

# **HISTORY OF EARLY INDIA**

## **BA HISTORY**

**( III SEMESTER )**

**CORE COURSE**

(2014 ADMISSION ONWARDS- CUCBCSS)



**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**  
**SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Calicut University, P.O. Malappuram, Kerala, India-673 635

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# **UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

**SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**STUDY MATERIAL**

## **B.A. HISTORY (2014 ADMISSION ONWARDS)**

**III SEMESTER CORE COURSE:**

### ***HISTORY OF EARLY INDIA***

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### Maps

1. Important Indus sites- Mohenjo- Daro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal, Rupar, Dholavira, Rupar, Alamgirpur,
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3. Sixteen Mahajanapadas

4. Major centers of Asokan Inscriptions- Dhauli, Sanchi, Sarnath, Barabar Caves, Junagad, Girnar, Junagadh, Maski, Kandahar, Lumbini

## **BOOKS FOR STUDY**

### **Module I**

1. Bridgett and Raymond Allchin, The Birth of Indian Civilization: India and Pakistan before 500 B.C.
2. A L Basham, The Wonder that was India
3. Romila Thapar, Early India: From the Origins to AD1300
4. Shereen Ratnagar, Understanding Harappa, Civilization in the Greater Indus Valley

### **Module II**

1. A L Basham, The Wonder that was India
2. D. D. Kosambi, An Introduction to the Study of Indian History
3. Romila Thapar, Early India: From the Origins to AD1300
4. Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid- First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley
5. R. S. Sharma, Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India
6. R. S. Sharma, Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India
7. D. N Jha, Ancient India: In Historical Outline

### **Module III**

1. A L Basham, The Wonder that was India
2. D. D. Kosambi, An Introduction to the Study of Indian History
3. Romila Thapar, The History of India Volume 1
4. Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid- First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley
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10. Kumkum Roy, The Emergence of Monarchy in North India: Eighth to Fourth Centuries BC- As Reflected in the Brahmanical Tradition

### **Module IV**

1. Romila Thapar, Early India: From the Origins to AD1300
2. Rajan Gurukkal, Social Formations of Early South India
3. K A N Sastri, A History of South India
4. K. Kailasapathy, Tamil Heroic Poetry
5. V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago
6. N. Subrahmanyam, Sangam Polity
7. R. Champakalakshmi, Trade Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300
8. R. Champakalakshmi, Religion Tradition and Ideology: Pre- Colonial South India
9. Dr. M R Raghava Varier; Charithrathile India (Malayalam )

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# Module I

## PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY

### STONE AGE IN INDIA

The history of human settlements in India goes back to prehistoric times. No written records are available for the prehistoric period. However, plenty of archaeological remains are found in different parts of India to reconstruct the history of this period. They include the stone tools, pottery, artifacts and metal implements used by pre-historic people. The development of archaeology helps much to understand the life and culture of the people who lived in this period.

In India, the prehistoric period is divided into the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age) and the Metal Age. However, these periods were not uniform throughout the Indian subcontinent. The dating of the prehistoric period is done scientifically. The technique of radio-carbon dating is commonly used for this purpose.

#### PALEOLITHIC OR OLD STONE AGE

The Old Stone Age sites are widely found in various parts of the Indian subcontinent. These sites are generally located near water sources. Several rock shelters and caves used by the Paleolithic people are scattered across the subcontinent. They also lived rarely in huts made of leaves. Some of the famous sites of Old Stone Age in India are:

- a. The Soan valley and Potwar Plateau on the northwest India.
- b. The Siwalik Hills on the north India.
- c. Bhimpetka in Madhya Pradesh.
- d. Adamgarh hill in Narmada valley.
- e. Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh and
- f. Attirampakkam near Chennai.

In the Old Stone Age, food was obtained by hunting animals and gathering edible plants and tubers. Therefore, these people are called as hunter-gatherers. They used stone tools, hand-sized and flaked-off large pebbles for hunting animals. Stone implements are made of a hard rock known as quartzite. Large pebbles are often found in river terraces. The hunting of large animals would have required the combined effort of a group of people with large stone axes. We have little knowledge about their language and communication. Their way of life became modified with the passage of time since they made attempts to domesticate animals, make crude pots and grow some plants. A few Old Stone Age paintings have also been found on rocks at Bhimbetka and other places. The period before 10000 B.C. is assigned to the Old Stone Age.

## **MESOLITHIC OR MIDDLE STONE AGE**

The next stage of human life is called Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age which falls roughly from 10000 B.C. to 6000 B.C. It was the transitional phase between the Paleolithic Age and Neolithic Age. Mesolithic remains are found in Langhanj in Gujarat, Adamgarh in Madhya Pradesh and also in some places of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The paintings and engravings found at the rock shelters give an idea about the social life and economic activities of Mesolithic people. In the sites of Mesolithic Age, a different type of stone tools is found. These are tiny stone artifacts, often not more than five centimeters in size, and therefore called microliths. The hunting-gathering pattern of life continued during this period. However, there seems to have been a shift from big animal hunting to small animal hunting and fishing. The use of bow and arrow also began during this period. Also, there began a tendency to settle for longer periods in an area. Therefore, domestication of animals, horticulture and primitive cultivation started. Animal bones are found in these sites and these include dog, deer, boar and ostrich. Occasionally, burials of the dead along with some microliths and shells seem to have been practiced.

## **NEOLITHIC AGE**

A remarkable progress is noticed in human civilization in the Neolithic Age. It is approximately dated from 6000 B.C to 4000 B.C. Neolithic remains are found in various parts of India. These include the Kashmir valley, Chirand in Bihar, Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh and in several places of the Deccan. The important Neolithic sites excavated in south India are Maski, Brahmagiri, Hallur and Kodekal in Karnataka, Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu and Utnur in Andhra Pradesh.

The chief characteristic features of the Neolithic culture are the practice of agriculture, domestication of animals, polishing of stone tools and the manufacture of pottery. In fact, the cultivation of plants and domestication of animals led to the emergence of village communities based on sedentary life. There was a great improvement in technology of making tools and other equipments used by man. Stone tools were now polished. The polished axes were found to be more effective tools for hunting and cutting trees. Mud brick houses were built instead of grass huts. Wheels were used to make pottery. Pottery was used for cooking as well as storage of food grains. Large urns were used as coffins for the burial of the dead. There was also improvement in agriculture. Wheat, barely, rice, millet were cultivated in different areas at different points of time. Rice cultivation was extensive in eastern India. Domestication of sheep, goats and cattle was widely prevalent. Cattle were used for cultivation and for transport. The people of

Neolithic Age used clothes made of cotton and wool.

## **METAL AGE IN INDIA**

The Neolithic period is followed by Chalcolithic (copper-stone) period when copper and bronze came to be used. The new technology of smelting metal ore and crafting metal artifacts is an important development in human civilization. But the use of stone tools was not given up. Some of the micro-lithic tools continued to be essential items. People began to travel for a long distance to obtain metal ores. This led to a network of Chalcolithic cultures and the Chalcolithic cultures were found in many parts of India. Generally, Chalcolithic cultures had grown in river valleys. Most importantly, the Harappan culture is considered as a part of Chalcolithic culture. In South India the river valleys of the Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra, Pennar and Kaveri were settled by farming communities during this period. Although they were not using metals in the beginning of the Metal Age, there is evidence of copper and bronze artifacts by the end of second millennium B.C. Several bronze and copper objects, beads, terracotta figurines and pottery were found at Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu.

The Chalcolithic age is followed by Iron Age. Iron is frequently referred to in the Vedas. The Iron Age of the southern peninsula is often related to Megalithic Burials. Megalith means Large Stone. The burial pits were covered with these stones. Such graves are extensively found in South India. Some of the important megalithic sites are Hallur and Maski in Karnataka, Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh and Adichchanallur in Tamil Nadu. Black and red pottery, iron artifacts such as hoes and sickles and small weapons were found in the burial pits.

## **BRONZE AGE**

### **Indus civilization**

The Indus Valley Civilization was a Bronze Age civilisation (3300–1300 BCE; mature period 2600–1900 BCE, pre-Harappan cultures starting c.7500 BCE extending from what today is primarily Pakistan, but also some regions in northwest India and northeast Afghanistan. Along with Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, it was one of three early civilisations of the Old World, and the most widespread among them, covering an area of 1.25 million km<sup>2</sup>. It flourished in the basins of the Indus River, one of the major rivers of Asia, and the now dried up Sarasvati River, which once coursed through northwest India and eastern Pakistan together with its tributaries flowed along a channel, presently identified as that of the Ghaggar-Hakra River on the basis of various scientific studies. Indus Valley Civilization along with Mesopotamia and Egypt is regarded as cradle of civilization.

At its peak, the Indus Civilization may have had a population of over five million. Inhabitants of the ancient Indus river valley developed new techniques in handicraft (carnelian products, seal carving) and metallurgy (copper, bronze, lead, and tin). The Indus cities are noted for their urban planning, baked brick houses, elaborate drainage systems, water supply systems, and clusters of large non-residential buildings.

The Indus Valley Civilization is also known as the Harappan Civilization, after Harappa, the first of its sites to be excavated in the 1920s, in what was then the Punjab province of British



India, and is now in Pakistan. The discovery of Harappa, and soon afterwards, Mohenjo-Daro, was the culmination of work beginning in 1861 with the founding of the Archaeological Survey of India in the British Raj. Excavation of Harappan sites has been ongoing since 1920, with important breakthroughs occurring as recently as 1999. There were earlier and later cultures, often called Early Harappan and Late Harappan, and pre-Harappan cultures, in the same area of the Harappan Civilization. The Harappan civilisation is sometimes called the Mature Harappan culture to distinguish it from these cultures. Bhirrana may be the oldest pre-Harappan site, dating back to 7570-6200 BCE.

By 1999, over 1,056 cities and settlements had been found, of which 96 have been excavated, mainly in the general region of the Indus and the Sarasvati River and their tributaries. Among the settlements were the major urban centres of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Dholavira, Ganeriwala in Cholistan and Rakhigarhi, Rakhigarhi being the largest Indus Valley Civilization site with 350-hectare (3.5 km<sup>2</sup>) area. The Harappan language is not directly attested and its affiliation is uncertain since the Indus script is still undeciphered.

## MAJOR SITES

The earliest excavations in the Indus valley were done at Harappa in the West Punjab and Mohenjodaro in Sind. Both places are now in Pakistan. The findings in these two cities brought to light a civilization. It was first called the 'The Indus Valley Civilization'. But this civilization was later named as the 'Indus Civilization' due to the discovery of more and more sites far away from the Indus valley. Also, it has come to be called the 'Harappan Civilization' after the name of its first discovered site. Among the many other sites excavated, the most important are Kot Diji in Sind, Kalibangan in Rajasthan, Rupar in the Punjab, Banawali in Haryana, Lothal, Surkotada and Dholavira, all the three in Gujarat. The larger cities are approximately a hundred hectares in size. Mohenjodara is the largest of all the Indus cities and it is estimated to have spread over an area of 200 hectares.

There are four important stages or phases of evolution and they are named as pre Harappan, early-Harappan, mature-Harappan and late Harappan. The pre-Harappan stage is located in eastern Baluchistan. The excavations at Mehrgarh 150 miles to the northwest of Mohenjodaro reveal the existence of pre-Harappan culture. In this stage, the nomadic people began to lead a settled agricultural life. In the early-Harappan stage, the people lived in large villages in the plains. There was a gradual growth of towns in the Indus valley. Also, the transition from rural to urban life took place during this period. The sites of Amri and Kot Diji remain the evidence for early-Harappan stage. In the mature-Harappan stage, great cities emerged. The excavations at Kalibangan with its elaborate town planning and urban features prove this phase of evolution. In the late-Harappan stage, the decline of the Indus culture started. The excavations at Lothal reveal this stage of evolution. Lothal with its port was founded much later. It was surrounded by a massive brick wall as flood protection. Lothal remained an

emporium of trade between the Harappan civilization and the remaining part of India as well as Mesopotamia.

## **FEATURES OF URBANIZATION**

A sophisticated and technologically advanced urban culture is evident in the Indus Valley Civilization making them the first urban centres in the region. The quality of municipal town planning suggests the knowledge of urban planning and efficient municipal governments which placed a high priority on hygiene, or, alternatively, accessibility to the means of religious ritual.

### **Town Planning**

The Harappan culture was distinguished by its system of townplanning on the lines of the grid system – that is streets and lanes cutting across one another almost at right angles thus dividing the city into several rectangular blocks. Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan each had its own citadel built on a high podium of mud brick. Below the citadel in each city lay a lower town containing brick houses, which were inhabited by the common people. The large-scale use of burnt bricks in almost all kinds of constructions and the absence of stone buildings are the important characteristics of the Harappan culture. Another remarkable feature was the underground drainage system connecting all houses to the street drains which were covered by stone slabs or bricks.

### **Great Bath at Mohenjodaro**

The most important public place of Mohenjodaro is the Great Bath measuring 39 feet length, 23 feet breadth and 8 feet depth. Flights of steps at either end lead to the surface. There are side rooms for changing clothes. The floor of the Bath was made of burnt bricks. Water was drawn from a large well in an adjacent room, and an outlet from one corner of the Bath led to a drain. It must have served as a ritual bathing site.

### **Granary**

The largest building in Mohenjodaro is a granary measuring 150 feet length and 50 feet breadth. But in the citadel of Harappa we find as many as six granaries.

### **Sanitation systems**

As seen in Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and the recently partially excavated Rakhigarhi, this urban plan included the world's first known urban sanitation systems, hydraulic engineering of the Indus Valley Civilization. Within the city, individual homes or groups of homes obtained water from wells. From a room that appears to have been set aside for bathing, waste water was directed to covered drains, which lined the major streets. Houses opened only to inner courtyards and smaller lanes. The house-building in some villages in the region still resembles in some respects the house-building of the Harappans.

The ancient Indus systems of sewerage and drainage that were developed and used in cities throughout the Indus region were far more advanced than any found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East and even more efficient than those in many areas of Pakistan and India today.

### **Architecture**

The advanced architecture of the Harappans is shown by their impressive dockyards, granaries, warehouses, brick platforms, and protective walls. The massive walls of Indus cities most likely protected the Harappans from floods and may have dissuaded military conflicts. Although some houses were larger than others, Indus Civilization cities were remarkable for their apparent, if relative, egalitarianism. All the houses had access to water and drainage facilities. This gives the impression of a society with relatively low wealth concentration, though clear social levelling is seen in personal adornments.

### **Citadel**

The purpose of the citadel remains debated. In sharp contrast to this civilisation's contemporaries, Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt, no large monumental structures were built. There is no conclusive evidence of palaces or temples—or of kings, armies, or priests. Some structures are thought to have been granaries. Found at one city is an enormous well-built bath (the "Great Bath"), which may have been a public bath. Although the citadels were walled, it is far from clear that these structures were defensive. They may have been built to divert flood waters.

### **Trade**

Most city dwellers appear to have been traders or artisans, who lived with others pursuing the same occupation in well-defined neighbourhoods. Materials from distant regions were used in the cities for constructing seals, beads and other objects. Among the artefacts discovered were beautiful glazed faïence beads. Steatite seals have images of animals, people (perhaps gods), and other types of inscriptions, including the yet un-deciphered writing system of the Indus Valley Civilization. Some of the seals were used to stamp clay on trade goods and most probably had other uses as well.

### **Authority and governance**

Archaeological records provide no immediate answers for a centre of power or for depictions of people in power in Harappan society. But, there are indications of complex decisions being taken and implemented. For instance, the extraordinary uniformity of Harappan artefacts as evident in pottery, seals, weights and bricks. These are the major theories:

- There was a single state, given the similarity in artefacts, the evidence for planned settlements, the standardised ratio of brick size, and the establishment of settlements near sources of raw material.

- There was no single ruler but several: Mohenjo-daro had a separate ruler, Harappa another, and so forth.
- Harappan society had no rulers, and everybody enjoyed equal status

### **Social Life**

Much evidence is available to understand the social life of the Harappans. The dress of both men and women consisted of two pieces of cloth, one upper garment and the other lower garment. Beads were worn by men and women. Jewelleries such as bangles, bracelets, fillets, girdles, anklets, ear-rings and fingerrings were worn by women. These ornaments were made of gold, silver, copper, bronze and semi precious stones. The use of cosmetics was common. Various household articles made of pottery, stone, shells, ivory and metal have been found at Mohenjodaro. Spindles, needles, combs, fishhooks, knives are made of copper. Children's toys include little clay carts. Marbles, balls and dice were used for games. Fishing was a regular occupation while hunting and bull fighting were other pastimes. There were numerous specimens of weapons of war such as axes, spearheads, daggers, bows, arrows made of copper and bronze. Arts The Harappan sculpture revealed a high degree of workmanship. Figures of men and women, animals and birds made of terracotta and the carvings on the seals show the degree of proficiency attained by the sculptor. The figure of a dancing girl from Mohenjodaro made of bronze is remarkable for its workmanship. Its right hand rests on the hip, while the left arm, covered with bangles, hangs loosely in a relaxed posture. Two stone statues from Harappa, one representing the back view of a man and the other of a dancer are also specimens of their sculpture. The pottery from Harappa is another specimen of the fine arts of the Indus people. The pots and jars were painted with various designs and colours. Painted pottery is of better quality. The pictorial motifs consisted of geometrical patterns like horizontal

lines, circles, leaves, plants and trees. On some pottery pieces we find figures of fish or peacock.

### **Script**

The Harappan script has still to be fully deciphered. The number of signs is between 400 and 600 of which 40 or 60 are basic and the rest are their variants. The script was mostly written from right to left. In a few long seals the boustrophedon method – writing in the reverse direction in alternative lines – was adopted. Parpola and his Scandinavian colleagues came to the conclusion that the language of the Harappans was Dravidian. A group of Soviet scholars accepts this view. Other scholars provide different view connecting the Harappan script with that of Brahmi. The mystery of the Harappan script still exists and there is no doubt that the decipherment of Harappan script will throw much light on this culture.

### **Religion**

From the seals, terracotta figurines and copper tablets we get an idea on the religious life of the Harappans. The chief male deity was Pasupati, (proto-Siva) represented in seals as sitting in a yogic posture with three faces and two horns. He is surrounded by four animals (elephant, tiger, rhino, and buffalo each facing a different direction). Two deer appear on his feet. The chief female deity was the Mother Goddess represented in terracotta figurines. In latter times, Linga worship was prevalent. Trees and animals were also worshipped by the Harappans. They believed in ghosts and evil forces and used amulets as protection against them.

