

# APPOLO STUDY CENTRE

## 1. Evolution of Humans and Society - Prehistoric Period

### Introduction

We live in the age of Information Technology. The mobile phones have literally put the world on our finger tips. The all-encompassing knowledge that we possess now, which has helped in the development of powerful technology, did not emerge all of a sudden. The foundation for our modern life was facilitated by the development of the process of cognition among the human ancestors in the prehistoric age. Prehistoric people were the pioneers of creative knowledge. From the artefacts and the languages they developed, we are able to understand how intelligent they were.

**Artefact** is an object or tool made or modified by humans.

**Cognition** refers to the act of mind in which knowledge and understanding are acquired through thoughts, experiences and senses. Cognition is related to development of human thought.

### Origin of the Earth and the Geological Ages

The history of humans is closely related to the history of the earth. The earth contains geological, archaeological and biological records of historical times in its upper layers. They are important for reconstructing the history of the earth and various living organisms. The fossil bones of the human ancestors are embedded in the earth's layers. Paleoanthropologists and archaeologists excavate the soil and rock layers on the earth and extract evidence about human ancestors. These layers and the fossils are scientifically dated to study the various stages in human evolution and prehistory. Through the gathered evidence, they attempt to understand the evolution of human history and developments in a chronological order.

**Archaeology** is the study of human past through the analysis and interpretation of material remains.

**Palaeoanthropology** is the study of the human ancestors and their evolution by the study of the fossil remains.

The earth was formed approximately 4.54 billion years ago. Gradually, conditions emerged for the growth of organisms. Ten plants and animals came into being, and thereby foundation was laid for the evolution of humans. The long span of time in earth's history is divided into eras, periods and epochs by the geologists.

The earliest trace of life in the form of microorganisms emerged 3.5 billion years ago. The primitive multi-cellular form of life first appeared in the Proterozoic era, about 600 to 542 million years ago. In the Palaeozoic era (542 to 251 million years ago), fish and reptiles along with various plants appeared. Dinosaurs existed in the Mesozoic Era (251 to 66 million years ago). Australopithecines (literally 'southern ape') appeared in the Cainozoic era, which commenced about 66 million years ago.

**Australopithecines** were the apes from which modern humans evolved. Now they are extinct, but they are considered to be the close relatives of humans.

**1 billion = 100 crore**

**1 million = 10 lakh**

## Human Enquiries into the Past and Origin of the World

### The Age of Speculation

Humans are the only species on earth concerned with understanding as well as explaining the world and the universe. In the course of evolution, humans became conscious and knowledgeable. They turned curious and began to think and ask questions about nature, organisms and the world around them. At first, they considered nature as God. They worshipped sun, moon and various natural forces about which they developed their own understanding, some of which is not scientific. The lack of scientific knowledge on the creation of the world is reflected in the ancient writings and religious literature.

**BCE - Before Common Era**

## Scientific Foundations of Geology, Biology and Archaeology

The beginning of history writing can be traced to the ancient Greeks. Herodotus (484–425 BCE) is considered the Father of History, because the history he wrote was humanistic and rationalistic. In the middle Ages, people were preoccupied with religion; but the real scientific enquiries became stronger only around the 15th and 16th centuries CE, with the Renaissance movement in Europe playing an influential role in rational thinking. Scientific enquiry was undertaken and scientific foundations for geology, biology, anthropology and archaeology were laid. Numerous ideas were articulated by various learned men in these fields during this period. Through their enquiry and observation, scholars believed that the evidence for the origin of the earth and the organisms lay in the upper layers of the earth. The rise of scientific enquiry into the origin of humans was possible because of

- ✓ The interest in collection of archaeological remains and the opening of museums after the Renaissance Movement;
- ✓ The development of ideas of stratigraphy and geology;
- ✓ Darwin's theory of biological evolution;
- ✓ The discovery of human and animal fossils, stone tools, and artefacts of early civilizations; and
- ✓ The ability to decipher early scripts.

**Stratigraphy:** The study of origin, nature and relationships of rock and soil layers that were formed due to natural and cultural activities.

**Oldest Museum:** The museum of Ennigaldi-Nanna in Mesopotamia was established in 530 BCE. The princess Ennigaldi was the daughter of the neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus. The Capitoline Museum in Italy is perhaps the oldest surviving museum (1471 CE) at present. Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University is the oldest university museum in the world. It was established in 1677 CE.

Herbert Spencer's (1820–1903 CE) and Charles Darwin's (1809–1882 CE) theory on biological evolution, concepts of natural selection and survival of the fittest contributed to the scientific understanding of human origins. Charles Darwin published the books *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871.

**Natural selection:** The processes by which organisms that are better adapted to their environment would survive and produce more offspring.

**Survival of the fittest** means “survival of the form that will leave the most copies of itself in successive generations.”

**Fossil”:** Prehistoric animal or plant that turns into stone over a period of time (millions of years) because of chemical and physical processes. Animal bones are preserved due to mineralization. Palaeontology is the study of fossils. The idea of the Three Age System proposed by C.J. Thomsen became the basis for understanding early human history. He classified the artefacts in the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, into Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age.

**Stone Age:** The period when stone was mainly used for making implements.

**Bronze Age:** The period when bronze metallurgy (extraction of metal from ores) developed.

**Iron Age:** The period when iron was smelted to produce implements.

Since the 19th century, scholars have used advanced scientific techniques and undertook systematic studies to contribute to the current state of knowledge on prehistory, human origins and the early civilisations. Now the theory of human evolution is widely accepted.

**Prehistory: From Australopithecus through Homo erectus to Homo sapiens**

The introduction of writing system is a hallmark of the human civilisation. The period before the introduction of writing is called prehistory. Prehistoric societies are treated as pre-literate. But pre-literate

should not be taken to mean primitive. The prehistoric people developed language, made beautiful paintings and artefacts, and they were highly skilful.

**Who are we? What is the name of our species?**

**We are *Homo sapiens sapiens***

### **Human Evolution and Migration**

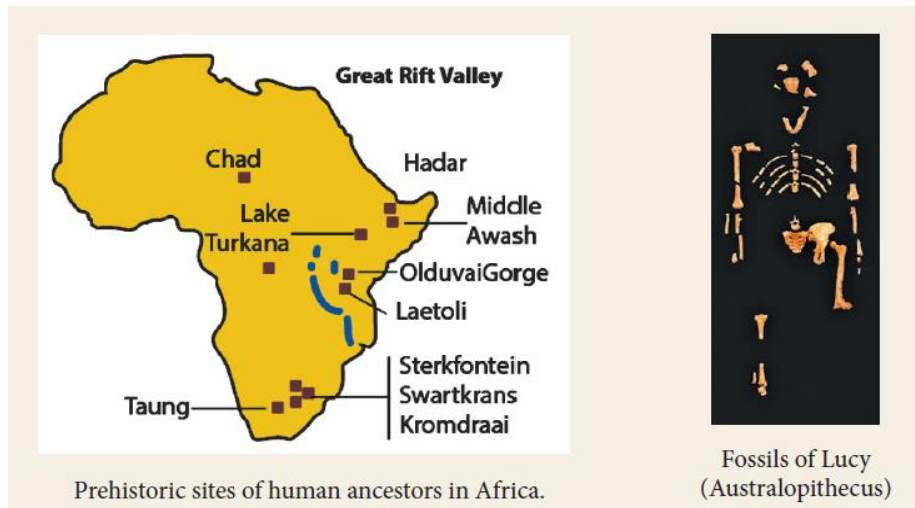
The chimpanzee, gorillas and orang-utans, along with humans, are collectively called the Great Apes. Among them, the chimpanzee is genetically the closest to humans. The ancestors to humans were called Hominines, and their origins have been traced to Africa. They evolved from those origins and then began to move to other parts of the world in due course of time. The Hominines emerged around 7 to 5 million years ago. Skeletons of *Australopithecus*, one of the early species of this tribe, have been found in Africa.

The Great Rift Valley in Africa has many sites that have evidence for the prehistoric period. The Great Rift Valley is a valley like formation that runs for about 6,400 km from the northern part of Syria to Central Mozambique in East Africa. This geographical feature is visible even from the space, and many prehistoric sites are found in eastern Africa. Human ancestors are divided into various species according to their physical features.

**Hominid:** refers to all the species of the modern and extinct great apes, which also includes humans.

**Hominines:** (a zoological tribe) refers to the close relatives of human ancestors and their sister species including *Homo sapiens* (the modern humans) and the extinct members of *Homo neanderthalensis*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo habilis* and various species of *Australopithecines*. Humans are the only living species of this 'tribe'. They stand erect, walk with two legs and have large brains. They can use tools and a few of them can communicate. It excludes the gorillas.

*Homo habilis* (handy human) was the earliest known human ancestors to make tools in Africa about 2.6 million years ago. Around 2 million years ago, the species of *Homo erectus/ergaster* emerged. This species made hand axes between 2 and 1 million years ago. They began to spread into various parts of Asia and Africa in time.



Prehistoric sites of human ancestors in Africa.

Fossils of Lucy  
(Australopithecus)

Anatomically, modern humans, called *Homo sapiens* (wise man), first appeared around 3,00,000 years ago in Africa. It is believed that these modern humans eventually migrated and dispersed into various parts of the world from around 60,000 years ago.

### Prehistoric Cultures

While the fossil bones are classified as various species such as *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus* and *Neanderthalensis*, based on the lithic tools, cultures are assigned names such as Earliest Lithic Assemblages, Oldowan Technology, Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic cultures.

### Earliest Lithic Assemblages of Human Ancestors

The earliest tools made by human ancestors are found in Lomekwi in Kenya. They are dated to 3.3 million years. Oldowan tools occur in the Olduvai Gorge in Africa. They are 2 to 2.6 million years old. The human ancestors (*Australopithecines*) used hammer stones and produced sharp-edged flakes. The tools were used for cutting, slicing and processing food.

### Lower Palaeolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu

One of the oldest Stone Age tools in the world made by human ancestors, called hominines, had been produced in Tamil Nadu. These stone tools are found near the Chennai region at several sites, especially at Athirampakkam. The archaeological excavations at this site and cosmic-ray exposure dating of the artefacts suggest that people lived here about 1.5 to 2 million years ago. The Kosasthalaiyar river is one of the major cradles of

human ancestors in the world. The people who lived here belonged to the species of Homo erectus.

**Archaeological excavation:** refers to digging undertaken to recover archaeological evidence such as stone tools, pottery, animal bones and pollens, in order to understand the past lifestyle of humans.

**Cosmic-ray exposure dating:** A method in which exposure to cosmogenic rays is done for dating the samples.

In 1863, Sir Robert Bruce Foote, a geologist from England, first discovered Palaeolithic tools at Pallavaram near Chennai. They are the earliest finds of such tools in India. Hence, the hand axe assemblages were considered the Madras Stone Tool Industry. The tools that he discovered are now housed in the Chennai Museum. The Palaeolithic people hunted wild animals and gathered the naturally available fruits, roots, nuts and leaves. They did not have knowledge of iron and pottery making, which developed much later in history.

Hand axes and cleavers are the important tool types of the Lower Palaeolithic period. These tools fitted with a wooden and bone handle were used for cutting, piercing and digging. The people of this time also used hammer stones and spheroids. The quartzite pebbles and cobbles were chosen as raw materials. The tools are found in the soil deposits and also in the exposed river side. They occur at Pallavaram, Gudiyam cave, Athirampakkam, Vadamadurai, Erumaivettipalayam and Parikulam.

### **Lemuria and the Tamils**

Some researchers relate the origin of the Tamils to the submerged continent of Lemuria. This theory of Lemuria continent was proposed in the 19th century. In the wake of advancements in plate tectonics theory, differing views are put forth by scholars. The available literary references point to the submergence of areas around Kanyakumari. Some parts of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu were connected by land about 5000 years BCE.

It is possible that some land might have submerged near Kanyakumari and around the coast of India, because of the rising sea levels. Underwater surveys are necessary in this area. Archaeological research reveals that at least a section of people may have been living continuously in South India, including Tamil Nadu, from the Mesolithic and Neolithic times. The Lower Palaeolithic tools are also found in the North Arcot and Dharmapuri

districts. The people belonging to this period used basalt rocks for manufacturing artefacts. However, the southern part of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka do not have evidence of Lower Palaeolithic Culture.

**Basalt rocks are igneous rocks:** Igneous rocks are those formed from the molten lava from the earth.

The Lower Palaeolithic Culture is datable to about 2 - 1.5 million years at Athirampakkam. This cultural phase continued in other parts of India up to 300,000 years ago.

### Middle Palaeolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu

In the course of time, the Middle Palaeolithic Culture emerged during 3,85,000 - 1,72,000 years ago. The tool types of this period underwent a change and smaller artefacts were used. Cores, flakes, scrapers, knives, borers, Levalloisian flakes, hand axes and cleavers are the artefact types of this period. Compared to the previous phase, these tool types became smaller in size.

Evidence for the Middle Palaeolithic Culture can be observed in some parts of Tamil Nadu. In the southern part of Tamil Nadu, at T. Pudupatti and Sivarakkottai, artefacts of the Middle Palaeolithic tools have been collected. Also near Tanjavur and Ariyalur, similar artefacts have been found.

### Mesolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu

In many parts of the world, and in some parts of India, the Upper Palaeolithic Culture succeeded the Middle Palaeolithic Culture. There is no evidence for the Upper Palaeolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu. But the people who used microliths or small-stone artefacts lived in many parts of Tamil Nadu. Since this cultural period occurs between Palaeolithic and Neolithic Culture, it is known as Mesolithic Culture or Middle Stone Age. Evidence for the existence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers is found at Chennai, North Arcot, Dharmapuri, Salem, Coimbatore, Ariyalur, Tiruchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Madurai, Sivagangai, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari. The teri sites near Thoothukudi have evidence of microlithic artefacts. These sites have red sand dunes called teris.

Mesolithic people might have engaged in fishing activities. The microlithic artefacts of southern Tamil Nadu are also found in the coastal regions



of Sri Lanka. Geologists argue that the Tamil Nadu region and Sri Lanka remained connected before 5000 BCE when the sea level was low. The people of this period used small artefacts made of chert and quartz. The tool types are scrapers, lunates and triangles. These people hunted wild animals and gathered fruits, nuts and roots for their subsistence.

**Scrapers** are tools used for scraping the surfaces. Scrapers are similar to the tools used in the kitchen for removing skin of vegetables.

**Triangles** are tools in the shape of triangles.

**Lunates** are tools in the shape of a crescent.

### **Neolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu**

The culture that domesticated animals and cultivated crops is called Neolithic. It is known as the New Stone Age. The Neolithic people used polished stone axes called celts. A cattle rearing was their main occupation. They lived in small villages with houses made of thatched roof and walls plastered with clay. Evidence of Neolithic village is found at Payyampalli in Vellore district and a few sites in the Dharmapuri region.

Payyampalli is a village in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. The earliest evidence for the domestication of animals and cultivation of plants is found at this site, which was excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India. Evidence for pottery making and cultivation of horse gram and green gram has been found in this village. These Neolithic sites were part of the Southern Neolithic Culture of India. They are mainly concentrated in the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka regions. The Neolithic people used stone axes fitted on a wooden handle. These polished stone axes are worshipped in many village temples of Tamil Nadu even today.

### **Iron Age/Megalithic period**

The cultural period that succeeded the Neolithic is called the Iron Age. As the name suggests, people used iron technology. It preceded the Sangam Age. The Iron Age was a formative period and the foundation for the Sangam Age was laid in this time. During the Iron Age, many parts of Tamil Nadu were occupied by people. An exchange relationship developed among the people.

The people of this age had knowledge of metallurgy and pottery making. They used iron and bronze objects and gold ornaments. They used

shell ornaments and beads made of carnelian and quartz. The evidence for Iron Age is found at many sites including Adhichanallur in Tirunelveli district, Sanur near Madhuranthakam and Sithannaval near Pudukkottai. Megalithic burial sites are found in the whole of Tamil Nadu.

### Megalithic Burial Types

The Iron Age is also known as megalithic, since people created burials with large stones for the dead people. Within these burials, the skeletons or a few bones of the dead persons were placed along with grave goods including iron objects, carnelian beads and bronze objects. Some of the burials do not have human bones and they have only the grave goods. They may be called memorial burials.

**Grave goods** are the objects placed in the burials along with the physical remains (bones) of the dead. People may have believed that these would be useful in the after-life. Egyptian pyramids also have similar artefacts.

Similar burials were also built in the early historic period or the Sangam Age. The Sangam literature mentions the various burial practices of the people. The megalithic burials are classified as dolmens, cists, menhirs, rock-cut caves, urn burials and sarcophagus. The burial types of Kodakkal (umbrella stone), Toppikkal (hatstone) and Paththikal (hoodstone) are found in Kerala. Dolmens, table-like stone structures, were erected as funerary monuments. Cists are stone enclosures buried under the earth. They were created by placing four stone slabs on the sides, one on top of each other. The cists and dolmens have openings called portholes. Urns are pottery jars and were used for burying the dead. Sarcophagi are burial receptacles made of terracotta. They sometimes had multiple legs. Menhirs are pillar-like stones erected as part of the burials or memorials.

**Portholes** are holes found in the cists and dolmens on one side. They may have acted as the entrance to the burials. There is a view that they were meant for the movement of the soul or spirit.

Why did they build using numerous burial types? What is the basis of this variation? There could be several factors influencing the megalithic burial types. For example, social status or the importance of the individuals buried or simply the choice of the relatives of the dead could have been the reasons. Raw material availability is another reason. In the deltaic areas

where stones are not available, people used the simple urns made by potters using clay. The menhirs may have been erected for the heroes in the Iron Age. The tradition of hero stones might have begun in the Iron Age or even before.

### **Agriculture and Pastoralism**

The people in the Iron Age practiced agriculture, domesticated cattle and sheep, and some of the groups were still hunting and gathering. Millets and rice were cultivated. Irrigation management developed in this period, since many of the megalithic sites are found nearby rivers and tanks. In the deltaic regions, irrigation as a technology had developed. Evidence of rice is seen in the megalithic sites like Adhichanallur in Toothukudi district and Porunthal near Palani.

### **Iron Age Society and Polity**

The Iron Age society had farming communities, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. Craft specialists, potters and blacksmiths were the professionals during this period. The society had several groups of peoples (tribes). The size of the burials and the variations found in the burial goods suggests the existence of numerous social groups and their diverse practices. Some of them seem to have had organised chiefdoms. Cattle lifting leading to wars and encroachment and expansion of territories had also started taking place in this period.

**Chiefdoms** were stratified societies in which chiefs were selected based on kinship relations.

The Ashokan inscriptions datable to third century BCE refers to the Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas and Satyaputras outside his empire in Tamilagam. If the Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas and Satyaputras had been powerful political powers in the Mauryan period, they must have commenced their political rule in the Iron Age.

### **Pottery**

Pottery is an important evidence found in the archaeological sites. The Iron Age and Sangam age people used the black and red colours to make black ware and red ware pottery. Potteries were used for cooking, storage and dining purposes. The black and red ware pottery has a black inside and a red outside, with lustrous surfaces.

## Iron Technology and Metal Tools

The megalithic burials have abundant iron objects placed in the burials as grave goods. Weapons such as swords and daggers, axes, chisels, lamps and tripod stands are also found. Some of these objects were hafted to wooden or bone or horn handles and used. The iron tools were used for agriculture, hunting, gathering and in battles. Bronze bowls, vessels with stylish finials decorated with animals and birds, bronze mirrors and bells have also been found.

### NOTE

- ❖ The DNA of a chimpanzee is 98% identical to that of a human being.
- ❖ The chimpanzee and the pygmy chimpanzee (also known as bonobo) are our closest living relatives.
- ❖ Wheat, barley and peas were domesticated around 10,000 years ago.
- ❖ Fruit and nut trees were domesticated around 4,000 BCE. They comprised olives, figs, dates, pomegranates and grapes.
- ❖ Athirampakkam and Gudiya Cave yielded both Early and Middle Palaeolithic artefacts.
- ❖ Domestication of Animals and Plants: A Milestone in Human History
- ❖ Rice was probably cultivated in India and China around 7000 BCE or even earlier. Wheat and barley were cultivated at Mehrgarh in northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent (Pakistan) before 6000 BCE.
- ❖ Animal domestication developed as part of symbiotic life. Dogs may have been domesticated first. Friendly animals were gradually domesticated. Sheep and goat were domesticated around 10,000 BCE in Southwest Asia. Oxen were used in Sumerian civilisation for tilling the land. Mehrgarh in Pakistan has evidence of sheep, goat and cattle domestication in the Neolithic period.
- ❖ Neolithic people perhaps devised the first pottery. They made pottery, using a slow wheel called turn-table or made pottery out of hand. Before firing, the pottery was polished with pebbles. This process is known as burnishing.
- ❖ Prehistoric period does not have evidence of writing.

## 2. Ancient Civilisations

### Introduction

Societies that adopted complex ways of life were more organised than the early hunter-gatherer and Neolithic farming societies. Urban societies had social stratification and well-planned cities. They practised crafts, engaged in trade and exchange, adopted science and technology and formed political organisation (early form of state). Hence the term 'civilisation' is used to distinguish them from the early forms of societies. However, they should not be considered superior to other forms of societies, since each culture or civilisation had its own unique features.

### Early Societies and Early State Formation

Societies before the modern times are classified as bands, tribes, chiefdoms and proto-state by scholars. Early societies were organised as bands during the Pre-Mesolithic Age. Bands were small groups of people who were nomadic, making their living on hunting and gathering. As the Neolithic way of life came into practice, large groups of people were concentrated in the villages. They were organised as tribal communities with a sedentary or semi sedentary lifestyle. The tribal organisations that developed in the Mesolithic times were mostly egalitarian in nature.

The chiefdoms are political formations larger than the tribal-level formations. People under chiefdoms lived over a larger area than the areas covered by tribes. Social distinction existed among these groups in terms of wealth and authority. The cultural developments after the Neolithic period in certain regions that had a following river and rich and fertile alluvial soil gave rise to civilisations. In the post-Neolithic period, that is, in the Bronze Age societies, early form of state (proto-state) originated in the areas where agricultural surplus and population density was more.

These early states had a political system that controlled many smaller regions, chiefs and cities through conquests. The kings and royals occupied the higher position in the social hierarchy. Palatial buildings were built for their dwelling. Priests, king's officials and traders formed the middle strata. Craft persons and peasants formed the lower sections in this hierarchical social system. Taxes were collected from the peasants and artisans. Language was refined, literary texts were composed and script

developed. Sciences, including mathematics and astronomy, emerged from research. The process of urbanisation began.

## **Early Civilisations**

Civilisation is seen as an advanced, organised way of life. It instilled a way of life that could be considered as an adaptation to particular environmental and cultural contexts. When it became necessary for large numbers of people to live in close proximity, they brought in planning, organisation and specialisation. Settlements were planned and laid out, a polity emerged, society became organised and food production and craft production were regulated. As civilisations began to take shape, huge buildings were built, the art of writing developed and science and technology contributed to the betterment of society. The surplus food production by the farmers in the fertile regions supported the livelihood of a large number of people. The people who did not cultivate crops engaged in artisanal activities such as making of bronze tools, ornaments and pottery.

Priests, scribes, nobles, rulers, administrators and craft persons became part of this civilisation. The Egyptian, Mesopotamian, the Chinese and the Indus were the important early civilisations. While these civilisations flourished in certain regions, people in other parts of the world lived as hunter-gatherers and pastoralists. The hunter-gatherers and pastoralists maintained their relationships with these civilisations through interactions. Their history is also equally important. During the time of these civilisations, South India witnessed the emergence of Neolithic agro-pastoral communities and Microlith form of life by hunter-gatherers.

**Egyptian Civilisation:** As one of the oldest civilisations, the Egyptian civilisation is known for its monumental architecture, agriculture, arts, sciences and crafts at a very early age.

## **Geography**

Egypt lies in the north-eastern corner of the African continent. It is bounded by the Red Sea on the east and Mediterranean Sea in the north. Egypt is irrigated by the River Nile, which originates in Lake Victoria in the south and flows into the Mediterranean Sea in the north. Deserts are seen on both sides of the Nile River. The Egyptian civilisation depended solely upon the flow of Nile River, and hence Egypt was called as the Gift

of Nile by the Greek historian Herodotus. The Nile also served as a means of transport.

The Nile valley is very rich and fertile as the river deposits fresh alluvium every year. This alluvium nurtured agriculture and helped to produce surplus of food grains, leading to the development of Egyptian civilisation. The dry regions on both the sides of the Niles, however remained deserts. The Egyptian kingdoms generally controlled the whole of Nile valley and when they became weak, the feudal lords and invaders dominated the region. Egypt was invaded by the Hyksos (around 1700 BCE), the Persians and the Greeks under the Alexander the Great, in 332 BCE, and later by the Romans. Ptolemies (Ptolemaic dynasty) ruled Egypt after Alexander's conquest. At the end of Ptolemaic rule, Roman influence became dominant. Cleopatra VII, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony dominated the political affairs of the pre-Roman Egypt. In 30 BCE, the Roman Empire annexed Egypt. After the conquest by the Romans, Egypt became intimately connected with the Sangam Age Tamilagam by the sea route.

**The Hyksos** were the rulers of the 15<sup>th</sup> dynasty of Egypt and they were probably from West Asia.

**Persians** are the people from the region of Persia, the ancient Iran.

**Greek** refers to the language and people of modern-day nation-state of Greece in Europe.

**Rome** refers to the ancient Roman Empire, which had as its capital the city of Rome in Italy.

### **Pharaohs, Society and Administration**

The Egyptian king was known as the Pharaoh. The people treated pharaoh as a divine form. Under the pharaoh, there was a hierarchy of officials including viziers, the governors of provinces, local mayors and tax collectors. The entire social system was supported by the work and production of artisans including stone cutters, masons, potters, carpenters, coppersmiths and goldsmiths, peasants and workers. Land belonged to the king and was assigned to the officials. Slavery was not common, but captives were used as slaves.

**Viziers** were the high officials who administered territories under the direction of the Pharaohs.

The Egyptians believed in life after death. Therefore, they preserved the dead body. The art of preserving the dead body is known as mummification. Pyramids and tombs were built to preserve the body of pharaohs. The famous Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamen's (who ruled from 1332 to 1322 BCE) tomb with a rich variety of offerings is located near Luxor in Egypt. The mask of his mummy made of gold and decorated with precious stones is an important artefact of the Egyptian civilisation.

### Agriculture and Trade

The Egyptians cultivated wheat, barley, millets, vegetables, fruits, papyrus and cotton. Papyrus was used for making rope mats and sandals, and later for producing paper. They domesticated cattle, sheep, goat and pigs, and hunted wild animals. They had pets such as dogs, cats and monkeys. The Egyptians had trade relations with Lebanon, Crete, Phoenicia, Palestine and Syria. Gold, silver and ivory were imported, and they acquired the Lapis Lazuli, a precious stone of bluish colour, from Afghanistan.

