 17th centuries the Gangetic plain was heavily forested. -Makkhan Lal.

The forests of Ganges region could have been cleared by means of fire. -A. Ghosh and Niharranjan Ray.

#### Sources

The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana, the dharmasastras, Buddhist texts such as the Tripitakas and Jatakas, Jaina texts and Greek accounts such as that of Arrian constitute literary sources for the period. Archaeological excavations have corroborated the literary evidences.

- Iron objects such as hoes, sickles, knives, hooks, nails, arrowheads, vessels and mirrors confirm the widespread use of iron technology.
- Textiles, beads, pottery, ivory objects, ceramics and glassware and artefacts of other metals are found.
- A large number of terracotta artefacts have also been found. Some of the urban features revealed by excavation of the various cities are as follows:
  - Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), considered luxury-ware and “urban hallmark” have been excavated.
  - The towns were enclosed by a moat and sometimes they were fortified.
  - Houses were built with mud bricks and in some cases with burnt bricks.
  - Facilities such as drains, ring wells and soak-pits are found, confirming the second urbanisation in the Gangetic plains.

### Developments in Gangetic plain

Agriculture improved during this phase of development in the middle Gangetic plains. Wet rice cultivation began to yield more produce of rice than other crops, thus creating the necessary agrarian surplus. Protected irrigation alone was not responsible for the surplus production of rice. Iron technology also played a crucial role. While it is debated whether iron axe aided clearing of the forests or whether iron ploughshare increased agricultural yield, there can be no two opinions that it played a critical role in improving the production of artefacts. The impact of iron technology is better understood if one considers “the technical changes which the introduction of iron implements would have brought about in various craft activities”. Leisure time provided by agricultural surplus and technology led to growth of crafts, which in turn aided vibrant trade.

## Second Urbanisation

Agricultural surplus, the growth of crafts and trade, and the growing population led to the emergence of towns in the Gangetic plains. This is called the second urbanisation in Indian history after the first urbanisation evident in the Harappan Civilization. Different types of towns came into being:

- **Political and administrative centres such as Rajgriha, Shravasti, Kaushambi and Champa**
- **Centres of trade and commerce such as Ujjain and Taxila**
- **Holy centres such as Vaishali.**

## Janapadas to Mahajanapadas

The Later Vedic period (900–600 BCE) witnessed the transition from a tribal polity based on lineage to a territorial state. The janas who migrated eastwards began to settle down in various regions. The loyalty of the people shifted from jana (tribe or clan) to janapada (territory). Janapada literally meant 'the place where the tribe sets its foot upon.' The janapadas fought with one another for resources and political dominance. Some janapadas extended their territories and brought various janas within their jurisdiction. Such janapadas grew into mahajanapadas.

Territory, people, government and sovereignty are important elements of a state. All these elements were found in some of the mahajanapadas. The mahajanapadas represented the emergence of territorial kingdoms that ruled over people (jana). The king headed the government aided by a centralised administration. The king was also the sovereign ruler. The king levied taxes out of agricultural surplus and redistributed it and ensured maintenance of law and order in a hierarchical society by force and coercion. These features marked the formation of state in the Gangetic plains.

## Sixteen Mahajanapadas

According to Puranic, Buddhist and Jaina traditions, there were sixteen mahajanapadas.

- Gandhara
- Kamboja
- Assaka
- Vatsa
- Avanti
- Shurasena
- Chedi
- Malla
- Kuru
- Panchala
- Matsya
- Vajji (Vrijji)
- Anga
- Kasi
- Kosala
- Magadha

The mahajanapadas are classified as gana-sanghas and chiefdoms based on the nature of their polity.

### **Gana-Sanghas**

The proto-states of the Gangetic region were known as janapadas and comprised chiefdoms, republics and small kingdoms. Sixteen mahajanapadas find mention in the early texts. There were also ganasanghas or oligarchies, which were centred on clans. The Vrijjis were one of the best known of the gana-sanghas, and Vaishali was their capital in the Mithila region. These kingdoms did not come under the single decision-making authority of a king but decisions were taken on a collective basis by the heads of the different clans together. There were also smaller kingdoms such as Kosala and Kasi. It is interesting to note that the names of the clans, such as Ikshvaku and Vrishni, as well as these early kingdoms, are all mentioned in the two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata.

### **Monarchies or Kingdoms**

The mahajanapadas on the Gangetic plains were all monarchies. Vedic orthodoxy was an established practice in these kingdoms. The

priestly class enjoyed a preeminent status in the mahajanapadas unlike in the gana-sanghas. The kingdoms were governed by kings and the administration was centralised. The brahman priests provided legitimacy to the king through various rituals. The kingship was hereditary and the succession was in most cases based on the law of primogeniture. The king was assisted by councils called parishad and sabha. The councils were advisory in nature. The king appropriated the agricultural surplus through land revenue apart from a few other taxes. Bali was a tax imposed based on the area of cultivable land. Bhaga was obtained as a share of the produce. Kara and Shulka were some of the other taxes collected during this period. Thus the king raised revenue through taxes to maintain an elaborate administrative structure and an army.

The richer landowners were called grihapatis. These landowners employed labourers called dasas or karmakaras. The smaller landowners were known as kassakas or krishakas. The society was stratified on the basis of varna. It emerged as a marker of status. Cultivators and artisans were identified as the shudras. A new social category that emerged during this period was placed below the shudras in the social hierarchy and considered untouchables. They were forced to live on the fringes of the settlements and subsisted on hunting and gathering their food. They were marginalised and given only menial jobs as urbanisation was on the rise. They had their own language, which was different from that spoken by the Indo-Aryans.

### **Emergence of Heterodox Thinkers**

In the sixth and fifth centuries before the Common Era, north India underwent a remarkable intellectual awakening that profoundly impacted India and influenced its culture in subsequent millennia as well. The impact also swept across South Asia. This awakening was the outcome of questioning the existing philosophy by a host of heterodox thinkers. Gosala, Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Ajita Kesakambalin and other thinkers renounced the world and wandered across the Gangetic plains, contemplating and reflecting on the social and cultural scenario of their times. It was not uncommon to see ascetics crisscrossing the Gangetic plains, propounding new ideas. The teachings of these ascetics addressed the needs of a rapidly changing society, which saw the emergence of new polity, the coming into being of urban centres, development of crafts, and an increase in long-distance trade. These thinkers questioned the Vedic

ideas of soul, mind and body, thereby paving the way for the rise of new religious sects. Even though all of them questioned the Vedic religion, there was rivalry among them. Eventually Buddhism and Jainism emerged as popular faiths.

## Causes of Intellectual Awakening

Sixth century BCE was a period of intense intellectual ferment. There are several reasons for the emergence of this ferment.

1. State formation and the rigidity of the Vedic religion constrained the liberty of thought and action. A revolt against religious practice of following dogmas found its articulation in heterodox sects.

“When attempts are made to smother the intellectual curiosity of people, the mind of man rebels against it, and the inevitable reaction shows itself in an impatience of all formal authority and a wild outbreak of the emotional life long repressed by the discipline of the ceremonial religion”. -Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the philosopher President of India.

2. The emergence of territorial identities accelerated the process of socio-political and economic changes. The elite class, disillusioned with the system in place, began to move in protest towards the heterodox religions blossoming in Magadha or middle Ganges plains.
3. As the Vedic religion was not fully organised, its reach did not permeate into the society and hence people did not find it difficult to follow the newly emerging religious sects.
4. With urbanisation and expansion of trade, new classes of merchants and bankers such as sethis sought higher social status appropriate to their economic status.
5. The grievance of Kshatriyas was that they were denied a staged life of ashramas, a privilege permitted only to Brahmins in the Vedic texts.

## Heterodox Sects

The ascetic wanderers and teachers attracted groups of followers and established various sects. Their philosophies encompassed antinomian (belief that divine grace takes away the necessity of obeying moral law), materialist and fatalist elements. They were heterodox sects that rivalled

the orthodox Vedic religion and many of them came into existence during this time. A Buddhist text, Samannaphala Sutta, while making a reference to Ajatashatru of Magadha meeting Gautama Buddha, mentions that before his meeting, the former had a philosophical discourse with the leaders of the various sects such as Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kachchayana, Sanjaya Belatthiputta and Nigantha Nataputta (Mahavira). They are described as “homeless wanderers” of longstanding (chira-pabbajito), founders of sects (tithakaro) and leaders of their orders (ganachariyo). These sects were the key rivals of Buddhism. Their doctrines were shown unsatisfactory while that of Buddha was acceptable to Ajatashatru.

## Ajivikas

The Ajivikas are believed to have evolved from one of the many ascetic groups of the times. According to Buddhist records, Nanda Vaccha was considered the founder of the Ajivika sect. He was succeeded by Kisa Samkicca, followed by Makkhali Gosala, who was the third and the greatest of the Ajivikas. Gosala met Mahavira for the first time in Nalanda and their friendship lasted for six years. They separated due to doctrinal differences. Gosala then went to Sravasti, where he was patronised by a rich potter woman called Halahala. He believed in the doctrine of reanimation, and criticised and ridiculed the severe austerities of the Vedic ascetics. Being rival sects, both the Buddhist and Jaina accounts portray Gosala as a person of vicious character. Sravasti was the headquarters of the Ajivika sect. The Ajivikas were naked ascetics. The basic principle of the Ajivikas was niyati or fate: they believed that nothing in this world could be changed as everything was predetermined. Everyone has to pass through a series of transmigrations to put an end to pain. According to Ajivikas, there were six inevitable factors in life, viz. gain and loss, joy and sorrow, and life and death. Two other preachers, Purana Kassapa and Pakudha Kacchayana, joined the Ajivikas after the death of Gosala and infused new life to it.

Purana Kassapa held the view that actions did not have any merit or demerit. No evil is caused by torture, hurting and killing others. Similarly, no merit is acquired by generosity, self-control and truthful speech. Humans cannot change anything by action as everything is predetermined. According to him, nonaction is the way out of life. Pakudha Kacchayana believed that the world was made of seven substances that were “unmade,

irreducible, uncreated, barren, stable as a mountain peak, standing firm like a pillar – that do not alter, do not change, do not interfere with one another, are incapable of causing one another pleasure, pain or both pleasure and pain”.

The Ajivikas had rich lay disciples such as potters and bankers. The Ajivika sect spread across the length and breadth of the country, though their influence was much less compared to that of Buddhism and Jainism.

Ajivikas in Tamil Land Manimekalai, Nilakesi and Sivagnanasiddhiyar have references to Ajivika doctrine. Nilakesi’s quest for truth takes her to Buddha and Puranan. Puranan was the leader of the Ajivika sect. The Cholas are known to have levied a tax on the Ajivikas.

Ajita Kesakambalin (Ajita of the Hair Blanket) was a materialist. He believed that every human was made of four primary elements: fire, water, wind and sense. After death, these elements return to the earth. There is no life after death. He said, “Generosity is taught by idiots. The words of those who speak of existence after death are false, empty chatter. With the breakup of the body, the wise and the foolish alike are annihilated, destroyed. They do not exist after death.”

### Lokayata and Carvaka

The term “lookayata” signifies materialist thought. Indian materialism has also been named Carvaka after one of the two founders of the school. Carvaka and Ajita Kesakambalin are said to have established Indian materialism as a formal philosophical system. Carvakas developed the concept of scepticism and believed in the pursuit of knowledge through experience. They questioned the authority of Vedas.

### Rivalry among Heterodox Sects

There was intense rivalry among the various heterodox sects. This is evident from the various religious accounts of the period. Buddhist and Jaina texts not only mention other heterodox sects but also belittle them. For example, Bhagavatisutra, a Jaina text, provides a poor account of Makkhali Gosala. He is described as born to a poor mendicant in a cowshed. It accuses Gosala becoming a disciple of Mahavira for material

comfort as the latter had many wealthy patrons. It describes “the greatest Ajivika teacher as a person of most contemptible character, a man of low parentage, and (sic) of low profession”. Buddhagosa also ridicules Gosala in his commentaries. He describes Gosala as a servant fleeing naked from his master on committing a mistake even disregarding the fact that his garment had fallen. A Buddhist Jataka story “compares the heretics with the fire-flies, whose faint light faded before the rising glory of the sun, i.e., the Buddha”.

## **Jainism**

Among the various sects, the sect led by Vardhamana Mahavira (referred to as Nigantha Nataputta by Buddhist texts) bloomed into a religion called Jainism. It was earlier known as Nirgranthas (free from bonds). Mahavira was known as Jina (conqueror) of the soul and hence his sect came to be known as Jainism. According to Jain tradition, Mahavira was not the founder of Jainism, but the last of the 24 Tirthankaras or ‘maker of fords’ (ford means a shallow place in river or stream to allow one to walk across). According to Jaina tradition, Risabha was the founder of the sect. He is considered the first Tirthankara. Yajur Veda mentions three of the Tirthankaras, viz., Risabha, Ajitanatha and Aristanemi. Mahavira organised his members into monastic and lay followers.

## **Life of Mahavira**

Vardhamana was born around 540 BCE in Kundagrama, a suburb of Vaishali. He was a member of the ruling family of a gana-sangha and his father Siddhartha was the chief of the Jnatrika clan. His mother Trishala was a Lichchavi princess and sister of its chief Chetaka. Mahavira was closely connected to rulers of Magadha, Anga and Videha through his mother. From his childhood, he was attracted to spiritual life. After the death of his parents, he left his home at the age of 30 and wandered about as a mendicant for 12 years in search of true knowledge. He practiced severe austerities and discarded his garments. During the course of his wanderings, he met Gosala and spent six years with him before they parted due to differences. In the 13th year of his wandering, at the age of 42, Vardhamana attained enlightenment or Nirvana. He then became a Tirthankara and came to be called a Jina or Mahavira (the Great conqueror). He preached for 30 years and was patronised by the rich and the elite. He died about 468 BCE at the age of 72 in Pavapuri near Rajgriha. He fasted

unto death according to Jaina ideals. His death or final liberation was a joyous event for the Jains.

Mahavira had a huge following. In the early stages, his followers were drawn from different sections of the society. However, in course of time, Jainism was confined to the trading and money-lending community. Jainism's insistence on non-violence closed other occupations, including agriculture, as it prescribed refraining from intended or unintended killing. About 500 years after Mahavira's death, in about 79 or 82 CE, a schism occurred in Jainism. Magadha was affected by severe famine and some of the Jaina monks under Bhadrabahu went south to maintain their strict discipline. They remained without garments and were known as Digambaras (space-clad or naked). Others stayed back under the leadership of Sthulabhadra and adopted a white garment and were known as Svetambaras (white-clad). The schism weakened Jainism in Magadha, but it found ardent followers in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Karnataka. On the death of Bhadrabahu, Shulabhadra held a Great Council at Pataliputra, which compiled the Jaina canon. It consisted of 12 angas (limbs). Another council was held in Valabhi, Gujarat, in the 5th century CE. It added 12 upangas (minor sections). The Jaina monks not only wrote religious treatises but also promoted secular literature. Acharrangasutra, Suttrakritanga, and Kalpasutra are the earliest Jaina texts. Most of the early Jaina texts were written in Ardha-Magadhi, the language of the common people.

### **Tenets of Jainism**

The central tenet of Jainism is non-violence. No other religion lays as much emphasis on non-violence as does Jainism. It also criticises human emotions. Jainism denies the existence of God. In its early stages, deity was not worshipped in Jainism. It emphasises that salvation cannot be attained by worshipping god or by sacrifices. It stipulates that one can escape misery only by performing austerities.

Mahavira rejected Vedic authority. Hence, Jainism is an unorthodox religion. According to Jainism, the world has no beginning or end. It goes through a series of progress and decline according to an eternal law. Jainism advocated dualism: the world is made of soul (jiva) and matter (ajiva), which are eternal. The coming together of jiva and ajiva creates karma (action), which leads to an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. To free

oneself from karma, one has to practice severe austerities and self-mortification. Therefore, in Jainism, only monks could achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

### **Triratnas**

Jain discipline requires adherence to certain rigorous rules. The Jains are required to follow three principles called Triratnas or Three Gems.

- (1) Right faith (samyag-darshana);
- (2) Right knowledge (samyag-jnana);
- (3) Right conduct (samyag-mahavrata)

### **Five Great Vows**

The monks have to undertake the five great vows (panchamahavrata):

- (1) **Not to kill or injure (ahimsa);**
- (2) **Not to steal (asteya);**
- (3) **Not to lie (satya);**
- (4) **Celibacy (brahmacharya);**
- (5) **Not to possess property (aparigraha)**

### **Non-Violence**

The five vows are common to both the monks and lay followers. The monks were to observe the vows more rigorously than the lay followers. As Jainism placed great emphasis on non-violence, strict observers of the faith wear a muslin cloth around their mouth and nose so that they would not inhale small insects even by mistake. To avoid trampling on ants and other insects, Jain monks used feathers to sweep the path before walking. Jains could not practice agriculture or other crafts that involve killing or injury to living organisms. Hence they took to trading and money-lending and excelled in it. As a result, they were closely associated with urbanisation.

Jainism is an egalitarian religion. It does not sanction any inequality based on birth. It is one's deeds that determine one's status in society and not birth. Jainism believes that "by one's action one becomes a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or a Vaishya, or a Sudra." Pride based on birth is considered a

sin. Women were admitted into the monastic order. However, as a woman one cannot attain salvation. By accumulating merit by good deeds, a woman could be reborn as a man and then strive to attain salvation.