### **Burial Methods**

The cemeteries discovered around the cities like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal and Rupar throw light on the burial practices of the Harappans. Complete burial and post-cremation burial were popular at Mohenjodaro. At Lothal the burial pit was lined with burnt bricks indicating the use of coffins. Wooden coffins were also found at Harappa. The practice of pot burials is found at

Lothal sometimes with pairs of skeletons. However, there is no clear evidence for the practice of Sati.

### **II.B.4. DECLINE**

There is no unanimous view pertaining to the cause for the decline of the Harappan culture. Various theories have been postulated. Natural calamities like recurring floods, drying up of rivers, decreasing fertility of the soil due to excessive exploitation and occasional earthquakes might have caused the decline of the Harappan cities. According to some scholars the final blow was delivered by the invasion of Aryans. The destruction of forts is mentioned in the Rig Veda. Also, the discovery of human skeletons huddled together at Mohenjodaro indicates that the city was invaded by foreigners. The Aryans had superior weapons as well as swift horses which might have enabled them to become masters of this region.

A possible natural reason for the Indus Valley Civilization's decline is connected with climate change that is also signalled for the neighbouring areas of the Middle East: The Indus valley climate grew significantly cooler and drier from about 1800 BCE, linked to a general weakening of the monsoon at that time. Alternatively, a crucial factor may have been the disappearance of substantial portions of the Ghaggar Hakra river system. A tectonic event may have diverted the system's sources toward the Ganges Plain, though there is complete uncertainty about the date of this event, as most settlements inside Ghaggar-Hakra river beds have not yet been dated. The actual reason for decline might be any combination of these factors. A 2004 paper indicated that the isotopes of sediments carried by the Ghaggar-Hakra system over the last 20 thousand years do not come from the glaciated Higher Himalaya but have a Sub-Himalayan source. They speculated that the river system was rain-fed instead and thus contradicted the idea of a Harappan-time mighty "Sarasvati" river. Recent geological research by a group led by Peter Clift investigated how the courses of rivers have changed in this region since 8000 years ago, to test whether climate or river reorganisations are

responsible for the decline of the Harappan. Using U-Pb dating of zircon sand grains they found that sediments typical of the Beas, Sutlej and Yamuna rivers (Himalayan tributaries of the Indus) are actually present in former Ghaggar-Hakra channels. However, sediment contributions from these glacial-fed rivers stopped at least by 10,000 years ago, well before the development of the Indus civilisation.

A research team led by the geologist Liviu Giosan of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution also concluded that climate change in form of the easterward migration of the monsoons led to the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization. The team's findings were published in PNAS in May 2012. According to their theory, the slow eastward migration of the monsoons across Asia initially allowed the civilisation to develop. The monsoon-supported farming led to large agricultural surpluses, which in turn supported the development of cities. The Indus Valley residents did not develop irrigation capabilities, relying mainly on the seasonal monsoons. As the monsoons kept shifting eastward, the water supply for the agricultural activities dried up. The residents then migrated towards the Ganges basin in the east, where they established smaller villages and isolated farms. The small surplus produced in these small communities did not allow development of trade, and the cities died out.

## Module II

### VEDIC AGE

The cities of the Harappan Culture had declined by 1500 B.C. Consequently, their economic and administrative system had slowly declined. Around this period, the speakers of Indo-Aryan language, Sanskrit, entered the north-west India from the Indo-Iranian region. Initially they would have come in small numbers through the passes in the northwestern mountains. Their initial settlements were in the valleys of the north-west and the plains of the Punjab. Later, they moved into Indo Gangetic plains. As they were mainly a cattlekeeping people, they were mainly in search of pastures. By 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., they occupied the whole of North India, which was referred to as Aryavarta. This period between 1500 B.C and 600 B.C may be divided into the Early Vedic Period or Rig Vedic Period (1500 B.C -1000 B.C) and the Later Vedic Period (1000B.C - 600 B.C).

#### Sources

##### **Literary Sources: Vedic literature.**

The most important literary source for the study of the Vedic society is the ‘Vedic literature’, consisting of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Itihasas and Puranas. Though they were not recorded in any chronological order, they provide useful information about the Vedic society. Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharva Veda are the four Vedas.

The Rigveda was the oldest and the most important book of the Aryans. It consists of 1017 hymns divided into ten mandalas or chapters. The hymns are addressed to various Gods imploring them to send material blessings to the people. They throw light on the early Aryan culture and society. The Yajurveda contains both hymns and commentaries. It describes the performance of sacrifices. The Samaveda is a collection of hymns that were meant to be sung by a special class of priests. According to Dr.R.C. Majumdar, ‘the Samaveda has great significance in the history of Indian music. It also throws interesting light on the growth of sacrificial ceremonies...’. The Atharvaveda is partly prose and partly poetry. It deals with magic and spells to overcome enemies.

The Brahmanas are commentaries useful for the easy comprehension of the Vedas. They also contains instructions to the priests regarding the correct chanting and pronunciation of the ‘mantras’. The Aranyakas are part of the Brahmanas. They are also called forest books, which are considered too sacred to be read only in the loneliness of the forest. Aranyakas are the great philosophical thoughts of the great saints of the past. The Upanishads describe the religious and spiritual thoughts of the Aryans. They discuss serious problems like Karma, soul and salvation. Max Muller called the Upanishads as, “the most wonderful composition of human mind”. The Vedic literature throws light on the life, culture and civilization of the

Aryans. The political, social, economic and religious life of the Aryans also reflects in the Vedic literature.

The Suthras, Smrithis, the Puranas, Dharmasastras, the epics etc. are come under the category of the later Vedic literature. The Suthras contains rules relating to Vedic rituals and customary laws. The Smrithis deal with laws, customs and practices of the various Aryan groups. The Puranas are legends. They are helpful in bridging the gaps of several royal dynasties in the history of ancient India. The

Dharma Sastras deal with ordinary laws and social customs. The duties and responsibilities of the rulers and the ruled are discussed in the Dharma Sastras.

The great epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata deal with the achievement of the great heroes in the early days of the Indo-Aryans. The Ramayana was composed by the great saint Valmiki. It deals with the conflict between the Aryan and non-Aryan civilizations. The Mahabharata describes the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. According to tradition, Vyasa was its compiler. Both the epics are inverses and discuss about life, culture and religion of the people of the later Vedic period.

### **Archaeological evidences**

The history of the Indus civilization is reconstructed on the basis of archaeological evidences only. But when we come to the historical period of the Vedic culture more information is derived from the literary sources. Here archaeological sources acts as supplementary to the available literary sources. The archaeological sources mainly throw light upon the material life of the then people and the society. It enable the historian to understand the pattern of settlements, the type of pottery used, the tools and weapons practiced and the houses in which they dwelt. The pottery, tools, weapons and monuments form the important aspects of archaeological excavations. Excavations conducted in Punjab, Northern Rajasthan, U.P. along the Indus and Ghagger Rivers over the last forty years have unearthed many settlements which had existed roughly between 1700 B.C.to 600 B.C. The important materials excavated from these sites are pottery called 'ochre coloured pottery', Black and Red ware and 'Painted Gray ware' cultures. However, the pottery types do not reflect the entire culture of the people. The analysis of pottery remains will help to understand the specific trait of the cultural assemblage of the period. The literary sources often refer to the geographical areas of U.P., Haryana and Rajasthan. When a particular pottery happens to be a distinct feature of a culture, that particular culture is known by the specifications of the pottery. The Ochre coloured pottery (OCP) culture is associated with a particular type of pottery. More than 100 sites have yielded this characteristic pottery in the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The OCP culture is succeeded by Black and Red Ware (BRW) and painted Gray Ware (PGW) cultures. The OCP was discovered in the archaeological sites of U.P. in 1950's. It is made of grained clay under fired and has a wash of ochre. The site associated with OCP is called OCP culture. The OCP sites are generally located on riverbanks. These sites are small in size. The material remains



of OCP culture are mostly in the form of pottery. These include Jars, bowls etc. Archaeological remains found at Atranjikhhera, an OCP site suggest that the people of this culture had grown rice and barley. The OCP culture has been ascribed to a period between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C.

Black and Red Ware (BRW) have been found at Atranjikhhera in between OCP and PGW levels during the excavations conducted in the early 1960's. But in Alangirpur and Hasthinapuri, BRW is found associated with PGW, the characteristic feature of Black and Red Ware is the black colour inside and near the rim on the outside and over the rest of the body red colour. Some of the pots are wheel made and some others are handmade. The BRW recovered from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have paintings, while those found in the doab area have no painting at all. Waste flakes, chips, heads of shell and copper, copper ring and fragments of comb made of bone and found in the BRW sites at Atranjikhhera. BRW are received from a wider area with some variations from region to regions. It covers a period between 2400 BC and the early centuries of the Christian era.

### **PGW (Painted Gray Ware).**

It was first excavated from Ahichatra in 1946. It is wide spread in North India. Thirty sites of PGW culture have been excavated so far including Bhagwanpura in Haryana, Now in Rajasthan, Rupar in Punjab etc, these settlements are located along the river banks and are mostly small villages. The pottery of this culture is wheels made and is gray in colour. Bowls and dishes are the common types of this culture. The people of this period lived in circular or rectangular houses. Certain houses had more than a dozen rooms. Several objects made out of copper, bone, iron and glass and found in the PGW sites. Iron objects are found in all most all sites. Ornaments had been used by the people. Remains of rice, barley and wheat were discovered at the sites of Hasthinapura and Atranjikhhera.

### **Rig Vedic Age**

During the Rig Vedic period, the Aryans were mostly confined to the Indus region. The Rig Veda refers to Saptasindhu or the land of seven rivers. This includes the five rivers of Punjab, namely Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej along with the Indus and Saraswathi. The political, social and cultural life of the Rig Vedic people can be traced from the hymns of the Rig Veda.

### **Eastward Movements of Vedic People**

The hymns of the *Rigveda* afford an interesting glimpse of the Aryan settlements in India. The centre of their activities was the Punjab. The rivers most often referred to are the Indus itself, the Sarasvati and the Drishadvati and the five streams – the Sutudri (Sutlej), Vipas (Beas), Parushni (Ravi), Asikni (Chenab) and Vitasta (Jhelum). The rivers mentioned outside the Indus basin are the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Sarayu. The Ganga was not an important river in the period of the *Rigveda* while Yamuna has been mentioned only three times. The

*Rigveda* also mentions some rivers of Afghanistan namely Kubha (Kabul), Gomati (Gomal) Krumu (Kurram) and Suvastu (Swat).

The *Rigveda* mentions one outstanding historical event, i.e. the victory of King Sudas over the Ten-king confederacy. Sudas was the chief of the Bharatas. At first Visvamitra was the priest of Sudas who, however, dismissed the former and appointed Vasishtha as his priest. Thereupon a long and bitter struggle ensued between the two rival priests. Visvamitra led a tribal confederacy of ten kings against the Bharatas, the federation consisting of the five well-known tribes Puru, Yadu, Turvasa, Adu and Druhya along with five others namely -Alina, Paktha, Bhalanas, Siva and Vishanin. The Bharatas utterly routed the confederacy on the bank of the Parushni, modern Ravi. Soon after this battle Sudas had to fight with three other non-Aryan tribes-Ajas, Sigrus and Yakshus. The Bharatas were settled in the region between the Sarasvati and the Yamuna while the Purus remained in the Harappa region. Though defeated the Purus were a very important tribe and were closely connected with Tritsus and the Bharatas. Out of the amalgamation of these rival tribes in later Vedic period emerged the Kurus. In their migration to the east and south-east the Aryans came into conflict with the *Dasas* or *Dasyus*. The Kiratas, Kikatas, Chandalas, Parnakas, and Simyus were Dasa tribes who inhabited the Gangetic valley. The Dasas were dark-complexioned, snub-nosed, worshippers of the phallus, rich in cattle and lived in fortified strongholds; *pura*. It would be too facile to suppose that there was perpetual enmity between the native *dasyus* and the invading Aryans. A gradual fusion took place and the process by which this sense of unity developed was called Aryanization.

### **Later Vedic Period**

The Aryans further moved towards east in the Later Vedic Period. The Satapatha Brahmana refers to the expansion of Aryans to the eastern Gangetic plains. Several tribal groups and kingdoms are mentioned in the later Vedic literature. One important development during this period is the growth of large kingdoms. Kuru and Panchala kingdoms flourished in the beginning. Parikshat and Janamejaya were the famous rulers of Kuru kingdom. Pravahana Jaivali was a popular king of the Panchalas. He was a patron of learning. After the fall of Kurus and Panchalas, other kingdoms like Kosala, Kasi and Videha came into prominence. The famous ruler of Kasi was Ajatasatru. Janaka was the king of Videha with its capital at Mithila. His court was adorned by scholar Yajnavalkya. Magadha, Anga and Vanga seem to be the easternmost tribal kingdoms. The later Vedic texts also refer to the three divisions of India – Aryavarta (northern India), Madhyadesa (central India) and Dakshinapatha (southern India).

### **Society**

#### **THE EARLY VEDIC SOCIETY**

The family was the basic unit of the Rigvedic society. It was patriarchal in nature

Monogamy was the usual norm of marriage but the chiefs at times practiced polygamy. Marriages took place after attaining maturity. After marriage the wife went to her husband's house. The family was part of a larger grouping called *vis* or clan. One or more than one clans made *jana* or tribe. The *jana* was the largest social unit. All the members of a clan were related to each other by blood relation. The membership of a tribe was based on birth and not on residence in a certain area. Thus the members of the Bharata tribe were known as the Bharatas. It did not imply any territory. The Rigvedic society was a simple and largely an egalitarian society. There was no caste division. Occupation was not based on birth. Members of a family could adopt different occupations. However certain differences did exist during the period.

### **Varna**

Varna or colour was the basis of initial differentiation between the Vedic and non-Vedic people. The Vedic people were fair whereas the non-Vedic indigenous people were dark in complexion and spoke a different language. Thus the Rigveda mentions *arya varna* and *dasa varna*. Here *dasa* has been used in the sense of a group different from the Rigvedic people. Later, *dasa* came to mean a slave. Besides, certain practices during this period, such as concentration of larger share of the war booty in the hands of the chiefs and priests resulted in the creation of some inequalities within a tribe during the later part of this Vedic phase. The warriors, priests and the ordinary people were the three sections of the Rigvedic tribe. The *sudra* category came into existence only towards the end of the Rigvedic period. This means that the division of society in the early Vedic period was not sharp. This is indicated by the following verse in the Rigveda: "I am a poet, my father is a physician and my mother grinds grain upon the stone. Striving for wealth, with varied plans, we follow our desires like cattle." The women in society enjoyed respectable position. She was married at a proper age and could choose a husband of her own choice. She could take part in the proceedings of the tribal assemblies called *sabha* and *samiti*

### **SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE**

The family remains the basic unit of the Vedic society. However, its composition underwent a change. The later Vedic family became large enough to be called a joint-family with three or four generations living together. The rows of hearths discovered at Atranjikhhera and at Ahichchhtra (both in western Uttar Pradesh) show that these were meant for communal feeding or for cooking the food of large families. The term 'Kula' for families is mentioned rarely in Rigveda. *Kulapa* was the head of the family. It comprised father, mother, sons, slaves and so on. Another word 'griha' is mentioned in Rigveda for family several times and *Kula* may have been used to indicate a loose knit joint family. *Kulapa* is often described not only as householder but as fighter. The institution of *gotra* developed in this period. This means that people having common *gotra* descended from a common ancestor and no marriage between the members of the same *gotra* could take place. Monogamous marriages were

preferred even though polygamy was frequent. Some restrictions on women appeared during this period. In a text women have been counted as a vice along with dice and wine. In another text a daughter has been said to be the source of all sorrows. Women had to stay with her husband at his place after marriage. The participation of women in public meetings was restricted.

### **Varna system**

However, the most important change was the rise and growth of social differentiation in the form of varna system. The four varnas in which society came to be divided were the brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. The growing number of sacrifices and rituals during the period made the brahmanas very powerful. They conducted various rituals including those related to different stages of agricultural operations. This made them all the more important. The kshatriyas, next in the social hierarchy, were the rulers. They along with brahmanas controlled all aspects of life. The vaishyas, the most numerous varna were engaged in agriculture as well as in trade and artisanal activities. The brahmanas and the kshatriyas were dependent on the tributes (gifts and taxes) paid to them by the vaishyas. The shudras, the fourth varna were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They were ordained to be in the service of the three upper varnas. They were not entitled to the ritual of upanayana samskara (investiture with sacred thread necessary to acquire education). The other three varnas were entitled to such a ceremony and hence they were known as dvijas. This can be construed as the beginning of the imposition of disabilities on the shudras as well as the beginning of the concept of ritual pollution. Another important institution that began to take shape was ashrama or different stages of life. Brahmacharya (student life), grihastha (householder), and vanaprastha (hermitage) stages are mentioned in the texts. Later, sanyasa, the fourth stage also came to be added. Together with varna, it came to be known as varna-ashrama dharma

## **THE EARLY VEDIC POLITY**

### **JANA**

We have mentioned above that the chief social unit of the Aryans was known as jana. In early Vedic society a tribe was called jana. The clans in a tribe were called vish. The leader of a lineage in a clan was a chief called a raja. The lineage chief, a raja of a clan, had the responsibility of organizing protection of his people and their cattle. He was helped in his task by the tribal assemblies called sabha, samiti, vidatha, gana and parishad. The inter tribal conflicts were frequent. The 'Battle of TenKings' mentioned in the Rig Veda was fought among different tribes like the

Bharata, Purus, Yadus etc. Tribal conflict were related to cattle raids, cattle thefts

etc. Cattle were the chief measure of wealth. And the term used for cattle during this period was 'gavishti', which means to search for cows. Cattle raids were common in those days. The

chief of the tribe was the Raja or the Gopati (one who protect cows). Kinship units are labelled as Gotra. The position of Raja was not hereditary but he was selected from amongst the clansmen. The clan settled in villages. It was a patriarchal society. The birth of a son was desired by everyone in the clan.

### **Sabha and Samiti**

Out of Jana, sabha and samiti were the most important assemblies mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Sabha might have been the council of select clan members and the

Samiti, perhaps comprised of the whole clan. These two assemblies performed the functions of the government and the administration. They were also involved in the selection of the Raja. All aspects of life were discussed in these assemblies. These may include wars, distribution of the spoils of wars, judicial and religious activities etc. Thus these assemblies in a way limited the powers of the chiefs. Women were also allowed to participate in the deliberations of the sabha and samiti. It functioned as centers for settling disputes, redistribution, and provided a place for performing sacrifice. The Sabha was the 'Body of the Elders' and constituted mainly of the Brahmanas and the elite. The speaker of Sabha was called Sabhapati and its members, Sabhya. The Samiti was more in the nature of a folk assembly in which the entire population could participate. The members of the Samiti were called Vishah. The most important function of the Samiti was the election of the king. The Sabha, a selected body was more like an advisory council.