### Art and Architecture

The Egyptians excelled in art and architecture. Their writing is also a form of art. Numerous sculptures, painting and carvings attest to the artistic skills of Egyptians. The pyramids are massive monuments built as tombs of mourning to the Pharaohs. The great pyramids near Cairo are known as the Giza Pyramids. Pyramids are considered to be one of the wonders of the world, and they were built between 2575 and 2465 BCE. These monuments display the engineering, architectural and human resource management skills of the Egyptians.

**The Great Sphinx of Giza** is a massive limestone image of a lion with a human head. It is dated to the time of Pharaoh Khafre. It is one of the largest sculptures of the world and measures seventy three metres in length and twenty metres in height.

### Religion

Egyptians practiced polytheism. Amon, Re, Seth, Thoth, Horus and Anubis are some of the gods of Egyptians. They worshipped many gods, but the Sun god, Re, was the predominant one. Later on, the Sun god was called Amon. Amon was considered to be the king of gods. Anubis is the god of death, related to embalming of the dead. He is considered the



protector of the dead and depicted with a jackal head. Thoth was the god of writing and learning. He has the head of the bird, ibis.

### **Philosophy, Science and Literature**

Egyptian civilisation excelled in science, literature, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics and the measurement system. Sundial, water clock and glass were developed by the Egyptians. They devised a solar calendar that consisted of twelve months of thirty days each, with five days added to the end of a year. This calendar was introduced as early as 4200 BCE. Literary works included treatises on mathematics, astronomy, medicine, magic and religion. The Egyptians also distinguished themselves in painting, art, sculpture, pottery, music and weaving.

### **Writing System**

Egyptians are well known for their writing system. Their form of writing is known as hieroglyphic. Hieroglyphic was used in the inscriptions on seals and other objects. The hieratic, another form of writing, was used for common purposes. This form of writing used a pictogram-based system. It was developed around 3000 BCE and many texts and books were written using this script. The Egyptian writing system was deciphered by the French scholar, Francois Champollion (1822 CE). He used the Rosetta stone, a trilingual inscription, for deciphering the script. This inscription, which was written in Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Greek, was taken to France by Napoleon and from there it was taken to England. Now this inscription is on display in the British Museum London.

### **Characteristics and Contributions of the Egyptian Civilisation**

- ✓ Egyptians developed a solar calendar system.
- ✓ The pyramids and their designs show their mathematical and surveying skills.
- ✓ Hieroglyphic writing system attests to their skills in handling symbols.
- ✓ Preservation of human body in the form of Mummies.
- ✓ They applied innovation in the use of science and technology.

### **Mesopotamian Civilisations**

Mesopotamia refers to the region of Iraq and Kuwait in West Asia. Several kingdoms emerged around the city states of this region from the

early third millennium BCE. The Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations flourished in Mesopotamia.

## **Geography**

In the Greek language, meso means 'in between' and potamus means river. The Euphrates and Tigris flow here and drain into the Persian Gulf since this area is in between two rivers it is known as Mesopotamia. The northern part of Mesopotamia is known as Assyria, and the southern part is called Babylonia.

## **The Sumerians**

The oldest civilisation in Mesopotamia belonged to the Sumerians. The Sumerians were the contemporaries of the people of Indus and Egyptian civilisations. These civilisations had trade connections. The Sumerians settled in the Lower Tigris valley around 5,000 to 4,000 BCE. They are believed to have originated from Central Asia. They founded many cities and Nippur was one of the important cities. They developed the cuneiform writing system. During the early phase of the Sumerian civilisation, kings acted as the chief priests. Their political domination came to an end by 2450 BCE.

## **The Akkadians**

The Akkadians dominated Sumeria briefly from 2450 to 2250 BCE. The Sargon of Akkad was a famous ruler. Sargon and his descendants (ca.2334–2218 BCE) ruled Mesopotamia for more than hundred years. In the cuneiform records of Akkadians, mention is made about the Indus civilisation. The documents of Sargon of Akkad (2334–2279 BCE) refer to the ships from Meluhha, Magan and Dilmun in the quay of Akkad.

## **The Babylonians**

The Semitic people called Amorites from the Arabian desert moved into Mesopotamia. They were known as Babylonians as they established a kingdom and made Babylon its capital. By the time of the king Hammurabi, they extended their domination to the western part of Mesopotamia. The powerful states of Ur (2112 to 2004 BCE) and Babylon (1792 to 1712 BCE) controlled this region. The hero Gilgamesh referred to in the first ever epic on the earth may have been a king of Sumeria.

Hammurabi, the sixth king of Babylon belonging to the first Amorite dynasty (1792–1750 BCE), attained fame as a great law-maker.

### **Assyrians**

The Assyrian Empire was politically active in Mesopotamia around 1000 BCE. The Assyrian kings were the priests of Ashur, the chief deity of Assyria. The Assyrian government was controlled by the emperor and provincial governors were appointed by the emperor to administer provinces. Assur was the capital city of Assyria. Ashurbanipal was a popular ruler of the late or neo-Assyrian empire (ca. 668 to 627 BCE). He maintained a famous library of cuneiform records. Assyrians worshipped the deity of Lamassu for protection.

### **Society, State and Administration**

The Sumerian civilisation had many city states. A typical Sumerian city was surrounded by cultivable lands. The fortified Sumerian cities had the temples called Ziggurats at its centre. The temple was controlled by the priests. Priests, scribes and nobles were part of the government. The rulers and priests occupied the top of the social hierarchy. The ruler performed the role of the chief priest. The scribes, merchants and artisans were placed next in the hierarchy. The scribes maintained the account of the taxes and the priests collected the taxes.

The temples acted as storehouses of the taxed commodities. Assemblies were created for the administration of the state. Cultivable lands were owned by the kings and the higher classes of people in the hierarchy. The peasants who remained attached to the temples in the earlier phase of Mesopotamian civilisation became free from that association in the later period. Not all people were allowed to live in the cities.

### **Food and Agriculture**

Agriculture was the main occupation of the Mesopotamians. They had developed irrigation systems for ensuring the availability of water for agriculture and cultivated wheat, barley, onions, turnips, grapes, apples and dates. They domesticated cattle, sheep and goats. Fish was part of their diet.

### **Trade and Exchange**

Trade was an important economic activity of the Mesopotamian society. Traders assisted in the exchange of goods procured from the potters and artisans. They traded with Syria and Asia Minor in the west, and in Iran and the Indus Valley civilisation in the east. They travelled in ships across the seas for trade. Their temples acted as banks and lent credit on their own account. The Mesopotamian documents have references to loan and repayment, with or without interest. Perhaps this is the first written evidence of charging an interest on borrowed money.

### **Cities and Town Planning**

The Mesopotamian cities featured mud or baked brick walls with gates. Some people lived in reed huts outside the cities. The Ziggurats were at the city centre on a platform and appeared like steep pyramids, with staircases leading to the top. Around this temple were complexes of ceremonial courtyards, shrines, burial chambers for the priests and priestesses, ceremonial banquet halls, along with workshops, granaries, storehouses and administrative buildings.

### **Religion**

Sumerian religion was polytheistic. They worshipped several gods and goddesses. Sumerians did not pay much attention to the life after death and so they did not build pyramids like the Egyptians. The Sumerians prayed to Enlil, the god of sky and wind. The city of Nippur was centre of Enlil's worship. Ninlil was the Sumerian goddess of grain. The Babylonians worshipped Marduk, and Ashur was the supreme god of the Assyrians. Ishtar was goddess of love and fertility, Tiamat the god of the sea and chaos, and Sin, the moon god. The kings were seen as representatives of the gods on earth. The Mesopotamians developed a rich collection of myths and legends. The most famous of these is the epic of Gilgamesh, which is written in the cuneiform text. It contains a legend of the flood and has similarities with the account of Noah's Ark mentioned in the Bible and other myths in the Hindu puranas.

### **Hammurabi's Law Code**

Hammurabi Code is an important legal document that specifies the laws related to various crimes. It has 282 provisions specifying cases related to family rights, trade, slavery, taxes and wages. It is carved on a stone, which portrays Hammurabi as receiving the code from the Sun god Shamash. It was a compilation of old laws based on retributive principles.

The 'eye for eye' and 'tooth for tooth' form of justice is used in the Hammurabi Code.

### **Cuneiform: The Sumerian Writing System**

Cuneiform is the Sumerian writing system. The shape of the letter is in the form of wedge and hence it is called cuneiform. Evolving around 3000 BCE, it is one of the earliest scripts of the world. The epic of Gilgamesh was written in this script. They used this script for commercial transactions and writing letters and stories. The clay tablets contain loads of information on the Sumerian civilisation.

### **Art**

The Mesopotamian art included sculptures in stone and clay. A few paintings and sculptures from the Mesopotamian times have survived today. Mesopotamian sculptures portray animals, such as goats, rams, bulls and lions. Some mythological figures like lions and bulls with human head have also been found in their art. Massive sculptures were created at the time of Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

### **Science**

The Mesopotamians excelled in mathematics, astronomy and medicine. They developed the concepts of multiplication, division and cubic equation. The numerical system based on 60 was conceived by them. They were the ones to formulate the 60-minute hour, the 24-hour day and the 360° circle. The Sumerian calendar had seven days in a week. Their numerical system had place values. They created the water clock and the lunar calendar based on the movement of the moon. They developed methods for measuring areas and solids. They also developed advanced weight and measurement systems.

They introduced the twelve month calendar system based on lunar months. Their ideas influenced Greek astronomy. They had developed a medicinal system as well. A text called the Diagnostic Handbook, dated to the 11th century BCE Babylon, lists symptoms and prognoses. This indicates their scientific understanding of herbs and minerals.

### **Contributions of the Mesopotamian Civilisation**

- ✓ The invention of the potter's wheel is credited to the Sumerians.
- ✓ They developed the calendar system of 360 days and divided a circle into 360 units.

- ✓ The cuneiform system of writing was their contribution.
- ✓ The Hammurabi's law code was another legacy of the Mesopotamians.

### **The Chinese Civilisation**

China has two major rivers. One is known as Huang He (Yellow River) and the other is called Yangtze River. The Yellow River is known as the Sorrow of China, since it changed its course and caused frequent floods. Evidence for the prehistoric Peking man (700,000 BP and 200,000 BP) and Yuanmou Man exists in China. Neolithic communities lived in China between 4500 and 3750 BCE. The Henan province in the Yellow and Yangtze river valley contain evidence for Neolithic villages. China had many city states and gradually these states became part of an empire.

### **Polity and Emperors**

Shi Huangdi (Qin Shi Huang, which means the first emperor) founded the Qin (Chin) dynasty. The emperor had the title 'son of heaven'. He is considered to be the first emperor of China. The period between 221 and 206 BCE is known as the imperial era in China. He conquered other principalities in 221 BCE and remained the emperor till 212 BCE. He defeated the feudal lords and established a strong empire. He is credited with unifying China. Shi Huangdi destroyed the walled fortifications of different states and constructed the Great Wall of China to protect the empire from the invading nomadic people. He also built roads to integrate the empire.

### **The Han Empire (206-220 CE)**

During this period, a written history of this empire was made available in China. The greatest of the Han emperors, Wu Ti (Han Wu the Great, 141 to 87 BCE), expanded the empire and built many public amenities, including irrigation tanks. He sent Zhang Qian as emissary to the West in 138 BCE and thereby paved the way for the opening of the Silk Road in 130 BCE to encourage trade activities. Because of the Silk Road and the resultant trade connections, China benefitted immensely during the rule of Emperor Zhang (75-88 CE). Chinese silk was much sought after by the Romans during the time of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius in 166 CE. Some of the Chinese silk might have reached Rome through the ports of Tamilagam.

## Philosophy and Literature

Chinese poets and philosophers such as Lao Tze, Confucius, Mencius, Mo Ti (Mot Zu) and Tao Chien (365-427 CE) contributed to the development of Chinese civilisation. Sun-Tzu, a military strategist, wrote the work called Art of War. The Spring and Autumn Annals is the official chronicle of the state at the time. The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine is considered China's earliest written book on medicine. It was codified during the time of Han Dynasty.

- **Lao Tze (c. 604-521 BCE)** was the master archive keeper of Chou state. He was the founder of Taoism. He argued that desire is the root cause of all evils.
- **Confucius (551-497 BCE)** was famous among the Chinese philosophers. He was a political reformer. His name means Kung the master. He insisted on cultivation of one's own personal life. He said, "If personal life is cultivated, family life is regulated; and once family life is regulated, national life is regulated."
- **Mencius (372-289 BCE)** was another well-known Chinese philosopher. He travelled throughout China and offered his counsel to the rulers.

## Chinese Script

Chinese developed a writing system from an early time. Initially it was a pictographic system and later it was converted into a symbol form.

## Contribution of the Chinese Civilisation

- ✓ Writing system was improved
- ✓ Invention of paper
- ✓ Opening of the Silk Road
- ✓ Invention of gun powder

## Indus Civilisation

The Indus civilisation, known also as the Harappan civilisation, covers an area of over 1.5 million square kilometres in India and Pakistan. Sutkagen-dor in the west on the Pakistan-Iran border; Shortugai (Afghanistan) in the north; Alamgirpur (Uttar Pradesh in India).in the east; and Daimabad (Maharashtra in India). in the south are the boundaries

with in which the Harappan culture has been found. Its main concentration is in the regions of Gujarat, Pakistan, Rajasthan and Haryana.