### **Jainism in Tamilnadu**

Jainism spread to Tamil Nadu from about the third century CE. Jaina rock shelters are found in large numbers around Madurai and other places. The mention of death of Kopperuncholan by fasting in chol Purananuru is considered by some to be similar to Jaina practice of sallekhana. Jaina influence is strong in early Tamil literature. Naladiyar, Palamoli, Jivaka Chinthamani, Yapperunkalam Karikai, Neelakesi are some of the prominent Jaina works in Tamil. As early as c. 470 CE a Jaina Dravida Sangha was established in Madurai by Vajranandi, a disciple of Boojya Padha. Jainism has survived in Tamil Nadu and there are several Jaina temples. One of the Jaina temples is at Tiruparuthikunram near Kanchipuram with beautiful ceiling paintings. This part of Kanchipuram was known as Jaina Kanchi.

### **Decline of Jainism in India**

Absence of royal patronage, split amongst Jains as Digambaras and Svetambaras, lack of missionary zeal, factionalism and the severity of practices, and spread of Buddhism as a rival faith led to the decline of Jainism in India.

### **Buddhism**

Among the heterodox sects, Buddhism was the most popular. It went on to emerge as a powerful religion patronised by various rulers. It was so influential that its ideas were adopted by Asoka as a state policy. Though it virtually disappeared from India for nearly a millennium, it spread far and wide and is widely followed even today in the South-east and East Asian countries. In the mid-twentieth century it was revived in India by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

### **Life of Buddha**

Gautama Buddha was born as Siddhartha in the Sakya clan to its king Suddhodhana and his chief queen Mahamaya. His mother Mahamaya

dreamt of a white elephant with six tusks entering her womb when she was pregnant. Learned men prophesied that the child would either become 'a Universal Emperor or a Universal Teacher'. While Mahamaya was going to her parents' home, Siddhartha was born in a park in Lumbini near Kapailavastu. Siddhartha grew in luxury as a royal prince. He married Yashodhara and had a son named Rahula. When he was riding on his chariot with his charioteer one day outside the palace, he saw an old man, a sick man, a corpse and finally a religious mendicant. Overcome by remorse at the misery of people, he left his palace in the dead of night in search of eternal truth. He rode in his chariot pulled by his favourite horse Kanthaka and driven by his charioteer Channa far away from the city. He cut his hair and sent it along with his discarded garments and jewellery to his father. This is known as Mahabhiraskramana or the Great Going Forth.

Siddhartha wandered about and joined Alara Kalama as a disciple for a brief period. He also sought guidance from a hermit Uddaka Ramaputta. Siddhartha was not satisfied with their path and practised severe austerities, which left him nearly dead. One day, he ate rice boiled in milk given by a milkmaid named Sujata and began meditation under a pipal tree in Bodhgaya. After 49 days of meditation, he attained enlightenment, at the age of 35. Thereafter, he came to be called Buddha or the Enlightened. He then delivered his first sermon in a deer park in Sarnath near Varanasi. This event is described as Dharmachakra-parivartana or 'wheel of the great law'. He spoke about the Four Noble Truths and the Middle Path. He established Sangha and spread his ideas far and wide. Buddha and his followers travelled for eight months of the year and stayed at a place for four months of the rainy season. At the age of 80, he passed away in Kusinagara. This is known as Parinirvana. The prominent disciples of Buddha were Sariputta, Mahamoggallana, Mahakaccayana and Ananda. Buddha had a huge following among both the royalty and lay persons.

## **Buddhist Councils**

After the death of Buddha, the tenets and other aspects of Buddhism were decided upon in the councils of Buddhist monks. Over a period of time, four Buddhist councils were held. The First Buddhist Council was held at Rajgriha after Buddha's death. It was headed by Upali. In this council, Upali recited the Vinaya Pitaka. Ananda recited Sutta Pitaka. The Second Buddhist Council met at Vaishali a century after Buddha's death.

The Buddhist Order split into two later. One was called the Sthaviravadins or 'Believers in the Teachings of the Elders' and the other known as Mahasanghikas or 'Members of the Great Community'. The Third Buddhist Council was held at Pataliputra. It was convened by Asoka. The Sthaviravadins established themselves strongly and expelled the heretics. The last section called "Kathavatthu" was added to Abhidhamma Pitaka. The Fourth Buddhist Council was held at Kashmir during the reign of Kanishka. Sarvastivadins were an important sect of Buddhism. Its doctrines were compiled in Mahavibhasa.

## **Buddhist Sects**

In course of time, Sthaviravadins, Mahasanghikas and Sarvastivadins emerged as major sects of Buddhism. New ideas emerged among the Sarvastivadins and Mahasanghikas. It led to the emergence of Mahayana and Hinayana (the Great and Lesser Vehicles) in Buddhism. Mahayana or the Great Vehicle became popular and influential in India. Nalanda University was an important centre of Buddhist learning and was patronised by the Palas. It spread to China and Japan. Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle became popular in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and other South-east Asian countries. By the end of the Gupta period, Vajrayana or the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt emerged. It was popular in Bengal and Bihar. It was influenced by primitive local cults and spread to Tibet in the 11th century CE. The Vikramasila University in Bihar was an important centre of Vajrayana Buddhism. Buddhism in India began to decline with the onset of the Bhakti movement. Slowly Buddhism came to be influenced by Hindu practices. Soon, Buddhism was incorporated into Hinduism, and Buddha came to be considered as an avatar of Vishnu in some traditions.

## **Buddhist Literature**

The Buddhist texts were compiled in Pali. The Pali canons are called as the Tripitakas (Three Baskets). They are Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. Vinaya Pitaka deals with monastic rules and moral disciplines. Sutta Pitaka dwells upon discourses and teachings of Buddha. Abhidhamma Pitaka expounds Buddhist philosophy. The Sutta Pitaka, which contains the teachings of Buddha, is divided into five groups or Nikayas. They contain popular works such as Theragatha and Therigatha (Hymns of the Elder Monks and Nuns) and Jataka tales (Buddha's deeds in

previous births as Bodhisattva). Other important Buddhist works include Milinda Panha, a discussion between Greco-Bactrian king Menander and Buddhist monk Nagasena, and Ceylonese chronicles Dipavamsa (Island Chronicles), Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle) and Culavamsa (Lesser Chronicle).

### **The Starving Tigress:**

A Jataka Tale Born in a family renowned for purity of conduct and great spiritual devotion, the Bodhisattva became a great scholar and teacher. With no desire for wealth, he went to a forest and led a life of an ascetic. It was in this forest he encountered a starving tigress, which after giving birth to cubs was about to eat her own new born cubs for survival. With no food in sight, the Bodhisattva offered his body as food to the tigress out of compassion

### **Four Noble Truths of Buddha**

The four noble truths prescribed by Buddha are as follows:

- **The Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth, age, death, unpleasantness, separation, unfulfilled wish.**
- **The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: thirst for pleasure, power, long life, etc. are the causes for sorrow.**
- **The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (Nirvana): complete stopping or release from sorrow.**
- **The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to Cessation of Suffering: the Noble Eight fold Path or the Middle Path.**

Buddhism believed in karma and the doctrine of rebirth. Past actions determine one's condition in this birth. To be free from karma or the cycle of rebirth is to attain nirvana. It can be attained by following the Middle Path.

### **Buddha's Middle or Eightfold Path**

(1) Right Views; (2) Right Resolve; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Conduct; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Recollection; (8) Right Meditation.

Hence Buddha did not mention or talk about God. He neither accepted nor denied the existence of God. Buddhism advocated equality. It preached non-violence or ahimsa and love towards all. However, it was a moderate religion compared to Jainism's insistence on ahimsa. It promoted trade and capitalism as it was against waste and advocated frugality. Jobs involving any form of killing were forbidden. Trade in weapons, living beings, meat, liquor and poison were not permitted.

### **Buddhism in Tamilnadu**

Buddhism spread to Tamizhagam from about third century BCE. Asokan inscriptions found in the Deccan region vouch for the spread of Buddhism to southern parts of India. Archaeological evidences also reveal the existence of a Buddhist complex of the fourth century CE in Kaveripattinam. Quoting Pattinapalai, Noboru Karashima refers to merchants in Kaveripattinam who as vegetarians were opposed to animal sacrifice. From this one could presume the influence of Buddhism in Tamil country. Manimekalai by Sattanar one of the twin epics of the post-Sangam age is a Buddhist literature. Similarly the now extinct Kundalakesi is a Buddhist epic. Kanchipuram in the early Christian era was a flourishing Buddhist centre. Dinnaga and Dhammapala who headed the famous Nalanda University were renowned Buddhist scholars from Kanchipuram. Hiuen Tsang who visited Tamil country mentions in his travel accounts about several Buddhist Stupas built by Asoka in Kanchipuram.

A Buddhist temple was built in Nagapattinam at the request of a Chinese ruler during the reign of Pallava king Narasimhavarman II (CE 695-722). Chinese monk Wu-hing visited the monastery. In CE 1006, during the reign of Rajaraja I, Srivijaya King Mara-wijayottunga-varman built a Buddhist temple in Nagapattinam. It is called the Soolamani-varma-vihara.

### **Decline of Buddhism in India**

Buddhism faced divisions from time to time. Division into various splinter groups like 'Hinayana', 'Mahayana', 'Vajrayana', 'Tantrayana' and 'Sahajayana' led Buddhism to lose its originality. Pali and Prakrit were the spoken languages of people of north India and it was through these languages the message of Buddhism was spread. But ever since the times of Fourth Buddhist Council held during the reign of Kanishka, Sanskrit had

come to be adopted. Buddhism thereupon became unintelligible to common people.

Buddhism also lost its royal patronage after Harshavardhana. In contrast, the Vedic religion got royal patronage first from Pushyamitra Sunga and later from imperial Guptas. The role of the exponents of Bhakti movement like Ramanuja, Ramananda also helped to restore the glory of Vedic religion.

The invasion of Huns gave a deathblow to Buddhism. Toramana and Mihirakula, the two Hun chiefs had a deepseated hatred for the Buddhists and they almost liquidated the Buddhists living in the north-west India. To make matters worse, the Rajput rulers who could not reconcile to the Buddhist concept of nonviolence, and as ardent advocates of Vedic religion started persecuting the Buddhists. Finally the invading Arabs and Turks forced the Buddhist monks to flee from India and seek asylum in Nepal, Tibet and Ceylon. In consequence Buddhism faded away in India.

## Lesson 4

### Emergence of State and Empire

#### Introduction

From the sixth century to the third century BCE, North India passed through major political and social changes. Buddhism and Jainism emerged as prominent religions having a large number of followers. Referred to as sramanic religions (from the word sramana in Sanskrit, meaning a teacher), these two religious systems were antithetical to the mainstream Vedic religion. As a consequence of new beliefs and ideas propounded by Jainism and Buddhism, the social order largely centred on Vedic rituals underwent a significant change, as people of many religious faiths were part of the emerging society. On the political front, minor states and federations of clans were merged through conquests to create an empire during this period, resulting in a large state, ruled by a chakravartin or ekarat (emperor or one supreme king). The rise of a centralised empire in the Gangetic plains of present-day Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh changed the social, economic and administrative fabric of the region.

The flat plains and the availability of plentiful water from the perennial rivers, such as the Ganga and its many tributaries, were among the favourable ecological conditions which promoted the rise of a large state in this particular region. Rivers also acted as major waterways for trade and travel. Bimbisara, who was a contemporary of Buddha, started the process of empire building. It was strengthened by his son Ajatashatru and then by the Nandas. The empire reached its glory and peaked with the advent of the Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya. The first three Mauryan emperors, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Ashoka, were the best known. After Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire went into decline.

#### Sources

The names of Chandragupta and his two successors in the Mauryan period are well known now. But reconstructing their lives and careers was a laborious and difficult process for the earlier historians. There are hardly any comprehensive contemporary accounts or literary works which refer to the Mauryan emperors though they are mentioned in various Buddhist and

Jain texts as well as in some Hindu works like the brahmanas. The Mahavamsa, the comprehensive historical chronicle in Pali from Sri Lanka, is an important additional source. The scattered information from these sources has been corroborated by accounts of Greek historians who left their accounts about India following Alexander's campaign in north-western part of the country.

Archaeology and epigraphy are the tools that provide rich information for the historian to understand earlier periods of history. Archaeology is particularly important because excavations reveal the nature of urban morphology, that is, layout of the city and construction of buildings. They also provide concrete information about the material culture of people in the past, such as the metals that were known, materials and tools they used, and the technology they employed. The archaeological finds in the Gangetic regions give us solid proof about the nature of the urban centres established in the region in course of time. Epigraphical evidence is scanty for the period. The most widely known are the edicts of Ashoka, which have been discovered in many parts of the country. In fact, the reconstruction of the Mauryan period to a great extent became possible only after the Brahmi script of the inscriptions at Sanchi was deciphered by James Prinsep in 1837. Information about other edicts in other parts of the country also became available at that time. It must be remembered that these were the oldest historical artefacts found in India in the nineteenth century, until archaeological excavations unearthed the Indus valley towns of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in the twentieth century. All the edicts began with a reference to a great king, "Thus spoke devanampiya (beloved of the gods) piyadassi (of pleasing looks)", and the geographical spread of the edicts make it clear that this was a king who had ruled over a vast empire. But who was this king? Puranic and Buddhist texts referred to a chakravartin named Ashoka. As more edicts were deciphered, the decisive identification that devananampiya piyadassi was Ashoka was made in 1915. One more edict when deciphered, which referred to him as devanampiya Ashoka, made reconstruction of Mauryan history possible.

Let us now turn to two later sources. The first is the rock inscription of Junagadh, near Girnar in Gujarat. This was carved during the reign of Rudradaman, the local ruler and dates back to 130-150 CE. It refers to Pushyagupta, the provincial governor (rashtriya) of Emperor Chandragupta. This is of importance for two reasons: (i) it indicates the extent of the Mauryan Empire, which had expanded as far west as Gujarat

and (ii) it shows that more than four centuries after his death, the name of Chandragupta was still well known and remembered in many parts of the country. A second source is a literary work. The play *Mudrarakshasa* by Visakhadatta was written during the Gupta period, sometime after the 4th century CE. It narrates Chandragupta's accession to the throne of the Magadha Empire and the exploits of his chief advisor Chanakya or Kautilya by listing the strategies he used to counter an invasion against Chandragupta. This play is often cited as a corroborative source since it supports the information gathered from other contemporary sources about Chandragupta. It is important to note from both these sources that the fame of Chandragupta had survived long after he was gone and became imbedded in popular lore and memory. They thus attest to the significance of oral traditions, which are now accepted as an additional valid source of history.

### **Rise of Magadha under the Haryanka Dynasty**

Among the 16 mahajanapadas, Kasi was initially powerful. However, Kosala became dominant later. A power struggle broke out between Magadha, Kosala, Vriji and Avanti. Eventually Magadha emerged as the dominant mahajanapada and established the first Indian empire. The first known ruler of Magadha was Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty. He extended the territory of Magadhan Empire by matrimonial alliances and conquests. By marrying off his sister to Prasenajit, ruler of Kosala, he received Kasi as dowry. He also married the princesses of Lichchhavis and Madra. He maintained friendly relations with Avanti but annexed Anga by military might. Thus, Magadha became a powerful and prominent power. During his reign, Bimbisara patronised various religious sects and their leaders. He had an encounter with Buddha as well.

His son Ajatashatru ascended the throne by killing his father. King Prasenajit immediately took back Kasi, which he had handed out as dowry to Bimbisara. This led to a military confrontation between Magadha and Kosala. The struggle lasted until Prasenajit was overthrown and died at Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha Empire. Kosala was then annexed to Magadha. Ajatashatru also fought and won the battle against the Lichchhavis. He defeated the Lichchhavis and the Mallas. Ajatashatru is also believed to have met Buddha in his lifetime. By the time Ajatashatru died in 461 BCE Magadha had become undisputedly the strongest power.

The Haryanka dynasty was succeeded by the Shishunaga dynasty. Shishunaga, a viceroy of Benaras, deposed the last Haryanka king and ascended the throne. The Shishunagas ruled for fifty years before the throne was usurped by Mahapadma Nanda.

### **Nandas: The First Empire Builders of India**

About a hundred years after Ajatashatru's demise, the Nandas became the emperors of Magadha in 362 BCE. The first Nanda ruler was Mahapadma. It is believed that he usurped the throne by murdering the last of the Shishunaga kings. Under the Nandas, the empire expanded considerably, and the wealth and power of the Nandas became widely known and feared. Mahapadma Nanda was succeeded by his eight sons, and they were together known as the navanandas or the nine Nandas. During the process of empire building, Nandas exterminated many kshatriya clans and subjugated kshatriya-ruled kingdoms, which had still retained a degree of autonomous authority, thus creating a centralised state. An inscription known as the Hathigumpha (elephant cave) from Udayagiri near Bhubaneswar, Odisha, records the aqueduct built by King Nanda three hundred years earlier. This is also indicative of the geographical extent of the Nanda Empire. Though the Nandas were able administrators and had strengthened the Magadha Empire, they were not popular among the people.

A centralised state required a new administrative framework to govern an extensive territory, the creation of a bureaucracy, resources of money and men for managing the administration and the army. A system of revenue administration had to be developed to raise the funds needed for the state through taxation. Such a political formation led to the development of cities as administrative centres, distinct from villages and rural areas. A large standing army was required for expanding and retaining the empire.

### **Persians and Macedonian Invasions**

The period from the sixth century witnessed close cultural contact of the north-west of India with Persia and Greece. It might be surprising to know that Gandhara and its adjoining regions on the Indus were part of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. Cyrus, the emperor of Persia, invaded India

around 530 BCE and destroyed the city of Kapisha. According to Greek historian Herodotus, Gandhara constituted the twentieth and the richest satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire. The region continued to be part of the Persian Empire till the invasion of Alexander the Great. The inscriptions of Darius I mention the presence of the Persians in the Indus region and include “the people of Gadara, Haravati and Maka” as subjects of the Achaemenid Empire.

The word “Hindu” appears for the first time in an inscription of Darius I at Persepolis, Iran. Darius lists “Hindu” as part of his empire. The word “Sindhu”, denoting a river in general and Indus in particular, became “Hindu” in Persian. The Greeks dropped the S and called it Indu, which eventually came to be called Hindu and later India.