### **Vidhata**

Vidhata appears for 122 times in the Rig-Veda and seems to be the most important assembly in the Rig Vedic period. Vidhata was an assembly meant for secular, religious and military purpose. The Rig-Veda only once indicated the connection of woman with the Sabha whereas Vidhata is frequently associated with woman women actively participated in the deliberations with men. Vidhata was the earliest folk assembly of the Aryans, performing all kinds of functions- economic, military religious and social. The Vidhata also provided common ground to clans and tribes for the worship of their gods

### **Gana**

Gana, the technical word for the republic, has been interpreted in most of the Rigvedic references in the sense of assembly or troop. A careful study shows that it was a sort of gentile organisation of the Indo-Aryans. The leader of the gana is generally called ganapati and at some places ganasya raja.

### **Parisad**

The early parisad seems to be a tribal military assembly, partly matriarchal and partly patriarchal. However, the variety of the references to the parisad in the Rigveda may also have been due to the non-Vedic character of the parisad. In later-Vedic period it tended to

become partly an academy and partly a royal council dominated by the priests, who functioned as teachers and advisers.

The post of the chief was not hereditary. The tribe generally elected him. Though the succession in one family was known but that was not based on the rule of primogeniture (i.e., the eldest son acquiring the position). The purohita assisted and advised the chief on various matters. Other than the purohita, there were a limited number of other officials who assisted the chief in the day-to-day tribal affairs. Senani, kulapa, gramani, etc. are some of the functionaries which find mention in the Rigveda. The sena or army was not a permanent fighting group and consisted of able bodied tribesmen who were mobilized at the time of the wars. Takshan, the carpenter and rathakara, the chariot maker were responsible for making chariots. There is no official mentioned as a collector of taxes. The people offered to the chief what is called bali. It was just a voluntary contribution made by the ordinary tribesmen on special occasions. All this shows that the early Vedic polity was an uncomplicated system based on the support and active participation of all the tribesmen. This situation, however, changed during the later Vedic phase.

### **CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE**

The changes in the material and social life during the later Vedic period led to changes in the political sphere as well. The nature of chiefship changed in this period. The territorial idea gained ground. The people started to loose their control over the chief and the popular assemblies gradually disappeared. The chiefship had become hereditary. The idea of the divine nature of kingship gets a mention in the literature of this period. The brahmanas helped the chiefs in this process. The elaborate coronation rituals such as vajapeya and rajasuya established the chief authority. As the chiefs became more powerful, the authority of the popular assemblies started waning. The officers were appointed to help the chief in administration and they acquired the functions of the popular assemblies as main advisors. A rudimentary army too emerged as an important element of the political structure during this period. All these lived on the taxes called bali, the shulka, and the bhaga offered by the people. The chiefs of this period belonged to the kshatriya varna and they in league with the brahmanas tried to establish complete control over the people in the name of dharma. However, all these elements do not show that a janapada or territorial state with all its attributes such as a standing army and bureaucracy had emerged in the later Vedic period but the process has started and soon after the vedic period in the sixth century BC we notice the rise of sixteen mahajanpadas in the northern India.

### **EARLY VEDIC ECONOMY**

#### **Pastoralism**

The early Vedic Aryans were pastoralists. Cattle rearing was their main occupation. They reared cattle, sheep, goats, and horses for purposes of milk, meat and hides. We arrive at this conclusion after analyzing the literary evidence in the Rigveda. A large number of words are

derived from the word *go* meaning cow. A wealthy person was known as *gomat* and the daughter called *duhitri* which means one who milks the cow. The word *gaveshana* and ***Gavishthi*** literally means search for cows, but it also means battle since many battles were fought over cattle. The cows were thought of as providers of everything. Prayers are offered for increase in the number of cattle. All the above and many more references show that cattle breeding were the most important economic activity of the Rigvedic Aryans. However, this is not to suggest that the early Vedic people had no knowledge of agriculture. The evidence for agriculture in comparison with pastoral activities in the early portions is meager and mostly late insertions. A few references show that they had knowledge of agriculture and practiced it to supplement their food requirements. They produced *yava* (modern *jau* or barley), which was rather a generic word for cereals. Apart from cattle-rearing and small-scale cultivation, people were engaged in many other economic activities. Hunting, carpentry, tanning, weaving, chariot-making, metal smeltry etc. were some such activities. The products of these activities were exchanged through barter. However, cows were the most favoured medium of exchange. The priests received cows, horses and gold ornaments as fees for performing sacrifices.

### **CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE**

During later Vedic phase, agriculture became the mainstay of the Vedic people. Many rituals were introduced to initiate the process of agriculture. It also speaks of ploughing with yokes of six and eight oxen. The buffalo had been domesticated for the agricultural purposes. This animal was extremely useful in ploughing the swampy land. The god Indra acquires a new epithet 'Lord of the Plough' in this period. The number and varieties of plant food increased. Apart from barley, people now cultivated wheat, rice, pulses, lentils, millet, sugarcane etc. The items of *dana* and *dakshina* included cooked rice. Thus with the beginning of food production agricultural produce began to be offered in the rituals. *Tila*, from which the first widely used vegetable food-oil was derived increasingly, came to be used in rituals. The main factor in the expansion of the Aryan culture during the later Vedic period was the beginning of the use of iron around 1000 BC. The Rigvedic people knew of a metal called *ayas* which was either copper or bronze. In the later Vedic literature *ayas* was qualified with *shyama* or *krishna* meaning black to denote iron. Archaeology has shown that iron began to be used around 1000 BC which is also the period of later Vedic literature. The northern and eastern parts of India to which the Aryans later migrated receive more rainfall than the north-western part of India. As a result this region is covered with thick rain forests which could not be cleared by copper or stone tools used by Rigvedic people. The use of iron tools now helped people clear the dense rain forests particularly the huge stumps left after burning, in a more effective manner. Large tracts of forestland could be converted into cultivable pieces in relatively lesser time. The iron plough could turn the soil from deeper portions making it more fertile. This process seems to have begun during the later part of the Rigvedic period but the effect of iron tools and implements become evident only towards the end of the Later

Vedic period. There has been a continuous increase in the population during the later Vedic period due to the expansion of the economy based on agriculture. The increasing number and size of Painted Grey Ware (PGW) settlements in the doab area shows this. With the passage of time the Vedic people also acquired better knowledge of seasons, manuring and irrigation. All these developments resulted in the substantial enlargement of certain settlements such as Hastinapur and Kaushambi towards the end of the Later Vedic period. These settlements slowly began to acquire characteristics of towns. Such rudimentary towns inhabited mainly by the chiefs, princes, priests and artisans were supported by the peasants who could spare for them some part of their produce voluntarily or involuntarily

### **THE EARLY VEDIC RELIGION**

The prayers to propitiate gods for physical protection and for material gains were the main concerns of the Rigvedic people. The Rigvedic gods were generally personifications of different aspects of natural forces such as rains, storm, sun etc. The attributes of these gods also reflect the tribal and patriarchal nature of the society as we do not find many goddesses mentioned in the text. Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Dyaus, Pushana, Yama, Soma, etc. are all male gods. In comparison, we have only a few goddesses such as Ushas, Sarasvati, Prithvi, etc which occupy secondary positions in the pantheon. The functions of different gods reflect their needs in the society. Thus, since the Rigvedic people were engaged in wars with each other they worshipped Indra as a god. He is the most frequently mentioned god in the Rigveda. He carried the thunderbolt and was also respected as a weather god who brought rains. Maruts the god of storm aided Indra in the wars in the way tribesmen aided their leader in the tribal wars. Agni, the fire god was the god of the home and was considered an intermediary between gods and men. Soma was associated with plants and herbs. Soma was also a plant from which an intoxicating juice was extracted. This juice was drunk at sacrifices. Varuna, another important deity, was the keeper of the cosmic order known as rita. This rita was an important aspect of tribal set-up. Pushan was the god of the roads, herdsmen and cattle. In the life of the pastoral nomads, this god must have been very important. Other gods were similarly associated with other aspects of nature and life. All these gods were invoked and propitiated at yajnas or sacrifices. These sacrifices were organized by the chiefs of the tribes and performed by priests. Gods thus invoked in the sacrifices supposedly rewarded the sacrificers with success in wars, progeny, increase in cattle and long life. It also brought large number of gifts in the form of dana and dakshina to the priests. It is important here to note that during the entire Vedic phase people did not construct temples nor did they worship any statue. These features of Indian religion developed much later

### **CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE**

We have already noted that in the later Vedic period agriculture had become an important activity of the people. Changes in the material life naturally resulted in a change in their attitude towards gods and goddesses too. Continuous interactions with the local non-Aryan



population also contributed to these changes. Thus, Vishnu and Rudra which were smaller deities in the Rigveda became extremely important. However, we do not have any reference to different incarnations or avatars of Vishnu, we are so familiar with, in any of the Later Vedic texts. Another important feature was the increase in the frequency and number of the yajna which generally ended with the sacrifices of a large number of animals. This was probably the result of the growing importance of a class of brahmanas and their efforts to maintain their supremacy in the changing society. These yajnas brought to them a large amount of wealth in form of dana and dakshina. Some of the important yajnas were - ashvamedha, vajapeya, rajasuya etc. You must have heard about these yajnas in the stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In these yajnas which continued for many days a large part of gifts went to the brahmanas. The purpose of these yajnas was twofold. Firstly, it established the authority of the chiefs over the people, and secondly, it reinforced the territorial aspect of the polity since people from all over the kingdom were invited to these sacrifices. You will find it interesting to know that people began to oppose these sacrifices during the later Vedic period itself. A large number of cattle and other animals which were sacrificed at the end of each yajna must have hampered the growth of economy. Therefore, a path of good conduct and self-sacrifice was recommended for happiness and welfare in the last sections of the Vedas, called the Upanishads. The Upanishads contain two basic principles of Indian philosophy viz., karma and the transmigration of soul, i.e., rebirth based on past deeds. According to these texts real happiness lies in getting moksha i.e. freedom from this cycle of birth and re-birth.

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## Module III

### URBANISATION IN THE GANGETIC BASIN

#### Buddhism and Jainism

The sixth century BC marked an important stage in the Indian history as far as the development of new religions is concerned. Numerous religious sects arose in the mid-Gangetic plains as a result of an upheaval of new ideas and the resulting rise of new philosophical tenets. These ideas were so diversified that the philosophical speculations based on them varied from religious speculations to the search for the Truth which the Upanishads had emphasized. The efforts in this direction brought about results in this century. In this period, we notice a growing resentment to the ritualistic orthodox ideas of the Brahmanas. In other words, the old Vedic religion had ceased to be a living force. The spiritual unrest and the intellectual stimulation led to the rise of various heterodox religious movements. The religious sects were based on regional customs and rituals practiced by different people living in north-east India. Of these sects, Jainism and Buddhism were the most important and they developed into most potent well organised popular religious reform movements.

Post-Vedic society was clearly divided into four varnas: Brahmanas, Kshatiryas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The Brahmanas who were allotted the functions of priests and teachers, claimed the highest status in society. They demanded several privileges, including those of receiving gifts and exemption from taxation and punishment. The next in hierarchy were the Kshatiryas who lived on the taxes collected from the cultivators. The third category thrived on agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade. They were the main tax payers. All these three classes were considered dvijas or twice born. The Sudras formed the lowest rung of the social order and were meant to serve the upper three castes as domestic slaves, agricultural labourers etc. in post-Vedic times.

The Vaishyas, having accumulated wealth and property, were gaining higher social status. The trading and commercial communities i.e. Vaishyas wanted their private property to be secure. Both these religious sects, therefore provided grounds to bring about changes in the social and economic set up. It was for this reason that Jainism discarded agriculture but did not protest against trade and Buddhism exhibited favourable opinion towards sea-voyages.

#### Buddhism

Of all the religious preachers of the sixth century BC, Gautama Buddha is the best known. Gautama Buddha or Siddhartha was a contemporary of Mahavira born in a royal family of the Sakyas at Kapilavastu in the southern part of present Nepal in the year 566 BC. Siddhartha (original name of Gautama Buddha) renounced the world at the age of twenty nine. He moved from place to place in search of truth for seven years and then attained

enlightenment at Bodh Gaya under pipal tree. From this time onwards, he began to be called the Buddha or the enlightened one.

Though his life was spent in royal splendor, it failed to attract the mind of Gautama. As traditions describe, he was deeply affected by the sight of an old man, a sick person, a dead body and an ascetic. The misery of the human life left a deep impact on Gautama. To find a solution to the misery of mankind, he spent years as a wandering ascetic. From a sage called Alara Kalama he learned the technique of meditation and the teachings of the Upanishads. After attaining the supreme knowledge, he proceeded to Sarnath near Varanasi to deliver his first sermon which is known as 'Dharma Chakra Pravartana' (setting in motion the wheel of Dharma).

Asvajit, Upali, Magallana, Sariputra and Ananda were the first five disciples of Buddha. His message laid down the foundation of both Buddhist religion and philosophy which in course of time spread far and wide to Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, etc.

Buddhism stood between the two extremes: unrestrained individualistic self-indulgence and equally individualistic but preposterous ascetic punishment of the body. Hence its steady rise and its name 'The Middle Way'.

The central theme of Buddha's religion is the eight-step path (ashtangamarga). The first step is the proper vision leading to the realization that the world is full of sorrows caused by desire, greed etc. The second is right aim which seeks to avoid the engagement of the senses and luxury. It aims to love humanity and increase the happiness in others. Right speech is the third step, it implies the practice of truthfulness promoting mutual friendship. Right action includes abstention from killing, stealing and unselfish deeds. Right livelihood instructs a man to live by pure and honest means. Right effort means proper way of controlling one's senses so as to prevent bad thoughts. The seventh step is correct awareness or right mindfulness which means understanding the idea that the body is impermanent and meditation is the means for the removal of worldly evils. The last step is right concentration which will lead to removal of evils generated by attachment to the body and the mind. This will lead to peace and unravel the real truth. Anyone who would follow the noble eightfold path would attain nirvana irrespective of his social origin.

Lord Buddha emphasized Four Noble Truths to mankind. He said that the world is full of suffering. All sufferings have a cause: desire, ignorance and attachment are the causes of suffering. The suffering could be removed by destroying its cause. In order to end suffering, one must know the right path. This path is the Eight Fold Path.

Buddhism laid emphasis on the law of 'Karma' by which the present is determined by the past actions. If an individual has committed no sins, he is not born again. This is an important part of Lord Buddha's teachings. Buddha preached that the ultimate goal of one's life is to attain Nirvana, the eternal state of peace and bliss, which is free from desire and sorrow, decay or disease and of course from birth and death. Therefore, annihilation of desire

is the real problem. Prayers and sacrifices will not end desire nor will rituals and ceremonies as emphasized by Vedic religion but he stressed on moral life of an individual.

Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the existence of God. He was a practical reformer who took note of the realities of the day. He said everything is transient in this Universe. There is no immortal soul. The Universe is soulless. The transmigration is no transmigration of soul. In transmigration nothing passes over from one life to another – only a new life arises as part of events which include the old or rather it is the reaction of one's own actions. He believed that one's ignorance makes a person believe in existence of God or soul and this ignorance creates desire in man, then leads to action and that action leads to impulse to be born again to satisfy desire. This leads to chain of birth and rebirth which is the primary cause of misery of a man. The chain of ignorance, desire, attachment etc. can be snapped by knowledge or Gyan. According to him, the time knowledge is to acknowledge the absence of soul. He who realises the absence of soul knows that he does not exist as an individual and as such there can be no relationship between him and the objects around him. Therefore, nothing in this world can make him happy or sad. So he is free (Vimukta) – he is an Arhat. Those who wish to attain this knowledge to attain salvation should have faith in 'Four Noble Truths' and 'Eight Fold Path'. For this, he has to work out mental training for concentration. Briefly, it is to Buddhism what gymnastics' was to the Greek body.

The moral doctrines of Buddha were simple. He believed that every individual is the maker of his own destiny. We are born time and again to reap the fruits of our Karma'. Good deeds, lead to higher life till salvation is achieved while evil deed hinder our spiritual elevation. One should neither lead a life of luxury nor a life of severe ascetism. The best course to be pursued by an individual is the Middle Path (Madhyama Pratipat or Tatha Grah Marg). Buddha laid stress on truth, charity, purity and control over passions and advocated for cardinal virtues i.e. Maitri (Love), Karuna (Passion), Mudita (joy at other's success) and Upeksha (Equanimity) towards all living being in order to lead a better life in the next birth. Besides one should avoid pursuing bad instincts such as ill-will, anger, deceit, jealousy, arrogance etc. One should not steal, speak lie or get drunk or have illicit relations. Thus, Buddha preached moral and ethical conduct for the common man. He stressed that the Noble Eight fold Path by which a person could attain Nirvana, is not a matter of belief or knowledge alone but also conduct.

The teaching of Buddha put forward a serious challenge to the existing Brahmanical order. Buddha's liberal and democratic approach quickly attracted the people of all sections. His attack on the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmanas was welcomed by the lower orders. Irrespective of caste, creed and sex, people were welcomed in the new order. Buddha rejected the authority of the Vedas and condemned animal scarifies. He detested the complex and meaningless rituals. He strongly believed that sacrifices and rituals could neither help a person to wash away his sins nor benefit any sinner by performing various ritualistic practices. Max Muller wrote "What was felt by Buddha had been felt more or less intensely

by thousands and this was the secret of his success". The practice of social equality on which Buddhism was based was the call of the day. Buddha understood and preached what masses desired at that time. Thus Buddhism represented the spirit of its age.

Lord Buddha was a living example of righteousness, chastity and holy ideals. He was a prince yet he accepted the life of a monk. He attained knowledge not by studying religious texts but by self realisation and self – emancipation. His religion was a religion in practice. He preached what he himself practiced in real life. He was an embodiment of truth and a living example of a holy life based on love and simplicity. Therefore, he could attract not only the common people but also princes, rulers and upper strata of the society to his faith, who in turn, helped in the propagation of his faith.