### **Planned Towns**

Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan), Mohenjo-Daro (Sindh, Pakistan), Dholavira (Gujarat, India), Kalibangan (Rajasthan, India), Lothal (Gujarat, India), Banawali (Rajasthan, India), Rakhigarhi (Haryana, India) and Surkotada (Gujarat, India) are the major cities of the Indus civilisation. Fortification, well-planned streets and lanes and drainages can be observed in the Harappan towns. The Harappans used baked and unbaked bricks and stones for construction. A civic authority perhaps controlled the planning of the towns. A few of the houses had more than one floor. The tank called the Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro is an important structure, well paved with several adjacent rooms. Some unearthed structures have been identified as the granary. We do not know about the nature of the state or political organisation of the Harappans. But they must have had a political organisation at the level of an early form of state. A male image from Mohenjo-Daro has been identified as 'priest king', but we do not know about the accuracy of this interpretation. The structure identified as granary should be considered as archaeologists' interpretation.

### **Agriculture and Animal Domestication**

The Harappans practiced agriculture. They cultivated wheat, barley and various types of millets. They adopted a double cropping system. Pastoralism was also known to them. They reared cattle, sheep and goats. They had knowledge of various animals including elephants but did not use horses. The Harappan cattle are called Zebu, and it is a large breed, often represented in their seals.

### **Pottery**

The Harappans used painted pottery. Their potteries have a deep red slip and black paintings. The pottery has shapes 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, depict pipal tree leaves, fish-scale designs, intersecting circles, zigzag lines, horizontal bands, and geometrical motifs, and floral and faunal patterns.

### **Metal, Tools and Weapons**



The Harappans used chert blades, copper objects and bone and ivory tools. They did not possess knowledge about iron. The tools and equipment's such as points, chisels, needles, fishhooks, razors, weighing pans, mirror and antimony rods were made of bronze. The chisels made out of Rohri chert were used by the Harappans. Their weapons included arrows, spears, a chisel-bladed tool and axe. The bronze image of dancing girl from Mohenjo-Daro is suggestive of the use of lost-wax process.

**Rohri chert** refers to the chert raw material collected from Rohri in Pakistan. It was used by the Harappans for making blades. The Harappans used both stone and bronze tools.

### **Textiles and Ornaments**

The Harappans used metal and stone adornments. They had knowledge of cotton and silk textiles. They made carnelian, copper and gold ornaments. Faience, stoneware and shell bangles were also used. Some of them had etched designs, and the Harappans exported them to the Mesopotamia.

### **Trade and Exchange**

The Harappans had close trade links with the Mesopotamians. Harappan seals have been found in the West Asian sites, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq and Iran. The cuneiform inscriptions mention the trade contacts between Mesopotamia and the Harappans. The mention of 'Meluhha' in the cuneiform inscriptions is considered to refer to the Indus region. The Harappans developed a system of proper weights and measures. Since they engaged in commercial transactions, they needed standard measures. The cubical chert weights are found at the Harappan sites. The copper plates for weighing balances have also been found. The weights point to their knowledge of the binary system. The ratio of weighing is doubled as 1:2:4:8:16:32.

### **Seals, Sealing's and Scripts**

The seals from various media such as steatite, copper, terracotta and ivory are found in the Harappan sites. They were probably used in the trade activities. The Harappan script is not yet deciphered. About 5,000 texts have been documented from the Harappan sites. Some scholars are of the view that the script is in Dravidian language.

### **Arts and Amusement**

The terracotta figurines, paintings on the pottery and the bronze images from the Harappan sites suggest the artistic skills of the Harappans. 'Priestking' made of steatite and dancing girl made of bronze (both from Mohenjo-Daro) as well as stone sculptures from Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Dholavira are the important objects of art. Toy carts, rattles, wheels, tops, marbles and hop scotches made in terracotta suggest the amusement of the Harappan people.

### **Religion**

The Indus people had a close relationship with nature. They worshipped pipal trees. Some of the terracotta figures resemble the mother goddess. Fire altars have been identified at Kalibangan. The Indus people buried the dead. Burials were done elaborately and evidence for cremation has also been found.

### **Original Inhabitants and their Culture**

The authors of the Harappan civilisation are not known, since the script has not been deciphered. One school of thought argues that they spoke the Dravidian language. The archaeological evidence shows movement of the Harappans to the east and south after the decline of the Indus civilisation. It is probable that some of the Harappan people moved into different parts of India. Only the decipherment of the script can give a definite answer.

Indus civilisation had more than one group of people. Several groups including farmers, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers lived in the Indus region. The Indus region had villages and large towns. The population was mixed. The periods of the civilisation has been divided into Early Harappan, starting around 3300 BCE and continuing to 2600 BCE and mature Harappan, are the last phase civilisations from 2600 to 1900 BCE. The later Harappan existed upto 1700 BCE.

### **Decline of Indus Culture**

The Indus civilisation and its urban features started declining from about 1900 BCE. Changes in climate, decline of the trade with Mesopotamia and drying up or flooding of the river Indus, foreign invasion were some of the reasons attributed to the collapse of this civilisation and for the migration of people in the southern and eastern directions. It did not completely disappear. It continued as rural culture.

## Indus Civilisation and Tamil Civilisation

The similarity of the graffiti found on the megalithic burial pots of South India with the Indus script and the identical place names of Tamil Nadu and Indus region of Pakistan are presented as arguments to establish the relationship between the Indus civilisation and Tamil culture. Researchers like Father Henry Heras, Asko Parpola and Iravatham Mahadevan find similarity between the Indus script and the Dravidian/Tamil language.

Archaeological evidence points out that several groups of people have been living in Tamil Nadu and South India continuously from the Mesolithic period. A few groups from the Indus region might have migrated into southern India. Some of the ideas and technologies of the Indus civilisations had reached South India in the Iron Age. The carnelian beads, shell bangles and bronze mirrors found in the Megalithic/Early Historic sites of Tamil Nadu were first introduced by the people of the Indus civilisation. More research is needed to arrive at any definite conclusion in this matter.

The towns of ancient Tamilagam such as Arikamedu, Uraiyur and Keezhadi that flourished are part of the **second urbanisation** of India and these towns are much different from the Indus cities. These towns emerged approximately 1,200 years after the decline of the Indus civilisation.

### NOTE

- ❖ **Mummies of Egypt:** The preserved dead body is called the mummy. The Egyptians had the tradition of preserving the dead bodies using Natron salt, a combination of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate. The preservation process is called mummification. After 40 days, when the salt absorbed all the moisture, the body was filled with sawdust and wrapped with strips of linen cloth and covered with a fabric. The body was stored in a stone coffin called sarcophagus.
- ❖ The word 'paper' comes from 'Papyrus'. The Egyptians wrote on the leaves of a plant called papyrus, a kind of reed, which grew on the banks of Nile.
- ❖ The city of Akkad later became the city of Babylon, a commercial and cultural centre of West Asia.

- ❖ The Epic of Gilgamesh is perhaps the oldest written epic on earth. It was originally written on twelve clay tablets in cuneiform in ancient Sumaria.
- ❖ Assyrian Empire was the first military power in history. They emerged militarily powerful because they were the earliest to use iron technology effectively.
- ❖ Ziggurats were pyramid-shaped monuments found in ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). One of the most famous Ziggurats of the time is the one in the city of Ur.
- ❖ **Development of Script:** Development of script is an important milestone in human history. Writing system began to emerge in Sumeria in the later part of fourth millennium BCE. Hieroglyphic, the Egyptian system of writing, developed in early third millennium BCE. The Harappans also had a system of writing around the same time, but it has not yet been deciphered. The Chinese civilisation too developed a writing system from a very early period.
- ❖ **The Great Wall of China:** The Great Wall of China, one of the wonders of the world, was a massive effort undertaken for the protection of China from the Mongols. In 220 BCE, under Qin Shi Huang, earlier fortifications were connected by walls as a form of defence against invasions. It was built from third century BCE until 17th century CE. It ran for over 20,000 kilometres covering the hills and plains, from the border of Korea in the east to the Ordos Desert in the west.
- ❖ The Indus Valley civilisation is also known as the Harappan civilisation, since Harappa was the first site to be discovered. This civilisation is known as Harappan civilisation rather than Indus Valley civilisation, since it extended beyond the Indus river valley.

### 3. Early Tamil Society and Culture

#### Introduction

Tamil civilization, as we have seen, begins at least three centuries before the Common Era (CE). As seafaring people, Tamil traders and sailors established commercial and cultural links across the seas and merchants from foreign territories also visited the Tamil region. The resulting cultural and mercantile activities and internal developments led to urbanization in this region. Towns and ports emerged. Coins and currency came into circulation. Written documents were produced. The Tamil-Brahmi script was adopted to write the Tamil language. Classical Tamil poems were composed. In the unit one, we studied the cultural developments in the Tamil region from the prehistoric period to the beginning of the Iron Age. In this lesson, we will learn about the development of Tamil culture in the Early Historic Period also known as the Sangam Age.

#### Sources for the study of early Tamil society

The sources for reconstructing the history of the ancient Tamils are:

1. Classical Tamil literature
2. Epigraphy (inscriptions)
3. Archaeological excavations and material culture
4. Non-Tamil and Foreign Literature

#### The Classical Sangam Tamil Literature

The Classical Sangam corpus (collection) consists of the Tholkappiyam, the Pathinen Melkanakku (18 Major works) and the Pathinen Kilkanakku (18 minor works) and the five epics.

#### Tholkappiyam

Tholkappiyam, attributed to Tholkappiyar, is the earliest written work on Tamil grammar. Apart from elaborating the rules of grammar, the third section of Tholkappiyam also describes poetic conventions that provide information on Tamil social life. The texts of Pathinen Melkanakku include Pathupaattu (ten long songs) and Ettuthogai (the eight anthologies). These texts are the oldest among the classical Tamil texts. The texts of Pathinen Kilkanakku belong to a later date.

### The Ettuthogai or the eight anthologies are

- |                |                |               |                   |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1. Natrinai    | 2. Kurunthogai | 3. Paripaadal | 4. Pathittrupathu |
| 5. Aingurunuru | 6. Kalithogai  | 7. Akanaanuru | 8. Puranaanuru    |

### Pathupattu collection includes ten long songs

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Tirumurugatrupadai | 6. Nedunalvaadai   |
| 2. Porunaratrupadai   | 7. Maduraikanchi   |
| 3. Perumpanatrupadai  | 8. Kurinjipaattu   |
| 4. Sirupanatrupadai   | 9. Pattinappaalai  |
| 5. Mullaipaattu       | 10. Malaipadukadam |

### Pathinen Kilkanakku (18 minor works)

The Pathinen Kilkanakku comprises eighteen texts elaborating on ethics and morals. The pre-eminent work among these is the Tirukkural composed by Tiruvalluvar. In 1330 couplets Tirukkural considers questions of morality, state craft and love.

### The Five Epics

The epics or Kappiyams are long narrative poem of very high quality. They are,

- |                     |                |                        |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Silappathikaaram | 2. Manimekalai | 3. Seevaka Chinthamani |
| 4. Valaiyapathi     | 5. Kundalakesi |                        |

### Epigraphy

Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions. Inscriptions are documents scripted on stone, copper plates, and other media such as coins, rings, etc. The development of script marks the beginning of the historical period. The period before the use of written script is called prehistoric period. Tamil-Brahmi was the first script used for writing in Tamil Nadu. Inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi are found in caves and rock shelters, and on pottery and other objects (coins, rings and seals).

### Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions

Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions have been found in more than 30 sites in Tamil Nadu mostly on cave surfaces and rock shelters. These caves were the abodes of monks, mostly Jaina monks. The natural caves were converted into residence by cutting a drip-line to keep rain water away

from the cave. Inscriptions often occur below such drip-lines. The sites have smooth stone beds carved on rock surface for monks who led a simple life and lived in these shelters. Merchants and kings converted these natural formations as habitation for monks, who had renounced worldly life. Mangulam, Muttupatti, Pugalur, Arachalur and Kongarpuliyankulam and Jambai are some of the major sites of such caves with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. Around Madurai many such caves with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions can still be seen. Many of them are located along ancient trade routes.

**Note:** You will notice that among the old inscriptions, people (both local and tourists) have marked their names thereby destroying some of the ancient inscriptions. Such acts of destruction of heritage property or property belonging to others are called vandalism.

### Hero Stones

Hero stones are memorials erected for those who lost their lives in the battles and in cattle raids. As cattle were considered an important source of wealth, raiding cattle owned by adjoining tribes and clans was common practice in a pastoral society. During the Sangam Age, the Mullai landscape followed the pastoral way of life. Tribal chieftains plundered the cattle wealth of enemies whose warriors fought to protect their cattle. Many warriors died in such battles and were remembered as martyrs. Memorial stones were erected in their honour. Sangam literature vividly portrays these battles and clashes, and describes such hero stones as objects of worship. Tholkappiyam describes the procedures for erecting hero stones.

Hero stones of the Sangam Age with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions can be found at Pulimankombai and Thathapatti in Theni district and Porpanaikottai in Pudukkottai district. Those of the Sangam Age discovered till now do not have images or sculptures. Hero stones of the post-Sangam Age and the Pallava period occur in large numbers in pastoral regions especially around the Chengam region near Thiruvannamalai district. These hero stones have inscriptions and the images of warriors and names of heroes.