## Taxila

Takshashila or Taxila is situated in present-day Pakistan. Between the fifth century and fourth century BCE, it was part of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. Because of its strategic location on the trade route between the East and the West, it emerged as an important centre of learning and culture. Students came from far and wide to Taxila in search of knowledge. The city was brought to light by the excavation carried out in the 1940s by Sir John Marshall. Taxila is considered “one of the greatest intellectual achievements of any ancient civilization”. Panini seems to have compiled his well-known work, *Ashtadhyayi*, here.

## Impact of Persian Contact

As the north-western part of India came under the control of the Persian Empire from about middle of the sixth century, the region became a centre of confluence of Persian and Indian culture. The Persian contact left its impact on art, architecture, economy and administration of ancient India. The cultural impact was felt most in the Gandhara region. The most significant impact was the development of the Kharosthi script, used in the north-western part of India. It was used by Ashoka in his inscriptions in the Gandhara region. The Kharosthi script was derived from Aramaic used widely in the Achaemenid Empire of Persia.

Like Aramaic, Kharosthi was written from right to left. Persian siglois (silver coin) is an imitation from the region. The earliest coins in India are traced to the period of the mahajanapadas. The Indian word for coin karsa is of Persian origin. The coins might have been inspired by the Persian coins. The existence of coins in that period suggests trade links between India and Persia. The Ashokan edicts might have been inspired by the edicts of the Achaemenid king Darius. The Ashokan edicts use the term lipi instead of the Iranian term dipi.

The Mauryan art and architecture show traces of Persian influence. Mauryan columns of the Ashokan Pillar are similar to the columns found in the Achaemenid Empire. The bell-shaped capital of the columns, especially the lion capital of Sarnath pillar and the bell capital of Rampurval pillar, show resemblance to designs found in the Achaemenid columns. Similarly, the pillared remains of the Palace in Pataliputra display a remarkable similarity to the pillared hall in the Achaemenid capital. However, the craftsmen, though inspired by the Persian art and architecture, gave a definite Indian character to their work.

### **Connection between Persian and Sanskrit**

There are linguistic similarities between Rig Veda and Avesta. The term Aryas was also used by the ancient Persians. According to Indologist Thomas Burrow, only phonetic change had occurred overtime. The Bogaz Koi (in North-East Syria) Inscription dating back to 1380 BCE records a treaty between a Hittite and a Mitanni King. It mentions the names of a few Rig Vedic gods such as Indara, Uruvna (Varuna), Mitira and Nasatiya (Ashvins).

### **Alexander's Invasion**

During Dana Nanda's reign, Alexander invaded north-west India (327-325 BCE). In many ways, the invasion by Alexander is a watershed in Indian history. It marked the beginning of the interaction between India and the West, which spanned many centuries to follow. Greek historians began to write about India, and Greek governors and kings ruled in the north-western region of India, which introduced new styles of art and governance. After his conquests in the Punjab region, Alexander expressed his desire to march further east to attack the Magadha Empire. However, his already tired troops had heard about the great emperor in the east

(Nanda) and his formidable army and refused to be engaged in a war against such a powerful adversary.

In 326 BCE when Alexander entered the Indian subcontinent after defeating the Persians, Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, surrendered and accepted the suzerainty of Alexander. The most famous of Alexander's encounters was with Porus, ruler of the region between Jhelum and Beas. The two armies met in the battle of Hydaspes in which Porus was imprisoned. Later, impressed by the Porus's dignity, Alexander restored his throne on the condition of accepting his suzerainty. His battle-weary soldiers refused to march further. Alexander did not want to proceed against the reluctance of his army. During his return, Alexander died of typhoid in Babylon.

### **The Impact of Alexander's Invasion**

Alexander's invasion led to the establishment of Greek satrapies in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent. Trade routes opened up with the West. There were four different trade routes in use, which facilitated the movement of Greek merchants and craftsmen to India, establishing direct contact between India and Greece. As trade contact increased, many Greek settlements were established in the northwest of India. Alexandria near Kabul, Boukephala near Peshawar in Pakistan and Alexandria in Sindh were some of the prominent Greek settlements.

The Greek accounts of India provide valuable information but with a bit of exaggeration. Alexander's death created a void in the north-west, facilitating the accession of Chandragupta Maurya to the throne of Magadha. It also helped him to conquer the numerous small chiefdoms in the north-west and bring the region under his empire.

### **Mauryan Empire**

Contemporary accounts by Greek historians show that Chandragupta was a youth living in Taxila when Alexander invaded India. Greek historians have recorded his name as "Sandrakottus" or "Sandrakoptus", which are evidently modified forms of Chandragupta. Inspired by Alexander, Chandragupta led a revolt against the Nandas years later and overthrew them. Chandragupta achieved it either by inciting the people to rise against an unpopular monarch, or by soliciting their support in

overthrowing an unpopular king. Chandragupta established the Mauryan Empire and became its first emperor in 321 BCE.

We know from the Junagadh rock inscription (referred to earlier) that Chandragupta had expanded his empire westward as far as Gujarat. One of his great achievements, according to local accounts, was that he waged war against the Greek prefects (military officials) left behind by Alexander and destroyed them, so that the way was cleared to carry out his ambitious plan of expanding the territories. Another major event of his reign was the war against Seleucus, who was one of Alexander's generals. After the death of Alexander, Seleucus had established his kingdom extending up to Punjab. Chandragupta defeated him in a battle some time before 301 BCE and drove him out of the Punjab region. The final agreement between the two was probably not too acrimonious, since Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 war elephants, and Seleucus sent an ambassador to Chandragupta's court. This ambassador was Megasthenes, and we owe much of the information that we have about Chandragupta to India, the account written by Megasthenes. The original of this work is lost, but many Greek historians had reproduced parts of his account describing the court of Chandragupta and his administration.

## Chandragupta

Chandragupta was obviously a great ruler who had to reinvent a strong administrative apparatus to govern his extensive kingdom. (The system of governance and polity is discussed in the next section.) Chandragupta was ably advised and aided by Chanakya, known for political manoeuvring, in governing his empire. Contemporary Jain and Buddhist texts hardly have any mention of Chanakya. But popular oral tradition ascribes the greatness of Chandragupta and his reign to the wisdom and genius of Chanakya. Chanakya, also known as Kautilya and Vishnugupta, was a Brahmin and a sworn adversary of the Nandas. He is credited with having devised the strategy for overthrowing the Nandas and helping Chandragupta to become the emperor of Magadha. He is celebrated as the author of the Arthashastra, a treatise on political strategy and governance. His intrigues and brilliant strategy to subvert the intended invasion of Magadha is the theme of the play, Mudrarakshasa.

## Bindusara

Chandragupta's son Bindusara succeeded him as emperor in 297 BCE in a peaceful and natural transition. We do not know what happened to Chandragupta. He probably renounced the world. According to the Jain tradition, Chandragupta spent his last years as an ascetic in Chandragiri, near Sravanabelagola, in Karnataka. Bindusara was clearly a capable ruler and continued his father's tradition of close interaction with the Greek states of West Asia. He continued to be advised by Chanakya and other capable ministers. His sons were appointed as viceroys of the different provinces of the empire. We do not know much about his military exploits, but the empire passed intact to his son, Ashoka.

Bindusara ruled for 25 years, and he must have died in 272 BCE. Ashoka was not his chosen successor, and the fact that he came to the throne only four years later in 268 BCE would indicate that there was a struggle between the sons of Bindusara for the succession. Ashoka had been the viceroy of Taxila when he put down a revolt against the local officials by the people of Taxila, and was later the viceroy of Ujjain, the capital of Avanti and a major city and commercial centre. As emperor, he is credited with building the monumental structures that have been excavated in the site of Pataliputra. He continued the tradition of close interaction with the Greek states in West Asia, and there was mutual exchange of emissaries from both sides.

## Ashoka

The defining event of Ashoka's rule was his campaign against Kalinga (present-day Odisha) in the eighth year of his reign. This is the only recorded military expedition of the Mauryas. The number of those killed in battle, those who died subsequently, and those deported ran into tens of thousands. The campaign had probably been more ferocious and brutal than usual because this was a punitive war against Kalinga, which had broken away from the Magadha Empire (the Hathigumpha inscription speaks of Kalinga as a part of the Nanda Empire). Ashoka was devastated by the carnage and moved by the suffering that he converted to humanistic values. He became a Buddhist and his new-found values and beliefs were recorded in a series of edicts, which confirm his passion for peace and moral righteousness or dhamma (dharma in Sanskrit).

## Edicts of Ashoka

The edicts of Ashoka thus constitute the most concrete source of information about the Mauryan Empire. There are 33 edicts comprising 14 Major Rock Edicts, 2 known as Kalinga edicts, 7 Pillar Edicts, some Minor Rock Edicts and a few Minor Pillar Inscriptions. The Major Rock Edicts extend from Kandahar in Afghanistan, Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra in northwest Pakistan to Uttarakhand district in the north, Gujarat and Maharashtra in the west, Odisha in the east and as far south as Karnataka and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh. Minor Pillar Inscriptions have been found as far north as Nepal (near Lumbini). The edicts were written mostly in the Brahmi script and in Magadhi and Prakrit. The Kandahar inscriptions are in Greek and Aramaic, while the two inscriptions in north-west Pakistan are in Kharosthi script.

The geographical spread of the edicts essentially defines the extent of the vast empire over which Ashoka ruled. The second inscription mentions lands beyond his borders: "the Chodas (Cholas), the Pandyas, the Satiyaputa, the Keralaputa (Chera), even Tamraparni, the Yona king Antiyoka (Antiochus), and the kings who are the neighbours of this Antioka". The edicts stress Ashoka's belief in peace, righteousness and justice and his concern for the welfare of his people. By rejecting violence and war, advocating peace and the pursuit of dhamma, Ashoka negated the prevailing philosophy of statecraft that stressed that an emperor had to strive to extend and consolidate his empire through warfare and military conquests.

## Third Buddhist Council

One of the major events of Ashoka's reign was the convening of the Third Buddhist sangha (council) in 250 BCE in the capital Pataliputra. Ashoka's deepening commitment to Buddhism meant that royal patronage was extended to the Buddhist establishment. An important outcome of this sangha was the decision to expand the reach of Buddhism to other parts of the region and to send missions to convert people to the religion. Buddhism thus became a proselytizing religion and missionaries were sent to regions outlying the empire such as Kashmir and South India. According to popular belief, Ashoka sent his two children, Mahinda and Sanghamitta, to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism. It is believed that they took a branch of the original bodhi tree to Sri Lanka.

Ashoka died in 231 BCE. Sadly, though his revolutionary view of governance and non-violence found a resonance in our contemporary sensibilities, they were not in consonance with the realities of the times. After his death, the Mauryan Empire slowly disintegrated and died out within fifty years. But the two centuries prior to Ashoka's death and the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire were truly momentous in Indian history. This was a period of great change.

The consolidation of a state extending over nearly two-thirds of the sub-continent had taken place with formalised administration, development of bureaucratic institutions and economic expansion, in addition to the rise of new heterodox religions and philosophies that questioned the established orthodoxy.

### **The Mauryan State and Polity**

The major areas of concern for the Mauryan state were the collection of taxes as revenue to the state and the administration of justice, in addition to the maintenance of internal security and defence against external aggression. This required a large and complex administrative machinery and institutions. Greek historians, taking their lead from Megasthenes, described the Mauryan state as a centralised state. What we should infer from this description as a centralised state is that a uniform pattern of administration was established throughout the very large area of the empire. But, given the existing state of technology in communications and transport, a decentralised administrative system had to be in place.

This bureaucratic set-up covered a hierarchy of settlements from the village, to the towns, provincial capitals and major cities. The bureaucracy enabled and required an efficient system of revenue collection, since it needed to be paid out of taxes collected. Equally, the very large army of the Mauryan Empire could be maintained only with the revenue raised through taxation. The large bureaucracy also commanded huge salaries. According to the Arthashastra, the salary of chief minister, the purohita and the army commander was 48,000 panas, and the soldiers received 500 panas. If we multiply this by the number of infantry and cavalry, we get an idea of the enormous resources needed to maintain the army and the administrative staff.

## Arthasastra

Perhaps the most detailed account of the administration is to be found in the Arthasastra (though the work itself is now dated to a few centuries later). However, it must be remembered that the Arthasastra was a prescriptive text, which laid down the guidelines for good administration. If we add to this the information from Ashoka's edicts and the work of Megasthenes, we get a more comprehensive picture of the Mauryan state as it was.

## Provincial Administration

At the head of the administration was the king. He was assisted by a council of ministers and a purohita or priest, who was a person of great importance, and secretaries known as mahamatriyas. The capital region of Pataliputra was directly administered. The rest of the empire was divided into four provinces based at Suvarnagiri (near Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh), Ujjain (Avanti, Malwa), Taxila in the northwest, and Tosali in Odisha in the southeast. The provinces were administered by governors who were usually royal princes. In each region, the revenue and judicial administration and the bureaucracy of the Mauryan state was replicated to achieve a uniform system of governance. Revenue collection was the responsibility of a collector-general (samaharta) who was also in charge of exchequer that he was, in effect, like a minister of finance. He had to supervise all the provinces, fortified towns, mines, forests, trade routes and others, which were the sources of revenue. The treasurer was responsible for keeping a record of the tax revenues. The accounts of each department had to be presented jointly by the ministers to the king. Each department had a large staff of superintendents and subordinate officers linked to the central and local governments.

## District and Village Administration

At the next level of administration came the districts, villages and towns. The district was under the command of a sthanika, while officials known as gopas were in charge of five to ten villages. Urban administration was handled by a nagarika. Villages were semi-autonomous and were under the authority of a gramani, appointed by the central government, and a council of village elders. Agriculture was then, as it remained down the centuries, the most important contributor to the economy, and the tax

on agricultural produce constituted the most important source of revenue. Usually, the king was entitled to one-sixth of the produce. In reality, it was often much higher, usually about one-fourth of the produce.

### **Source of Revenue**

The Arthasastra, recommended comprehensive state control over agricultural production and marketing, with warehouses to store agricultural products and regulated markets, in order to maximise the revenues from this most important sector of the economy. Other taxes included taxes on land, on irrigation if the sources of irrigation had been provided by the state, taxes on urban houses, customs and tolls on goods transported for trade and profits from coinage and trade operations carried on by the government. Lands owned by the king, forests, mines and manufacture and salt, on which the state held a monopoly, were also important sources of revenue.

### **Judicial Administration**

Justice was administered through courts, which were established in all the major towns. Two types of courts are mentioned. The dharmasthiya courts mostly dealt with civil law relating to marriage, inheritance and other aspects of civil life. The courts were presided over by three judges well-versed in sacred laws and three amatyas (secretaries). Another type of court was called kankasodhana (removal of thorns), also presided over by three judges and three amatyas. The main purpose of these courts was to clear the society of anti-social elements and various types of crimes, and it functioned more like the modern police, and relied on a network of spies for information about such antisocial activities. Punishments for crimes were usually quite severe. The overall objective of the judicial system as it evolved was to extend government control over most aspects of ordinary life.

### **Ashoka's Dharmic State**

Ashoka's rule gives us an alternative model of a righteous king and a just state. He instructed his officials, the yuktas (subordinate officials), rajjukas (rural administrators) and pradesikas (heads of the districts) to go on tours every five years to instruct people in dhamma (Major Rock Edict 3). Ashoka's injunctions to the officers and city

magistrates stressed that all the people were his children and he wished for his people what he wished for his own children, that they should obtain welfare and happiness in this world and the next. These officials should recognise their own responsibilities and strive to be impartial and see to it that men were not imprisoned or tortured without good reason. He added that he would send an officer every five years to verify if his instructions were carried out (Kalinga Rock Edict 1).

Ashoka realised that an effective ruler needed to be fully informed about what was happening in his kingdom and insisted that he should be advised and informed promptly wherever he might be (Major Rock Edict 6). He insisted that all religions should co-exist and the ascetics of all religions were honoured (Major Rock Edicts 7 and 12). Providing medical care should be one of the functions of the state, the emperor ordered hospitals to be set up to treat human beings and animals (Major Rock Edict 2). Preventing unnecessary slaughter of animals and showing respect for all living beings was another recurrent theme in his edicts. In Ashoka's edicts, we find an alternative humane and empathetic model of governance. The edicts stress that everybody, officials as well as subjects, act righteously following dhamma.

## **Economy and Society**

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture formed the backbone of the economy. It was the largest sector in terms of its share in total revenue to the state and employment. The Greeks noted with wonder that two crops could be raised annually in India because of the fertility of the soil. Besides food grains, India also grew commercial crops such as sugarcane and cotton, described by Megasthenes as a reed that produced honey and trees on which wool grew. These were important commercial crops. The fact that the agrarian sector could produce a substantial surplus was a major factor in the diversification of the economy beyond subsistence to commercial production.

### **Crafts and Goods**

Many crafts producing a variety of manufactures flourished in the economy. We can categorise the products as utilitarian or functional, and luxurious and ornamental. Spinning and weaving, especially of cotton fabrics, relying on the universal availability of cotton throughout India,

were the most widespread occupations outside of agriculture. A great variety of cloth was produced in the country, ranging from the coarse fabrics used by the ordinary people for everyday use, to the very fine textures worn by the upper classes and the royalty. The Arthashastra refers to the regions producing specialised textiles – Kasi (Benares), Vanga (Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Madurai and many others. Each region produced many distinctive and specialised varieties of fabrics. Cloth embroidered with gold and silver was worn by the King and members of the royal court. Silk was known and was generally referred to as Chinese silk, which also indicates that extensive trade was carried on in the Mauryan Empire.