The teachings of Buddha were not only simple but quite practical. Buddha prescribed a middle path for the attainment of Nirvana. For the common man, it did not mean acquisition of difficult knowledge, observance of costly rituals, severe ascetism or abandoning family life but it meant observing certain simple rules of morality to attain salvation. This factuality was not catered to by contemporary religions. Moreover, Buddha preached in the language of the masses, i.e. Magadhi which facilitated the spread of Buddhist doctrines among the common people. Gautama Buddha also organized the samgha or the religious order whose doors were open to all irrespective of caste, creed and sex. However, slaves, soldiers and debtors could not be admitted. The Buddhist samghas proved to be the best instruments in the propagation of Buddhism. Each local samgha was like a workplace or an assembly for the followers of Buddhism where teachings of Buddha were imparted to the followers. The samghas were also centres of learning, spiritual exercise for the monks, exchange of ideas among the members. These Samghas prepared religious preachers or monks into a well- organized body to propagate the teachings of Buddha. These monks worked selflessly for propagation of Buddhism. According to V. Smith, 'The well organised body of monks and nuns was the most effective instrument in the hands of this religion. Besides various scholars like Nagarjuna, Vasumitra, Dinang, Dharamkisti etc. produced vast literature on Buddhism which provided the base for its strength.

From its inception, Buddhism got the protection and support of various rulers. Bimbisara and Ajatshatru of Magadha, Prasanjit of Kosala and Udayana, king of Kaushambi, were either followers or admirers of Buddha. Pradyata, king of Avanti too had invited Buddha to his kingdom. King Ashoka also played an important role in the propagation of the religion. Emperor Kanishka also patronized Buddhism and took measures to propagate it outside India. Asoka's son Mahendra and daughter Sanghmitra were sent to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism. Many monasteries were established by him and the samghas were also liberally donated by the Mauryan Emperor. Buddhism also came to be adopted by merchant class. Merchants like Anatha Pindika and courtesans like Amrapali accepted the faith because they got due respect in this religion.

According to tradition shortly after the death of Buddha, the first Buddhist Council was held in 483 BC near Rajgriha where an attempt was made to compile the teachings of Buddha. Since the scripture of Buddhism grew by a long process of development over several centuries, this council did not meet with much success. The second council was held at Vaishali in 383 BC which ended in a permanent split of Buddhist order into Sthaviravadins and Mahasangikas. The former upheld the orthodox Vinaya Pataka dealing with the teachings of Buddha while the latter favoured the new rules and their relaxation. In the third council at Pataliputra, the philosophical interpretations of the doctrines of Buddha were collected into the third Pitaka called Abhidhamma Pitaka. An attempt was made to define true canonical literature and eliminate all disruptive tendencies. The fourth council held in Kashmir under the auspices of Kanishka compiled three commentaries of the three Pitaka.

By this time, Buddhism was already divided into eighteen important sects but the two most important and major ones were Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle and the Mahayana the Great Vehicle. The Hinayanists believed in the original teachings of Lord Buddha and did not want any relaxation in them. Whereas Mahayanists accepted many Buddhisattvas who were in the process of obtaining but had yet not obtained Buddhahood. Both the sects agreed that the Buddha had taken birth several times and in several forms as bodhisattvas before the attainment of Buddhahood and would take birth in future also. But both differed with regard to the cause of these births and deaths. According to Hinayanism, the different births were simply different stages of progress of the Buddha till salvation. Thus they believed that Buddha was a man and his birth as Gautama was his last stage in the attainment of Nirvana. But Mahayanism believed that Buddha was an incarnation of God. He took birth several times not to attain Nirvana for himself but to help others in the attainment. Secondly, whereas the Hinayansim regarded the salvation of one's own self as the highest goal, Mahayanism believed that the greatest ideal is to help the society in self elevation. Thirdly, Hinayanism regarded Nirvana as a state of permanent bliss or peace away from the cycle of birth and death while the Mahayanism regarded it as the union of an individual with Adi Buddha, an idea quite simpler to the union with the Brahman of the Upanishadas. Fourthly, Hinayana did not regard the Buddha free from the bond of birth and death while Mahayana regarded the Buddha as God and believed in his different incarnations, all free from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Fifthly, Hinayanism believed in the practice of self-culture and good deeds as the only way to salvation. Mahayanism was based on faith and devotion to various Buddha to attain salvation. Finally, while the religious texts of Hinayanism were written in Pali, those of Mahayanism were written in Sanskrit. The Mahayanism remained closer to the concepts of Hinduism with regard to Nirvana, Brahma, incarnations of God, faith, devotion etc. thus forming a bridge between the old Buddhism and modern Hinduism.

Buddhism remained one of the foremost religions of not only India but the whole of Asia for many centuries but slowly it lost its hold over Asia and practically became non-existent in India. Corruption had crept in Buddhist Samghas because of the free entry of wealth and

women in the monastic order. The division of the Buddhism into different sects also contributed to the destruction of the image of the movement among the people. The adoption of Sanskrit as language of the Buddhist texts made Buddhism lose popular contact and hold over the masses, since Sanskrit was not the language of the masses. The moral corruption of monks led to intellectual bankruptcy of the Samgha and when Hinduism was reviewed particularly under the patronage of Gupta rulers, Buddhism failed to meet its intellectual challenge and therefore lost popular support. Moreover, Buddhism basically was an atheistic system which did not regard God as an essential creator and preserver of the Universe. On the other hand, Hinduism a strong faith based on the existence of God preached the masses about the God as Saviour and perpetual merciful helper of mankind. The ruling class also realised might as the order of the day and need of the time where non-violence and other teachings were becoming increasingly irrelevant, and thereby withdrew its support to Buddhism. Hinduism bounced back with the spirit of toleration and the acceptability of new ideas in its fold. But the final blow to Buddhism came with the invasion of Hunas and the Turks. Thus, Buddhism lost its control over the country of its birth.

Nevertheless, Buddhism made positive contribution to Indian culture. It gave to Indian people a simple, economical and popular religion. It rejected rituals and sacrifices, authority of the Brahmanas which had made Hinduism unpopular. The monastic system or the organisation of religious devotees in disciplined communities or orders was another contribution of Buddhism to India. It also provided religious unity to Indian people by raising the public morality by its adherence to a high moral code. At the same time, it gave serious impetus to democratic spirit and social equality. The philosophers of Buddhism had a rational approach towards religion and individualistic in its approach. It preached that the self-emancipation could alone help an individual to attain Nirvana. As far as the Indian education and literature is concerned, the Samghas became the centres of learning and Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila became centres of Buddhist learning. In the domain of architecture, sculpture and painting, the stupas of Sanchi, Sarnath, Nalanda, Amravati and Ellora are regarded as the best specimens of Indian architecture. The famous lions of the Sarnath columns, the beautiful bull of Rampurva column, the carvings on the gateways of the great Buddhist sites at Bharhut, Ganga and Sanchi are remarkable specimens of sculpture. The schools of Gandhara and Mathura produced the first images of Buddha which are appreciable pieces of art. The statues of Buddha carved in stone, copper and bronze are also some of the best examples of Buddhist art. The mural paintings of Ajanta caves earned world-wide fame. Thus, Indian architecture, sculpture and painting owe a large debt to Buddhism. Finally, the power to assimilate foreigners into its fold and the spirit of toleration has been a source of great inspiration from Buddhism to Indian society.

### **Jainism**

The changing scenario of the socio-economic order of the 6th century BC led to the establishment of Jainism and Buddhism as heterodox sects later to be popularly known as

reform movements. Jain tradition speaks of twenty four Tirthankaras(prophets). In the Rigveda Mantras there are references to Rishaba, the first Tirthankara as claimed by Jains. However, the first twenty two Tirthankaras have no historical foundation. Only the last two, Parsva and Mahavira, are historical personages. Very little is known about the life of Parsva. It is believed that he was the son of the King of Banaras who became an ascetic at the age of thirty, got enlightenment after 84 days of penance, gave his message to the people upto the age of 100 years and died in Bihar nearly 250 years before Mahavira.

In fact, the real founder of Jainism was its 24th Tirthankara Mahavira. It is difficult to fix the exact dates of birth and death of this reformer. Most Tirthankaras upto the fifteenth, were supposed to have been born in eastern UP and Bihar but their historicity is extremely doubtful. No part of the mid-Gangetic plains was settled on any scale until the fifth century BC. Evidently, the mythology of the Tirthankaras, most of whom were born in the mid-Gangetic basin and attained nirvana in Bihar, seems to have created to endow Jainism with antiquity. According to one tradition, Vardhaman Mahavira was born in 540 BC in a village near Vaishali. Being the son of the head of a Kshatriya clan, he also had connections with the royal family of Magadha. Initially, Mahavira led the life of a householder but in his quest for truth, he abandoned the world at the age of 30 and became an ascetic. After wandering from place to place for 12 years, he attained omniscience (Kaivalya) through which he conquered misery and happiness. Because of this conquest, he is known as Mahavira or the great hero or Jina that is the conqueror and his followers are known as Jainas. He propagated his religion for thirty years and his mission took him to Koshala, Magadha, Mithila, Champa etc. He passed away at the age of 72 in 468 BC at Pavapuri near modern Rajgir.

Religious texts written in Pali do not recognize Mahavira as an originator of a new religion but as a reformer of an existing religion. Mahavira accepted mostly the religious doctrines of Parsva but certainly made some alterations and additions to them. Parsva emphasized self – control and penance and advised his followers to observe Satya (truth), Ahimsa (non-violence), Aprigraha(no possession of property), Asteya(not to receive anything which is not freely given). To these Mahavira added Brahmacharya (celibacy). As regards philosophy, Jaina philosophy shows a close affinity to Hindu Sankhya philosophy. It also ignores the idea of God, accepts that the world is full of sorrows and believes in the theory of Karma and transmigration of soul.

Jaina philosophy is that of dualism. It believes that human personality is formed of two elements: Jiva(soul) and Ajiva(matter). While Ajiva is destructible, Jiva is indestructible and the salvation of an individual is possible through progress of Jiva. In short, the living and non-living (soul and matter) by coming into contact with each other create energies which cause birth, death and various experiences of life. These energies already created could be destroyed by a course of discipline leading to salvation or nirvana. This means seven things:



1. There is something called the living.
2. There is something called the non-living.
3. The two come in contact with each other.
4. The contact leads to production of energies.
5. The process of contact could be stopped.
6. The existing energies could be exhausted.
7. Salvation could be achieved.

These seven propositions are called the seven tattvas or truths or realities by Jainas. On the basis of these propositions, Jaina philosophy states that if one desires to attain Nirvana, it is important for him to destroy Karma. One could gradually do it by avoiding evil Karma first and later other Karma. To equip himself for such a task a person should observe the five principles of the religion namely Satya, Ahimsa, Aprigraha, asteya and Brahamacharya. Jainism is essentially atheistic the concept of God being irrelevant. But it accepts a group of prophets or Tirthankaras who were deified men. Every mortal possesses the potentiality of becoming as great as they were. Jainism represents the universe as functioning according to eternal law continuously passing through a series of cosmic waves of progress and decline. According to it, the sole purpose of life is the purification of soul. Unlike the Upanishada, Jainism preaches that the purification of soul cannot be attained through knowledge but only through rigorous ascetic punishment of the body thereby freeing the soul from the sorrows of life. In other words, right belief, right knowledge and right action or ratnatreya or three jewels of Jain religion formed the basis of man's life.

Jainism believed that the highest state of a soul was God. According to Mahavira man is the architect of his own destiny and he could attain salvation and even the status of a God by pursuing a life of purity, virtue and renunciation. A monastic life was essential for full salvation. No lay jaina could take up the profession of agriculture since this involved not only the destruction of plant life but also of many living things in the soil. That is why strict limitation of private property enforced by Jainism was interpreted to mean only landed property. There was no restriction on amassing wealth by means of trade and commerce. The practice of non-violence in Jainism had more of negativity since it lays greater emphasis on vegetarianism and precaution against killing of insects and animals rather than on loving them.

The principal sects of the Jainism are two, Svetambara and Digambara. There are differences between the two sects regarding versions of some incidents of the life of Mahavira, the type of food taken by Jaina preacher or munis, and the question whether women could attain Nirvana or not. But the basic difference is on the use of clothes. The

preachers of Svetambara wore white clothes while the preachers of Digambara sect practice complete nudity. Some scholars maintain that Prasva did not ask his followers to discard clothes but Mahavira insisted on nudity. Jain sacred texts known as 12 Angas were also non-acceptable to Digambaras as authentic. The original doctrines taught by Mahavira were contained in 14 old texts known as 'purvas'. In the first council at Pataliputra, the Jaina canon was divided into 12 sections which the Svetambaras accepted but Digambaras refused to accept this claiming that all old scriptures were lost. At the second council held at Vallabhi new additions were made in the form of 'Upangas' or minor sections. Among the 12 angas the Acharayanga Sutta and the Bhagwati Sutta are the most important. While the former deals with the code of conduct which a Jaina monk is required to follow, the later expound the Jaina doctrines in a comprehensive manner.

Teachings of Mahavira became very popular among the masses and different sections of society were attracted to it. One of the important causes for the success was the popular dialect (Prakrit) used in place of Sanskrit. The simple and homely morals prescribed to the masses attracted the people. The royal patronage by the rulers of Magadha later made Mathura and Ujjain great centres of Jainism. Jain councils collected the material of the sacred texts to write them down systematically, in Ardhamagadhi. But in the absence of popular religious preachers after the death of Mahavira, its division into two important sects, absence of protection by the later rulers, revival of Hinduism under the Guptas, Cholas, Chalukyas and Rajput kings also contributed to its slow decline. But its contribution to Indian culture particularly literature, architecture and sculpture has been remarkable. Though the language of its religious texts had been Prakrit, it helped in giving a literary shape to some spoken languages of India. The temples and idols still existing in various cities as Mathura, Gwalior, Junagarh, Chittor, Abu have been accepted as some of the best specimens of Indian architecture and sculpture particularly the temples of Abu, the Jaina tower at Chittorgarh, the elephant caves of Orissa and the 70 feet high idol of Bahubali in Mysore.

### **Mahajanapadas**

The Janapadas as mentioned in the later Vedic texts, Jain and Buddhist sources, signify that for the first time in Indian history regions with different types of human settlements come to acquire geographical names. The incorporation of the Janapadas by powerful rulers of the Mahajanapadas as mentioned in the contemporary literature led to political conflicts between rulers and in a later period, to the establishment of the Magadha Empire. This meant that gradually the power of the ganasamghas declined and the rule of monarch was established.

The kings or groups of Kashatriyas, the chiefs of which called themselves rajas or kings ruled over Janapadas or Mahajanapadas. The appearance of urban centres meant the emergence of different social groups pursuing different occupations because the existence of cities implies the existence of different sections of populations engaged in multiple activities. Since people following different occupations came to the forefront, their living and getting familiar with

one place led to the distinction between urban and rural centres. Moreover, some groups were not engaged in the production of food so they had to receive a share of the produce from other social groups who could pass on their surplus in exchange of services of the groups who did not engage in agriculture. Thus emerged the system of taxation. Since the exchange of goods had undergone major changes by this time, the complexity of the system led to the emergence of professional middlemen and merchants. They would mediate in the dealings of different individuals and regions. This is how the class of merchants or *sethis* came to be regarded as important in society not only as economically sound merchants but also as big landlords. This period also saw the appearance, for the first time in India, of metallic coins which were extensively used for exchange. It also witnessed the regular trade connections between cities and towns.

It is in this context that one notices the emergence of Janapadas and the Mahajanapadas in the sixth century BC. The emergence of Janapadas signified the birth of geography in Indian history. During the Vedic times people were not attached to any particular geographical region because they led a nomadic life wandering in search of food from one place to another. Their affiliation was only towards the tribe which was a collection of people staying together to have a communal living. With the passage of time, people developed ways and means to earn a source of livelihood not only by depending on the forces of nature but by practicing agriculture and engaging themselves in the production of food. Each group came to be distinctly recognized by the production of a certain type of crop. The barter system among the various tribes for their living led them to have a newly acquired need for a settled life and familiarising themselves with surrounding landscape. This was the time when they learnt to call a particular surrounding as their own. This geographical space was separated from those of the other communities (Janapadas) who might be friendly or hostile to them. These Janapadas characterised by cohesion inside and separation from the outside world, proved to be a seminal development in ancient India. These units or Janapadas became the centres for the development of uniform language, customs and beliefs.

From the sixth century BC, the villages, towns and cities were the units where people lived in a Janapada. It was at this time that the Kings and monarchs emerged on the stage of history. This was also the age of intense philosophical speculation. Buddhism, Jainism and many other heterodox sects emerged during this period. We find information about the Janapadas and the Mahajanapadas from some Vedic and Buddhist texts. These texts have clear references to various regions and geographical divisions. Excavations at Hastinapur, Ahichchatra, Kaushambi, Ujjaini, Sravasti, Vaishali suggest prosperous agricultural settlements and towns. The contemporary texts also indicate changes in society and economy which were taking place in well-defined geographical space.