### Inscriptions

Pottery vessels from the Early Historic Period have names of people engraved on them in Tamil-Brahmi script. Potsherds have been discovered

in Arikkamedu, Azhagankulam, Kodumanal, Keezhadi, and many other sites in Tamil Nadu. Pottery inscribed with names in Tamil-Brahmi script have also been found in B erenike and Quseir al Qadhim in Egypt and in Khor Rori in Oman indicating that early Tamils had trade contacts with West Asia and along the Red Sea coast. People etched their names on pottery to indicate ownership. Many of the names are in Tamil while some are in Prakrit.

### **Prakrit**

Prakrit was the language used by the common people in the Northern part of India during the Mauryan period.

### **Archaeology and Material Culture**

Archaeology is the study of the past by interpretation of the material cultural remains. Such remains are unearthed by the systematic excavation of old inhabitation sites called archaeological sites. Archaeological sites have mounds which are an accumulation of soil, pottery, building and organic remains and objects. In many parts of Tamil Nadu they are called Nattam, Kottai and Medu. Such sites provide evidence of how people lived in the past.

### **Archaeological Sites**

Archaeological excavation refers to systematically digging a site to recover material evidence for exploring and interpreting societies of the past. Archaeological excavations at the early historic sites are the source of evidence of the activities of the Sangam Age people. Excavations at Arikkamedu, Azhagankulam, Uraiur, Kanchipuram, Kaveripoompattinam, Korkai, Vasavasamudram, Keezhadi, Kodumanal in Tamil Nadu, and Pattanam in Kerala provide the evidence we have of this period. Arikkamedu, near Puducherry, is a Sangam Age port, excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). British archaeologist, Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler, French Archaeologist, J.M. Casal, and Indian archaeologists, A. Ghosh and Krishna Deva, excavated this site. They found evidence of a planned town, warehouse, streets, tanks and ring wells

### **The Archaeological Survey of India**

(ASI) is a Central government agency that manages archaeological sites and monuments in India. The Government of Tamil Nadu has its own



department for archaeology called the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology. The Indian Treasure Trove Act (1878), the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act (1972), the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958) are legislation related to the preservation of archaeological remains in India.

### Material Culture

Archaeologists have found evidence of brick structures and industrial activities, as well as artefacts such as beads, bangles, cameos, intaglios, and other materials in these sites. Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions on pottery and coins have also been unearthed. Evidences of the various arts, crafts and industries together help us reconstruct the way of life of the people of those times. From this we learn and understand how they might have lived. **Cameo** – an ornament made in precious stone where images are carved on the surface. **Intaglio** – an ornament in which images are carved as recess, below the surface.

### Coins

Coins as a medium of exchange were introduced for the first time in the Sangam Age. The coins of the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas, punch-marked coins, and Roman coins form another important source of evidence from the Sangam Age. Punch-marked coins have been found at Kodumanal and Bodinayakanur. Roman coins are concentrated in the Coimbatore region, and are found at Azhagankulam, Karur, and Madurai. They were used as bullion for their metal value and as ornaments. **Bullion** means precious metal available in the form of ingots. **Punch-marked coins** are the earliest coins used in India. They are mostly made of silver and have numerous symbols punched on them. Hence, they are known as punch-marked coins

### Non-Tamil Sources (Foreign Accounts)

Non-Tamil literary sources also offer information on early Tamil society. The presence of the non-Tamil sources reveals the extensive contacts and interactions of the early Tamil society with the outside world.

### Arthasastra

Arthasastra, the classic work on economy and statecraft authored by Chanakya during the Mauryan period, refers to Pandya kavataka. It may mean the pearl and shells from the Pandyan country.

### **Mahavamsa**

Mahavamsa, the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicle, composed in the Pali language, mentions merchants and horse traders from Tamil Nadu and South India. Chronicle is a narrative text presenting the important historical events in chronological order.

### **Periplus of Erythrean Sea**

Periplus of Erythrean Sea is an ancient Greek text whose author is not known. The term Periplus means navigational guide used by sailors. Erythrean Sea refers to the waters around the Red Sea. It makes references to the Sangam Age ports of Muciri, Thondi, Korkai and Kumari, as well as the Cheras and the Pandyas.

### **Pliny's Natural History**

Pliny the Elder, was a Roman who wrote Natural History. Written in Latin, it is a text on the natural wealth of the Roman Empire. Pliny speaks about the pepper trade with India and he states that it took 40 days to reach India, from Oealis near North East Africa, if the south west monsoon wind was favourable. He also mentions that the Pandyas of Madurai controlled the port of Bacare on the Kerala coast. The current name of Bacare is not known. Pliny laments the loss of Roman wealth due to Rome's pepper trade with India – an indication of the huge volume and value of the pepper that was traded.

### **Ptolemy's Geography**

Ptolemy's Geography is a gazetteer and atlas of Roman times providing geographical details of the Roman Empire in the second century CE. Kaveripoompattinam (Khabaris Emporium), Korkai (Kolko), Kanniyakumari (Komaria), and Muciri (Muziris) are some of the places mentioned in his Geography.

### **Peutingian table**

Peutingian table is an illustrated map of the Roman roads. It shows the areas of ancient Tamilagam and the port of Muziris.

Note: Taprobane refers to Sri Lanka as Island. Muziris refers to the port of Muchiri.

### Vienna Papyrus

Vienna papyrus, a Greek document datable to the second century CE, mentions Muciri's trade of olden days. It is in the Papyrus Museum attached to the Austrian National Library, Vienna (Austria). It contains a written agreement between traders and mentions the name of a ship, Hermapollon, and lists articles of export such as pepper and ivory that were shipped from India to the Roman Empire. Papyrus, a paper produced out of the papyrus plant used extensively for writing purposes in ancient Egypt.

### The Sangam Age

The Sangam Age or the Early Historic period is an important phase in the history of South India. This period is marked out from prehistory, because of the availability of textual sources, namely Sangam literature and Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. Sangam text is a vast corpus of literature that serves as an important source for the study of the people and society of the relevant period.

### Chronology

There is considerable debate among scholars about the age and chronology of Sangam society. The Sangam texts are generally dated to between third century BCE and the third century CE. The references in Greco-Roman texts, Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions and the references to the Cheras, Cholas and the Pandyas in the Ashokan inscription corroborate this date. It is generally agreed that the Sangam poems were composed in the early part of the historical period, but were compiled into anthologies in the later period. **Ashokan Brahmi** - the script used in Ashokan edicts or inscriptions.

**The Thinai:** The concept of Thinai is presented in the Tamil Grammar work of Tholkappiyam and this concept is essential to understand the classical Tamil poems. Thinai is a poetic theme, which means a class or category and refers to a habitat or eco-zone with specific physiographical characteristics. Sangam poems are set in these specific eco-zones and reveal that human life has deep relationships with nature. The themes of the poems are broadly defined as akam (interior) and puram (exterior).

Akathinai refers to various situations of love and family life, while Purathinai is concerned with all others aspects of life and deals particularly with war and heroism.

### **Ainthinai**

The Five Thinais or landscapes. Tamilagam was divided into five landscapes. Each region had distinct characteristics - a presiding deity, occupation, people and cultural life according to its specific environmental conditions. This classification has been interpreted by scholars to reflect real life situations in these landscapes. The five landscapes are Kurunji, Mullai, Marutham, Neythal and Paalai.

- ✓ Kurunji refers to the hilly and mountainous region.
- ✓ Mullai is forested and pastoral region.
- ✓ Marutham is the fertile riverine valley.
- ✓ Neythal is coastal region.
- ✓ Paalai is sandy desert region.

### **Sangam Age Polity: Political Powers of Tamilagam**

The Sangam Age has its roots in the Iron Age. In the Iron Age people were organised into chiefdoms. From such communities of Iron Age emerged the Vendhars of the early historic period and the Velirs of the Sangam Age were chieftains. The Mauryan emperor, Asoka, conquered Kalinga (Odisha) and parts of Andhra and Karnataka regions. Ashokan inscriptions found in present day Odisha, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are not seen in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Therefore, we may conclude that the Tamil rulers were independent of Mauryan authority.

### **The Muvendhar**

Among the political powers of the Sangam Age, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas occupied pre-eminent positions. They were known as Muvendhar (the three kings). The muvendhar controlled the major towns and ports of the Sangam period.

### **The Cheras**

The Cheras, referred to as Keralaputras in the Ashokan inscriptions, controlled the region of present-day Kerala and also the western parts of Tamil Nadu. Vanci was the capital of the Cheras while Muciri and Thondi were their port towns. Vanci is identified with Karur in Tamil Nadu while

some others identify it with Thiruvanchaikkalam in Kerala. Pathirtruppathu speaks about the Chera kings and their territory. The Cheras wore garlands made from the flowers of the palm tree. The inscriptions of Pugalur near Karur mention the Chera kings of three generations. Coins of Chera kings have been found in Karur. The Silappathikaram speaks about Cheran Senguttuvan, who built a temple for Kannagi, the protagonist of the epic. The bow and arrow was the symbol of the Cheras. Legend has it that Ilango who composed the Silappathikaram, was the brother of Cheran Senguttuvan.

### **The Cholas**

The Cholas ruled over the Kaveri delta and northern parts of Tamil Nadu. Their capital was Uraiyur and their port town was Kaveripoompattinam or Pumpuhar, where the river Kaveri drains into the Bay of Bengal. Pattinappaalai is a long poem about Kaveripoompattinam composed by the poet Kadiyalur Uruthirankannanar. Silappathikaram describes the trading activities at Kaveripoompattinam. Karikalan is notable among the Chola kings and is credited with bringing forestlands under the plough and developing irrigation facilities by effectively utilising the water from the river Kaveri.

The foundation for the extensive harnessing of water for irrigation purposes, which reached its zenith in later Chola times (10th to 13th centuries) was laid in his time. Karikalan fought battles with the Pandyas, Cheras and other chieftains. The Chola emblem was the tiger and they issued square copper coins with images of a tiger on the obverse, elephant and the sacred symbols on the reverse.

### **The Pandyas**

The Pandyas who ruled the southern part of Tamil Nadu are referred to in the Ashokan inscriptions. Madurai was the Pandya's capital. Tamil literary tradition credits Pandyan rulers with patronizing Tamil Sangams (academies) and supporting the compilations of poems. The Mangulam Tamil-Brahmi inscription mentions the king Nedunchezhiyan. Nediyan, Mudathirumaran, Palayagasalai Mudukudumipperuvazhuti were some of the important rulers of the dynasty. The Pandyan symbol was the fish. Velirs / Chieftains Apart from the Vendhars, there were Velirs and numerous chieftains who occupied territories on the margins of the muvendhar. The velirs were the seven chiefs Pari, Kari, Ori, Nalli, Pegan,

Ai and Athiyaman. Sangam poems write extensively about the generosity of these velirs. Tese chiefs had intimate relations with the poets of their time and were known for their large-heartedness. Tese chiefains had alliance with one or other of the muvendhar and helped them in their battles against the other Vendhars.

### **Society in Sangam Age**

Many of the communities of the Iron Age society were organised as tribes, and some of them were Chiefdoms. The Sangam Age society was a society in transition from a tribal community ruled by a chief to a larger kingdom ruled by a king

### **Composition of the Society**

Social stratification had begun to take root in Tamil society by the Sangam times. There were several clan-based communities including groups such as Panar, Paratavar, Eyinar, Uzhavar, Kanavar, Vettuvar and Maravar. The Vendhars, chiefs, and their associates formed the higher social groups. There were priests who were known as Antanars. There were artisan groups specialising in pottery and black smithy. The caste system we find in northern India did not take root in Tamil country as social groups were divided into five situational types (Tamil) and related occupational patterns.

Even though Sangam society was characterized by limited consumption of commodities, the kings, chiefs and merchants led a prosperous life. People at the margins lived in poverty. Panars depended on their patrons for their livelihood. The development of agriculture and pastoral ways of life might have harmed the eco-system and the naturally available forest and wild animals. It is possible that some of the hunter-gatherers might have been pushed to the forest areas and a few might have taken up the occupation of manual labourers. The development of agriculture in the wet-land region depended on the use of certain groups of people as labourers.

### **Women**

Women are frequently referred to in Tamil texts as mothers, heroines, and foster-mothers. Women from Panar families, dancers, poets, and royal women were all portrayed in Sangam literature. There are references to women from all five eco-zones. For example,

Vennikkuyathiyar is identified as a poetess from the village of Venni. There are references to women protecting Thinai fields from birds and Umanar women selling salt showing that women were involved in primary production. Instances where women preferred to die along with their husbands also occur in the literature of the times.

### Economy

The economy was mixed as elaborated in the Thinai concept. People practiced agriculture, pastoralism, trade and money exchange, hunting-gathering, and fishing depending upon the eco-zones in which they lived.

### Primary Production

Agriculture was one of the main sources of subsistence. Crops like paddy, sugarcane, millets were cultivated. Both wet and dry land farming were practiced. In the riverine and tank-irrigated areas, paddy was cultivated. Millets were cultivated in dry lands. Varieties of rice such as sennel (red rice), vennel (white rice), and aivananel (a type of rice) are mentioned in the literature. Rice grains were found in burial urns at excavations in Adichanallur and Porunthal. People in the forest adopted punam or shifting cultivation. **Pastoralism** - nomadic people earning livelihood by rearing cattle, sheep, and goat.

### Industries and Crafts of the Sangam Age

Craft production and craft specialization were important aspects of urbanization. In the Sangam Age there were professional groups that produced various commodities. The system of production of commodities is called industry.

### Pottery

Pottery was practised in many settlements. People used pottery produced by Kalamceyko (potters) in their daily activities and so they were made in large numbers. Black ware, russet-coated painted ware, black and red ware potteries were the different types of pottery used.