Metal and metal works were of great importance, and the local metal workers worked with iron, copper and other metals to produce tools, implements, vessels and other utility items. Iron smelting had been known for many centuries, but there was a great improvement in technology after about 500 BCE, which made it possible to smelt iron in furnaces at very high temperatures. Archaeological finds show a great qualitative and quantitative improvement in iron production after this date. Improvement in iron technology had widespread implications for the rest of the economy. Better tools like axes made more extensive clearing of forests possible for agriculture; better ploughs could improve agricultural processes; better nails and tools improved woodwork and carpentry as well as other crafts. Woodwork was another important craft for ship-building, making carts and chariots, house construction and so on. Stone work—stone carving and polishing—had evolved as a highly skilled craft. This expertise is seen in the stone sculptures in the stupa at Sanchi and the highly polished Chunar stone used for Ashoka's pillars.

Sanchi Stupa

A whole range of luxury goods was produced, including gold and silver articles, jewellery, perfumes and carved ivory. There is evidence that many other products like drugs and medicines, pottery, dyes and gums were produced in the Mauryan Empire. The economy had thus developed far beyond subsistence production to a very sophisticated level of commercial craft production.

Crafts were predominantly urban-based hereditary occupations and sons usually followed their fathers in the practice of various crafts. Craftsmen worked primarily as individuals, though royal workshops for

producing cloth and other products also existed. Each craft had a head called *pamukha* (*pramukha* or leader) and a *jetha* (*jyeshtha* or elder) and was organised in a *seni* (senior guild), so that the institutional identity superseded the individual in craft production. Disputes between *senis* were resolved by a *mahasetthi*, and this ensured the smooth functioning of craft production in the cities.

## Trade

Trade or exchange becomes a natural concomitant of economic diversification and growth. Production of a surplus beyond subsistence is futile unless the surplus has exchange value, since the surplus has no use value when subsistence needs have been met. Thus, as the economy diversified and expanded, exchange becomes an important part of realising the benefits of such expansion. Trade takes place in a hierarchy of markets, ranging from the exchange of goods in a village market, between villages and towns within a district, across cities in long-distance overland trade and across borders to other countries. Trade also needs a conducive political climate as was provided by the Mauryan Empire, which ensured peace and stability over a very large area. The rivers in the Gangetic plains were major means for transporting goods throughout northern India. Goods were transported further west overland by road. Roads connected the north of the country to cities and markets in the south-east, and in the south-west, passing through towns like Vidisha and Ujjain. The north-west route linked the empire to central and western Asia. Overseas trade by ships was also known, and Buddhist Jataka tales refer to the long voyages undertaken by merchants. Sea-borne trade was carried on with Burma and the Malay Archipelago, and with Sri Lanka. The ships, however, were probably quite small and might have hugged the coastline.

We do not have much information about the merchant communities. In general, long-distance overland trade was undertaken by merchant groups travelling together as a caravan for security, led by a caravan leader known as the *maha-sarthavaha*. Roads through forests and unfavourable environments like deserts were always dangerous. The *Arthashastra*, however, stresses the importance of trade and ensuring its smooth functioning. Trade has to be facilitated through the construction of roads and maintaining them in good condition. Since tolls and octroi were collected on goods when they were transported, toll booths must have been set up and manned on all the trade routes. Urban markets and craftsmen

were generally closely monitored and controlled to prevent fraud. The Arthashastra has a long list of the goods – agricultural and manufactured – which were traded in internal and foreign trade. These include textiles, woollens, silks, aromatic woods, animal skins and gems from various parts of India, China and Sri Lanka. Greek sources confirm the trade links with the west through the Greek states to Egypt. Indigo, ivory, tortoiseshell, pearls and perfumes and rare woods were all exported to Egypt.

## Coins and Currency

Though coinage was known, barter was the medium of exchange in pre-modern economies. In the Mauryan Empire, the silver coin known as *pana* and its sub-divisions were the most commonly used currency. Hordes of punch-marked coins have been found in many parts of north India, though some of these coins may have been from earlier periods. Thus while coins were in use, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which the economy was monetised.

## Process of Urbanisation

Urbanisation is the process of the establishment of towns and cities in an agrarian landscape. Towns can come up for various reasons – as the headquarters of administration, as pilgrim centres, as commercial market centres and because of their locational advantages on major trade routes. In what way do urban settlements differ from villages or rural settlements? To begin with, towns and cities do not produce their own food and depend on the efficient transfer of agricultural surplus for their basic consumption needs. A larger number of people reside in towns and cities and the density of population is much higher in cities. Cities attract a variety of non-agricultural workers and craftsmen, who seek employment, thereby forming the workforce for the production of manufactured goods and services of various kinds. These goods, in addition to the agricultural products brought in from the rural countryside, are traded in markets. Cities also tend to house a variety of persons in service-related activities. The *sangam* poetry in Tamil and the Tamil epics provide vivid pictures of cities like Madurai, Kanchipuram and Poompuhar as teeming with people, with vibrant markets and merchants selling a variety of goods, as well as vendors selling various goods including food door to door. Though these literary works relate to a slightly later period, it is not different in terms of the prevailing levels of technology, and these descriptions may be taken as

an accurate depiction of urban living. The only contemporary pictorial representation of cities is found in the sculptures in Sanchi, which portray royal processions, and cities are seen to have roads, a multitude of people and multi-storeyed buildings crowded together.

### **Urbanisation in Sixth Century BCE**

One of the first pre-requisites for urbanisation is the development of an agricultural base. This had evolved in the Indo-Gangetic plain and from very early on there are references to cities like Hastinapura and Ayodhya. By about sixth century BCE, urbanization had spread to the doab and many new city centres like Kaushambi, Bhita, Vaishali and Rajagriha, among others, are mentioned in the region. Buddhist texts about Buddha's preaching were always located in urban centres. Cities developed primarily because of the spread of agriculture and wet rice cultivation, in particular in the doab region, after the marshy land was drained and reclaimed for cultivation. The fertile soil and plentiful availability of water from the perennial rivers made it possible to raise even two crops of rice, and the production of a large agricultural surplus to feed the cities. The improvements in iron technology also had an impact on economic life both in rural and urban areas. As Magadha grew, many regional centres like Ujjain were also incorporated into the empire.

### **Housing and Town Planning**

Towns were often located along the rivers, presumably for ease of access to transportation. They were surrounded by moats and a rampart to provide defensive protection. They were always open to attacks since treasuries holding government revenue were housed in them, in addition to the fact that as trading centres, the local people and merchants were also wealthy. As the towns became more prosperous, the quality of the houses, which were built of mud brick and even of fired brick, improved. Towns also had other facilities like drains, ring wells and mud pits, testifying to the development of civic amenities and sanitation. Excavations from the Mauryan period show that the standard of living had improved as compared to the earlier period. The houses were built of brick, and the cities had ring wells and soak pits. There was a quantitative increase in the use of iron and the variety of iron artefacts.

## City of Pataliputra

Pataliputra was the great capital city in the Mauryan Empire. It was described as a large and wealthy city, situated at the confluence of the Ganga and Son rivers, stretching in the form of a parallelogram. It was more than 14 kilometres in length and about 2Vi kilometres wide. It was protected by an outer wall made of wood, with loopholes for shooting arrows at enemies. There were 64 gates to the city and 570 watch towers. There was a wide and deep moat outside the wall, which was fed by water from the river, which served both as a defence and an outlet for sewage. There were many grand palaces in the city, which had a large population. The city was administered by a corporation of 30 members. Ashoka added to the magnificence of the city with the monumental architecture that he added to the capital, like the many-pillared hall.

## Art and Culture

Most of the literature and art of the period have not survived. Sanskrit language and literature were enriched by the work of the grammarian Panini (c. 500 BCE), and Katyayana, who was a contemporary of the Nandas and had written a commentary on Panini's work. Buddhist and Jain texts were primarily written in Pali. Evidently many literary works in Sanskrit were produced during this period and find mention in later works, but they are not available to us.

The Arthasastra notes the performing arts of the period, including music, instrumental music, bards, dance and theatre. The extensive production of crafted luxury products like jewellery, ivory carving and wood work, and especially stone carving should all be included as products of Mauryan art.

Many religions, castes and communities lived together in harmony in the Mauryan society. There is little mention of any overt dissension or disputes among them. As in many regions of that era (including ancient Tamil Nadu), courtesans were accorded a special place in the social hierarchy and their contributions were highly valued.

## Lesson 6

### Polity and Society in Post – Mauryan Period

#### Introduction

In the four centuries following the death of Emperor Asoka and the resulting decline of the Mauryan Empire, parts of India were subject to the invasion of the Indo-Greeks, Sakas and Kushanas from West and Central Asia. All of them established themselves as rulers over large parts of India. This strengthened the process of acculturation and the assimilation of foreign cultures and art forms into Indian society. It also resulted in the integration of India with the Mediterranean world and Central Asia and China through extended trade linkages.

#### Indo – Greek Reactions

##### The Beginnings

India's interaction with the Greeks began with the invasion of north-western India by Alexander (327–325 BCE) and his conquest of the Punjab region. When he began his return march to the West, he left the conquered territories under provincial governors. One of Chandragupta Maurya's early military expeditions was against these foreign intruders.

Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander's most capable generals, succeeded in making himself the master of a vast territory from Phrygia (Turkey) to the river Indus after 311 BCE. Within a few years, probably around 305 BCE, Chandragupta waged a war against Seleucus and defeated him. However, this was not the savage defeat that happened to Alexander's governors. Instead, Chandragupta made a peace treaty with Seleucus. Seleucus surrendered the land he had conquered up to the Indus and received 500 war elephants in return. There is also mention of a marriage agreement. The treaty also led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Greeks and the Mauryan emperor. Megasthenes was sent to the Mauryan capital Pataliputra as the Greek ambassador.

Bindusara, Chandragupta's son, continued to maintain friendly ties with the Greek kingdoms in West Asia. Greek historians refer to ambassadors sent by Ptolemy II of Egypt and to Bindusara's

correspondence with Antiochus of Syria. Asoka also continued the tradition of friendly relations with the Greek kingdoms. His Rock Edict (13) mentions five yona kings, identified as Antiochus II Theos of Syria, Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Magas of Cyrene and Alexander of Corinth. This also indicates that the relations of Asoka with the Greeks extended beyond West Asia well into the heartland of Greece.

We now come across the term yavana (or yona) for Greeks, which was used throughout India. The word was derived from the Persian word yauna, which referred to Greeks. In India the term yavana was used to denote all persons of Greek origin, including those of mixed race and even the Phoenicians.

This regular interchange of ambassadors and correspondence, as well as the extension of the Mauryan Empire till Afghanistan, facilitated regular trade from India to the West as far as Egypt. Trade was carried on by the overland route via north-west Afghanistan (Bactria) and also partly by the coastal route along the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. A variety of luxury goods, including ivory, tortoise shell, pearls, indigo and other dyes, aromatic substances like spikenard or nard (a fragrant oil from the Gangetic region) and malabathrum (leaf of cinnamon, used as an aromatic) and rare woods were exported from India.

The cultural influence of the Greeks is evident from the capitals of monuments at Pataliputra. Many historians argue that the elaborate administrative institutions of the Mauryan Empire drew inspiration from the administrative systems of the Persians and Greeks. The eventual rise of Indo-Greek kingdoms in western India strengthened these cross-cultural influences and gave rise to a distinct school of art.

### **Indo-Greek kings**

The Seleucid Empire, which extended from northern Afghanistan (Bactria) to Syria, began to weaken and disintegrate after 250 BCE. The governor of Bactria, Diodotus, revolted against Antiochus II and became the independent ruler of Bactria. In 212 BCE, the king of Bactria was a Greek named Euthydemus. The Seleucid emperor Antiochus III was unable to subjugate Euthydemus and agreed to negotiate a settlement with him, since Antiochus himself needed to turn his attention to his dominions in

the West. But Antiochus III did come down the Kabul river and managed to defeat the local Indian king, known as Subhagasena. Nothing much is known about this king. It can be inferred that the mention of an independent king in the region might be an indication of the weakening of the central authority of the Mauryan Empire after Asoka's death in 236 BCE.

## Demetrius

Euthydemus's son Demetrius succeeded him (c. 200 BCE), and another Demetrius, probably Demetrius II, was the first known Indo-Greek king (c. 175 BCE). The distinguishing feature of the reign of the Indo-Greek kings was their exquisite coinage. Minted in the same style as Greek coins of silver, they carried the portrait of the reigning king on one side with his name. The coins thus give us a visual picture of the kings, who are represented in various kinds of headgear and with distinctive facial and physical features. Extensive collections of these coins have been found from the period, which makes it possible to reconstruct the lineage of the Indo-Greek kings with certainty.

Indian accounts of the period refer to the yavana invasion of Ayodhya (Saketa) and further east into the Magadha territory. However, since the Greeks seem to have been beset by internal dissensions, they did not retain any of this territory. They ceded land to Pushyamitra, the Sunga emperor who had usurped the throne after the last Mauryan ruler. Numismatic evidence also proves Demetrius's association with India. He issued bi-lingual square coins with Greek on the obverse and Kharoshti (the local language of north-western Pakistan) on the reverse.

At about 165 BCE, Bactria was lost to the Parthians and Sakas. After this, the yavanas continued to rule in central and southern Afghanistan and north-western India. The Greeks continued to be beset with internal squabbles among many claimants to power, and the names of more than thirty kings can be identified from their coins. It is possible that they all ruled small pockets as autonomous rulers and issued their own coinage.

## Menander

Menander (c.165/145–130 BCE) was the best known of the Indo-Greek kings. He is said to have ruled a large kingdom in the north-west of the country. His coins have been found over an extensive area ranging from

the valleys of the Kabul and Indus rivers to as far as western Uttar Pradesh. This gives a good indication of the extent of his kingdom. Though he does not look like a great and heroic conqueror as seen in his coins, he is said to have raided the Gangetic region along with the kings of Panchala and Mathura. King Kharavela of Kalinga mentioned in the Hathigumpha inscription, was not able to stop him. Menander successfully attacked Pataliputra, but retreated without consolidating his conquest. Interestingly, in his coins, he is described as “king” and “soter” or saviour, and not as a great conqueror.

Menander is mainly remembered as the eponymous hero of the Buddhist text, *Milinda-pinha* (questions of Milinda), in which he is engaged in a question-and-answer discussion on Buddhism with the teacher Nagasena. He is believed to have become a Buddhist and promoted Buddhism.

Another Indo-Greek king whose name is remembered is Antialcidas (or Antialkidas), c. 110. He is known to us primarily because his emissary, Heliodorus, who was sent to the court of King Bhagabhadra erected a pillar or garuda-dhvaja with its capital adorned by a figure of Garuda, in honour of God Krishna (Vasudeva). Heliodorus had evidently become a follower of Vishnu. (The pillar stands in isolation in the middle of an open ground in Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh.)

Indian interactions with the Greeks was not limited to the Indo-Greek kings. Greeks were becoming known and their presence recorded throughout the sub-continent. Merchants, sailors and many others of Greek origin were travelling to India, so there was a continued interaction with the Greeks.

### **Sakas, Parthians and Kushanas**

The Indo-Greek kingdoms in north-western India were ousted by various nomadic tribes from Central Asia, known as the Sakas (Scythians), Parthians (Pahlavis) and Kushanas (yueh-chi or yuezhi tribes in Chinese). In spite of the fact that they followed the Greek practice of issuing vast amounts of coinage with their names and titles (mostly “king of kings”), this is a very confusing period in our history. It is a daunting task to try and work out the lineage of various ruling clans and dynasties that came into India.

The first question that arises is: why and how did nomadic tribes turn to war and conquest? The advent of these tribes in India arose as a result of a complex sequence of migrations and political developments in Central Asia. In the eastern part of Central Asia, the Yueh-chi were being pushed westward by the Chinese who had built the Great Wall to keep out nomads and to protect their villages and agriculture from their raids. The Yueh-chi, in turn, turned westward and pushed the Sakas towards eastern Iran, where the Parthians had become rulers following the collapse of the Seleucid empire. As a curious historical event, in 58 BCE, the independent Parthian kingdom of eastern Iran was established by the Parthian Vonones (or Azes, according to some historians). This year was taken to denote the start of the Vikram samvat era, the Indian calendar.

## Sakas

The Sakas were pushed back from eastern Iran by the Parthian ruler Mithradates (188–123 BCE), and they then turned to north-western India and finally settled in the region between the Indus valley and Saurashtra. The first Saka ruler in India was Maues or Moga/Moga (20 BCE to 22 CE). He occupied Gandhara, driving a wedge into the Indo-Greek kingdoms, but it was his successor Azes who finally destroyed the last remnants of the Indo-Greek kingdoms and extended Saka rule as far as Mathura.

In India, the Sakas became assimilated into Hindu society. They began to adopt Hindu names and religious beliefs, so much so that their coins had representations of Hindu gods on one side. The Sakas appointed kshatrapas or satraps as provincial governors to administer their territories. Many of the kshatrapas titled themselves mahakshatrapas and were virtually independent rulers.

One of the most famous of the Saka kshatrapas was Rudradaman (130–150 CE). His exploits are celebrated in the famous rock inscription of Junagadh (in Gujarat). According to this inscription, he had even defeated the Satavahanas in battle. His name indicates that the process of assimilation into Indian society was complete by that time.

## Kushanas

The Sakas were displaced by the Parthian Gondophernes, who first conquered Kabul (c. 43 CE). He lost the Kabul valley to the Kushanas, but

he was successful against the Sakas in India. Records of his rule have been discovered in Peshawar district. The Sakas approached the Kushanas (Yueh-chi) for war help against the Parthians. The first Kushana king who conquered Afghanistan was Khujula Kadphises, followed by Wima Kadphises. The two kings extended Kushana territory to Gandhara, Punjab and as far to the east as the Ganga-Jumna doab till Mathura.