With progress in agriculture and settlement by 500 BC Janapadas became a common feature. Around 450 BC, over forty Janapadas covering even Afghanistan and south-eastern Central Asia are mentioned by Panini. However, the major part of southern India was excluded. Pali texts show that these Janapadas or small principalities grew into Mahajanapadas that is large states. These texts mention sixteen of them. The literature belonging to our period of interest refer to various kinds of units of settlements as Mahajanapadas, Janapadas, Nagara, Nigama, Grama etc. Janapada, literally means the place where the people place their feet. In the early Vedic times, the members of Jana were pastoral groups roaming in search of pastures. In later Vedic phase, the members of Jana took up agriculture and began to lead a settled life. These agriculture settlements came to be known as Janapadas. Initially, these settlements were named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages settled in that area. The Kuru and Panchal Janapadas located around Delhi and upper UP were named after their Kshatriya lineages. With the use of ploughshares and introduction of iron, people decided to settle down in one place and practice agriculture. The agriculturist could now clear the forest land and make it arable with the use of iron tools and implements. Middle Gangetic valley i.e. the area east of Allahabad came to be recognized as best suited for wet rice cultivation. The agricultural expansion led to the growth of population. Agricultural surplus was made available. Cattle was no more considered a major strength of wealth. Money economy had surpassed barter system. This led to the chiefs of the lineages constantly at war with each other either to show their might or to surpass each other by financial strength. Through the process of agricultural expansion, war and conquest the Vedic tribes had come in closer contact with each other and with the non-Aryan population. This in fact led to the formation of large territorial units. For example, the Panchalas represented the amalgamation of five different tribes. By the sixth century BC, some of the Janapadas developed into Mahajanapadas. This happened as a result of the series of changes in the internal social and political organisation of the Janapadas. One such important change as mentioned earlier was the expansion of agricultural communities. Agricultural land now came to be considered as an important economic asset as against cattle. Another important change was the emergence of new categories and groups of people in the society, namely the Gahapati or the master of an individual household which owned land, and merchants or settlers or a person having the best, a term used by the Buddhist texts for people who dealt with money and had acquired considerable prestige and power. Combined with developments in the social and economic fields were changes in the nature of the polity of the Mahajanapadas. In the period prior to our period of study the word Raja was referred to as the chief of a lineage. Rama was referred to as Raghukularaja meaning one who rules over Raghu clan. Similarly, Yudhishtira is called Kuru or Raja. They ruled over their lineage and the concept of ruling over a territory had not come into existence. The taxes collected from the Kinsmen were mostly voluntary contributions. King was a father figure who ensured the safety and prosperity of the lineage. He did not function independently and taxation or maintenance of independent army was not his prerogative. The reference to kings in the sixth century BC on the other hand indicate his rule over a geographical unit belonging to him with

a regular taxation system and an army. The distinction between Raja or Ruler and Praja or the ruled became more pronounced. There are references to Krsaka or peasants who paid taxes to the king. The cattle raids of the preceding period were now replaced by organised campaigns in which territory was annexed and the agriculturists and craftsmen were to pay taxes. Bhaga or share of the agricultural produce was given to the king for safeguarding their interests and welfare and for being in subordination to the king. Survey of the agricultural land was done by an officer called rajjughahaka besides bhagadugha an officer who collected bhaga. These officers are mentioned in the contemporary literature. The Jatakas also mention royal officials measuring out grain to send to royal granary. The Mahajanapadas did not bear the name of the dominant Kshatriya lineage. For example Kosala, Magadha, Avanti, Vatsa were not named after any Kshatriya lineage. Thus one notices that a new political system had emerged by the sixth century BC. The word 'Mahajanapadas' denoted large Janapadas like those of Magadha, Kosala etc. which were ruled by powerful kings or oligarchs. In fact, many of the Mahajanapadas of the sixth century BC came up by incorporating Janapadas which were earlier independent. For example, Kosala Mahajanapada included the janapada of the Sakyas and of Kashi. Magadha came to include the Janapada of Anga, Vajji etc. even before it grew into an empire.

In the Mahajanapadas, the basic unit of settlement was the Gama meaning village. Agriculture was the main occupation of people in agriculture settlements. This shows a transition from pastoral and nomadic economy to an agricultural and settled economy. The villages were small and large varying from a single household to many families. Probably the households were part of an extended kin group where each person was related to another in the village. However, with the emergence of families who had large landholdings and who took the services of dasas, karmakara and porisās, villages inhabited by non-kinship groups also came into being. Land ownership and tenancy rights find mention in the contemporary literature. Ksetrika or Kassaka denoted the peasantry class who generally belonged to the Sudra jati. Since caste system was fully entrenched in the social and economic hierarchy, these peasants must have formed the lowest rung of the hierarchical order. The leaders of the villages were called Gamini meaning managers of stage, soldiers or elephant and horse trainers. References to villages of cattle keepers, ironsmiths, woodworkers indicate specialization of crafts by now. Increasing trade and prosperity of the economy is reflected by the engagement of villagers not only in agriculture but in diversified arts and crafts. Barter system and regular exchange of goods became an integral part of the economic life of the people. Specialisation of crafts along with localization of the people led to a major change in the socio-economic and political life of the sixth century BC.

Towns and cities dominated by the monarchs and merchants had at the same time heterogeneous population in the new kinds of settlements. The difference between the new settlements named as Pura, Nigama, Nagara is not known but the size and the varying features of these settlements must have led to their different identities. These towns and

cities were definitely larger than villages. Big cities like Ayodhya and Varanasi find a mention in the contemporary literature. This historic phase is associated with settlements using a pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware. Increased trade and developing economies led to massive fortification of the cities like Kaushambi, Ujjain, Rajghat (Varanasi), Rajgir etc. These cities emerged as the centres of power and control over the Mahajanapadas. In the wake of growing economy, the use of coinage made the position of the merchant class stronger. Thus, one notices that the period starting with the sixth century BC saw the emergence of cities in ancient India for the second time. This urbanisation was more significant since it endured for a longer time and saw the beginning of a literate tradition. This tradition is embodied in Buddhism, Jainism and many strands of Hinduism. It is not only big cities which emerged at this time. Along with agriculture based villages there existed market centres, small towns, big towns and other types of settlements.

In order to understand the rise of cities in the sixth century BC one would like to emphasise on the need of establishing new centres of political power and activity in the wake of changing socio-economic milieu. The establishment of urban centres need not necessarily mean the increase in population of a particular area. Urban centres or cities are undoubtedly larger in size where people not only engage themselves in agriculture related activities but diversified non-agricultural activities also. Moreover, an urban centre functions in relationship to a large hinterland. In other words cities are able to harness the resources of the countryside. Or else cities could provide administrative, economic or religious services to the rural areas where the population residing is much larger than the physical space of the city. This could lead to the emergence of a class of kings, priests, merchants living in the cities who may turn out to be wealthier and more powerful than a common man. To lessen the economic disparity between different groups of people and to keep in check the hostilities between the rich and the poor, the centralized machinery of the state is needed. This kind of social structure also implies the coming into being a state society. It is against this background that the study of urban society and the rise of cities characterised by the presence of craft specialists, rich and poor people and a state administration, should be studied.

By the sixth century BC, the position of the Brahmins who specialized in ritual activity became questionable. The warrior class or Kshatriyas surfaced as a class of landowners. They desired a settled life based on agriculture and thus the introduction of the iron technology proved a boon for augmentation of agricultural surplus and clearing of forests. The middle Gangetic valley became the focus of increasing use of iron tools and wet rice cultivation. Larger food production made it possible to sustain increased production which is reflected in an increase in the number of settlements in the archeological records of the period between sixth century to fourth century BC. The groups that grew up controlling surplus wealth became the ruling class of the newly emergent kingdoms. And on the foundation of this wealth were born the cities of the sixth century BC.

The rise of cities in the sixth century BC is mentioned in the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain texts of the times. It was this period which saw the beginning of the written tradition in ancient Indian literary history. This evidence of the emergence of cities is corroborated by the archaeological sources. In the upper Gangetic valley, people used a particular kind of pottery called the painted grey ware, whereas in middle Gangetic plains, black and red pottery was known. By about the sixth century BC people of this entire zone started using Northern Black Polished Ware which is representation of the broad cultural uniformity in the Gangetic towns in the sixth century BC. Punch marked coins made of silver and copper, probably issued by merchants, reflect organised commerce by this time. The introduction of money in turn led to the emergence of the class of money-lenders. The use of terms 'Pura and Durga' to denote fortifications to protect urban centres and separate them from rural areas is an important indication for the rise of cities not only as seats of political power but as centres of commercial activity. The use of term 'Nigama' in Pali literature meant a township of specialized craftsmen. The term Nagara was commonly used for towns or cities which combined the political functions of the Pura and commercial functions of the Niagrama. The Buddhist literature refers to six Mahanagaras located in the middle Gangetic valley namely champa, Rajgriha, Kashi, Sravasti, Saketa and Kaushambi.

During the sixth century BC, India came to be divided into a number of independent states and even north India had no single paramount power. Most of these states were monarchical but quite a large number of them had republican or oligarchic constitutions. The Buddhist and Jain religious texts are more informative regarding them as compared to the Hindu religious texts. The Buddhist texts mention the following republican or oligarchic states:

- 1) The Sakyas of Kapilvastu in the foothills of the Himalayas near the border of Nepal.
- 2) The Bhaggas of Sumsumara hill in eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- 3) The Butis of Allakappa between the districts of Sahabad and Muzaffarpur in Bihar.
- 4) The Kalama of Kesaputta.
- 5) The Kaliyas of Ramagama.
- 6) The Mallas of Pava-modern Faizpur in Bihar.
- 7) The Mallas of Kusinara-modern Kasiya in eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- 8) The Moriyas of Piphalivana in the foothills of the Himalayas.
- 9) The Videhas of Mithila-modern Janakpur near the boundaries of Nepal.
- 10) The Licchavis of Vaisali – Basarh in the modern district of Muzaffarpur in north Bihar.

The concept of 'republic' has been variously explained from time to time according to its varying content. In its most elementary meaning, republic is contrasted with monarchy and means a form of state and government in which there is no hereditary monarch. Thus according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the republic is 'a state in which the supreme power rests in the people or in officers elected by them, to whom the people have delegated powers sufficient to enable them to perform their duties required of them'. The head of the state is usually elected directly and in modern usage this fact distinguishes a republic from a monarchy in which the head is hereditary.

Literally, the word republic means public affairs or commonwealth. Cicero, a Roman thinker says – Commonwealth is people's affair and this body should be delegated to either single man or to selected persons or must be retained by all members of the group. Montesquieu also believes that in republican government, sovereign power is possessed by either the whole people or some part of it. The age of republics can be ascribed to the post Vedic period. Indian writers call republics as Ganas or Samghas meaning a community organised by law, belief, external habits and principles of life which formed basic laws of republic. Burke calls it a partnership in all spheres of life promoting prosperity of individual and community.

A.S. Altekar says that republics had a definite constitutional meaning. Since republic denoted a form of government where the power was vested not in person but in Gana or group of persons, Sangha is another term of the same sense as distinguished from monarchy. Altekar's definition is in conformity with Panini's Ashtadhyayi, writings of Katyayana and Mahabharata, as a political term of Gana.

The existence of republics along with monarchies in the sixth century BC is found in Avadantashataka, accounts of visits of merchants from mid-India to Deccan, Jain Ayengasutra, Bhagvati Sutra and coin legends also refer to the existence of republics at that time. The existence of republican form of government signifies noticeable advancement in the political career of the people in this age. According to Shobha Mukerji – the rise or fall of several monarchies in this period gave opportunity to the republics to flourish where people experienced organizational experience. In historic times, republics existed in north-west and north-east zones and Punjab. Buddhist canons and Jataka stories refer to republics in Uttar Pradesh and North Bihar. But very little is known about the political history of these states except for Sakyas and Licchavis.

The Buddhist sources refer to the presence of sixteen Mahajanapadas in the period when Buddha lived. Since North India had no single paramount power, sixth century BC witnessed the emergence of these independent states. The Mahajanapadas represented a conglomerate of thousands of villages and a few cities. These Mahajanapadas extended from the north-west Pakistan to east Bihar and from Himalayas in the north to river Godavari in the south. Traditional literature also refer to sixteen large states each comprising several agricultural settlements (Janapadas) as existing in India in the sixth century B.C.



The Buddhist text Anguttara Nikaya which is a portion of Sutta – Pitaka gives the following list of sixteen Mahajanapadas in the time of Buddha:

- 1) Kashi
- 2) Koshala
- 3) Anga
- 4) Magadha
- 5) Vajji
- 6) Malla
- 7) Chedi
- 8) Vatsa
- 9) Kuru
- 10) Panchala
- 11) Maccha(Matsya)
- 12) Surasena
- 13) Assaka
- 14) Avanti
- 15) Gandhara
- 16) Kambhoja

Another Buddhist text Mahavastu enumerates a similar list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas while omitting Gandhara and Kambhoja in the North West. These are substituted by Sibi and Dasarna in Punjab and central India respectively. Bhagavati Sutra, a Jaina work gives a comparatively different list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas while including Vanga and Malaya. However, the number sixteen seems to have been acceptable and conventional but the list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas varied because the regions important to the Buddhist and Jains had some variation. The list includes a gradual shift of focus to the middle Gangetic valley because of the location of most of these Mahajanapadas in this area.

### **The Gana-Sanghas**

In post Vedic era the geographical focus shifted to the transitional Ganga valley and migration and resolution of people took lay beside two circuits: Northern originated from the Himalayan foothills and moved south to merge into the southern circuit close to Pataliputra. The Buddhist sources since well since Ashtadhyayi of Panini provide us information in relation to the transitional Ganga valley and Gana sanghas respectively. It was the gana-

sanghas of the transitional Ganga valley such since Vrijis which contained the constituent characteristics of state formation. Monarchy was initially recognized in Kosala, Magadha, Gandhara, Kasi and Kausambi. There were the two categories of state systems since they appeared in the Age of the Buddha: Gana-sanghas and Monarchies. The origin of the gana-sanghas is related to migration to transitional Ganga valley. Migration resulted due to population pressure and also due to a procedure of fission in lineage systems. Due to fissioning off in the middle of Kshtriya clans in later Vedic era the members of Rajakula too few other regions and recognized a new janapada. Janapada referred to a territory named after a Kshtriya clan. A cluster of clans shaped a jana and the region where they settled was described janapada literally meaning the lay where the tribe puts its feet. This is how Sakya, Koliya and Licchavi clans came into being. Few of the gana-sanghas comprised of single clan elements like Sakyas, Koliyas and Mallas. Few were confederacies of clans of which significant were Vrijji of whom Licchavis were mainly significant. In the gana-sanghas the organization of clan holdings was prevalent. So, Gahapatis are rarely referred to since agriculturists in gana-sanghas. In the gana-sanghas the Kshtriya lineages were regarded since owners of cultivable land. The name of the territory was derived from the Kshtriya lineage that had earlier cultivated land on a family foundation but now used labour when the mass of holdings became too large to be manageable. The clan held the land together on the criteria based on birth and the produce was so distributed in the middle of its members. The gana-sanghas were the assemblies of Kshtriya lineages. They were recognized through the younger members of the recognized Kshtriya lineages. In the gana-sanghas ownership of land was vested in the Kshtriya lineage. Non-kin clusters provided labour for working on the land of Kshtriya lineage. There was extremely small scope for rituals. Gana-sanghas have been variously interpreted since republics, oligarchies and chiefdoms. The members of the ruling lineages were referred to since rajas, rajakulas or consecrated Kshtriyas. The head of each household was raja. The representations of the gana-sanghas were embossed on punch marked coins which designates the beginnings of the exploit of coined money. Decisions were arrived at by the way of voting. Within the rajakulas all members were regarded since equal. Therefore chiefdoms have a centralized command building in which status to leadership is decided through birth and ancestry and genealogies become significant. There is reference to military and fiscal offices. They did not possess a standing army nor did they have any regular organization of revenue collection. Though, the sources do refer to taxes imposed on traders. Varna organisation did not determine social status in Ganasangha regions. Rituals were not significant and two broad categories in this region were those who owned land and those who labored on it. All these characteristics indicate the subsistence of an incipient state or stratified community. Variation in the middle of the members of the ganasanghas would lead to fissioning off in the middle of clusters. These clusters would settle fresh regions. Though in such a situation if one segment of the clan would seize domination then the janapada could turn into a monarchy.

## Monarchies

With the establishment of the kingdoms of Magadha and Kosala the term janapada incorporated villages, markets, cities and municipalities which meant subsistence of an organization of management and revenue. Domination came to be vested in the hands of sure families, who did not possess the highest status. Pasenadi the king of Kosala legitimized his location since a king through performing asvamedha, vajapeya, etc. in which hundreds of animals were killed. The rituals were now a mere symbolism to legitimize domination and not a way to section with wealth acquired in raids. In Kosala and Magadha land was owned through gahapatis and they cultivated it themselves or used the labour of others. State also undertook farming of land. Wasteland was brought under farming and with the expansion of agrarian economy a big surplus was released in the monarchical states. The ritual gifts granted to Brahamnas at the time of Yajna were fewer and instead the practice of gifting of land to Brahamnas was initiated. The tax collection machinery was well recognized in Kosala. Bali now meant a tax but could also mean an offering at a sacrifice. Bhaga and ardhha constituted a share of total and sulka meant traditions duty. Panini mentions taxes prevalent in the eastern region including land tax. The importance of Kosa is indicated.

This was necessary for maintaining a standing army an essential condition for emergence of a state organization. Rulers of Magadha paid due attention to army organisation which incorporated recruitment and training of soldiers and the innovation in armoury. In the campaign against Vrjji Magadha used two new techniques ratha-musala and mahasilakantika. Now raids were replaced through intended campaigns

## Second urbanization

The period of second urbanisation (6th century B.C. to 3rd century B.C.) noticed large-scale beginning of town life in the middle Gangetic basin. The widespread use of iron tools and weapons helped the formation large of territorial states. The towns became good markets and both artisans and merchants were organised into guilds under their respective headmen.

Eighteen of the more important crafts were organised into guilds (Sreni, Puga), each of which was presided over by a Pramukha (foreman), Jyeshthaka (elder) or Sresthin (chief). Sarathavaha was the caravan-leader. A Pali text refers to sea-voyages and of trading journeys to the coast of Burma, the Malay world (Suvarna-bhumi), Ceylon (Tamraparni) and even to Babylon (Baveru).

The principal sea-ports were Bharukachcha (Broach) Suparaka (Sopara, north of Bombay) and Tamralipti (Tamluk in West Bengal). Of the riparian ports, Sahajati (in Central India), Kausambi on the Yamuna, Banaras, Champa and later Pataliputra on the Ganges and Pattala on the Indus, deserve special mention.

The great inland routes mostly radiated from Banaras and Sravasti. The chief articles of trade were silk, embroidery, ivory, jewellery and gold. The system of barter was also prevalent. This led to localisation of crafts and industries and the emerging of artisans and merchants as important social groups. Besides others, these cities began to use coins made of metals for the first time.

The earliest coins belong to the fifth century B.C. and they are called punch-marked coins. The standard unit of value was the copper Karshapana weighing a little more than 146 grains. Silver coins were also in circulation.

The rural economy was mainly agriculture based. Rice was the staple cereal produced in eastern U.P and Bihar in this period. It was an economy which provided subsistence not only to direct producers but also to many others who were non-agriculturists. The greater part of the land came to be owned by gahapathis (peasant-proprietors).

### **Rise of Magadha**

In the sixth century B.C., India presented the chronic symptom of disintegration. The Aryan India in the North was divided into, sixteen great kingdoms and a number of republican, autonomous states. Out of the medley of political atoms, four kingdoms viz., Avanti, Vatsa, Kosala and Magadha, Magadha Empire rose into prominence by aggrandizing upon other weaker states. They entered into a four-power conflict for imperial supremacy which ended in the ultimate victory of Magadha Kingdom over them. It is the first successful attempt for imperial and dynastic unification of India in the period of recorded history.

### **Causes of Magadhan Success**

The factors that contributed to the rise of Magadha Empire were both internal and external. The various dynasties that ruled over Magadha from the 6th century B.C. pursued a uniform and ceaseless policy of expansion. The goal of imperial expansion fixed by Bimbisara was steadfastly pursued till Asoka sheathed his sword after the conquest of Kalinga.