### Iron Smelting Industry

Iron manufacturing was an important artisanal activity. Iron smelting was undertaken in traditional furnaces and such furnaces, with terracotta pipes and raw ore have been found in many archaeological sites.

For instance evidence of iron smelting has been found in Kodumanal and Guttur. Sangam literature speaks of blacksmiths, and their tools and activities. Iron implements were required for agriculture and warfare (swords, daggers, and spears).

### **Stone Ornaments**

Sangam Age people adorned themselves with a variety of ornaments. While the poor wore ornaments made of clay, terracotta, iron, and leaves and flowers, the rich wore jewellery made of precious stones, copper, and gold. Quartz, amethyst (sevvantikkal) and carnelian (semmanikkal) were some of the semi-precious stones used for making ornaments. Diamond drills were used to pierce holes in the hard stones and etched carnelian beads have been found in the megalithic monuments.

### **Gold jewellery**

Gold ornaments were well known in this period. A gold coin from Roman was used to make jewellery. Evidence of gold smelting has been found at Pattanam in Kerala. Gold ornaments have been unearthed at the megalithic sites of Suttukeni, Adichanallur and Kodumanal, and towns of Arikkamedu, Keezhadi and Pattanam in Kerala.

### **Glass Beads**

The presence of glass beads at the sites reveals that people of the Sangam Age knew how to make glass beads. Glass material (silica) was melted in a furnace and drawn into long tubes which were then cut into small beads. Glass beads came in various shapes and colour. Arikkamedu and Kudikkadu, near Cuddalore show evidence of glass beads industry. It is possible that people who could not afford precious stones used glass beads instead.

### **Pearl Fishery and Shell Bangle**

The Pamban coast is famous for pearl fishery. A pearl has been discovered in recently excavated Keezhadi site. Shell bangles were very common in the Sangam Age. The Parathavars collected conch shells from the Pamban Island, which were cut and crafted into bangles by artisans. Whole shells as well as fragments of bangles have been found at many sites. Sangam literature describes women wearing shell bangles.

### **Textiles**



Textile production was another important occupation. Evidence of spindle whorls and pieces of cloth have been found at Kodumanal. Literature too refers to clothes called kalingam and other fine varieties of textiles. Periplus also mentions the fine variety of textiles produced in the Tamil region. **Spindle** whorls were used for making thread from cotton.

### **Exchange, Trade, Merchants, and Trade Routes**

We saw the primary production of grains, cattle wealth, and various commodities. These goods were not produced by everybody and were not produced in all settlements. Resources and commodities were not available in all regions. For example, the hill region did not have fish or salt and the coastal regions could not produce paddy. Therefore trade and exchange was important for people to have access to different commodities. Specialised groups called vanikars (traders) travelled in groups trading goods and commodities between regions.

#### **Traders**

The terms vanikan and nigama (guild) appear in Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. There were different types of merchants: gold merchants, cloth merchants, and salt merchants. Salt merchants were called Umanars and they travelled in bullock carts along with their family.

#### **Means of Transport**

Bullock carts and animals were used to transport goods by land. Trade routes linked the various towns of Tamilagam. Various types of water crafts and sea-going vessels such as Kalam, Pahri, Odam, Toni, Teppam, and Navai are also mentioned in Tamil literature.

#### **Barter and Coins**

Barter was the primary mode of exchange. For instance, rice was exchanged for fish. Salt was precious and a handful of it would fetch an equal amount of rice. The extensive availability of coin hoards of the Sangam Age of the Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas, and Malayaman indicates that they were used widely.

#### **Tamilagam and Overseas Interactions**

Tamil country had connections with countries overseas both in the east and west. Roman ships used monsoon winds to cross the Western Sea

or the Arabian Sea to connect Tamilagam with the Western world. Spices including pepper, ivory, and precious stones were exported. Metal including gold, silver and copper and precious stones were imported. Yavanar referred to the Westerners, including the Greeks, Romans and West Asian people. Yavana derives from the Greek region of Ionia.

### **Tamil Nadu to Red Sea Coast**

An Indian jar with 7.5 kg of pepper, teak wood, a potsherd with Tamil-Brahmi inscription and Indian pottery have been discovered at Berenike, a port on the Red Sea coast of Egypt. At Quseir al Qadhim, another port located north of Berenike on the Red Sea Coast, three Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions, Panaiori, Kanan, and Cattan, have been found on pottery discovered here. A stone with the name "Perumpatankal" has been found at Khuan Luk Pat, Thailand. Southeast Asia was known as Suvarna Bhumi in Tamil literature. This stone was used by a person called Perumpattan, probably a goldsmith. It was a touchstone used to test the purity of gold.

### **Emergence of towns and ports**

The Sangam Age saw the first urbanization in Tamilagam. Cities developed and they had brick buildings, roof tiles, ring wells and planned towns, streets, and store houses. The towns worked as ports and artisanal centres. Arikamedu, Kaveripoompattinam, Azhagankulam and Korkai on the east coast and Pattanam in Kerala were port centres. Kanchipuram, Uraiyur, Karur, Madurai and Kodumanal were inland trade centres. Many goods and commodities were produced in these centres and were exported to various regions. Though few in number, large towns appeared in the Sangam Age. Small villages however were found in many areas. Bronze vessels, beads, shell bangles, glass beads, pottery with names of people written in Tamil-Brahmi script were found at these sites.

### **Pattanam, Kerala**

Pattanam is located near North Paravur in Vadakkekara village of Ernakulam district of Kerala. It was an ancient port town that had overseas connections with the western and eastern worlds.

### **Kodumanal, Tamil Nadu**

Kodumanal is located near Erode in Tamil Nadu and is identified with the Kodumanam of Pathitrapattu. Evidence of iron, stone bead and

shell work, as well as megalithic burials have been discovered at this site. More than 300 pottery inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi have also been found.

### Faith and Belief System

Like the diverse nature of the society and economy, the belief system of the Sangam Age was also diverse. It consisted of animism, ancestor worship, hero worship and worship of several deities. Tolkappiyam lists the presiding deities of Kurunji, Mullai, Marutham, Neythal and Paalai landscapes, as Murugan, Tirumal, Indiran, Varunan and Kotravai, respectively. However, people also worshipped natural forces and dead heroes, and ancestors. The force of anangu is mentioned in the literature which indicates the prevalence of animistic beliefs. Jainism was present as evidenced by the caves with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions. Performance of Yagna is also evidenced. Buddhism was also present in certain centres. Different groups practiced various forms of worship

### Culture of Arts

Various art forms too existed in the Sangam Age. Performances of ritual dances called Veriyatal are referred to in the literature. Composition of poems, playing of music instruments and dances were also known. The literature mentions the fine variety of cuisine of the Sangam Age. People took care of their appearance and evidence of antimony rods (kohl sticks) made of copper has been found in archaeological sites. They were used by women for decorating their eyebrows.

#### NOTE

- ❖ **Pulimankombai Hero stone:** Pulimankomba is a village in the Vaigai river valley in Theni district. In 2006, rare hero stone inscriptions in Tamil- Brahmi script were discovered in this village. One of the inscriptions from Pulimankombai reads “Kudalur Akol pedu tiyan antavan kal”. It means "The stone of Tiyan Antavan who was killed in a cattle raid at the village of Kudalur".
- ❖ **Akanaanuru poem 149 describes the trading at the port of Muciri as follows:** “the well crafted ships of the Yavana came with gold returned with pepper at the wealthy port of Muciri”
- ❖ **What is an urban centre?** A planned town with brick architecture and a proper layout. Urban centres have a larger population involved in non-agrarian, commercial and political occupations. Various industrial

activities are seen in these towns.

- ❖ **Pattanam, Kerala:** Pattanam is located near North Paravur in Vadakkekara village of Ernakulam district of Kerala. It was an ancient port town that had overseas connections with the western and eastern worlds.
- ❖ **Kodumanal, Tamil Nadu:** Kodumanal is located near Erode in Tamil Nadu and is identified with the Kodumanam of Pathitrupattu. Evidence of iron, stone bead and shell work, as well as megalithic burials have been discovered at this site. More than 300 pottery inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi have also been found.
- ❖ **Keezhadi near Madurai, Tamil Nadu:** Keezhadi is located near Silaimaan east of Madurai, on the highway to Rameswaram. In a large coconut garden, called Pallichandai Tidal, the Archaeological Survey of India excavated an ancient town dating to the Sangam Age. Archaeological excavations have produced evidence for brick buildings, drainage, Tamil-Brahmi inscription on pottery, beads of glass, carnelian and quartz, pearl, iron objects, games pieces, and antimony rods. Further excavation may shed light on the nature of the craft production and the cultural activities undertaken at this settlement.

## 4. Intellectual Awakening and Socio-Political Changes

### Introduction

The discovery of iron marked the beginning of the second phase in the history of civilisations. The invention of smelting of iron transformed both production and warfare. Before iron, copper and its alloy, bronze, which were expensive, were employed in production. The copper or bronze edges became blunt quickly and so implements, whether weapons or ploughs, made of bronze could not be used effectively. Iron ore, in contrast, was available in abundance compared to copper or bronze. The effect of iron axe on agriculture was immense. The iron axe enabled cultivators to clear the jungles and the iron plough was used to break the hardest soil. The Assyrian Empire, which made use of iron technology, was ascendant by the beginning of the seventh century BCE. Small kingdoms or city states emerged in China, Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Greece, Italy, Palestine, Lebanon and North Africa.

A new civilisation began to develop in northern India, with the revival of trade and urbanization during the sixth century BCE. In this period of major political and social changes in north India, Buddha and Mahavira were born. In the century following their death, Buddhism and Jainism took root as major religions in India. This meant that new religious orders were coming up with many followers, propagating new beliefs and philosophies. Similarly Zoroastrianism in Persia and Confucianism and Taoism in China became popular during this period.

### Religion in the Sixth Century BCE

The new civilisations that emerged in the new Iron Age had certain common features. They were characterised by the proliferation of new crafts, growth of long-distance trade, building of cities and towns, rise of universalistic religions and evolution of a code of conduct. Sixth century BCE was, therefore, a period of exceptional development in all spheres of life such as material, cultural and intellectual. About this time, we find that a number of prominent men, great thinkers and founders of new religions lived, making it a period of great historical importance. Philosophical and religious thinkers such as Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Iran and Mahavira and Buddha in India gained popularity in sixth century BCE.

## Confucia

In the sixth century BCE, two great thinkers were born in China: Confucius and Lao-Tse. They laid down the systems of morals and social behaviour for individuals and communities. But after their death, temples were built in their memory and the philosophy they taught was developed into a religion. Known as Confucianism and Taoism respectively, their books were held in great reverence in China. Confucianism exerted a big influence on not only the political class of China but also on the common people.

### Confucius (551-478 BCE)

Confucius was born in the Shantung province of China in 551 BCE. He studied history, poetry, philosophy and music. He is the author of five important works:

1. The Book of Records, which is chiefly ethical, providing guidelines for the regulation of human society;
2. The Book of Odes, illustrating the sound principles of morality in songs;
3. The Book of Changes dealing with metaphysics;
4. The Spring and Autumn Annals, a code of political morality; and
5. The Book of History narrating the events and legends of the early religions of China.

### Five Cardinal Principles of Confucius' Ethics

1. Humaneness
2. Righteousness
3. Propriety;
4. Wisdom
5. Trustworthiness

Confucius said that wisdom grows from the family, and that the foundation of society is the disciplined individual in an orderly family. The superior man, according to him, is not merely intelligent or scholarly, but his character should be exemplary. The superior man of Confucius possesses three virtues: intelligence, courage and goodwill. Though Confucius insisted on children obeying parents and wife her husband, he also clearly proposed that "when the command is wrong a son should resist his father and a minister should resist the prince." When asked about government, he said that there are three requisites for it: "That there

should be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment and confidence of the people in their ruler.”

The philosophy of Confucius gave the Chinese people an awareness about their political rights. It also clearly listed the government’s duty towards the people. Confucius felt that the government should work with an ideal. In matters of national life, Confucius felt that the people in the nation are the actual and proper source of political sovereignty. He advised that the ruler must appoint persons of character in the government to govern the people impartially. Confucianism is often characterised as a system of social and ethical philosophy rather than as a religion.

### **Taoism**

Lao-Tse, the greatest of the pre-Confucian philosophers, was 53 years older than Confucius. Lao-Tse was born in 604 BCE. Disgusted with the intrigues of politicians and the prevailing corruption of his time, he left China to live in a peaceful abode. Lao-Tse wrote a book in two parts, running into 5,000 words. He then disappeared from the place and no one knew where he died. His book Tao Teh Ching is a guide to the conduct of life.

### **Teachings of Lao-Tse (Taoism)**

- ✓ The cause of human unhappiness in the world is human selfishness. Selfishness creates unlimited human desires, which can never be satisfied.
- ✓ In nature, all the things act in a natural way. The law of human conduct must correspond with nature.
- ✓ Humans live a life under the regulation of someone. This is because they have acquired knowledge and have not remained innocent. On the basis of their acquired knowledge, they have built up an urban civilisation and have made themselves unhappy.

### **Zoroastrianism**

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest of the revealed world religions. It remained as the state religion of three great Iranian empires, which flourished from the 6th century BCE and dominated much of the Near and Middle East. Zoroaster of Persia is the founder of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster was pained to find his people worshipping primitive deities. He revolted against it and proclaimed to the world that there is one god,

Ahura Mazda (the Lord of Light). The holy book of Zoroastrians is Zend Avesta. It is a collection of sacred literature of different epochs, containing religious hymns, invocations, prayers, confessions, laws, myths and sacred reminiscences. The doctrines and rituals of the Zoroastrians have much similarity to those of the Vedas.