## Kanishka

The best known of the Kushana kings was Kanishka, who is thought to have ruled from 78 CE till 101 or 102 CE. Ironically, 78 CE is held to be the beginning of the "Saka era" in the Indian calendar. Historians are, hence, divided about Kanishka's period. His rule is said to have started anywhere between 78 and 144 CE. Kanishka was an ardent follower of Buddhism and hosted the fourth Buddhist mahasangha or council (the third council had been held in Pataliputra during Asoka's reign). By now Mahayana Buddhism had become the dominant sect, and Kanishka supported the missions sent to China to preach Buddhism.

Kushana coins were of the highest quality and conformed to the weight standards of Roman coins. In the coins, Kushana rulers are referred to as "king of kings", "Caesar", "lord of all lands" and by other such titles. Unfortunately, the titles did not leave much room on the coins for the actual name of the ruler. Hence our information on the Kushana kings tends to be very uncertain. Kanishka's coins as well as his statue found near Mathura show him dressed in a belted tunic along with overcoat and wearing boots, testifying to his Central Asian origins.

The Karakoram highway, a joint project between China and Pakistan, which was completed in 1979, has yielded great dividends for archaeologists and historians. The rock of Hunza mentions the first two Kadphises and the Kusanadevapura (son of God) Maharaja Kaniska. This inscription confirms that Kanishka's empire stretched from Central Asia till eastern India. Buddhist sources record that he had conquered Magadha and Kashmir and Khotan in Sinkiang.

The artefacts found along the Karakoram highway also establish that this was the route taken by Buddhist monks travelling to China on their mission to spread Buddhism. Merchants followed the missionaries, so this became a major commercial route for the import of Chinese silk and horses

from the West into India. Indian merchants established themselves in various towns in Central Asia and seized the opportunity to become intermediaries in the luxury trade between China and the Roman Empire, since merchants from the West did not want to venture further east beyond Central Asia.

Kushana kings, mostly with their names ending with -shka (among them Huvishka and Vasishka as well as later Kanishkas and even Vasudeva), ruled for at least one century more, but nothing much is known about them. Clearly the empire was beginning to break down, and the satraps (the Kushanas also continued the practice of appointing satraps to govern the provinces) were able to set themselves up as independent rulers in various regional capitals.

### **Art and Literature**

During the reign of Kushanas, there was great creative energy when art and literature flourished. This was partly due to royal patronage and partly due to other factors, like the growing ascendancy of Mahayana Buddhism, which allowed the representation of the person of Buddha in human form. The Greek influence led to an Indo-Greek style of sculpture and art commonly referred to as Gandhara art. Statues of Buddha, sculpted particularly in Taxila and the north-western regions, show him in graceful garments, surrounded by cherubs and leaves inspired by the Greek tradition. But mention must also be made of the red sandstone sculpture with intricate carving produced near Mathura.

The Buddhists began to carve out rock caves in the hills of western India, which served as religious centres with chaityas and viharas, stretching from the Ajanta caves to the Kanheri caves in Mumbai. Large statues of Buddha were sculpted in these caves as a part of the Mahayana tradition, and in later centuries, they were further embellished with murals of extraordinary beauty, as seen in the Ajanta caves.

Kanishka was the patron of Buddhist philosophers such as Asvaghosha, Parsva and Vasumitra, as well as the great Buddhist teacher Nagarjuna. Asvaghosha is known for his Buddhacharita and is celebrated as the author of the first Sanskrit play, Sariputraprakarana, in nine acts. The great dramatist Bhasa, whose plays were re-discovered only about a hundred years ago in South India, most probably belonged

to this period. Among the Hindu treatises, we find the Manusmriti, Vatsyayana's Kamasutra and Kautilya's Arthashastra taking final shape by the second century CE.

### **Gandhara Art**

Situated in the cross-roads of cultural influences, Gandhara region was influenced by Greek and Roman culture. Gandhara school of art developed in the first century Common Era. During the time of Kushana Empire, in view of its contact with Rome, the techniques of Roman art were assimilated and applied in north-western India. The Gandhara art is famous for the portrayal of Buddha in a spiritual state, eyes half-closed in meditation.

### **The Tamil Kingdoms**

Southern India remained immune to the political changes taking place in the northern part of the country. Around the first century CE, the Satavahana kingdom was established in the Deccan area, comprising the modern states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. This, however, was not like the centralised empire of the Mauryas, and the provincial governors of the Satavahanas had a considerable degree of autonomy.

The political landscape of the Tamil region was fragmented into small kingdoms, in contrast to the north where extensive empires flourished. The Tamil region was ruled by *muvendar*, the three kings - the Pandyas from their capital Madurai, the Cholas from their capital Uraiyur (now a suburb of the city of Tiruchi), and the Cheras from Vanji (modern-day Karur). We know that these kings were known to the Mauryas even in the 3rd century BCE and Asoka's second rock edict mentions them as kingdoms bordering his empire. However, there were many war lords and chiefs (often referred to as *velir*) who were ruling over smaller principalities in the region.

We have extensive information about the Tamil region coming from the corpus of Tamil poetry collectively known as the Sangam literature, dating from the third century BCE to the third century CE. To these we can add the epics *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, which were written somewhat later. The very large volume of trade with the Tamil region evoked a great deal of interest among the Roman and Greek historians and geographers, and their accounts complement the information in the Tamil

sources, especially with respect to trade. A first century CE account in Greek, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (Periplus Maris Erythraei), is the most reliable source of information on the ports of the Indian coast and trade. Archaeological findings confirm the information from all these sources.

## **Contours of International Trade**

Two major developments changed the contours of trade between Europe and India towards the beginning of the Common Era. By the end of the last century BCE, Rome emerged as the superpower of the Mediterranean world, displacing the Greek kingdoms, and the republic became an empire in 27 BCE under Emperor Augustus. Rome was the largest and, probably, the wealthiest city in the world commanding huge resources realised through conquests in Europe and North Africa. The wealth of Rome greatly increased the demand for various products from India, especially the spices and textiles of the Tamil country, resulting in a great expansion of trade.

The second development was the discovery of the pattern of monsoon winds in the Arabian Sea in the first century CE by Hippalus, an Egyptian sailor. Till then, the sea trade between India and the Mediterranean world was controlled by the Arabs. Arabs had a monopoly of the knowledge of the source regions of products such as cinnamon and pepper, which formed the main export to Rome. But when the information about the direct sea route became common knowledge, Roman ships began to sail directly to the western coast of India. They could thus avoid sailing close to the coastline, which made them vulnerable to attacks by pirates. Further, this also meant that the overland route could be circumvented completely, since traders on that route were also vulnerable to attacks by Parthians in Iran. The ultimate result of the combination of the growing demand from Rome and the opening of the direct sea route to western India was an increase in the number of ships sailing to India from about twenty ships a year to almost one ship a day.

## **Trade Between tamizhagam and Rome**

Trade had flourished between the Tamil country and Rome even when Rome was a republic. Roman coins and artefacts of the period have been excavated at Arikamedu, near Pondicherry, which is said to have been

an Indo-Roman trading station. Before the first century of the Common Era, Roman ships did not venture past the western coast of India around Cape Comorin. So the ports on the west coast were the main ports involved in trade with Rome. From the west coast, the Roman traders travelled overland through the Palghat pass to production centres further east. Kodumanal and Padiyur in Erode and Vaniyampadi near Salem had mines producing beryl, which was a gemstone in high demand in Rome. In addition, Chennimalai near Erode produced iron and steel (remnants of furnaces and slag have been found here), which was also exported to Rome. This is the reason why the finds of Roman coins of the earlier period are concentrated in Coimbatore, Erode, Salem and Karur districts.

By the end of the first century CE, however, Roman ships had begun to sail to ports on the Coromandel (east) coast of Tamil Nadu, and many of these ports are mentioned in the Periplus. On the west coast, the main ports were Naura (Cannanore) and Tyndys/Tondi (Ponnani), which were said to be on the northern border of the Tamil country of the Cheras. Musiri or Muziris was an important port located further south. Traditionally identified as Kodungallur, the recently undertaken Muziris excavation locates the port at Pattanam, a few kilometers away. Muziris was probably the busiest port on the coast. A recently discovered trade agreement written on papyrus between a merchant of Muziris and a merchant of Alexandria indicates the large consignments of cargo carried even by individual merchants. According to Sangam poetry, Musiri was the centre of two circuits of trade. Boats came in from the interior carrying rice and took back fish, which indicates a kind of barter trade in the primary consumption goods. At the same time, sacks of pepper were brought to the market and were exchanged for gold, which came in the ships, which in turn, was transported on barges to the shore.

The ships sailing from India to Rome carried pepper, a large quantity of pearls, ivory, silk cloth, spikenard (a fragrant oil from the Gangetic region which was much in demand for personal use among wealthy Romans) malabathrum, the leaf of the cinnamon tree, again used as an aromatic, sapphire, beryl, diamonds and tortoiseshell. As Roman ships began to trade with the Coromandel coast, the fine cotton textiles of the region were also exported. From Rome, the main imports were coin, topaz, antimony, coral, crude glass, copper, tin and lead and wine. Clearly, the value of the exports from the Tamil region was much higher than the value of imports from Rome, and the volume of trade peaked in the second half

of the first century CE, during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. The growing trade imbalance, which had to be met through exports of coins or silver, became a source of concern. There was a complaint that each year the trade to India caused a drain of 55 million sesterces to Rome. Ultimately Emperor Vespasian passed laws to curb the luxury consumption of the wealthier classes in Rome, and imports from India subsequently comprised only cotton textiles and pepper, which were relatively low-value commodities.

A further change in the trading pattern evolved because of the increased vulnerability of the traditional overland silk route. Silk cloth and yarn from China were carried by sea to the Coromandel ports, from where they were transhipped to Rome. Information about the trade relations of the Tamil region with the south-east and further east is very scanty. However, tortoiseshell (an important export to Rome) was sourced from islands near Malaya in the Indian Ocean, while silk came from China. There was also constant interaction with Java and Sri Lanka, which are mentioned in Tamil literature almost as extensions of Tamil Nadu, and Buddhism was probably the connecting link, which brought these countries together.

### **Foreign merchants (yavanas)**

The expansion of overseas trade and shipping brought foreign merchants and sailors to the Tamil region. Because of the seasonal nature of the monsoon winds, and the prevailing levels of technology, long voyages necessitated long periods of stay in host countries. We find interesting insights into the response of Tamil society to the presence of these foreign merchants. Puhar was the most important port on the Coromandel coast. Here, yavana merchants lived in especially ear-marked residential quarters in the harbour area. Though they were allowed to trade freely, and were noted for their attractive goods, there was a good deal of reserve in the attitude of the local Tamils to foreign merchants who were considered an alien, barbaric people, who spoke a harsh-sounding language.

Other yavanas also came with the merchants. The fortress of Madurai was guarded by yavanas carrying large swords. There are also references to yavana or metal workers and carpenters, who were described as “hard-eyed” probably because they had grey or blue eyes. All these may not have been strictly of Greek origin, as implied by the term

yavana, which had become a generic word to denote persons from the eastern Mediterranean regions.

### **Trade and the Economy: The Larger Picture**

The magnitude of the expansion of trade that is evident in this period could have been achieved only through major changes to the production base of the economy. Even in the case of primary products like mined gemstones like beryl, increased demand would have involved more labour to work the mines, more implements and more capital. In the case of textiles, there would have been a considerable increase in weaving activity and in the subsidiary activities like spinning to produce the yarn for weaving, and perhaps even growing more cotton to increase the supply of the raw material. Growing trade thus would lead to a considerable degree of expansion of the economy.

Merchants became more visible and important as trade grew. There were merchants dealing with specific products like food grains, cloth, gold and jewellery in the markets of the big cities. Merchants were also involved in overseas trade, as well as overland trade. Thus, the circuits of trade became more specialised with institutionalised arrangements to support the expanding commercial activities.

One of the most important questions that arises is what was the extent to which money was used in commerce. This is difficult to answer. In all pre-modern economies, barter was an important medium of exchange. For instance, salt merchants of the Tamil region carried salt in their carts from the coastal areas of the east inland, travelling together in groups. It is more than probable that they exchanged their salt for other goods and necessities, rather than selling the salt for money. However, the extent of the overland and overseas trade, as well as the descriptions of the city markets in the literature would imply that money was the main medium of exchange.

The Roman coins that have been found in various centres substantiate this inference. Locally, imitations of Roman coins were also minted, primarily to increase the supply of money in circulation. Fairly large volumes of Chera coins have also been found in the bed of the Amaravati river. The very large quantities of Indo-Greek and Kushana coins found in North India would lead to a similar conclusion about the level of

monetisation. All this would lead to the inference that there was considerable use of money as the medium of exchange in the ancient period.

## Conclusion

The centuries in discussion in this chapter were not a period of great political stability. With the exception of Kanishka, the invaders in North India did not consolidate their conquests by establishing large, stable empires. Even Kanishka ruled only for a relatively short period, and his empire slowly fell apart after his death. The Tamil region did not have the unifying force of a large empire and was fragmented into relatively small kingdoms and even smaller principalities. The most important development of this period both for the north and the south was the great expansion of trade. From the north, trade relations extended to China in the east and up to the known Mediterranean world in the west. For the south, in addition to internal trade and circuits of exchange, there was exponential growth in overseas trade to the west, and also to the east up to China. The result would be seen in a considerable degree of economic growth and increased prosperity, which is evident from the excavations of cities as well as the descriptions of urban centres in Tamil poetry.

## Lesson VIII

### The Guptas

#### Introduction

After the Mauryan empire, many small kingdoms rose and fell. In the period from c. 300 to 700 CE, a classical pattern of an imperial rule evolved, paving the way for state formation in many regions. During this period, the Gupta kingdom emerged as a great power and achieved the political unification of a large part of the Indian subcontinent. It featured a strong central government, bringing many kingdoms under its hegemony. Feudalism as an institution began to take root during this period. With an effective guild system and overseas trade, the Gupta economy boomed. Great works in Sanskrit were produced during this period and a high level of cultural maturity in fine arts, sculpture and architecture was achieved.

The living standards of upper classes reached a peak. Education, art and study of science progressed, but the feudal system of governance put people in some form of hardship. Although some historians proclaim that Gupta period was a golden age, it is not entirely accurate. Many scholars would, however, agree that it was a period of cultural florescence and a classical age for the arts.

#### Sources

There are three types of sources for reconstructing the history of the Gupta period.

##### I. Literary sources

- Narada, Vishnu, Brihaspati and Katyayana smritis.
- Kamandaka's Nitisara, a work on polity addressed to the king (400 CE)
- Devichandraguptam and Mudrarakshasam by Vishakadutta provide details about the rise of the Guptas.
- Buddhist and Jaina texts
- Works of Kalidasa
- Accounts of the Chinese traveller Fahien

## II. Epigraphical Sources

Mehrauli Iron Pillar inscription -achievements of Chandragupta I.

Allahabad Pillar inscription -describing Samudragupta's personality and achievements in 33 lines composed by Harisena and engraved in Sanskrit in Nagari script.

## III. Numismatic Sources

Coins issued by Gupta kings contain legends and figures. These gold coins tell us about the titles the Guptas assumed and the Vedic rituals they performed.

Origins of the Gupta Dynasty Evidence on the origin and antecedents of the Gupta dynasty is limited. The Gupta kings seem to have risen from modest origins. Chandragupta I, who was the third ruler of the Gupta dynasty married Kumaradevi, a Lichchavi prince. The marriage is mentioned in the records of his successors with pride indicating that that royal connection would have contributed to the rise of Guptas. Lichchavi was an old, established gana-sangha and its territory lay between the Ganges and the Nepal Terai. According to Allahabad pillar inscription Samudragupta, the illustrious son of Chandragupta I, had conquered the whole fertile plains west of Prayag to Mathura and launched a spectacular raid through Kalinga into the south as far as Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital. The Puranas mention Magadha, Allahabad and Oudh as the Gupta dominions.

The first ruler of the Gupta Empire was Sri Gupta (240-280 CE) who was succeeded by his son Ghatotkacha (280-319 CE). Both Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha are mentioned as Maharajas in inscriptions. Chandragupta I, the son of Ghatotkacha, ruled from 319 to 335 CE and is considered to be the first great king of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta held the title of maharaja-adhiraja (great king over other kings). His imperial position is inferred from the records of others. No inscriptions or coins have survived from his reign.

Chandragupta I appointed his son Samudragupta to succeed him in 335 CE. A lengthy eulogy on him, inscribed on an Ashokan pillar, suggests that he was claiming the legacy of the Mauryan kingdom. This inscription

gives an impressive list of kings and regions that succumbed to Samudragupta's march across the country.

Four northern kings were conquered mainly in the area around Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh. The kings of the south and the east were forced to pay homage, and from the places mentioned, it appears that Samudragupta campaigned down the eastern coast as far as Kanchipuram. Nine kings of the western half of the Ganges Plain were violently uprooted. The forest kings (tribal chiefs of Central India and the Deccan) were forced to pay tribute. The kings of Assam and Bengal in eastern India and those of small kingdoms in Nepal and the Punjab also paid tribute by submission. Nine Republics in Rajasthan, including the Malavas and Yaudheyas, were forced to accept Gupta's suzerainty. In addition, foreign kings, such as the Daivaputra Shahanushahi (a Kushana title), the Sakas and the king of Lanka also paid tribute, as mentioned in the eulogy.

Tough this statement is exaggerated, it is undeniable that the southern kings paid tribute, while the northern kingdoms were annexed to the Gupta Empire under Samudragupta. His direct control was confined to the Ganges valley, since the Sakas remained unconquered in western India. The tribes of Rajasthan paid tribute, but the Punjab was outside the limits of his authority. Samudragupta's campaign broke the power of the tribal republics in those regions that led to repeated invasions from the Huns.