An unbroken chain of very able and extraordinary monarchs ascended the Magadhan throne. The credit for the rise of Magadha Empire goes to the competent rulers of Magadha Kingdom. Shishunaga, Bimbisara, Ajatasatru, Mahapadma and Chandragupta were exceptionally able kings. They were fortunate in having great ministers and diplomats like Vassakara, Kautilya and Radha Gupta without whose efforts Magadhan ascendancy would have suffered.

The geographical factors contributed significantly for the rise of Magadha Empire. Magadha lay on the main land route connecting Eastern India with the West. She could easily control the trade between the two regions of the country. Magadha Empire was encircled by the Ganges, the Son and the Champa on the three sides and made it impregnable for the enemy. Her old capital Rajgriha was strategically situated as it was surrounded on all sides by hills and cyclopean stone walls.

Magadha's new capital Pataliputra was still more strategically invincible than Rajgriha. It was easier to control the course of the Ganges from the city of Pataliputra. These geographical advantages of Magadha helped her to be aggressive against her neighbours while baffled by the impregnability of Magadha.

One of the main factors behind the rise of Magadhan Power was her economic solvency and growing prosperity. Magadha had a vast population which could be employed in agriculture, mining and for manning her army. The Sudras and the non-Aryans could be employed in clearing up the forest and reclaim surplus land for farming. The surplus population could easily live on the yield of the surplus land. The Magadhan lands were very fertile due to its location between the Ganges and the Son. In the 4th Century B.C. that the Magadhan lands yielded multiple crops round the year. People of Magadhan Empire became prosperous due to fertility of the land and the government became automatically rich and powerful.

The mineral resources of Magadha were other sources of her power and prosperity. With the dawn of the Iron Age, iron became an important metal for making implements, plough shears and weapons of war. Magadha had abundant iron supply from her mines. Besides she had copper mines. Magadha could equip her vast army with iron weapons; she could sell surplus iron to other states. Deep ploughing with heavy iron plough was possible due to easy supply of iron.

Economically, Magadha Kingdom had many sources of prosperity. Magadha was situated on the land route connecting Eastern India with the west. The trade flowing over this route passed through Magadha. The river Ganges which flowed through the heart of Magadha was the high route of trade in Northern India. Magadha was linked up to parts of Northern India right up to Kasi or Baranasi by the Ganga route and from Prayag or Allahabad; the place of confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, Magadha could send her merchandise along the Yamuna route up to Delhi region. Downwards from Magadha the open sea could be reached by the Ganga route. The Son and the Champa flowed along the Magadhan frontier.

In ancient times river routes served as high way of commerce. Magadha could control the North Indian trade through her mastery over the Ganges. When Bimbisara conquered Anga kingdom, its flourishing port of Champa was annexed to Magadha. Champa was a famous river port from which ocean going vessels laden with merchandise sailed to different countries of South-East Asia, Ceylon and South India. After annexation of Champa, Magadha became the mistress of this flourishing trade.

The rise of Magadhan Kingdom was linked up with the establishment of her supremacy over the Ganges. The conquest of Champa established her mastery over lower Gangetic Valley up to the confluence of the river with the Bay of Bengal.

Magadha Empire now turned to establish her supremacy over the upper Gangetic region. Bimbisara and Ajatsatru defeated Kosala and annexed Kasi, a famous river port and emporium. The mastery over Kasi, gave Magadha the opportunity to make economic

penetration in Kosala kingdom or U. P. Virtually the southern side of the Ganges came under Magadhan hegemony, where she started ceaseless economic penetration. Magadha turned her gaze to the northern side of the Ganges Vaisali and Lichchavi countries. The fertile tracts this region became targets of Magadhan imperialism.

The conquest of Vaisali and Lichchavi countries gave Magadha a supreme mastery over the Gangetic valley and she became virtually invincible. Magadha launched the programme of a pan-Indian empire depending on the strength of her heel in the Gangetic valley.

Culturally, the rise of Magadha can be explained on the ground that Magadha was the meeting ground of two opposite cultures. The Aryan culture lost its original virility when it reached Magadha and the lingering traces of non-Aryan culture of Eastern India got mixed up with the Aryan culture. This interaction of two cultures gave new power and spirit to Magadha Empire. Just as the Teutonic races of middle Ages in Europe united in them their own martial culture with the Latin refinement; the Magadhans united in them the cultures of the Aryans and the non-Aryans. In the sphere of thought and philosophy Eastern India made her mark in the teaching of Mahavira and Buddha. The revolution inaugurated by them in the sphere of thought was supplemented by Magadha in political field by the emergence of Magadhan imperialism and the Magadhan bid to establish a pan-Indian empire.

Externally, the threat of foreign invasions like that of Achaemenians in the 6th century B.C.; that of the Macedonians in the 4th Century B.C. and the subsequent infiltration of foreign races boldly put forward the question that without a central paramount government on the subcontinent, it was impossible to defend it from foreign invasions. Such a consciousness certainly worked behind the rise of Magadhan imperialism and prepared the country to submit to Magadhan hegemony

## **MAURYAN RULE**

### **Central Government**

The ascendancy of the Mauryas had resulted in the triumph of monarchy in India. Other systems like republics and oligarchies that were prevalent in the pre-Mauryan India had collapsed. Although Kautilya the foremost political theorist of ancient India supported the monarchical form of government, he did not stand for royal absolutism. He advocated that the king should take the advice of his ministry in running the administration. Therefore, a council of ministers called Mantriparishad assisted the king in administrative matters. It consisted of Purohita, Mahamantri, Senapati and Yuvaraja. There were civil servants called Amatyas to look after the day-to-day administration. These officers were similar to the IAS officers of independent India. The method of selection of Amatyas was elaborately given by Kautilya. Asoka appointed Dhamma Mahamatras to supervise the spread of Dhamma. Thus the Mauryan state had a well organized civil service.

Revenue Department Samharta, the chief of the Revenue Department, was in charge of the collection of all revenues of the empire. The revenues came from land, irrigation, customs, shop tax, ferry tax, forests, mines and pastures, license fee from craftsmen, and fines collected in the law courts. The land revenue was normally fixed as one sixth of the produce. The main items of expenditure of the state related to king and his household, army, government servants, public works, poor relief, religion, etc.

### **Army**

The Mauryan army was well organized and it was under the control of Senapati. The salaries were paid in cash. Kautilya refers to the salaries of different ranks of military officers. According to Greek author Pliny, the Mauryan army consisted of six lakh infantry, thirty thousand cavalry, nine thousand elephants and eight thousand chariots. In addition to these four wings, there were the Navy and Transport and Supply wings. Each wing was under the control of Adyakshas or Superintendents. Megasthenes mentions six boards of five members each to control the six wings of the military.

### **Department of Commerce and Industry**

This department had controlled the retail and wholesale prices of goods and tried to ensure their steady supply through its officers called Adyakshas. It also controlled weights and measures, levied custom duties and regulated foreign trade.

### **Judicial and Police Departments**

Kautilya mentions the existence of both civil and criminal courts. The chief justice of the Supreme Court at the capital was called Dharmathikarin. There were also subordinate courts at the provincial capitals and districts under Amatyas. Different kinds of punishment such as fines, imprisonment, mutilation and death were given to the offenders. Torture was employed to extract truth. Police stations were found in all principal centres. Both Kautilya and Asokan Edicts mention about jails and jail officials. The Dhamma Mahamatras were asked by Asoka to take steps against unjust imprisonment. Remission of sentences is also mentioned in Asoka's inscriptions.

### **Census**

The taking of Census was regular during the Mauryan period. The village officials were to number the people along with other details like their caste and occupation. They were also to count the animals in each house. The census in the towns was taken by municipal officials to track the movement of population both foreign and indigenous. The data collected were cross checked by the spies. The Census appears to be a permanent institution in the Mauryan administration.

### **Provincial and Local Administration**

The Mauryan Empire was divided into four provinces with their capitals at Taxila, Ujjain, Suvarnagiri and Kalinga. The provincial governors were mostly appointed from the members of royal family. They were responsible the maintenance of law and order and collection of taxes for the empire. The district administration was under the charge of Rajukas, whose position and functions are similar to modern collectors. He was assisted by Yuktas or subordinate officials. Village administration was in the hands of Gramani and his official superior was called Gopa who was in charge of ten or fifteen villages. Both Kautilya and Megasthenes provided the system of Municipal administration. Arthashastra contains a full chapter on the role of Nagarika or city superintendent. His chief duty was to maintain law and order. Megasthenes refers to the six committees of five members each to look after the administration of Pataliputra. These committees looked after: 1. Industries 2. Foreigners 3. Registration of birth and deaths 4. Trade 5. Manufacture and sale of goods 6. Collection of sales tax.

### **Arthashastra**

Kautilya was the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya. Chandragupta found the Mauryan Empire with his help. Arthashastra was written by him. It is the most important source for writing the history of the Mauryas and is divided into 15 *adhikarnas* or sections and 180 *Prakaranas* or subdivisions. It has about 6,000 slokas. The book was discovered by Shamasastri in 1909 and ably translated by him. It is a treatise on statecraft and public administration. Despite the controversy over its date and authorship, its importance lies in the fact that it gives a clear and methodological analysis of economic and political conditions of the Mauryan period. The similarities between the administrative terms used in the Arthashastra and in the Asokan edicts certainly suggests that the Mauryan rulers were acquainted with this work. As such his Arthashastra provides useful and reliable information regarding the social and political conditions as well as the Mauryan administration.

Kautilya who was also known as Chanakya was a friend, guide and philosopher to Chandra Gupta Maurya and played a significant role in ousting the Nandas and placing Chandragupta on the throne of Magdha. However, according to scholars like Winternitz and Keith, the work is of a much later period. Probably it was written in the early centuries of Christian era and that the author was a different person and not the Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya. The generally accepted opinion amidst the controversies regarding the authorship and its date is that the kernel of the Arthashastra belongs to the Mauryan age and was written by Kautilya but it contains some later day additions and interpolations. The Arthashastra consists of fifteen sections and 180 sub sections. It has 6,000 slokas. The work was discovered by Shama Sastri in 1909. Its contents can be divided into three main parts:

1. The first part deals with the king, his council and the government;
2. The second with civil and criminal law and
3. With inter state law, diplomacy and war.



Thus its range is comprehensive and it contains detailed instructions and guidelines for the governance of a state. It can be called a 'Manual of Administration'. It shows an amazing understanding of the intricacies of administration, foreign policy and diplomacy. Indeed it is an outstanding work showing ancient Indian achievements in the field of political science.

### **Asoka and Dhamma**

According to some scholars, his conversion to Buddhism was gradual and not immediate. About 261 B.C. Asoka became a Sakya Upasaka (lay disciple) and two and a half years later, a Bhikshu (monk). Then he gave up hunting, visited Bodhi-Gaya, and organized missions. He appointed special officers called Dharma Mahamatras to speed up the progress of Dhamma. In 241 B.C., he visited the birth place of Buddha, the Lumbini Garden, near Kapilavastu. He also visited other holy places of Buddhism like Sarnath, Sravasti and Kusinagara. He sent a mission to Sri Lanka under his son Mahendra and daughter Sangamitra who planted there the branch of the original Bodhi tree. Asoka convened the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra in 240 B.C. in order to strengthen the Sangha. It was presided over by Moggaliputta Tissa.

Although Asoka embraced Buddhism and took efforts to spread Buddhism, his policy of Dhamma was a still broader concept. It was a way of life, a code of conduct and a set of principles to be adopted and practiced by the people at large. His principles of Dhamma were clearly stated in his Edicts. The main features of

Asoka's Dhamma as mentioned in his various Edicts may be summed up as follows:

1. Service to father and mother, practice of ahimsa, love of truth, reverence to teachers and good treatment of relatives.
2. Prohibition of animal sacrifices and festive gatherings and avoiding expensive and meaningless ceremonies and rituals.
3. Efficient organization of administration in the direction of social welfare and maintenance of constant contact with people through the system of Dhammayatras.
4. Humane treatment of servants by masters and prisoners by government officials.
5. Consideration and non-violence to animals and courtesy to relations and liberality to Brahmins.
6. Tolerance among all the religious sects.
7. Conquest through Dhamma instead of through war.

The concept of non-violence and other similar ideas of Asoka's Dhamma are identical with the teachings of Buddha. But he did not equate Dhamma with Buddhist teachings. Buddhism remained his personal belief. His Dhamma signifies a general code of conduct. Asoka wished that his Dhamma should spread through all social levels.

## GANDHARA-MATHURA SCHOOL

Architecture in association with sculpture enjoyed the liberal patronage of Kanishka. The style of this age is known as the Gandhara. The forms of Greek art were applied to Buddhist subjects with reasonable amount of success. Images of the Buddha appeared in the likeness of Apollo and Yaksha Kubera in the fashion of Zeus of the Greeks figures. The drapery follows the Hellenistic models. This particular style was later transmitted to the Far-East through Chinese Turkestan. The figure of the Buddha in China and Japan reveal distinct traces of the Hellenistic modes of vogue at the court of Kanishka. Excavations in the Khotan (Chinese Turkestan) prove that it was the meeting place of four civilization - Greek, Indian Iranian and Chinese.

The Kushan dynasty reached its apex-during the days of Kanishka, who ruled over a flourishing nation strategically located to control the gates to the trade network of Asia. He even sent an envoy to the Emperor Trajan in Rome. Kanishka coins also reveal his desire to live harmoniously with various people and religions within his domain and beyond it. The elaborate parthian struck on the face of his coins illustrates particularly the various religions, practised beyond Gandhara-deities of Persia and Gods of Rome, Alexandria and the Hellenised orient and finally Shiva and Skand Kumar representing brahminical India. The most remarkable image appeared on a gold coin of Kanishka with standing figure of the Buddha.

The Gandhara sculptures have been found in the ruins of Taxila and in various ancient sites in Afghanistan and in West Pakistan. They consist mostly of the images of the Buddha and relief sculptures presenting scenes from Buddhist texts. A number of Bodhisattava figures were carved out. A figure of Gandhara shows the first sermon in the deer park and the death of the Buddha. In all these figures there is a realistic treatment of the body although it is draped. In these sculptures there is a tendency to mould the human body in a realistic manner paying great attention to accuracy and physical details particularly in the presentation of muscles, moustaches, etc. Also the representation of the thick bold fold lines forms a distinct characteristic. Thus the Gandhara sculptures offer a striking contrast to what has been discovered elsewhere in India.

The Gandhara art primarily depicted the Buddhist themes. The mother of the Buddha resembles an Athenian matron. Apollo-like face went into the making of a Buddhist scene. Perhaps one of the loveliest Gandhara sculptures reflecting a western subject is the figure of Athena of Rome at Lahore. This sculpture is made out of blue-grey schist, which is found only in Gandhara. Although the technique of Gandhara was essentially borrowed from Greece this particular art is essentially Indian in spirit. It was employed to give expression to the beliefs and practices of Buddhists. Except for a few exceptions no Greek art motif has been detected in the extant specimens. The Gandhara artist had the hand of a Greek, but the heart of an India.

There are large Gandhara stupas and monasteries survived as ruins at Guldara in Afganishta. Later a votive stupa from loriyaan Tangai in Gandhara has been found. If this is treated as the model of stupa in Gandhara, the stupa has undergone great changes from great stupa at Sanchi with its dome structure. In Gandhara the dome grew taller while the square railing at its summit was enlarged and elaborated.

The greatest of all Gandhara stupas, as the one erected by Kanishka outside the gates of modern Peshawar. Here also the stupa had not survived but a reliquary (receptacle for relics) of Kanishka have been found. One more such reliquary has been found at Bimaran in Afganishtan.

This particular kind of Gandhara style continued at least till the 8th century. It was along with Caravan route joining Taxila with Bactria that one of the greatest monastic centers of Buddhism flourished. It is the Bamiyan valley. The paintings in the valley reveal the motives adopted from Sassanian fabric designs. The most spectacular creation carved from the cliffs at Bamiyan are two colossal standing figures of the Buddha, the largest of them began as high as 175 ft. in its stone niche. It was finished with lime plaster. The image reflects the Gupta style of early fifth century. Above the figure's head are fragments of painting resembling those created by Gupta Buddhists at Ajanta.

Stucco was a popular technique in Gandhara art. A large number of monasteries of Afganishtan are decorated with stucco images. Also terracotta was used particularly among those who could not afford stone sculpture. Terracotta figures were also used as decorations in homes and as toys. All these provide interesting glimpses of the dresses and fashions of the time.

Another revealing feature is the presence of the images of Mother Goddess as the worship of this goddess remains an essential religious expression of the ordinary people. Buddhism too came to be associated with fertility cult and other popular religious cults. This association is evident from the symbolic importance of the stupa and the brackets with female figures as to be seen at Sanchi. As a matter of fact, these figures are sophisticated version of Mother Goddess images.

Apart from Gandhara sculpture appeared at Sarnath near Benaras, Mathura on the Yamuna and 'Amravati' and in Andhara Pradesh. They all offer many examples of excellent sculpture. Each of them has a distinct style. The most well-known are the elaborate base relief from Amravati. Over many years this form was pursued. Most of it was probably executed in Huvishka reign.

Simultaneously with the appearance of Buddha icon in Gandhara Buddha portrait based upon Yaksha model began to be created in the southern worship or Mathura. This place was a religious center even before the arrival of the Kushans. Understandably the Jains continued their activities along with those of the Buddhists in the Kushan and Gupta periods. Some scholars believe that the Mathura worship created a Buddha icon at least as early as

Gandhara. Close to Mathura is a sanctuary consisting of stone figures of Kushan rulers and deities. Only mutilated sculptures are recovered. They are carved from sikri sand-stone which is red mottle with cream spots. Two great fragmentary protraits are of king Vima Kadphises and standing king Kanishka. The garments worn by the Kushans can be known from these two pieces.

Apart from creating the Buddha figures in the form of Bodhisattva the Mathura school did produce the master-piece of Buddha in the mid 2nd century. It is carved from the local sand-stone and it is a sitting figure. Unlike the majority of stas Buddhas of Gandhara wrapped in the toga-like sanghatis this Buddha of a warmer clime is dressed as a true Indian wearing transparent muslim garments. Such like transparent textile being shown in a distinctive Mathura feature.

Some hold the view that the Buddha image was evolved independently both at Mathura and Gandhara since there is a striking difference between the two. The Gandhara school laid stress on accuracy of an anatomical details and physical beauty while that of Mathura strove to impart sublime and spiritual impression to the figures. The first was realistic and the other idealistic.