The language of Avesta bears similarity to that of the Indo-Aryan. Linguists have established a close relationship between Indo-Aryan and the languages of West Asia, in particular Iran. The old Iranian language dates back to the second millennium BCE. Later, it incorporated languages of Dravidians and those of aboriginals of the Indian sub-continent. According to the historian Romila Thapar, the old Iranian and Indo-Aryan speakers originally belonged to a single group and later split up because of dissensions.

### Teachings

Zoroaster taught that the great object of religion, state or society is the cultivation of morality. The highest religious conception is purity of thought, word and deed. He asserted that Ahura Mazda has seven qualities: (1) light; (2) good mind; (3) right; (4) dominion; (5) piety; (6) well-being; and (7) immortality. Ahura Mazda is omniscient (knows everything), omnipotent (all powerful) and omnipresent (is everywhere). In Zoroastrianism, sacrifice and image worship were discarded. Fire was worshipped as a symbol of the deity and considered the highest form of worship. Charity was made an essential part of religion, and service to the poor was particularly emphasised. Human virtues did not mean only prayer, meditation, sacrifices and rituals. It meant much more, such as fighting evil, making efforts for good and assisting the activity of Ahura Mazda.

This religion ceased to exist in its place of origin, as in the wake of Muslim conquest of Persia (Iran), many of the Zoroastrian families fled to different countries, including India between the eighth century and tenth century CE. With their dwindling numbers and in the face of coercive measures adopted by the Arabs to push through their new faith, as well as the incidents of destruction of fire temples and killing of priests, Zoroastrianism went into a decline. The Parsis, who came to India from



Persia first as merchants and later in the wake of persecution, brought Zoroastrianism with them and they have been practicing it ever since.

### **Impact of Iron Technology in India**

In the Gangetic valley, people learnt to produce crops more than that was required for subsistence. So, another section of people took up some professional crafts as their livelihood. Like the farmers, these craftsmen also had to rely on a group of people who collected raw materials and distributed the craft products. Early urbanisation happened in two ways. One was as a result of some villages specialising in black smithy, pottery, carpentry, cloth weaving and the like. The other was on account of the congregation of specialised craftsmen in villages close to where the raw materials were available and where markets were present. Such a concentration enabled villages to evolve into towns and exchange centres. Vaisali, Shravasti, Rajagriha, Kausambi and Kashi were some significant commercial centres of the Gangetic plain.

### **Religion: Post-Rig Vedic**

Three more Vedas – Yajur, Sama and Atharva – were composed after the Rig Veda. Manuals of rituals called Brahmanas, specifying rhyming words to be sung, and two commentaries on certain Rig Vedic hymns called Aranyakas, containing knowledge to be learnt secretly in the forest, and the Upanishads, were compiled in the upper Gangetic plain during 1000–600 BCE.

### **Post-Vedic**

During the post-Vedic period, the Rig Vedic gods such as Varuna, Indra, Agni, Surya and Usha lost their importance. New gods like Siva, Vishnu and Brahma appeared on the religious firmament. Aryans developed the ideas of tapas (virtuous living) and brahmacharya (celibacy). Rites and rituals insisted on by Brahman priests overshadowed the true spirit of the religion. The sacrificial cult, supported by the wealthy and the elite, practised in accordance with the formulae prescribed in Brahmanas, were opposed by Buddha and Mahavira, who revolted against the existing practices and proposed their ethical teachings.

### **Jainism and Buddhism**

In the Gangetic plain, iron plough agriculture required the use of bullocks. But the indiscriminate killing of cattle for Vedic rituals and

sacrifices caused resentment. The founders of Jainism and Buddhism did not prescribe killing as a religious rite. They secured their livelihood mostly by alms. Celibacy and abstinence from holding property made the new teachers much more acceptable than the Brahman priests. The people's resentment about the expensive and elaborate Vedic rituals, animal sacrifice and the desire for wealth eventually took them towards Jainism and Buddhism.

Mahavira and Buddha lived a life of purity and exemplified simplicity and self-denial. They lived in the times of Bimbisara and Ajatashatru, the famous kings of Magadha. The commercial development of the northern cities like Kaushambi, Kushinagara, Benaras, Vaishali and Rajgir added importance to the Vaishyas who turned to Buddhism and Jainism in their eagerness to improve their social status.

## Jainism

### **Mahavira: Birth and Life:**

Vardhamana Mahavira was born in 599 BCE at Kundagrama near Vaishali. His mother was Trishala, a Lichchavi princess. He spent his early life as a prince and was married to a princess named Yashoda. The couple had a daughter. At the age of thirty, he left his home and became an ascetic. For over twelve years, Mahavira wandered from place to place, subjecting himself to severe penance and self-mortification. In the thirteenth year of his asceticism, he acquired the highest knowledge and came to be known as Jaina (the conqueror) and Mahavira (great hero). Jains believe that Mahavira came in a long line of Tirthankaras and he was the twenty fourth and the last of them. Rishabha was the first Tirthankara and Parshvanath the penultimate or the twenty third. Mahavira travelled extensively as a preacher in the kingdoms of Magadha, Videha and Anga. Magadha rulers Bimbisara and Ajatashatru were influenced by his teachings. Thousands of people became his followers. After 30 years of preaching, Mahavira died at Pawapuri in 527 BCE at the age of seventy two.

### Teachings of Mahavira

The three principles of Jainism, also known as Tri-ratnas, are the following:

1. **Right faith** : Belief in the teachings and wisdom of Mahavira.

2. **Right knowledge** : Acceptance of the theory that there is no God and that the world existed without a creator.
3. **Right action** : It refers to the Mahavira's observance of the five great vows: (a) ahimsa, (b) honesty, (c) kindness, (d) truthfulness and (e) not coveting or desiring things belonging to others.

### Spread of Jainism

In order to spread his new faith, Mahavira founded monasteries and engaged munis (Jaina monks) who led a very austere life. In North India, this new faith was patronised by rulers such as Dhana Nanda, Chadragupta Maurya and Kharavela. There was a notable following for Jainism in Karnataka and western India during the 4th century BCE. Jainism encouraged the public spirit among all who embraced it. Varna system practiced by Brahmans was challenged. People were spared from the costly and elaborate rituals and sacrifices. Mahavira believed that all objects, both animate and inanimate, have souls and various degrees of consciousness. They possess life and feel pain when they are injured.

### Split in Jainism

In course of time, Jainism split into two branches, namely the Digambaras (sky-clad) and the Svetambaras (white-clad). The Digambaras were the orthodox followers of Mahavira. The Digambara rejected clothes altogether. Svetambara wore a white dress from head to toe.

### Decline of Jainism

The lack of royal patronage, its severity factionalism and spread of Buddhism led to the decline of Jainism in India.

## Buddhism

### Gautama Buddha: Birth and Life:

Gautama Buddha was the son of Suddhodana, the chief of a Kshatriya clan of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu in present-day Nepal. His given name was Siddhartha. As he belonged to the Sakya clan, he was also known as 'Sakya Muni'. He was born in 567 BCE in Lumbini Garden, near Kapilavastu. His mother, Mayadevi (Mahamaya), died after a few days of his birth and he was brought up by his step - towards worldly affairs, his father got him married at the age of sixteen to a princess called Yashodhara. He led a happy married life for some time and had a son by name Rahula.

One evening, while Siddhartha was passing through the city, he came across an old man who had been abandoned by his relatives, a sick man crying with pain and a dead body surrounded by weeping relatives. Siddhartha was deeply moved by these sights. He also saw an ascetic who had renounced the world and found no sign of sorrows. These 'Four Great Sights' prompted him to renounce the world and search for the cause of suffering. In 537 BCE, he left his palace and went into the forest in search of truth. In the course of his wanderings, he sat under a peepal tree for several days until he attained enlightenment. The place where he attained enlightenment, the Mahabodhi temple, still exists in Bodh Gaya (Bihar). After his enlightenment, Buddha decided to impart his knowledge to the people. He went to Varanasi and gave his first sermon at Saranath. He preached in the kingdoms of Magadha and Kosala. A large number of people became his followers including his own family. After forty five years of preaching, he breathed his last in 487 BCE at Kushinagar (near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh) at the age of eighty.

### Teachings of Buddhism

- i. **Four Great Truths:** 1. there is suffering and sorrow in this world. 2. The cause of human suffering is desire and craving. 3. This pain or sorrow can be removed by suppressing desire and craving. 4. This is to be achieved by leading a disciplined life or by following what Buddha called the 'Noble Eight-fold Path'.
- ii. **Attainment of Nirvana:** According to Buddha, a person should aim at attainment of nirvana or the highest bliss, and it could be achieved by any person by leading a virtuous life and by following the Noble Eight-fold Path.

- iii. **The Noble Eight-fold Path:** Buddha preached a new path to attain the purest state of mind: **1. right views, 2. right aspirations, 3. right speech, 4. right action, 5. right livelihood, 6. right effort, 7. right mindfulness and 8. right contemplations or meditation.** Buddha preached that he who practices the eight-fold path can attain the highest and purest state of mind.
- iv. **Middle Path and Salvation:** Buddha advised his followers neither to indulge in material pleasures and luxuries nor to practice austere penances. He said that by following the 'Middle Path', people could attain moksha or salvation, that is freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
- v. **Ahimsa or Non-violence** was another fundamental belief of Buddha. He condemned bloody sacrifices in the yajnas. According to him, love for all living beings was an essential disposition for a good practitioner of Buddhism.
- vi. **Emphasis on Morality:** Buddha advised his followers to do good deeds and lead a moral and disciplined life. He appealed to them to refrain from lying, from killing living beings, from taking intoxicants, from stealing and from leading a sensual life.

### **Spread of Buddhism**

Buddha, in order to carry his message to different parts of India, established the Buddhist sangha or the Holy Order of Monks. The bikshus (monks) and the bikshunis (nuns) were enlisted for spreading the faith and they were required to lead a life of purity and poverty. Buddhism spread to Central Asia, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Southeast Asia, as well as the eastern countries of China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

### **The Split in Buddhism**

During the reign of Kanishka, the Buddhist monk Nagarjuna initiated reforms in the way Buddhism was being followed. As a result, Buddhism was split into two as Hinayana and Mahayana.

- i. The *Hinayana* (Lesser Vehicle) was the original creed preached by Buddha. The followers of this form regarded Buddha as their guru and did not worship him as God. They denied idol worship and continued with the people's language, Pali.

- ii. In *Mahayana* (Greater Vehicle), Buddha was worshipped as God and Bodhisattva as his previous avatar. The followers made images and statues of Buddha and Bodhisattva and offered prayers, and recited hymns (mantras) in their praise. Later, they wrote their religious books in Sanskrit. This form of Buddhism was patronised by Kanishka.

### **Decline of Buddhism**

Buddhism declined in India due to the following reasons:

1. Buddhism was popular in the beginning because it was preached in people's language (Pali). The later texts were written in Sanskrit, which was difficult for the common people to understand.
2. The split in Buddhism into Hinayana and Mahayana was another vital reason. Image worship in Mahayana made no difference between Hinduism and Buddhism.
3. Buddhism lost its royal patronage during the reign of Guptas.
4. Further, the invasions of Huns and Turks almost wiped out Buddhism.

### **Other Heterodox Sect**

#### **Ajivika**

The period that produced Buddhism and Jainism also witnessed the birth of a sect known as Ajivika. Its founder was Gosala (Maskariputra Gosala), a friend of Mahavira. For some time, they were together. Later, Gosala moved away and founded the Ajivika sect. As an atheistic sect, Ajivikas rejected the karma theory, which postulated that the condition of men is determined by their past actions. Gosala argued that acts of charity and piety can, in no way, influence this finality. Ajivikas had a small presence in southern India. Under the Cholas, a special tax was levied on them. Three Tamil texts, the Manimekalai of Buddhists, the Nilakesi of Jains and the Sivajanasiddhiyar of Saivites, contain the outlines of Ajivika doctrine.

### **Political Organisation: Pre-Mauryan**

The spread of Aryans in the east led to the establishment of new settlements in the Gangetic region. One important result of introduction of iron tools was the easy removal of dense forest cover from the banks of the

Ganges. Sedentary agriculture had resulted in a permanent settlement of a clan in a particular area, thereby giving it a geographical identity. Retaining their acquired land required political organisation. The emergence of gana-sangha, chiefdom, has to be seen in this context. The clusters where particular clansmen were dominant came to be known as janapadas.

### **Gana-sanghas**

There were two distinct forms of government at the time of Mahavira and Buddha: monarchical kingdom and clan oligarchies or Gana-sanghas. The Gana-sanghas provided a polity alternative to the kingdoms. Vedic rituals and the rules of varna were not followed. The Gana-sanghas consisted of either a single clan, such as the Shakyas, Koliyas and Mallas, or a confederacy of clans, such as the Vrijjis and the Vrishnis (a confederacy located at Vaisali). The Gana-sanghas had only two strata: the Kshatriya rajakula, ruling families, and the dasa-karmakara, the slaves and labourers. The dasa-karmakaras had no representation in the Assembly. The presence of various other popular religious cults in Gana-sanghas is in contrast to the socio-cultural system prevailing in kingdoms.