The relationship with Kushanas is not certain, but with regard to Lanka, its ruler Meghavarman sent presents and requested permission from Samudragupta to build a Buddhist monastery at Gaya. Samudragupta's reign lasted for about

40 years, which must have given him ample time to plan and organise these campaigns. He performed the horse-sacrifice ritual to proclaim his military conquests.

Samudragupta patronised scholars and poets like Harisena and thus promoted Sanskrit literature. Tough an ardent follower of Vaishnavism, he also patronised the great Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu. As a lover of poetry and music, he was given the title "Kaviraja". His coins bear the insignia of him playing the vina (lute).

Named after his grandfather, Chandragupta II was a capable ruler, who ruled for 40 years from c. 375 to 415 CE. He came to power after a succession struggle with his brother Rama Gupta. He is also known as Vikramaditya. With the capital at Pataliputra, Chandragupta II extended the limits of the Gupta Empire by conquest and matrimonial alliances. He married off his daughter Prabhavati to a Vakataka prince, who ruled the strategic lands Chandragupta II of Deccan. This alliance was highly useful when he proceeded against the Saka rulers of western India. Chandragupta II conquered western Malwa and Gujarat by defeating the Saka rulers who had reigned for about four centuries in the region.

The kingdom's prosperity grew out of its trade links with Roman Empire. After establishing himself in eastern and western India, Chandragupta II defeated northern rulers like the Huns, Kambojas and Kiratas. He was a great conqueror and an able administrator as well. His other names (as mentioned in coins) include Vikrama, Devagupta, Devaraja, Simhavikrama, Vikramaditya and Sakari. His court had nine jewels or navaratnas, that is, nine eminent people in various fields of art, literature and science. This included the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, the Sanskrit scholar Harisena, the lexicographer Amarasimha, and the physician Dhanvantari. Fahien, the Buddhist scholar from China, visited India during his reign. He records the prosperity of the Gupta Empire. Chandragupta II was the first Gupta ruler to issue silver coins. His rule thus formed the peak period of Gupta's territorial expansion.

Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumara Gupta I, who founded the Nalanda University. He was also called Sakraditya. The last great king of the Gupta dynasty, Skanda Gupta, was the son of Kumara Gupta I. He was able to repulse an attack by the Huns, but the recurrence of Huns' invasion strained his empire's coffers. The Gupta Empire declined after the death of Skanda Gupta in 467 CE. He was followed by many successors who hastened the end of the Gupta Empire. The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnu Gupta who reigned from 540 to 550 CE.

## The King

During the Gupta age, political hierarchies can be identified by the titles adopted. Kings assumed titles such as maharajadhiraja, paramabhattacharya and parameshvara. They were also connected with gods through epithets such as parama-daivata (the foremost worshipper of the

### **Fahien's account on Mathura and Pataliputra**

At Mathura, the people are numerous and happy; they do not have to register their household. Only those who cultivate the royal land have to pay a portion of the grain from it. Criminals are fined both lightly and heavily depending on the circumstances.

In the case of repeated rebellion, their right hands are cut off. Throughout the whole country, the people do not kill any living creatures or drink any intoxicant.

The inhabitants of Pataliputra are rich and prosperous and vie with one another in the practice of benevolence. In the cities, the Vaisya families establish houses for dispensing charity and medicines. All the poor and destitute, orphans, widows and childless, maimed and cripples are provided with every kind of help.

gods) and parama-bhagavata (the foremost worshipper of Vasudeva Krishna). Some historians have suggested that the Gupta Kings claimed divine status. For example, Samudragupta is compared to Purusha (Supreme Being) in the Allahabad inscription. These assertions can be seen as reflections of an attempt to claim divine status by the king.

### **Ministers and other Officials**

Seals and inscriptions make a mention of official ranks and designations, whose precise meaning is often uncertain. The term "kumaramatya" occurs in six Vaishali seals, which suggests that this title represented a high-ranking officer associated with an office (adikarana) of his own. The designation "amatya" occurs on several Bita seals, and the "kumaramatya" seems to have been pre-eminent among amatyas and equivalent in status to princes of royal blood. Kumaramatyas were attached to the king, crown prince, revenue department or a province. One of the Vaishali seals refers to a kumaramatya who seems to have been in charge of the maintenance of the sacred coronation tank of the Lichchavis.

Individuals holding the ranks of kumaramatya sometimes had additional designations as well, and such ranks were hereditary. For example, Harisena, composer of the Allahabad prashasti (inscriptions of praise), was a kumaramatya, sandhivigrahika and mahadandanayaka, and was the son of Dhruvabhuti, a mahadandanayaka.

The origin of Huns is not definitely known. According to Roman historian Tacitus, they were a barbarian tribe living near Caspian Sea and contributed to the fall of Roman Empire. They organised under Attila and were known for their savagery and bestiality in Europe. One branch of Huns, known as white Huns, moved towards India from Central Asia and their invasion began about a hundred years after the Kushanas.

## Council of Ministers

The Gupta king was assisted by a council of mantrins (ministers). The Allahabad prashasti refers to an assembly or council, presumably of ministers, which was known as the Sabha. The various high-ranking functionaries included the sandhivigrahika or mahasandhivigrahika (minister for peace and war), who seems to have been a high-ranking officer in charge of contact and correspondence with other states, including initiating wars and concluding alliances and treaties.

High-ranking officials were called dandanayakas, and mahadandanayakas were high-ranking judicial or military officers. One of the seals mentions a mahadandanayaka named Agnigupta. The Allahabad prashasti refers to three mahadandanayakas. All these suggest that these posts were hereditary by nature. Another person had a designation mahashvapati (commander of the cavalry), indicating military functions.

## Division of the Empire

The Gupta Empire was divided into provinces known as deshas or bhuktis. They were administered by governors who were usually designated as uparikas. The uparika was directly appointed by the king and he, in turn, frequently appointed the head of the district administration and the district board. Uparika carried on the administration "with the enjoyment of the rule consisting of elephants, horses and soldiers", indicating his control over the military machinery as well. The fact that the uparika had the title maharaja in three of the Damodarpur plates indicates his high status and rank in the administrative hierarchy. The Eran pillar inscription of Budhagupta, dated Gupta year 165 CE, refers to maharaja

Surashmichandra as a lokpala, governing the land between the Kalinndi and Narmada rivers. Lokpala here seems to refer to a provincial governor.

The provinces of the Gupta Empire were divided into districts known as visayas, which were controlled by officers known as vishyapatis. The vishyapatis seems to have been generally appointed by the provincial governor. Sometimes, even the kings directly appointed the vishyapatis. Prominent members of the town assisted the vishyapati in administrative duties.

### Administrative Units below the District level

The administrative units below the district level included clusters of settlements known variously as vithi, bhumi, pathaka and peta. There are references to officials known as ayuktakas and vithi-mahattaras. At the village level, villagers chose functionaries such as gramika and gramadhyaksha. The Damodarpur copper plate of the reign of Budhagupta mentions an ashtakula-adhikarana (a board of eight members) headed by the mahattara. Mahattara has a range of meanings including village elder, village headman, and head of a family community. The Sanchi inscription of the time of Chandragupta II mentions the panch-mandali, which may have been a corporate body.

### Army

Seals and inscriptions mention military designations such as baladhikrita and mahabaladhikrita (commander of infantry and cavalry). The standard term “**senapati**” does not occur in Gupta inscriptions, but the term could be found in some Vakataka epigraphs. A Vaishali seal mentions the ranabhandagar-adhikarana, which is the office of the military storehouse. Another Vaishali seal mentions the adhikarana (office) of the dandapashika, which may have been a district-level police office.

The officials connected specifically with the royal establishment included the mahapratihara (chief of the palace guards)

and the khadyatapakita (**superintendent of the royal kitchen**). A Vaishali seal mentions a person both as a mahapratihara and a taravara. The top layer of the administrative structure also included amatyas and sachivas, who were executive officers in charge of various departments. The system of

espionage included spies known as dutakas. Te ayuktakas were another cadre of high-ranking ofcers.

## **Economic Condition**

Nitisara, written by Kamandaka, is a text like Arthasastra. It emphasises the importance of the royal treasury and mentions various sources of revenue. The many ambitious military campaigns of kings like Samudragupta must have been financed through revenue surpluses. Gupta inscriptions reveal some details about the revenue department. The akshapataladhikrita was the keeper of royal records. Gupta inscriptions mention the terms klijta, bali, udranga, uparikara, and iranyavesti meant forced labour.

## **Agriculture and Agrarian Structure**

Agriculture fourished in the Gupta period due to establishment of irrigation works. Apart from the state and individual cultivators, Brahmins, Buddhists and Jain sanghas brought waste lands under cultivation when they were donated to them as religious endowments. Cultivators were asked to maintain their crops properly from damages and those who indulged in damaging the crops were punished. Likewise, crops and felds were fenced.

The crops cultivated during the Gupta period were rice, wheat, barley, peas, lentils, pulses, sugarcane and oil seeds. From Kalidasa, we come to know that the south was famous for pepper and cardamom. Varahamihira gives elaborate advice on the plantation of fruit trees.

The Paharpur copper plate inscription indicates that the king was the sole proprietor of the land. Even when he made land grants, he reserved his prerogatives over it. Te location and boundaries of individual plots were marked out and measured by the record keepers and infuential men in the locality. As stated in Paharpur plates, an ofcer called ustapala maintained records of all the land transactions in the district and the village accountant preserved records of land in the village. During the Gupta period, the land was classifed as detailed below.

<b>Kshetra</b>	<b>Cultivable land</b>
Khila	Waste land
Aprahata	Jungle or waste land
Vasti	Habitable land
Gapata Saraha	Pastoral land

<b>Types of tenures</b>	<b>Nature of Holding</b>
Nivi dharma	Endowment of land under a kind of trusteeship was prevalent in North and Central India and Bengal.
Nivi dharma aksayana	A perpetual endowment. The recipient could make use of income derived from it.
Aprada dharma	Income from land could be enjoyed, but the recipient is not permitted to gift it to anyone. The recipient has no administrative rights either.
Bhumi chchidranayaya	Right of ownership acquired by a person making barren land cultivable for the first time. This land was free from any rent liability.

#### Other Land Grants

Agrahara grants	Given to Brahmins, it was perpetual, hereditary and tax free.
Devagrahara grants	A land grant in favour of a Brahmin as well as gifts to merchants for the repair and worship of temples.
Secular grants	Grants made to feudatories of Guptas.

## Irrigation

The importance of irrigation to agriculture was recognised in India from the earliest times. From the Narada Smriti, we understand that there were two kinds of dykes: the bardhya, which protected the field from floods, and the khara, which served the purpose of irrigation. To prevent inundation, jalanirgamah (drains) were constructed, which is mentioned by Amarasimha.

Canals were constructed not only from rivers but also from tanks and lakes. The most famous lake was the Sudarsana lake at the foot of Girnar Hills in Gujarat.

## Position of Peasantry

The position of peasantry was undermined. They were reduced to the position of serfs due to the caste classification and also due to the granting of various privileges and lands to others. The practice of lease-holding reduced the permanent tenants to tenants at will (which means tenants could be evicted without notice). The farmers were required to pay various taxes.

Tax	Nature
Bhaga	Kings customary share of the produce normally amounting to one-sixth of the produce paid by cultivators
Bhoga	Periodic supply of fruits, firewood, flowers, etc., which the village had to provide to the king
Kara	A periodic tax levied on the villagers (not a part of the annual land tax)
Bali	A voluntary offering by the people to the king, but later became compulsory. It was an oppressive tax.
Udianga	Either a sort of police tax for the maintenance of police stations or a

	water tax. Hence, it was also an extra tax.
Uparikara	Also an extra tax. Scholars give different explanations about what it was collected for.
Hiranya	Literally, it means tax payable on gold coins, but in practice, it was probably the king's share of certain crops paid in kind.
Vata-Bhuta	Different kinds of cess for maintenance of rites for the winds (vata) and the spirits (bhuta)
Halivakara	A plough tax paid by every cultivator owning a plough
Sulka	A royal share of merchandise brought into a town or harbour by merchants. Hence it can be equated with the customs and tolls.
Klipta and Upakilpta	related to sale and purchase of lands.

### Industry: Mining and Metallurgy

Mining and metallurgy was one of the most flourishing industries during the Gupta period. Amarasimha, Varahamihira and Kalidasa make frequent mention of the existence of mines. The rich deposits of iron ore from Bihar and copper from Rajasthan were mined extensively during this period.

The list of metals used apart from iron were gold, copper, tin, lead, brass, bronze, bell-metal, mica, manganese, antimony, red chalk (sanssilajata) and red arsenic.

Blacksmiths were next only to agriculturists in importance in the society. Metal was used for the manufacture of various domestic implements, utensils and weapons. The improvement in the ploughshare, with the discovery of iron, for deep ploughing and for increasing cultivation happened during this period.

The most important and visible evidence of the high stage of development in metallurgy is the Mehrauli Iron Pillar of King Chandra in the Qutb Minar Complex in Delhi, identified with Chandragupta II. This monolith iron pillar has lasted through the centuries without rusting. It is a monument to the great craftsmanship of the iron workers during the Gupta period. Coin casting, metal engraving, pottery making, terracotta work and wood carving were other specialised crafts.

A significant development of the period in metal technology was the making of the seals and statutes of Buddha and other gods. It was laid down that the people had to pay for the loss arising out smelting of iron, gold, silver, copper, tin and lead.

### **Trade and Commerce**

The contribution of traders to the soundness of the Gupta economy is quite impressive. Two distinctive types of traders called sresti and sarthavaha existed. Sresti was usually settled at a particular place and enjoyed an eminent position by virtue of his wealth and influence in the commercial life and administration of the place. The sarthavaha was a caravan trader who carried his goods to different places for profitable sale.

Trade items ranged from products for daily use to valuable and luxury goods. They included pepper, sandalwood, elephants, horses, gold, copper, iron and mica. The abundant inscriptions and seals mentioning artisans, merchants and guilds are indicative of the thriving crafts and trade. (Guild is a society or other organisation of people with common interests or an association of merchants.) There are several references in several sources to artisans, traders and occupational groups in the guilds. Guilds continued as the major institution in the manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise. They remained virtually autonomous in their internal organisation, and the government respected their laws. These laws were generally drafted by a larger body, the corporation of guilds, of which each guild was a member.

The Narada and Brihaspati Smritis describe the organisation and activities of guilds. They mention that the guild had a chief and two, three or five executive officers. Guild laws were apparently laid down in written documents. The Brihaspati Smriti refers to guilds rendering justice to their members and suggests that these decisions should, by and large, be

approved by the king. There is also mention of the philanthropic activities of guilds, for instance, providing shelter for travellers and building assembly houses, temples and gardens. The inscription also records that the chief of the guilds played an important role in the district-level administrative bodies. There is also mention of joint corporate bodies of merchant-bankers, caravan merchants and artisans. The guilds also acted as banks. The names of donors are mentioned in this inscription.

Usury (the lending of money at an exorbitant rate of interest) was in practice during the Gupta period. The detailed discussion in the sources of that period indicates that money was used, borrowed and loaned for profit. There were many ports that facilitated trade in the western coast of India such as Calliena (Kalyan), Chaul port in ruin sixty kilometres south of Mumbai, and the markets of Male (Malabar), Mangarouth (Mangalore), Salopatana, Nalopatana and Pandopatana on the Malabar coast. Fahien refers to Tamralipti in Bengal as an important centre of trade on the eastern coast. These ports and towns were connected with those of Persia, Arabia and Byzantium on the one hand and Sri Lanka, China and Southeast Asia on the other. Fahien describes the perils of the sea route between India and China. The goods traded from India were rare gems, pearls, fine textiles and aromatics. Indians bought silk and other articles from China.

The Guptas issued many gold coins but comparatively few silver and copper coins. However, the post-Gupta period saw a decline in the circulation of gold coins.

## **Cultural Florescence**

### **Art and Architecture**

By evolving the Nagara and the Dravida styles, the Gupta art ushers in a formative and creative age in the history of Indian architecture with considerable scope for future development.

### **Rock-cut and Structural Temples**

The rock-cut caves continue the old forms to a great extent but possess striking novelty by bringing about extensive changes in the ornamentation of the facade and in the designs of the pillars in the interior.

The most notable groups of the rock-cut caves are found at Ajanta and Ellora (Maharashtra) and Bagh (Madhya Pradesh). The Udayagiri caves (Orissa) are also of this type.

The structural temples have the following attributes: (1) flat-roofed square temples; (2) flat-roofed square temple with a vimana (second storey); (3) square temple with a curvilinear tower (shikara) above; (4) rectangular temple; and (5) circular temple.

The second group of temples shows many of the characteristic features of the Dravida style. The importance of the third group lies in the innovation of a shikhara that caps the sanctum sanctorum, the main feature of the Nagara style.

### **Stupas**

Stupas were also built in large numbers but the best are found at Samat (Uttar Pradesh), Ratnagiri (Orissa) and Mirpur Khas (Sind).

### **Sculpture: Stone Sculpture**

A good specimen of stone sculpture is the well-known erect Buddha from Sarnath. Of the puranic images, perhaps the most impressive is the great Boar (Varaha) at the entrance of a cave at Udayagiri.

### **Metal statues**

The technology of casting statues on a large scale of core process was practised by the craftsmen during the Gupta period with great workmanship. Two remarkable examples of Gupta metal sculpture are (1) a copper image of the Buddha about eighteen feet high at Nalanda in Bihar and (2) the Sultanganj Buddha of seven-and-a-half feet in height.

### **Painting**

The art of painting seems to have been in popular demand in the Gupta period than the art of stone sculptures. The mural paintings of this period are found at Ajanta, Bagh, Badami and other places.