Others hold the view that the Hellenistic artists of Gandhara are the earliest iconographers while others attributed to the sculptures of Mathura. However, it is generally held that sculptures made by the former have been reckoned as those belonging to the Gandhara School, while those made by the latter have been ascribed to the Mathura school. It is probably that images came to be made and almost simultaneously by both the schools. For the sculptural and iconographic features of their products differ in essential details.

### **Other Schools of Mauryan Period**

Talking of other schools, Amravati school is the foremost. Its sculptures show a mastery of stone sculpture. The monuments at Jaggayyapeta, Nagarjuna-konds and Amaravati are classes by themselves. The Andhra sculpture is generally known as Amaravati schools. The stupas at Amaravati were made of a distinctive white green marble probably it was began about the time of Christ, and received its final carved faces and railings from about 150 A.D. to 200 A.D.

The nature art of Amaravati region is one of India's major and distinct styles. A great number of graceful and elongated figures on the reliefs imbue a sense of life and action that is unique in Indian art, not only that each figure is animated by an internal vitality, the quality of the surface further enhances the action of having a glid quality reminding one of water-worn pebbles.

One of the great stupa railing (probably of the 3rd century A.D.) show the Buddha in Human form subduing a maddened elephant which had been sent by his jealous cousin, Devadatta, to attack him. In the field of sculpture a round figure appears belonging to the 3rd century of

A.D. It has a sure certain modulation of the flowing sculptural volume and illusion of life, both hallmarks of the late Amaravati school.

All the railings of the Amaravati stupa are made out of marble while the dome itself is covered with slabs of the same material. Unfortunately, the entire stupa is in ruins. Fragments of its railings have been partly taken to the British Museum. The sculptures of the stupa are quite different in style from those of northern India. The figures of Amaravati have slim blithe features and they are represented in most difficult poses and curves. However, as the scenes are mostly over-crowded, the general effect is not very pleasing, indeed one characteristic and Amaravati is not disputed. The technical excellence of sculptures in carving plants and flowers, particularly the lotuses at Amaravati are most admirably represented in this school. The Buddha is mostly represented by symbols.

It is only recently excavations have revealed art works at Nagarjunakonda. Slabs of limestone illustrate scenes from the Buddha's life.

Although the period under review is not known for architecture, there came into existence beautiful temples and monasteries. The famous tower of Kanishka of Peshawar was one of the wonders of Asia. Unfortunately, no trace has been left behind.

There is only one class of buildings which merit some attention and they are the caves hewn out of solid rocks. The caves of the Ashokan period were plan chambers. But the caves of this period are adorned with pillars and sculptures. Some were used as Chaityas or halls of worship. There are many such chaitya caves at Nashik, Bhoja, Bedsa, and Karle. The last one is regarded as the finest specimen because of the beauty of the sculptures on the front wall. The chaitya of Karle is the most impressive specimen of massive rock architecture. Monasteries or Viharas were excavated near the chaityas. We have three viharas of this kind at Nasik.

Apart from these caves we know of several free standing pillars as the Garuda-dhavaja of Heliodorus. This period of times is really famous for independent Buddhist structures. The most important of days monuments are the stupas distributed over an area of 125 kilometers all around Ellora. The most famous of them are at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda

### **Satavahanas**

In the Deccan, the Satavahanas established their independent rule after the decline of the Mauryas. Their rule lasted for about 450 years. They were also known as the Andhras. The Puranas and inscriptions remain important sources for the history of Satavahanas. Among the inscriptions, the Nasik and Nanaghad inscriptions throw much light on the reign of Gautamiputra Satakarni. The coins issued by the Satavahanas are also helpful in knowing the economic conditions of that period. The founder of the Satavahana dynasty was Simuka. He was succeeded by Krishna, who extended the kingdom up to Nasik in the west. The third king was Sri Satakarni. He conquered western Malwa and Berar. He also performed asvamedha

sacrifices. The seventeenth king of the Satavahana dynasty was Hala. He reigned for a period of five years. Hala became famous for his book *Gathasaptasati*, also called *Sattasai*. It contains 700 verses in Prakrit language. The greatest ruler of the Satavahana dynasty was Gautamiputra Satakarni. He ruled for a period of 24 years from 106 to 130 A.D. His achievements were recorded in the Nasik inscription by his mother Gautami Balasri. Gautamiputra Satakarni captured the whole of Deccan and expanded his empire. His victory over Nagapana, the ruler of Malwa was remarkable. He patronized Brahmanism. Yet, he also gave donations to Buddhists.

Gautamiputra Satakarni was succeeded by his son Vashishtaputra Pulamayi. He extended the Satavahana power up to the mouth of the Krishna river. He issued coins on which the image of ships was inscribed. They reveal the naval power and maritime trade of the Satavahanas. The last great ruler of Satavahanas was Yajna Sri Satakarni

### **Significance Of The Satavahanas**

1. It was the emergence of Vakataka power in the Vindhya area some where about the middle of the third century that brought about the downfall of the Satavahanas. But an empire so firely established in its home domains does not break down with the fall of a dynasty. The Rastrakutas and the Chalukyas in the Godavari valley and the Pallavas in the south originally the viceroys of the Satavahanas, claimed successtion to the empire with in their own territorial limits as the Vakatakas claimed it to the north of the Vindhyas. The Gangas and the Kadambas were also the inheritors of the tradition and as the Vijayanagar emperors claimed in time to be Chalukya Chudamanis, or the crest jewels of the Chalukya dynasty and as the great kings of Gujarat equally claimed succession from the Chalukyas, the imperial tradition of the Satavahanas may be said to have been carried forward at least to the beginning of the seventeenth century.
2. The rise of the Satavahanas signified that the economic revolution of the Gangetic region was repeated allover India. Added to this because of the peculiar geographical terrain of the Deccan peninsula a number of small kingdoms came into existence but not any big empire.
3. Since the Satavahanas had controlled part of the Deccan and part of northern India, they acted as the couriers of Aryanism to southern India.
4. It is intriguing to note that the Satavahana inscriptions were primarily in pali but not in Sanskrit indicating it took long time to establish Sanskrit language as the language of the elite although people professed Aryanism much earlier.
5. The administrative structure of the Satavahana is a revealing one because it was not a highly centralized administration and it conceded the emergence of feudalism. Feudal chiefs like Mahara this mahasenapatis and mahabhojas issued their own coins.
6. The artistic excellence that was achieved under the aegis of the Satavahanas had a tremendous significance. Buddhist mounments came into existence at Nasik, Vidisha,

Bhattiprolu, Goli, Ghantasala and Amaravati. Most probably human figure was first carved out at Amaravati and Amaravati's sculptures influenced South-east Asian sculptures.

7. Under the aegis of the Satavahanas trade was given a boost. The important ports were Koddura and Chinnaganjam on the east and Kalyan, Sopara, Goa and Pigeon islands on the West coast. And some of the important commercial centers were Tagara, Pratihstana, Nasik, Junnar and Dhanyakataka.

### **SATAVAHANA ACHIEVEMENTS**

The government of the Satavahana kingdom was organized on the traditional lines. The kingdom was divided into Janapadas, which were further sub-divided into aharas. Each ahara was under an Amataya. The basic unit of the ahara was the grama with the village headman called gamika. Central control was maintained over the provinces. Princes were generally made viceroys. And the kings did not assume high-sounding titles. They were expected to maintain dharma.

The state derived its income from crown lands, court fees, fines and ordinary taxes on lands. The extraordinary taxes of the Mauryan period were not imposed. In general, Central control was not high because feudal traits emerged in the Satavahana period. The feudal chiefs like maharathas mahasenapatis and mahabhojas issued their own coins.

The area under the satavahanas in general witnessed considerable prosperity. There was brisk trade. Broach was the most important port and it had a vast and rich hinterland. Pratihstana produced cotton cloth. Tagara and Ujjain produced muslin. The chief imports were wines, copper, tin, lead and gold and silver coins. Another important port was Kalyan mentioned in the Periplus. The other ports were Sopara, Goa and Pigeon islands. Within the kingdom there were important cities like Tagara, Pratihstana, Nasik, Junnar and Dhanyakataka. Koddura and Chinnaganjam were the important ports on the east. The general life led by the people was similar to the one portrayed in Vatsyana's Kama-Sutra. Evidence also shows that a good number of people emigrated from the Deccan to colonize the regions in South-East Asia.

The Satavahanas and Shiva were worshiped. Saptasatika reveals the worship of many Hindu deities. Vaishnavism and Shivism grew popular. Gautamiputra-Satakarni claimed himself to be the protector of Brahmins. The Nasik prasasti states that Varnashrama Dharma was maintained. Buddhism too was popular. Both the Sakas and Satavahanas encouraged Buddhism. Ushavadata made several grants to Buddhist monks. Some of these grants were renewed by Gautamiputra Satakarni. Buddhist monuments and stupas came into existence at Nasik, Vidisa, Bhattiprolu, Goli, Ghantasala and Amaravati. It was at the last place that most probably human figures were carved out for the first time. And the stupa at this place had a marble railing with relief sculptures. A Vijayanti merchant was responsible for enriching Karle and Kanheri Buddhist caves. Merchants from Nasik contributed to the caves at Vidisa and Bharhut. In brief cave architecture and building of stupas witnessed certain development.

under the auspices of the satavahanas; and the donations or the merchants belonging to the guilds prove the commercial prosperity of the area.

kings patronized literature and architecture. Hala was an authority on the Puranas. He was the author of *Sapta-Sataka*. It is said that Hala paid as much as 40 million pieces of gold for four *kavyas*. *Leelavati* deals with the military campaigns of Hala.

The kings encouraged architecture. The five gateways at Sanchi the rock-cut Chaitya-halls of Bhaja, Karle, Nasik and Kanheri and the stupas at Amaravati, Bhattiprolu, Goli and Ghantasala were built in this period. The capitals of the pillars in Karle caves are elaborately sculptured. The dome and the base of the Amaravati stupa is elaborately sculptured. Jataka stories were incised on marble slabs. The upper part of the dome is a beautiful floral design. It is generally said that its construction began during the time of Gautamiputra Satakarni and was completed during the time of Yajna Sri Satakarni. Most probably two Ajanta Frescoes (9th and 10th) came into existence during this period.

The satavahanas were great excavators of cave temples and the magnificent temples of Ellora and Ajanta were the continuation of the Satavahana tradition to which all Middle Indian dynasties in succeeding ages claimed historic relationship. The basic tradition in Middle India is of the Satavahana empire. As in the north it is of the Mauryan. From the point of view of historic continuity it is important to remember this primary fact as up to quite recent times the traditions flowing from the satavahanas were living factors in Indian history.

### **Satavahana Administration**

The Satavahana administration was very simple and was according to the principle laid down in Dharmashastras. The king laid no claim of divine right. They had only the most modest title of *rajan*. They had no absolute power. Their power was checked in practice by customs and shastras. The king was the commander of war and of threw himself into the thickest of the fray.

A peculiar feature of the Satavahana administration was the presence of feudatories of different grade. The highest class was that of petty princes bearing the kingly title *raja* and striking coins in their own names. Next in rank was the *maharathi* and *mahabhoja*. Both titles from the beginning were hereditary and restricted to a few families in a few localities. Probably *mahabhoja* ranked higher than that of *maharathi*.

The *mahabhojas* were the feudatories of Satavahanas. They were primarily located in western Deccan. They were related by blood to the feudatory *maharathi*. It is definitely known that the *maharathis* were the feudatories of Satavahanas. They also granted in their own name villages with physical immunities attached to them. The *maharathis* of the *chitaldrug* enjoyed the additional privilege of issuing coins in their own name. Towards the end of the Satavahana period two more feudatories were created *Mahasenapathi* and then *mahataralavara*. Barring districts were controlled by feudatories, the empire was divided into *janapadas* and *aharas*, the



latter corresponding to modern districts. The division below that of ahara was grama. Non-hereditary governors were subject to periodical transfers. There were other functionaries like great chamberlain store-keepers treasurers and dutakas who carried royal orders.

The government lived from hand to mouth. The taxes were neither heavy nor many. The sources of income were proceeds from the royal domain, salt monopoly ordinary and extraordinary taxes both soldiers and officials were paid in kind. The Satavahana administration was very simple and was according to the principle laid down in Dharmashastras. The king laid no claim of divine right. They had only the most modest title of rajan. They had no absolute power. Their power was checked in practice by customs and shastras. The king was the commander of war and of threw himself into the thickest of the frays.

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### **RISE AND FALL OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE**

With the coming of the Buddha in early 4th century A.D. historical data becomes more reliable. Starting from 4th century A.D. till the latter half of the 6th century AD the facts of the day enable us to come to firm conclusions. How exactly the Guptas rose to power is difficult to be portrayed. With the collapse of the Indo-Scythian or Kushan empire some time during the 3rd century A.D. the political pictures for northern Indian began to transformed. In all likelihood, a large number of independent states must have been formed. The lichachhavis of Vaisali of the days of Buddha re-emerged again. It appears that they obtained possession of

Pataliputara and probably ruled as tributaries of the Kushans who had their headquarters at Peshawar.

The founder of the dynasty was Sri Gupta who bore the titles raja and maharaja. Historically, as can be gleaned from a few Gupta inscriptions, the history of dynasty really starts with king Ghatokacha, the son of Sri Gupta. Unfortunately, the original borders of the Gupta possession are not known. A number of historians feels that these must have coincided with the borders of Magadha, while others include parts of present day west Bengal as well. The vagueness of the answers of this question is because of lack of precise epigraphic data. One of the main written sources available is the writing of the Chinese Pilgrim, T-Tsing.

### **CHANDRAGUPTA I :**

Early in the 4th century Lichchhavi prince was married to the ruler in Magadha, who bore the historic name of Chandragupta. This alliance enhanced his power. Soon he was able to extend dominion over Oudh as well as Magadha and along the Ganges as far as Prayag or Allahabad. Chandragupta I assumed the high-sounding title of Maharajadhiraja (Great king of Kings.) Conceding the importance of his wife, Chandragupta issued gold coins in the joint names of himself, his queen Kumaradevi and the Lichchhavi nation. Emboldened by his success he established a new era. In all likelihood, the reign of Chandragupta I ended about 335 A.D. Even his son was careful to describe himself as the son of the daughter of Lichchhavi. There is some dispute regarding his succession since a few gold coins have been found in the name of Kacha. It is generally held that his name is Samudragupta.

### **SAMUDRAGUPTA:**

Samudragupta had a long reign of 40 or 45 years. He succeeded in making himself the paramount ruler of northern India. To begin with, he subdued the princes of the Gangetic plain who failed to acknowledge his authority. The Allahabad inscription, composed by the court poet Harisena in praise of Samudragupta's spectacular victories, lists the names of kings and countries defeated by the Gupta ruler. Samudragupta succeeded in conquering nine kings of Aryavarta (in the Ganges Valley) and twelve kings from Dakshinapatha that is a region of southern India. In the inscription is also made of two kings of the Nava dynasty, rulers of Ahichhtra. In the next stage he brought the wild forest tribes under his control. Finally, he carried a brilliant expedition into south reaching as far as the Pallava Kingdom. Samudragupta's southern campaign was successful to begin with defeated the king of southern Koshala, Mahendra and then the rulers of the region now known as Orissa, in the vicinity of the river Godavari, and the Pallava King, Vishnugopa, whose seat of power was Kanchi. The other areas mentioned in the inscription have not yet been identified. He did not annex the territories in the Deccan and South, but he performed an Asvamedha sacrifice which had been long in abeyance in order to claim imperial rank. Interestingly, gold medals were struck in commemoration of his Vedic sacrifices.

During Samudragupta's reign the Gupta Empire became one of the largest in the East. Its influence spread and close ties were established with many other states. Not without reason did the court poet Harisena write his eulogy of the valour and might of his king, who, in the words of the inscription, subdued the world. This assessment made by the court poet of old has considerable influence on many modern scholars who tend to idealise Samudragupta and described him as did Vincent A. Smith as the (as the Indian Napoleon) an outstanding individual possessed of remarkable qualities.

By the close of Samudragupta's reign his empire extended in the north to the base of the Himalayas. Excluding Kashmir, probably the eastern limit was the Brahmaputra which the Narmada may be regarded as the frontier in the south. And in the west, the Jamuna and Chambal rivers marked the limits of his empire, Nevertheless, various tribal states in the Punjab and Malwa paid Tributes and homage were paid by the rulers of five frontier kingdoms - Samatata (delta of the Brahmaputra), Davaka (Possibly eastern Bengal), Kamarupa (equivalent to Assam), Karttipura (probably Kumaon and Gharwal) and Nepal.

Apart from the vastness of his kingdom, Samudragupta received homage from a handful of foreign kings. The Kushans princes of the North-West ruled in peace beyond the Indus basin also, friendly relations were maintained with the King Mahendra of Ceylon who had built a splendid monastery at Bodhi Gaya after obtaining the permission of Samudragupta.

Samudragupta was a man of exceptional abilities and unusual varied gifts - warrior, statesman, general, poet and musician, philanthropist, he was all in one. As a patron of arts and letters, he epitomized the spirit of his age. Coins and inscription of Gupta period bear testimony to his "versatile talents and 'Indefatigable energy'".

### **WARRIOR:**

Samudragupta was a great warrior - this is well proved by the account of Harisena in Allahabad Pillar inscriptions although the description is poetic "whose most charming body was covered over with all the beauty of the marks of a hundred confused wounds caused by the blows of battle axes, arrows, spears, pikes, swords, lances, javelins". At least three types of coins - Archer Type, Battle - Axe and Tiger type - represent Samudragupta in martial armour. The coins bearing the epithets like 'parakramah' (valour), 'kritanta-parashu', vyaghra parakramah', prove his being a skilful warrior.

Samudragupta was a brilliant commander and a great conqueror is proved by Harisena's description of his conquests. He mentions that Samudragupta exterminated nine north Indian states, Subdued eighteen Atavika kingdoms near Bajalpur and Chhota Nagpur, and in his blitz-like campaign humbled the pride of twelve South Indian Kings, Nine border tribes, and five frontier states of Samatata, Devaka, Karupa, Nepal and Karttipur 'paid taxes, obeyed orders and performed obeisance in person to the great Samudragupta'. The conquests made him the lord - paramount of India. Fortune's child as he was, he was never defeated in any battle. His Allahabad inscription also stresses his being 'invincible' in battle. Samudragupta's Ashvamedha type of

coins commemorate the Asvamedha sacrifices he performed and signify his many victories and superemacy.

### **SCHOLAR, POET AND MUSICIAN :**

According to Allahabad Prasasti's exaggerated picture, 'samudragupta was a man of many sided genius, who put to shame the preceptor of the lord Gods and Tumburu and Narad and others by his sharp and polished intellect and Chhola -skill and musical accomplishment. His title of Kaviraj (King of poets) is justified by various poetical compositions. Unfortunately none of these compositions have survived.