In Gana-sanghas, the head of the clan presided over the Assembly, comprising the heads of families. The clan's head was not chosen following heredity. This Assembly discussed the matters relating to the affairs of the Gana-sanghas and if a unanimous decision was not possible, it was put to vote. There were advisers to the head of the clan. In later days, elaborate judicial procedures also evolved. The income of the Gana-sanghas was drawn from agriculture and cattle rearing, which was confined only to the Punjab and the doab, and to some extent from trade. For the chieftains of the north-west, the income primarily came from trade. Land was owned in common by the clan. They were cultivated by dasa-karmakara. There was only domestic slavery. The use of slaves in production was absent.

### **Rise of Kingdoms**

The 6th century BCE witnessed the establishment of kingdoms, oligarchies and chiefdoms as well as the emergence of towns. From the largest of the chiefdoms emerged kingdoms. Many tribes of Rig Vedic period such as Bharatas, Pasus, Tritsus and Turvasas passed into oblivion and new tribes such as the Kurus and Panchalas rose into prominence. Sixteen mahajanapadas are listed in the Buddhist texts. Linguistic and

cultural commonality prevailed in the janapadas, whereas in the mahajanapadas, different social and cultural groups lived. With the emergence of kingdoms, the struggle for supremacy among different states occurred frequently. Sacrifices such as Rajasuya and Asvamedha were performed to signify the imperial sway of monarchs over their rivals. The Rig Vedic title of 'Rajan' was replaced by impressive titles such as Samrat, Ekkrat, Virat or Bhoja.

### **Growth of Royal Power**

The king enjoyed absolute power. The sabha of the Rig Vedic period ceased to exist. The king sought the aid and support of the samiti on matters like war, peace and fiscal policies. However, in spite of the existence of the assemblies, the power of the king kept increasing. The Satapatha Brahmana describes the king as infallible and immune from all punishments. The growth of royal power was reflected in the enlarged administrative structure. The king was now assisted by a group of officers such as Bhugadugha (collector of taxes), Suta (charioteer), the Aksharapa (superintendent of gambling), Kshattri (chamberlin), Gorikartana (king's companion in the chase), Palogola (courtier), Takshan (carpenter) and Rathakara (chariotmaker). In addition, there were the ecclesiastical and military officials like the Purohita (chaplain), the Senani (army general) and the Gramani (leader of the village). In the later Vedic period, Gramani, who acted both a civil and military officer, was the link through which the royal authority was enforced in the village. The king administered justice and occasionally delegated his judicial power to Adhyakshas (royal officials). In the villages, Gramyavadin (village judge) and Sabha (court) decided the cases. Punishments for crimes were severe.

### **The Rise of Magadha Kingdom**

The polity followed in kingdoms was different from that of ganasanghas. Kingdoms operated with a centralised government. Political power was concentrated in the ruling family, which had become a dynasty, with succession becoming hereditary. There were advisory bodies such as parishad (ministers) and sabha (advisory council). The sabha collected the revenue and remitted it to the treasury in the capital of the kingdom, from where it was redistributed for the public expenses, such as maintenance of army and salaries to state officials. Of the kingdoms mentioned in the literature of the period, Kashi, Kosala and Magadha are considered to be powerful. The only republic that rivalled these kingdoms was the Vrijiis,



whose capital was Vaisali. In the struggle for control for the Gangetic Plain, which had strategic and economic advantages, the Magadha kingdom emerged victorious.

Bimbisara was the first important king of Magadha. Through matrimonial alliances with the high-status Lichchavi clan of Vaishali and the ruling family in Kosala, Bimbisara went on to conquer Anga (in West Bengal now), thereby gaining access to the Ganges delta. Bimbisara succeeded in establishing a comprehensive structure of administration. Village was the basic unit of his administrative system. Apart from villages (gramas), there were fields and pastures as well as wasteland and the forests (aranya, khetra and vana). Each village was brought under a gramani (headman), who was responsible for collecting taxes and remitting them to the state treasury. Officers appointed to measure the land under cultivation and assess the value of crop were to assist the gramani in his task. Land tax (bali) was the main source of revenue to the kingdom and the share of the produce (bhaga) was determined proportionate to the extent of land cultivated.

The term shadbhagin - one who is entitled to a share of one-sixth - referred to the king. Thus, a peasant economy came into being at Magadha. Ajatashatru, the son of Bimbisara, is said to have murdered his father and ascended the throne in 493 BCE. He continued his father's policy of expansion through military conquests. The capital city of Magadha was Rajagriha, which was surrounded by five hills, providing protection to the kingdom from external threats. Ajatashatru strengthened the Rajagriha fort and also built another fort at Pataligrama on the Ganges. It served as the exchange centre for the local produce and later became the Mauryan capital of Pataliputra. Ajatashatru died in 461 BCE and he was succeeded by five kings. All of them followed the example of Ajatashatru by ascending the throne by killing their parent. Fed up with such recurring instances, people of Magadha appointed the last ruler's viceroy Shishunaga as the king.

After ruling nearly for half a century, the Shishunaga dynasty lost the kingdom to Mahapadma Nanda who founded the Nanda dynasty. The Nandas were the first of non-kshatriya dynasties to rule in northern India. Nandas extended the Magadhan Empire still further. Nandas gave importance to irrigation, with the canals they built touching even the Kalinga (Odisha) kingdom. During their period, officials were regularly appointed to collect the taxes which became a part of the administrative

system. Nandas' attempt to build an imperial structure was cut short by Chandragupta Maurya who founded the Mauryan kingdom in 321 BCE.

### **North-West India and Alexander**

Historically, the north-west part of India remained a region under varying suzerainties such as north India, Afghanistan and Persia (Iran). During 6th century BCE, it was part of the Achaemenid empire founded by Cyrus II of Persia. The Indian region had since been providing mercenaries for the Persian armies in their fight against the Greeks. Takshashila or Taxila, as the Greeks called it, was a prominent city in the northwest. It turned out to be a centre for intermixing of Iranian and Indian culture and learning. The ascendancy of Achaemenid empire in north-west ended with the conquest of that empire by Alexander of Macedonia. While marching on the territories of the Achaemenid Emperor Darius III. Alexander, the Greek Emperor entered the Indian provinces in 326 BCE. His campaign in northern India lasted for two years.

The king of Jhelum region, Porus, fought him heroically in the battle of the Hydaspes (Jhelum). Tough Porus lost the battle, he was restored to the throne only to be killed by one of Alexander's generals after Alexander's death. Alexander had left his governors in India. But his sudden death at the age of thirty three prompted his governors to leave north-west India to seek their fortune in West Asia. Alexander was a great general and a world conqueror. After his death, his great empire fell to pieces. Ptolemy took Egypt with its capital Alexandria, while Seleucus had Persia and Mesopotamia and part of Asia Minor as his share. Alexander's death, however, cleared the way for the founding of a great empire, the Mauryan empire in India.

### **Mauryan Empire: State and Society**

#### **Mauryan Kings**

Vishnugupta, who was later known as Chanakya or Kautilya, fell out with the Nanda king and vowed to dethrone him. Chandragupta perhaps inspired by Alexander of Macedonia, was raising an army and looking for opportunities to establish a kingdom of his own. On hearing the news of Alexander's death, Chandragupta stirred up the people and with their help drove away the Greek garrison that Alexander had left at Taxila. Then he and his allies marched to Pataliputra and defeated the Nanda king in 321 BCE. Thus began the reign of the Mauryan dynasty. During

Chandragupta's reign, Seleucus, the general of Alexander, who had control over countries from Asia Minor to India, crossed the Indus only to be defeated by Chandragupta. Seleucus's envoy, Megasthenes, is said to have remained in India and his account titled Indica is a useful record about Mauryan polity and society.

After gaining control over the Gangetic plain, Chandragupta turned his attention to north-west to take advantage of the void created by Alexander's demise. These areas comprising the present-day Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Makran surrendered without any resistance. Thereupon Chandragupta moved to Central India. According to Jaina tradition, towards the end of his life, Chandragupta, who had by now become an ardent follower of Jainism, abdicated his throne in favour of his son Bindusara. Bindusara, during his rule, succeeded in extending the Mauryan Empire upto Karnataka. At the time of his death, a large part of the subcontinent had come under Mauryan suzerainty.

Ashoka succeeded Bindusara in 268 BCE. Desirous of bringing the remaining parts of South India into his empire, Ashoka waged a war against Kalinga in the eighth year of his reign. The people of Kalinga fought bravely, but they were defeated after a large-scale slaughter. This war and slaughter affected Ashoka so much that he decided to give up war. Ashoka became an ardent Buddhist after meeting the Buddhist monk Upagupta and propounded his Dharma. The only true conquest, he proclaimed, is the conquest of self and the conquest of men's hearts by the dhamma (Pali) or dharma (Sanskrit). He issued edicts, which were carved out in the rock.

In one of his Kalinga edicts, he tells us his horror and sorrow over the deaths which the war and conquest caused. In yet another edict, he makes it known that Ashoka would not tolerate any longer the death or captivity of even hundredth or thousandth part of the number killed and made captive in Kalinga. Ashoka's passion for protecting life extended to animals as well. Hospitals were constructed for them and animal sacrifice was forbidden. Ashoka sent his son Mahendra and his daughter Sanghamitra to Ceylon to spread his message of Dharma there. Ashoka died after ruling for 38 years.

### **Mauryan Administration**

The Mauryan state in its early years undertook some measures that were positive for the development of society. The state raised taxes to finance a huge standing army and a vast bureaucracy. The Mauryans had evolved a very efficient system of governance. The king, as the head of the administration, was assisted by a council of ministers. There were mahamatriyas, who functioned as secretaries to the ministers. The person in charge of revenue and expenditure was samaharta. The empire was divided into four provinces and these provinces were administered by governors, who were usually princes or from the royal family.

The district was under a sthanika, while gopas were in charge of five to ten villages. The urban administration was under a nagaraka. Six committees with five members each carried on their duties under him. They were to take care of the foreigners, to register the birth and death of the citizens, to look after trade and commerce, to supervise different manufactures and to collect excise duties and custom duties respectively. Like the city or town administration, the military department was also managed by a board of 30 members, split into six committees, with five members in each of them. At the village level, there was gramani, whose responsibility was maintaining the boundaries, keeping the records of land and a census of population and livestock. In order to keep a vigil over the entire administration, including the conduct of officers, a well-knit spy system was evolved and put in place. Justice was administered through well-established courts in all major towns and cities. Punishment for crimes was severe.

The state used the surplus appropriated for the development of the rural economy by founding new settlements, granting land and encouraging the people to settle as farmers. It also organised irrigation projects and controlled the distribution of water. There was state control of agriculture, mining, industry and trade. The state discouraged the emergence of private property in land and banned its sale. The Mauryan state gave further boost to urban development. It secured land trade routes to Iran and Mesopotamia, as well as to the kingdoms of northern China. Arthasastra refers to Kasi (Benares), Vanga (Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam) and Madurai as textile centres. The distribution of black polished ware of northern India as far as South India is indicative of the extent of trade during the Mauryan rule. Trade contributed to urbanisation in a big way. New cities such as Kaushambi, Bhita, Vaishali and Rajagriha had sprung up in the doab region.

## Educational Centres

Monasteries and temples served the purpose of imparting education. Nalanda was a great monastery built by the Magadha Empire. Educational centres offered Buddhist and Vedic literature, logic, grammar, medicine, philosophy and astronomy. Even the science of war was taught. Nalanda became the most renowned seat of learning in course of time. It was supported by the revenues of 100 villages. No fees were charged to the students and they were provided free board and lodging.

### NOTE

- ❖ The correct way of writing Confucius, according to the new Pinyin system of transliteration, is Kong Fu-Tse. The European scholars who visited China found it difficult to pronounce the name and so they turned it into Latin and called him Confucius. [Linguists developed a system called Pinyin, meaning spelled sounds, for pronouncing and spelling Chinese names and words in languages written in the Latin alphabet.
- ❖ Manichaeism, resembling Iranian and Indian religions, was founded in Persia by Mani in the 3rd century CE but could not survive in the face of persecution of the Church on grounds of heresy.
- ❖ The statue of Bahubali (known as Gomateswara, 57 feet) at Shravanabel gola in Karnataka is the tallest Jaina statue ever carved out in India.
- ❖ **Jaina Kanchi** : Jainism was one of the major faiths in the Tamil region during the 7th century CE. The Pallava king. Mahendravarman was a Jain. Under the influence of Appar he got converted to Saivism. Close to the present town of Kanchi there is a place called Jaina Kanchi where you find many Jain temples. One of the important temples is the Thiruparuthikundram temple, where the ceiling is painted with the life story of Mahavira.
- ❖ When Buddha's closest disciple Ananda asked Buddha whether women can become monks. Buddha said, Yes, if women can follow the path of renunciation, they can become monks and completely enlightened just as men.
- ❖ Northern India extended from the Kabul Valley in the north to the Godavari in the South. It witnessed the rise of sixteen states known as

*Mahajanapadas* or sixteen great states: Kasi, Kosla, Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Chedi, Vatsa, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya, Surasena, Assaka, Avanti, Gandhara and Kamboja.

- ❖ Iron plough agriculture led to the rise of empires Assiryan in Iran and Magadha in India.
- ❖ There are 33 edicts, including 14 major rock edicts, 7 pillar edicts and 2 Kalinga edicts, apart from Minor Rock edicts and Minor Pillar inscriptions. They form the reliable sources to know about the Mauryan Empire, in particular the dharmic rule of Ashoka.
- ❖ Our national emblem with four lions is a replica of the Ashoka Pillar of Saranath.
- ❖ Chandragupta's minister Chanakya is credited with a book titled *Arthasastra*, which gives a detailed account of the Mauryan administration.

APPOLO  
STUDY CENTRE