From the point of technique, the surface of these paintings was perhaps done in a very simple way. The mural paintings of Ajanta are not true frescoes, for frescoes is painted while the plaster is still damp and the murals of Ajanta were made after it had set. The art of Ajanta and Bagh shows the Madhyadesa School of painting at its best.

## **Terracotta and Pottery**

Clay figurines were used both for religious and secular purposes. We have figurines of Vishnu, Karttikeya, Durga, Naga and other gods and goddesses.

Gupta pottery remains found at Ahchichhatra, Rajgarh, Hastinapur and Bashar afford proof of excellence of pottery. The most distinctive class of pottery of this period is the “red ware”.

## **Sanskrit Literature**

The Guptas made Sanskrit the official language and all their epigraphic records were written in it. The period saw the last phase of the Smriti literature.

Smritis are religious texts covering a wide range of subjects such as ethics, politics, culture and art. Dharmasastras and puranas form the core of this body of literature.

## **Sanskrit Grammar**

The Gupta period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on Panini who wrote Ashtadhyayi and Patanjali who wrote Mahabhashya on the topic. This period is particularly memorable for the compilation of the Amarakosa, a thesaurus in Sanskrit, by Amarasimha. A Buddhist scholar from Bengal, Chandrogomia, composed a book on grammar named Chandravakyaranam.

## **Puranas and Ithihasas**

The Puranas, as we know them in their present form, were composed during this time. They are the legends as recorded by the Brahmins. They

were originally composed by bards (professional storytellers), but now, having come into priestly hands, they were rewritten in classical Sanskrit. Details on Hindu sects, rites and customs were added in order to make them sacrosanct religious documents. The succession of dynasties was recorded in the form of prophesies. Thus what began as popular memories of the past were revived and rewritten in prophetic form and became the Brahmanical interpretation of the past. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana also got their final touches and received their present shape during this period.

Eighteen major puranas are listed. Of them the well known are: Brahma Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Skanda Purana, Shiva Maha Purana, Markendeya Purana, Agni Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Matsya Purana and Shrimad Bhagavat Purana.

### **Buddhist Literature**

The earliest Buddhist works are in Pali, but in the later phase, Sanskrit came to be used to a great extent. Most of the works are in prose with verse passages in mixed Sanskrit. Arya Deva and Arya Asanga of the Gupta period are the most notable writers. The first regular Buddhist work on logic was written by Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu's disciple, Dignaga, was also the author of many learned works.

### **Jaina Literature**

The Jaina canonical literature at first took shape in Prakrit dialects. Sanskrit came to be the medium later. Within a short time, Jainism produced many great scholars and by their efforts the Hindu itihasa and puranas were recast in Jaina versions to popularise their doctrines. Vimala produced a Jaina version of Ramayana. Siddasena Divakara laid the foundation of logic among the Jinas.

### **Secular Literature**

Samudragupta himself had established his fame as Kaviraja. It is widely believed that his court was adorned by the celebrated navaratnas like Kalidasa, Amarasimha, Visakadatta and Dhanvantri. Kalidasa's famous dramas are Sakunthalam, Malavikagnimitram and

Vikramaurvashiyam. The works of Sudraka (Mrichchhakatika), Visakhadatta (Mudraraksasa and Devichandraguptam) and the lesser known dramatists and writers also contributed to the literary and social values in the classical age. An interesting feature of the dramas of this period is that while the elite spoke in Sanskrit, the common people spoke Prakrit.

### **Prakrit Language and Literature**

In Prakrit, there was patronage outside the court circle. The Gupta age witnessed the evolution of many Prakrit forms such as Suraseni used in Mathura and its vicinity, Ardh Magadhi spoken in Awadh and Bundelkhand and Magadhi in modern Bihar.

### **Nalanda University**

Nalanda was an acclaimed Mahavihara, a large Buddhist monastery in the ancient kingdom of Magadha in India. The site is located about ninety five kilometres southeast of Patna near the town of Bihar Sharif and was a centre of learning from the fifth century CE to c. 1200 CE. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The highly formalised methods of Vedic learning helped inspire the establishment of large teaching institutions such as Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramashila, which are often characterised as India's early universities. Nalanda flourished under the patronage of the Gupta Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries and later under Harsha, the emperor of Kanauj. The liberal cultural traditions inherited from the Gupta age resulted in a period of growth and prosperity until the ninth century. The subsequent centuries were a time of gradual decline, a period during which Buddhism became popular in eastern India patronised by the Palas of Bengal.

At its peak, the Nalanda attracted scholars and students from near and far with some travelling all the way from Tibet, China, Korea and Central Asia. Archaeological findings also confirm the contact with the Shailendra dynasty of Indonesia, one of whose kings built a monastery in the complex.

Nalanda was ransacked and destroyed by an army of the Mamluk dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate under Bakhtiyar Khalji in c. 1200 CE. While

some sources note that the Mahavihara continued to function in a makeshift fashion for a little longer, it was eventually abandoned and forgotten. The site was accidentally discovered when the Archaeological Survey of India surveyed the area. Systematic excavations commenced in 1915, which unearthed 11 monasteries and 6 brick temples situated on 12 hectares (30 acres) of land. A trove of sculptures, coins, seals and inscriptions have also been discovered since then and all of them are on display in the Nalanda Archaeological Museum situated nearby. Nalanda is now a notable tourist destination and a part of the Buddhist tourism circuit. Recently, the government of India, in cooperation with other South and South-east Asian countries, has revived this university.

## **Gupta Sciences**

### **Mathematics and Astronomy**

The invention of the theory of zero and the consequent evolution of the decimal system are to be credited to the thinkers of this age. In the Surya Siddhanta, Aryabhata (belonging to late fifth and early sixth century CE) examined the true cause of the solar eclipses. In calculation of the size of the earth, he is very close to the modern estimation. He was the first astronomer to discover that the earth rotates on its own axis. He is also the author of Aryabhattiyam, which deals with arithmetic, geometry and algebra.

Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita (sixth century CE) is an encyclopaedia of astronomy, physical geography, botany and natural history. His other works are Panch Siddhantika and Brihat Jataka. Brahmagupta (late sixth and early seventh century CE) is author of important works on mathematics and astronomy, namely Brahmasphuta-siddhanta and Khandakhadyaka.

### **Medical Sciences**

Metallic preparations for the purpose of medicine and references to the use of mercury and iron by Varahamihira and others indicate that much progress was made in chemistry. The Navanitakam was a medical work, which is a manual of recipes, formulation and prescriptions. Hastayurveda or the veterinary science authored by Palakapya attests to the advances made in medical science during the Gupta period.

## Decline of the Gupta Empire

The last recognised king of the Gupta line was Vishnugupta who reigned from 540 to 550 CE. Internal fighting and dissensions among the royal family led to its collapse. During the reign of a Gupta king, Budhagupta, the Vakataka ruler Narendrasena of western Deccan, attacked Malwa, Mekala and Kosala. Later on, another Vakataka king Harishena conquered Malwa and Gujarat from the Guptas. During Skanda Gupta's reign, the grandson of Chandragupta II, the Huns invaded northwest India. He was successful in repulsing the Huns, but consequently his empire was drained of financial resources. In the sixth century CE, the Huns occupied Malwa, Gujarat, Punjab and Gandhara. As the Hun invasion weakened the Gupta hold in the country, independent rulers emerged all over the north like Yasodharman of Malwa, the Maukharis of Uttar Pradesh, the Maitrakas in Saurashtra and others in Bengal. In time, the Gupta Empire came to be restricted to only Magadha. They did not focus on empire building and military conquests. So, weak rulers along with incessant invasions from foreign as well as native rulers caused the decline of the Gupta Empire. By the beginning of the sixth century, the empire had disintegrated and was ruled by many regional chieftains.

### Feudalism

The social formation of feudalism was the characteristic of the medieval society in India. Feudal features listed by historian R.S. Sharma are: royal grants of land; transfer of fiscal and judicial rights to the beneficiaries; the grant of their rights over peasants, artisans and merchants; an increased incidence of forced labour; appropriation of surplus by the state; a decline in trade and coinage; payment of officials through land revenue assignments; and the growth of the obligations of the samantas (subordinate or feudatory rulers).

## Lesson - 8

### Harsha and Rise of Regional Kingdoms

#### I Harsha Introduction

North India splintered into several warrior kingdoms after the downfall of the Gupta Empire. Excepting in the areas that were subdued by the Huns (modern Punjab, Rajasthan and Malwa), regional identity became pronounced with the emergence of many small states. Maithriyas had organised a powerful state in Sourashtra (Gujarat), with Valabhi as their capital. Agra and Oudh were organised into an independent and sovereign state by the Maukharis. The Vakatakas had recovered their position of ascendancy in the western Deccan. Despite political rivalry and conflict among these states, Thanesar, lying north of Delhi between Sutlej and Yamuna, was formed into an independent state by Pushyabhutis. It rose to prominence under Harsha. Harsha ruled the kingdom as large as that of the Guptas from 606 to 647 CE.

#### Sources

##### Literary sources

Bana's Harshacharita  
Hieun Tsang's Si-Yu-ki

##### Epigraphical sources

- Madhuban copper plate inscription
- Sonpat inscription on copper seal
- Banskhera copper plate inscription
- Nalanda inscription on clay seals

Bana's Harshacharita was the first formal biography of a king. It inaugurated a new literary genre in India.

## Pushyabhutis

The founder of the Vardhana dynasty was Pushyabhuti who ruled from Thanesar. He served as a military general under the imperial Guptas and rose to power after the fall of the Guptas. With the accession of Prabhakaravardhana (580–605 CE), the Pushyabhuti family became strong and powerful. Prabhakaravardhana fought against the Gurjaras and the Huns and established his authority as far as Malwa and Gujarat. He gave his daughter Rajyasri in marriage to the Maukhari king, Grahavarman, of Kanauj (near modern Kanpur), thus making Kanauj his ally. Prabhakaravardhana's dream of building an empire was eventually realised by his younger son Harshavardhana.

Harshavardhana (605-606 CE), the eldest son of Prabhakaravardhana, ascended the throne after his father's death. He was treacherously murdered by Sasanka, the Gauda ruler of Bengal. This resulted in his younger brother Harshavardhana becoming the king of Thanesar. Harsha had known the weakness of a group of small kingdoms and conquered his neighbours to integrate them into his empire. As Thanesar was too close to the threats from the northwest, Harsha shifted his capital from Thanesar to Kanauj. Kanauj was located in the rich agricultural region of the western Ganges Plain.

### Harsha as King of Kanauj

The magnates of Kanauj (the capital of Maukhari kingdom), on the advice of their minister Poni, invited Harsha to ascend the throne. A reluctant Harsha accepted the throne on the advice of Avalokitesvara Bodhisatva with the title of Rajputra and Siladitya. Thus the two kingdoms of Thanesar and Kanauj became united under Harsha's rule. Consequently, Harsha transferred his capital to Kanauj.

### Harsha's Military Conquests

On his accession in 606 CE Harsha focused his attention on the affairs of his sister Rajyasri who had fled to the Vindhya mountains to escape from the evil design of Deva Gupta of Malwa to covet her. Harsha went to the Vindhya mountain ranges and succeeded in saving his sister who was about to burn herself after killing Deva Gupta. Harsha consoled Rajyasri and brought her

back to the kingdom of Kanauj. Later Rajyasri took to Buddhism and was instrumental in converting Harsha to Buddhism.

According to Bana, Harsha, in an effort to build an empire, sent an ultimatum to the following kings to either surrender or be prepared for a battle:

1. Sasanka, the Gauda ruler of Bengal.
2. The Maitrakas of Valabhi and Gurjara of Broach region.
3. The Chalukya king, Pulikesin II, in the Deccan
4. Rulers of Sindh, Nepal, Kashmir, Magadha, Odra (northern Odisha)
5. and Kongoda (another geographical unit in ancient Odisha).

Harsha's immediate task was to take revenge on Sasanka. Harsha entered into an alliance with the king of Kamarupa (Pragiyatisha), which is today the modern Assam. But there is hardly any detail of the war between Harsha and Sasanka. However, Harsha seems to have successfully subjugated the Gauda Empire, which included Magadha, Gouda, Odra and Kongoda only after the death of Sasanka.

The hostilities between Harsha and the Maitrakas ended in the marriage of Dhruvabhatta with the daughter of Harsha. Soon, Valabhi became a subordinate ally of Harsha.

### **Pulikesin II, the Chalukya King**

Harsha sought to extend his authority southward into the Deccan. However the Chalukya king Pulikesin II, who controlled the region, humbled Harsha. In commemoration of his victory over Harsha, Pulikesin assumed the title of "Parameswara". Inscriptions in Pulikesin's capital Badami attest to this victory.

### **Extent of Harsha's Empire**

Harsha ruled for 41 years. His feudatories included those of Jalandhar (in the Punjab), Kashmir, Nepal and Valabhi. Sasanka of Bengal remained hostile to him. Though it is claimed that Harsha's Empire comprised Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Kanauj, Malwa, Odisha, the Punjab, Kashmir, Nepal and Sindh, his real sway did not extend beyond a compact

territory between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers. The kingdom of Harsha disintegrated rapidly into small states after his death.

### **Harsha's Relations with China**

Harsha had cordial relations with China. The contemporary Tang emperor, Tai Tsung, sent an embassy to his court in 643 and again in 647 CE. On the second occasion, the Chinese ambassador found that Harsha had recently died. On learning that the throne had been usurped by an undeserving king, the Chinese ambassador rushed to Nepal and Assam to raise a force to dislodge the usurper. Later, the king who had usurped the throne was taken to China as a prisoner.

### **Administration**

According to historian Burton Stein, a centralised administration did not even exist under the powerful Guptas. It was restricted only to the central part of the Gangetic plain between Pataliputra and Mathura. Beyond that zone, there was no centralised authority. The only difference between Guptas and Vardahanas is that the former had formidable enemies like Huns, while the latter had no such opponents. The copper plates of 632 CE record a gift of land to two Brahmans. The names of certain political personages with state power, as protectors of the gift, are mentioned in them. Some were mahasamantas, allied to the king but of a subordinate status. Others were independent maharajas but acknowledged feudatories of Harsha. There was yet another category of rulers who pledged their loyalty to Harsha and professed to be at his service. This is the characteristic of Harsha's imperial authority in North India.

### **Council of Ministers**

It appears that the ministerial administration during the reign of Harsha was the same as that of the imperial Guptas. The emperor was assisted by a council of ministers (Mantri Parishad) in his duties. The council played an important role in the selection of the king as well as framing the foreign policy of the empire. The prime minister was of the most important position in the council of ministers.

## Key Officials

1. **Avanti** - **Minister for Foreign Relations and War**
2. **Simhananda** - **Commander in chief**
3. **Kuntala** - **Chief Cavalry Officer**
4. **Skandagupta** - **Chief Commander of Elephant force**
5. **Dirghadhvaj** - **Royal Messengers**
6. **Banu** - **Keeper of records**
7. **Mahaprathihara** - **Chief of the Palace Guard**
8. **Sarvagata** - **Secret Service Department**

## Revenue Administration

Bhaga, Hiranya and Bali were the three kinds of tax collected during Harsha's reign. Bhaga was the land tax paid in kind. One-sixth of the produce was collected as land revenue. Hiranya was the tax paid by farmers and merchants in cash. There is no reference to the tax Bali. The crown land was divided into four parts.

- Part I** - **for carrying out the affairs of the state**
- Part II** - **for paying the ministers and officers of the crown**
- Part III** - **for rewarding men of letters**
- Part IV** - **for charity to religious institutions**

## Administration of Justice

Criminal law was more severe than that of the Gupta age. Mimamsakas were appointed to dispense justice. Banishment and the cutting of limbs of the body were the usual punishments. Trial by ordeal was in practice. Life imprisonment was the punishment for the violations of the laws and for plotting against the king.

Hieun Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, spent nearly 13 years in India (630-643 CE), collecting sacred texts and relics which he took back to China. He was known as the "prince of pilgrims" because he visited important pilgrim centres associated with the life of Buddha. His Si-Yu-Ki provides detailed information about the social, economic, religious and cultural conditions during the reign of Harsha.

According to Hieun Tsang, perfect law and order prevailed throughout the empire, as the law-enforcing agencies were strong. The pilgrim records the principal penalties and judicial ordeals practised in India at that time. Corporal punishment for serious offences was in practice. But the death penalty was usually avoided. Offences against social morality and defiance of law were punished by maiming. Harsha travelled across the kingdom frequently to ensure his familiarity with his people. He was accessible to people and kept a closer watch on his tributary rulers.

### **Administration of Army**

Harsha paid great attention to discipline and strength of the army. The army consisted of elephants, cavalry and infantry. Horses were imported. Ordinary soldiers were known as Chatas and Bhatas. Cavalry officers were called Brihadisvaras. Infantry officers were known as Baladhikritas and Mahabaladhikritas. Hieun Tsang mentions the four divisions (chaturanga) of Harsha's army. He gives details about the strength of each division, its recruitment system and payment for the recruits.

### **Division of the Empire**

The empire was divided into several provinces. The actual number of such provinces is not known. Each province was divided into Bhuktis. And each Bhukti was divided into several Vishayas. They were like the districts. Each vishaya was further divided into Pathakas. Each such area was divided into several villages for the sake of administrative convenience. Harsha Charita refers to a number of officials who took care of the local administration. Only their titles are known. What they did isn't available in Harsha Charita. We learn that bhogapathi, ayuktha, pratpalaka-purusha and the like looked after the local administration.

### **Cities and Towns**

Hieun Tsang describes the structure, aesthetics and safety measures of the cities, towns and villages of India. In his view, India was the land of innumerable villages, numerous towns and big cities like China. He pointed out that Pataliputra lost its prominence and its place was taken by Kanauj. The elegance of Kanauj with its lofty structures, beautiful gardens and the museum of rare collections is described. The refined appearance of

its residents, their costly dressings and love for learning and art are also pointed out in his account.

Most of the towns, according to Hieun Tsang, had outer walls and inner gates. Though the walls were wide and high, the streets and lanes were narrow. Residential houses had balconies made of wood and coated with lime mortar. Floors were smeared with cow dung for the purpose of purity and hygiene. Big mansions, public buildings and Buddhist monasteries and viharas were magnificent multi-storeyed structures. They were built of kiln-fired bricks, red sandstone and marble. Harsha constructed a large number of viharas, monasteries and stupas on the bank of the Ganges.

Harsha built charitable institutions for the stay of the travellers, and to care for the sick and the poor. Free hospitals and rest houses (dharmasalas) in all the towns were constructed where the travellers or the outsiders could stay. Hospitals were built to provide medical treatment free of charge.

### **Religious Policy**

Harsha was a worshipper of Siva at least up to 631 CE. But he embraced Buddhism under the influence of his sister Rajyasri and the Buddhist monk Hieun Tsang. He subscribed to the Mahayana school of thought. Yet he held discourses among learned men of various creeds. Slaughter of animals and consumption of meat was restricted. Harsha summoned two Buddhist assemblies (643 CE), one at Kanauj and another at Prayag.

The assembly at Kanauj was attended by 20 kings including Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. A large number of Buddhist, Jain and Vedic scholars attended the assembly. A golden statue of Buddha was consecrated in a monastery and a small statue of Buddha (three feet) was brought out in a procession. The procession was attended by Harsha and other kings.

### **Buddhist Assembly at Prayag**

Harsha convened quinquennial assemblies known as Mahamoksha Parishad at Prayag (at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna). He

distributed his wealth among Buddhists, Vedic scholars and the poor people. Harsha offered fabulous gifts to the Buddhist monks on all the four days of the assemblage.

Hieun Tsang observed that the principles of Buddhism had deeply permeated the Hindu society. According to him, people were given complete freedom of worship. Social harmony prevailed among the followers of various creeds. Harsha treated the Vedic scholars and the Buddhist bikshus alike and distributed charities equally to them.

## Caste System

Caste system was firmly established in the Hindu society. According to Hieun Tsang, the occupations of the four divisions of

Hieun Tsang, hailed as the prince of pilgrims, visited India during the reign of Harsha. Born in China in 612 CE he became a Buddhist monk at the age of twenty. During his travels, he visited various sacred places of northern and southern India. Hieun Tsang spent about five years in the University of Nalanda and studied there. Harsha admired him for his deep devotion to Buddha and his profound knowledge of Buddhism. Hieun Tsang carried with him 150 pieces of the relics of Buddha, a large number of Buddha image in gold, silver, sandalwood and above all 657 volumes of valuable manuscripts.

society continued to be in practice as in the previous times. People were honest and not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct. The butchers, fishermen, dancers and sweepers were asked to stay outside the city. Even though the caste system was rigid, there was no social conflict among the various sections of the society.

## Status of Women

Hieun Tsang's account also provides us information on the position of women and the marriage system of the times. Women wore purdah. Hieun Tsang, however, added that the purdah system was not followed among the higher class. He pointed out that Rajyasri did not wear purdah when listening to his discourse. Sati was in practice. Yasomatidevi, wife of Prabhakara Vardhana, immolated herself after the death of her husband.

## **Lifestyle**

The life pattern of the people of India during the rule of Harsha is known from the accounts of Hieun Tsang. People lived a simple life. They dressed in colourful cotton and silk clothes. The art of wearing fine cloth had reached perfection. Both men and women adorned themselves with gold and silver ornaments. The king wore extraordinary ornaments. Garlands and tiaras of precious stones, rings, bracelets and necklaces were some of the ornaments used by the royalty. The wealthy merchants wore bracelets. women used cosmetics.

## **Dietary Habits**

Hieun Tsang also noted that Indians were mostly vegetarians. The use of onion and garlic in the food preparation was rare. The use of sugar, milk, ghee and rice in the preparation of food or their consumption was common. On certain occasions, fish and mutton were eaten. Beef and meat of certain animals were forbidden.

## **Education**

Education was imparted in the monasteries. Learning was religious in character. Much religious literature were produced. The Vedas were taught orally and not written down. Sanskrit was the language of the learned people. An individual took to learning between 9 and 30 years of age. Many individuals devoted their whole life to learning. The wandering bhikshus and sadhus were well known for their wisdom and culture. The people also paid respect to such people of moral and intellectual eminence.

## **Harsha as a Patron of Art and Literature**

Harsha patronised literary and cultural activities. It is said the state spent a quarter of its revenue for such activities. Bana, the author of Harshacharita and Kadambari, was a court poet of Harsha. The emperor himself was a renowned litterateur, which is evident from the plays he wrote such as Priyadarsika, Rathnavali and Nagananda. Harsha gifted liberally for the promotion of education. Temples and monasteries functioned as centres of learning. Renowned scholars imparted education in the monasteries at Kanauj, Gaya, Jalandhar, Manipur and other places. The Nalanda University reached its utmost fame during this period.

## Nalanda University

Hieun Tsang recorded the fame of the Nalanda University. Students and scholars from the Buddhist countries like China, Japan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Tibet and some other countries of Central and Southeast Asia stayed and studied in the university. Shilabhadra, a reputed Buddhist scholar, who probably hailed from Assam, was the head of the University during the visit of Hieun Tsang. As an educational centre of international fame, Nalanda had 10,000 students on its rolls. Dharmapala, Chandrapala, Shilabhadra, Bhadrhari, Jayasena, Devakara and Matanga were important teachers in the university receiving royal patronage.

## II The Palas

Afer the death of Harsha, the Pratiharas (Jalore-Rajasthan), the Palas (Bengal) and the Rashtrakutas (Deccan) engaged in a triangular contest for the control of the Ganga-Yamuna doab and the lands adjoining it. Te Palas controlled vast areas of the eastern Gangetic Plain. Apart from earning revenue from agriculture, Palas also derived income from their wide commercial contacts in South-east Asia. Buddhism in Bengal provided a link between eastern India and Java and Sumatra.

### Establishment of Pala Rule in Bengal

Sashanka, the Gauda ruler, believed to have ruled between 590 and 625 CE, is considered the frst prominent king of ancient Bengal. Afer the fall of the Gauda kingdom, there was no central authority, which led to recurring wars between petty chiefains. So, in 750 CE, a group of chiefs met and decided on a "Kshatriya chief" named Gopala to be their ruler. Tere is a story that Gopala was elected because of his ability to kill a "demoness" that had killed those who were previously elected like him. Tough Gopala did not have royal antecedents, he succeeded in acquiring a kingdom. Gopala's political authority was soon recognised by several independent chiefs. His original kingdom was in Vanga or East Bengal.

The Palas ruled eastern India from Pataliputra between the ninth and the early twelfth centuries. Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali were the languages in use in their kingdom. Palas followed Mahayana Buddhism.

## Pala Rulers

Gopala I was succeeded by his son Dharmapala (770–815 CE) who made the Pala kingdom a force to reckon with. Bengal and Bihar were directly ruled by him. Kanauj was ruled by his nominee. The rulers of the Punjab, Rajaputana, Malwa and Berar accepted his suzerainty. He assumed titles like Paramesvara, Parambhattaraka and Maharajadhiraja.

Dharmapala proved to be a great patron of Buddhism. He founded the Vikramasila monastery in Bhagalpur district in Bihar, which developed into a great centre of Buddhist learning and culture. He built a grand vihara at Somapura in modern Paharapura (present-day Bangladesh). Dharmapala also built a monastery at Odantapuri in Bihar. He patronised Harisbhadra, a Buddhist writer.

Dharmapala's son Devapala extended Pala control eastwards up to Kamarupa (Assam). He defeated Amoghavarsha, the Rashtrakuta ruler, by allying with all the states that regarded the Rashtrakutas as their common enemy. Devapala was also a great patron of Buddhism. He granted five villages to Balaputradeva, the king of the Sailendra dynasty of Suvarnadipa (Sumatra), to maintain a monastery built by him at Nalanda. Nalanda continued to flourish as the chief seat of Buddhist learning even during the Pala reign.

Devapala was succeeded by Vigramapala, who abdicated his throne after ruling for a few years and went to lead an ascetic life. Narayanapala, son of Vigramapala, was also a man of pacific and religious disposition. The Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas took advantage of Narayanapala's disposition and defeated the Palas. The rise of the Pratiharas in Jalore under Mihira Bhoja and the advance of the Rashtrakutas into Pala territories inevitably brought about the decline of the Palas. The petty chiefs, who formerly owed allegiance to the Palas, also started asserting their independence.

The slide of the Pala dynasty was accelerated during the rule of his three successors – Rajyapala, Gopala III and Vigramapala II. The fortunes of the dynasty, however, were revived by Mahipala I, son of Vigramapala II. The most important event of his period was the invasion of northern India

by Rajendra Chola sometime between 1020 and 1025 CE. However, the advance of the Cholas beyond the Ganges was checked by Mahipala I.

After 15 years of Mahipala's rule, four insignificant rulers followed. Ramapala was the last ruler who tried to recover the lost glory of the dynasty. He ruled for about 53 years and after his death, the presence of Pala dynasty was confined to only a portion of Magadha (Bihar) and continued to exist only for a short period. Vijayasena of the Sena dynasty who had become powerful by then in northern Bengal expelled the last ruler Madanapala (1130-1150 CE) from Bengal and established his dynastic rule.

## **Religion**

The Palas were great patrons of Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddhist philosopher Haribhadra was the spiritual preceptor of Dharmapala, the founder of the Pala kingdom. Bengal remained one of the few places where Buddhist monasteries continued to exist. The kingdom as well as Buddhism soon suffered decline because of large-scale conversion of merchants and artisans to Islam.

## **Art and Architecture**

Two artists of this period were Dhiman and his son Vitapala. They were great painters, sculptors and bronze statue makers. The Pala school of sculptural art was influenced by the Gupta art. Mahipala I constructed and repaired several sacred structures at Saranath, Nalanda and Bodhi Gaya. Gopala founded the famous monastery at Odantapura (Bihar). Dharmapala established the Vikramashila and the Somapura Mahaviharas (Bangladesh).

## **Literature**

The prominent Buddhist scholars of Vikramashila and Nalanda universities were Atisha, Saraha, Tilopa, Dansheel, Dansree, Jinamitra, Muktimitra, Padmanava, Virachan and Silabhadra. The notable Pala texts on philosophy include Agama Shastra by Gaudapada, and Nyaya Kundali by Sridhar Bhatta. Many texts on medicine were compiled by Chakrapani Datta, Sureshwar Gadadhara Vaidya and Jimutavahana. The Palas also patronised Sanskrit scholars. Many Buddhist tantric works were authored

and translated into Sanskrit. The original tantric works comprise a varied group of Indian and Tibetan texts. The “Mahipalageet” (songs on Mahipala), a set of folk songs, are still popular in the rural areas of Bengal. Sandhyakar Nandi’s epic Ramacharitam, a biography of a later Pala ruler Ramapala, describes how forest chiefs were brought into their alliance through lavish gifts.

### III The Rashtrakutas

The rivalry between the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas proved to be destructive to both the dynasties. The Arab traveller Al-Masudi who visited Kanauj recorded the enmity between the two ruling dynasties. The Rashtrakutas who were biding their time to capture Kanauj from Pratiharas succeeded in their motive and continued to rule until 10th century CE. They claimed descent from the Rastikas or Rathikas, an important clan domiciled in the Kannada-speaking region and mentioned in the edicts of Ashoka.

#### Rise of the Dynasty

The Rashtrakutas were originally known to be the feudatories of the Western Chalukyas of Vatapi. Though Rashtrakutas were early rulers, the greatest ruler of the dynasty was Dandidurga. Ruling from a smaller part of Berar, Dandidurga built his career of territorial conquest after the death of Vikramaditya II (733–746 CE), the Chalukya ruler. He captured Gurjara Kingdom of Nandipuri, Malwa and eastern Madhya Pradesh and the whole of Berar. By 750 CE, he had become the master of central and southern Gujarat and the whole of Madhya Pradesh and Berar.

After consolidating his position, and after defeating Kirthivarman II (746–753 CE), the last Chalukya ruler of Vatapi, Dandidurga assumed the titles of Maharajadhiraja, Parameshwara and Paramabhattacharya. He developed relationships with the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II by giving his daughter in marriage to the Pallava king. After Dandidurga’s death in 758 CE, his uncle (father’s brother) Krishna I ascended the throne.

## Krishna I and His Successors

Krishna I (756–775 CE) defeated the Gangas of Mysore. His eldest son Govinda II succeeded him in 775CE. He defeated the Eastern Chalukyas. He left the affairs of country to his brother Dhruva who eventually crowned himself as the ruler. During the reign of Dhruva (780–794 CE), the Rashtrakuta power reached its zenith. After humbling the western Ganga king, Dhruva defeated Dantivarman, the Pallava king. The ruler of Vengi (modern Andhra) also had to accept his suzerainty. After establishing his hegemony in the south, Dhruva turned his attention towards the regions around Kanauj. Vatsarya, the Pratihara king, and Dharmapala, the Pala ruler, who were contenders for supremacy in the region, were defeated by Dhruva. He nominated his third son Govinda III as the heir-apparent.

The accession of Govinda III (794–814 CE) to the throne heralded an era of success like never before. Dantika, the Pallava king, was subdued by Govinda III. Vishnuvardana, the ruler of Vengi, turned out to be his maternal grandfather and so he did not challenge his authority. Thus Govinda III became the overlord of the Deccan. The Rashtrakuta Empire reached its height of glory.

Govinda III was succeeded by his son Amoghavarsha (814–880 CE). Amoghavarsha ruled for 64 years and his first twenty years of the rule witnessed endless wars with the Western Gangas. Peace returned when Amoghavarsha gave his daughter in marriage to a Ganga prince. Amoghavarsha was a patron of literature and he patronised the famous Digambara acharya Jinasena, Sanskrit grammarian Sakatayana and the mathematician Mahaviracharya. Amoghavarsha was himself a great poet and his Kavirajamarga is the earliest Kannada work on poetics. After Amoghavarsha, his successors were able to sustain the vast empire, but the ablest among them was Krishna III (939–968 CE).

Krishna III was the last great ruler of the Rashtrakuta dynasty. Soon after his accession, he invaded the Chola kingdom along with his brother-in-law Butunga. Kanchi and Thanjavur were captured in 943 CE. His army remained in effective control of Thondaimandalam, consisting of Arcot, Chengalpattu and Vellore. In 949 CE, he defeated the Chola army of Rajaditya in the battle of Takkolam (in present day Vellore district). Krishna III marched upto Rameshvaram where he built a pillar of victory. Thus he succeeded in establishing his suzerainty over the entire Deccan

region. It was under him the Rashtrakutas joined the contest that was held then among the northern ruling dynasties for control of Kanauj. The continued conflict over the possession of Kanauj emboldened some of the local rajas to assert their independence. Their defiance destroyed the possibility of a single kingdom ruling northern India with its centre at Kanauj. Invasions from the north-west also prevented any such attempts to create a powerful state. But the successors of Krishna III were too weak to save the kingdom from its decline.

Hiranyagarbha literally means golden womb. A person coming out of this golden womb, after elaborate rituals performed by priests, is declared as reborn possessing a celestial body. The Satavahana king Gautamiputra Sathakarni performed this ritual to claim kshatriya status.

## Religion

The worship of Shiva and Vishnu was popular during the Rashtrakuta reign. The famous rock-cut Shiva temple at Ellora was built by Krishna I. The seals have the pictures of Garudavahana of Vishnu or of Shiva seated in yogic posture. Dantidurga performed the Hiranyagarbha ritual at Ujjayini. There are references to Tula-danas gift or offer of gold equal to one's own weight to temple deities.

Jainism was patronised by later rulers such as Amoghavarsha I, Indra I V, Krishna II and Indra III. Buddhism had declined and its only important centre was at Kanheri.

## Literature

The Rashtrakuta rulers were great patrons of learning. Kannada and Sanskrit literature made great progress during their reign. Amoghavarsha I was the author of Prasnotaramalika, a Sanskrit work, and Kavirajamarga, a Kannada work. Jinasena wrote the Adipurana of the Jains. Krishna II's spiritual guide, Gunabhadra, wrote the Mahapurana of the Jains. The three gems of ancient Kannada literature - Kavichakravarthi Ponna, Adikavi Panpa and Kavichakravarti Ranna - were patronised by Rashtrakuta king Krishna III, as well as by Tailapa and Satyashraya of Western Chalukyas.

## Architecture

The Rashtrakutas made splendid contributions to Indian art. The rock-cut shrines at Ellora and Elephanta located in present-day Maharashtra belong to their period. The Ellora cave complex contains the features of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monuments and art work. Amoghavarsha I espoused Jainism and there are five Jain cave temples at Ellora ascribed to his period.

The most striking structure at Ellora is the creation of the Monolithic Kailasanath Temple. The temple was hewn out of a single rock during the time of Krishna I in the 8th century. It is similar to the Lokeshvara temple at Pattadakal, in Karnataka, built by Chalukya king Vikramaditya II to commemorate his victory over the Pallavas. The sculptured panels of Dasavatara Bhairava, Ravana shaking the Mount Kailasa, dancing Shiva and Vishnu, and Lakshmi listening to music are the best specimens of sculpture inside the temple.

The main shrine at Elephanta is artistically superior to the shrines at Ellora. The sculptures such as Nataraja and Sadashiva excel even that of the Ellora sculptures in beauty and craftsmanship. Ardhanarishvara and Maheshamurti are the other famous sculptures. The latter, a three-faced bust of Lord Shiva, is 25 feet tall and considered one of the finest pieces of sculpture in India. The paintings are still seen in the porch of the temple of Kailasa and ceilings of the Maheshamurti shrine at Ellora.