The presence of the two celebrated literary personalities like Harisena and Vasubandhu definitely proves that he was a great patron of men of letters.

Harisena's commemoration of Samudragupta's knowledge and proficiency in song and music is curiously confirmed and corroborated by the existence of a few rare gold coins depicting him comfortably seated on a high-becked couch engaged in playing the Veena (lyre or lute): the scene is obviously from his private life.

### **Statesman and Administrator :**

Samudragupta displayed greater foresight in his conquests and in the administration and consolidation of his empire. A practical statesman as he was he adopted different policies of different regions. "His treatment of the nine kings of the north India was drastic, they were 'forcibly rooted up' and their territories were incorporated in the dominions of the victor, but he made no attempt to effect the permanent annexation of the twelve southern States; he only exacted a temporary submission from the defeated chiefs, and then withdrew after having despoiled the rich treasures of the south; the policy of Dharm-Vijaya which Samudragupta followed in respect of the kings of south India is symbolic of his statesmanship, and was based on the needs and situations prevailing at that time. It was not an easy task to control effectively the far off regions from Pataliputra particularly when the means of transport and communication were too meager. The later history of India bears testimony to this fact. To the distant tribal states of the Punjab Eastern Rajputana and Malwa he granted autonomy treating them as buffer Kingdoms against the foreign rulers like Sakas and Kushans.

That Samudragupta was an efficient administrator is clear from the very fact that he not only established a vast empire but also left it as a legacy to his successors well-knit and well-organised. The Allahabad Pillar Prasasti makes the mention of officials known as 'Mahadandanayaka' 'Kumaramaty' and 'Sandhivigrahika' and that his administration was severe and tyrannical and that Samudragupta was very firm towards sinners but generous towards righteous people.

### **Vedic religion and philanthropy:**

Samudragupta was the up-holder of Brahmanical religion. Because of his services to the cause of religion the Allahabad inscription mentions the qualifying title of 'Dharma-prachir

Bandhu' for him. But he was not intolerant of other creeds. His patronage to Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu and the acceptance of the request of the king of Ceylon to build a monastery of Bodh Gaya amply prove that he respected other religions. His Asvamedha types of coins with other coins bearing the figures of Lakshmi and Ganga together with her 'vahas' makara (crocodile) testify his faith in Brahmanical religions. Samudragupta had imbibed the true spirit of religion and for that reason, he has been described as 'Anukampavan' (full of compassion) in the Allahabad inscription. He has been described "as the giver of many hundreds of thousands of cows" Personal Appearance, despite the small of the coins and the limitations of reproducing the real image by striking the die, can be judged from his figures on the coins 'tall in stature and of good physique he has strong muscular arms and a fully developed chest. From the above description it is clear that Samudragupta was endowed with no ordinary powers - Physical, intellectual and spiritual. About 380 AD Samudragupta was succeeded by one of his son who was selected as the most worthy of the crown. This ruler is known as Chandragupta-II. Later he took the additional title of Vikramaditya, which was associated by tradition with the Raja of Ujjain who was known for defeating the Sakas and founding the Vikram era.

### **Policy of Matrimonial Alliance**

The most important event of his reign was his matrimonial alliance with the Vakataka king Rudra Sena II and the subjugation of the peninsula of Saurashtra of Kathiawar which had been ruled for centuries by the Saka dynasty as the Western Satraps. Matrimonial alliances occupy a prominent place in the foreign policy of the Guptas. The Lichchhavi alliance had strengthened their position in Bihar; Samudragupta had accepted gifts of maidens from neighbouring courts. With the same purpose, Chandragupta II married the Naga Princess Kubernaga and gave his own daughter, Prabhavati, in marriage to Vakataka king, Rudra Sena II. The Vakataka alliance was master stroke of diplomacy as it secured the subordinate alliance of the Vakataka king who occupied a strategic geographical position. It is noteworthy that Rudra Sena died young and his widow reigned until her sons came of age. Other dynasties of the Deccan also married into Gupta royal family, the Guptas thus ensuring friendly relations to the south of their domain. This also means that Chandragupta II did not renew Samudragupta's southern adventures preferring to seek room for expansion towards the South-west.

### **GUPTA ADMINISTRATION**

The two hundred years of Gupta rule may be said to mark the climax of Hindu imperial tradition. From the point of view of literature, religion, art, architecture, commerce and colonial development, this period is undoubtedly the most important in Indian history. The Guptas inherited the administrative system of the earlier empires. The Mauryan bureaucracy, already converted into a caste, had functioned with impartial loyalty under succeeding empires. Under the Guptas we have direct allusions to viceroys, governors, administrators of

provinces, and of course to ministers of the imperial government. The Mahamatras or provincial viceroys go back to the Mauryan period and continue, in fact, up to the twelfth century as the highest ranks in official bureaucracy. The position of Kumaramatyas, of whom many are mentioned, is not clear as we know of them in posts of varying importance. The gramikas or the village headmen formed the lowest rung in the ladder. Uparikas or governors were also appointed to provinces. In the Damodarpur plates we have mention of an uparika named Arata Datta who was governing like police chiefs, controller of military stores, chief justice (Mahadanda Nayak) leave no doubt about the existence of an organized hierarchy of officials exercising imperial authority in different parts of the country.

1. Monarchs took high sounding titles - Supreme Lord and Great King of Kings - the empire had a philosophy called imperialism but unfortunately it only touched the social and cultural fields it had no political objectives.
2. King was at the apex - princes often Viceroys. Queens were learned. Kumaradevi of Chandragupta I and Dhruvadevi of Chandragupta II appear on the coins.
3. Council of Ministers was often hereditary - Harisena and Saba of Chandragupta II were military generals. Very often, ministers combined many offices - some ministers accompanied the king to the battles. Chief Ministers headed the Ministry.
4. Central Government - each department had its own seal - number of Mahasenapatis to watch over feudatories - foreign ministers like Sandhi probably supervised the foreign policy towards the feudatory states.

The whole organization was bureaucratic as in the case of Mauryas. To some extent, the administration mellowed with the Guptas - Police regulations were less severe - capital punishments rare. Glowing tributes were paid to the Gupta administration by Fahien. There was no needless interference of the government in the lives of people. It was temperate in the repression of crime and tolerant in matters of religion. Fahien could claim that he pursued his studies in peace wherever he chose to reside.

### Provincial administration

Provinces were known as Bhuktis or Deshes. Officers very often of royal blood - maintained law and order and protected people against external aggression - also looked after public utility services. Bhuktis were divided into groups of districts called Pradeshes. Pradeshas were divided into Vishyas or districts. The head of the districts was Vishayapati. Probably the provincial head was assisted by various officials. Damdoar plate inscription mentions number of functionaries - chief banker, Chief Merchants, Chief Artisan, Chief of the writer class etc. Whether they formed part of the non-official council of the districts or were elected is not known.

Districts divided into number of villages - villages being the last unit. Villages looked after houses, streets, temples banks etc. - each village had its own weavers, black-smiths and gold-

smiths, carpenters etc. Village headmen known as gramika were assisted by a council called Panchamandali. Each village had its own seal.

Towns looked after by Purapalas - town councils. A very revealing feature of the administration was the payment of grants in land instead of salaries. Only personnel of the military service were paid cash salaries. The grants in land were of two kinds. The agrahara grant was only to Brahmins and it was tax-free. The second variety of land grant was given to secular officials either as salary or as reward for services. Both these practices were widely used as the time passed by. These grants definitely weakened the authority of the king. Although technically the king could cancel the grants, he could not do so as the time passed by. Not enough evidence on taxation. Officials on tour were provided free rice, curd, milk, flowers, transport, etc. Perhaps they were like modern day officials at the districts level, Local people paid the expenses for apprehending criminals. Three varieties of land - waste land belonging to State which was donated very often. The crown land was rarely donated. The third was the private land. Land revenue and various taxes from the land were collected in the various stages of production. Administration was highly decentralized - police, control of military stores, chief justice, etc. Probably, recruitment ceased to be based on merit. Such an administration required a good standing army and complicated system of checks and counter-checks.

## **GUPTA SOCIETY**

The Gupta age saw the acceptance of the Aryan pattern in northern India. The key status of the Brahmin was established. Good number of books had re-written incorporating the viewpoint of the Brahmins confirming the view that the status of the Brahmin was effective and powerful. Added to this, the increased granting of land to Brahmins strengthened the pre-eminence of the Brahmin in society. The Brahmin thought that he was the sole custodian of Aryan tradition. Not only, this, the Brahmins also monopolized knowledge and the education system.

Also, in the Aryan pattern of a society the master of the house occupied higher status. This indicates the disappearance of the indigenous pre-Aryan culture. Luckily this patriarchal Aryan society did not spread to all parts of India as conflict between Aryan and non-Aryan cultures continued. Although the patriarchal stamp of Aryan and non-Aryan society, as revealed by the low status of women, became increasingly evident, the opposite also appeared in the form of increasing worship of Mother Goddess and fertility cults. In a way, the imposition of Aryan pattern of society on classes other than those of upper castes was incomplete and uncertain. In the post-Gupta era more and more concessions were made to popular cults as borne out by the spread of Saivism and linga worship. Thus, the Aryan pattern of society could not take root in the whole of India.

Although women were idealized in literature, they definitely occupied a subordinate position. Only upper class women were permitted a limited kind of education and that too only for

enabling them to converse intelligently. Occasionally there are references of women teachers and philosophers. Some of the later day evil practices began to appear in this age. Early marriages appeared, and even pre-puberty marriages. It was also suggested that a widow should not only live in strict celibacy, but pre-ferably burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. It gradually came to be followed by the upper classes of central India to begin with and later in eastern India and Nepal.

Some of the towns of South Bihar were large like those of Magadha. People were generally rich and prosperous. Charitable institutions were numerous. Rest houses for travelers existed on the highways. The capital itself had excellent free hospital endowed by benevolent and enlightened citizens.

Interestingly Pataliputra was still a city which inspired awe. Fahien was impressed by it particularly as it possessed two monasteries of interest. According to him, the monks were famous for their learning and students from all quarters attended their lectures. He himself had spent three years in the study of Sanskrit language and the Buddhist scriptures in Patiliputra. Fahien was tremendously impressed by the palaces and halls erected during the time of Asoka in the middle of the city. According to him the massive stone-work adorned with sculptures and decorative carvings appeared to be the work of spirits beyond the capacity of human craftsmen.

Fahien also recorded that on his journey from the Indus to Mathura and Yamuna he saw a large number of monasteries tenanted by thousands of monks. Mathura alone had 20 such institutions.

It is said that people generally observed the Buddhist rule of life. The Chandalas or outcastes lived outside towns and cities. They were required to strike a piece of wood on entering to town or a bazaar so that people might not become polluted by contact with them. This particular observation shows that the manners and attitudes of people and government underwent a great change from the days of the Mauryas. It may be remembered that earlier the people of Taxila offered herds of fat beasts to Alexander to be slaughtered. Even Asoka did not forbid the slaughter of kine. Fahien observed that through out the whole country no body except the lowest out castes killed any living thing. Drank strong liquor, or ate onions and garlic. Probably this view of Fahien has to be taken with a pinch of salt. What all his remark conveys is that the sentiment of ahimsa was probably very strong in mid-India. Possibly, Fahien was only remarking on Buddhists.

The university at Nalanda became an educational center of international fame. Founded in the fifth century by one of the later Gupta emperors, it was endowed munificently by monarchs and rich men from all parts of India and the Hindu colonies. Both Yuan-chwang and I-Tsing have left detailed accounts of their observations. We have also sufficient epigraphical and archaeological records to know more about it. Formal education was imparted both in brahminical institutions and in Buddhist monasteries. In the latter pupils lived for 10 years but



those who sought to join the ranks of monk remained for a longer period. Nalanda was the premier center of Buddhist learning. Primarily formal education was limited to grammar rhetoric prose, composition, logic, metaphysics and medicine. It is interesting to observe that detailed works on veterinary science appeared and that too they primarily related to horses and elephants.

Dramatic entertainment was popular both in court circles and outside. Music concerts and dance performances were primarily held in well-to-do households and before discerning audience. The generality of people derived pleasure in gambling and in witnessing animal fights specially those, of rams, cocks and quails. Athletics and gymnastics were the well-known sporting tournaments of the day. At various festivals both religious and secular amusements of various kinds were witnessed by people. The festival of spring was an important event for merry-making. Although Fahien says that vegetarianism was widely prevalent meat was commonly consumed. Wine both local and imported was drunk and chewing of beetle leaf was a regular practice.

Caste and occupation were related although it was not very strictly maintained. There appears to be some improvement in the status of the shudra as compared to the Mauryan times. There was a clear distinction between shudras and slaves in the legal literature of the day. Also the term 'dvija' came to be restricted to Brahmins. The inscriptions of the day, however indicate that there was social mobility among the sub-castes. The legal text-books primarily base themselves on the work of Manu. The writers of the day were Yajñavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati, Katyayana. Joint family system was well-known.

## **GUPTA ECONOMY**

Trade reached its peak during the Gupta period. The annexation of the territory of the Satraps brought areas of exceptional wealth and fertility into the orbit of the empire. The State gathered abundant revenues in the form of custom duties at the numerous ports on the western coast like Broach Sopara, Cambay and a multitude of centers where most of the trade routes converged. The city of Ujjain is even now regarded as one of the seven sacred Hindu cities, slightly lower than that of Benaras in sanctity. The favored position of the city made a succession of rulers embellish the city with various religious establishments.

Guilds continued to be the nodal points of commercial activity. They were almost autonomous in their internal organization. The government respected their laws. The laws governing the guilds were made by a corporation of guilds in which each guild had a member. The corporation elected a body of advisers who functioned as its functionaries. Some industrial guilds like that of the silk weavers had their own separate corporations. It is also interesting to observe that the Buddhist Sangha was rich enough to participate in commercial activities. At places the Sangha acted as the banker and lent money on interest. This was in addition to their returns from land. They too took one sixth of the produce just as the State.

The rate of interest varied. Very high rates of interest were no longer charged for overseas trade showing that there was increased confidence in that form of trade. Generally the rate was 20 per cent as against 240 of the earlier period. This lowering of the interest rate also reveals abundance of goods and consequent decrease in rate of profit.

Textiles of various kinds were manufactured. The domestic market was considerable. They had also markets in foreign countries. Silk, muslin, calico, Linen, wool and cotton were produced in great quantities. Western India was known for silk weaving. By the end of the Gupta period there was an eclipse of this industry. Possibly the increasing use of the central Asian route and the sea-route to China might have caused this eclipse.

However, ivory work remained at its peak and did stone-cutting and carving. In metal-work copper the chief items of production were those of copper, iron and lead. Bronze also began to be used. The pearl-fishers of western India reaped huge profits in foreign markets. A great variety of precious stones like jasper, agate, quartz and lapis-lazuli were exported. Pottery indeed remained the most important part of industrial production although the earlier elegant black polished ware was no longer produced.

For carrying goods pack animals and ox-drawn carts were used. In certain areas elephants were used for transport. The Ganges, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri were the main waterways.

There was some change in the items of trade as compared to the preceding period. Chinese silk was imported in great quantities. So was ivory from Ethiopia. They imported horses from Arabia. Iran and Bactria increased during this period. Regarding over-seas trade ships regularly crossed to Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the China Seas. Indian trade contacts with East Africa were continued. It is strange to observe that in the period when commercial activity was at its apex the law-makers declared travel by sea a taboo and a great sin. Ritual purity became an obsession with both Brahmins and upper castes. It was held that travel to distant lands would lead to contamination with the mlecchas (impure and non-caste people).

It is generally held that the people's standard of living was very high. The prosperous urban dwellers lived in comfort and ease. Indeed there was a wide variation in the pattern of living. Out-castes were made to live on the outskirts of towns. Also there was no change in the standard of living of villagers as known from the accounts of foreign travelers.

The daily life of a comfortably well-off citizen in towns is described in the Kamasutra. The citizen led a gentle existence devoted to various refinements of life. In social gatherings poetic recitations and compositions were heard. Music was another necessary accomplishment particularly the playing of veena.

## **LEGACIES OF GUPTAS**

### **Science**

In the field of education the sciences of mathematics and astronomy including astrology, were pursued. The famous writers of the day were Aryabhata, Varahamihira, and a little later Brahmagupta. The first two writers definitely absorbed some Greek elements relating to their respective sciences. By the end of the sixth century India had devised the decimal system for the notation of numeral and employed a special sign for zero. This contribution of India to the world in the sphere of practical knowledge was used in inscriptions only a century after Aryabhata.

Most of technical and specialized knowledge remained with guilds. Unfortunately, this knowledge was transmitted to younger generations on hereditary lines. This knowledge of the guilds has no contact with Brahmin institutions and Buddhist monasteries. Exceptionally the only one subject that brought the guilds and others close was mathematics. Understandably great advance was made in the field of mathematics.

The first major works on astronomy were compiled earlier. Some of the fundamental problems of astronomy were tackled by Aryabhata. It was primarily because of his efforts that astronomy was recognized as a separate discipline. Aryabhata also believed that the earth was a sphere and the shadow of the earth falling on the moon caused eclipses. A near contemporary of Aryabhata was Varahamihira who divided the study of astronomy into three distinct branches - astronomy, and mathematics, horoscopy and astrology.

## **GUPTA LITERATURE**

Our knowledge of the development of Sanskrit literature in the early centuries A.D. is based on writings from the Gupta period. However, tradition associates the work of Ashvaghosha and out-standing writer and playwright, one of the founders of Buddhist Sanskrit literature and a major philosopher- with the reign of Kanishak (the early second century AD). Many of his works remain unknown, but fragments of the following poems in Sanskrit have been preserved: Buddhacharita ("A life of the Buddha") Saundarananda (Sundari and Nanda) and the drama shripuprarakarana. (A drama dealing with Shripuputra's Conversion to Buddhism). In ancient India these works of Ashvaghosha had enjoyed wide popularity and the Chinese pilgrim I-tsing who visited India in the seventh century wrote that the "poem" so gladdened the heart of the reader that he never tired of repeating it over and over again. Although the Buddhacharita and the Shripuprarakarana treated only Buddhist themes and propagated the teaching of the Buddha they possessed artistic qualities. Ashvaghosha adheres to the epic tradition and his characters lives are filled with drama and rich emotional experience.

In his plays Ashvaghosha lays the foundation of ancient Indian drama which was to come into its own in the works of such writers as Bhasa, Kalidasa and Shudraka. Thirteen plays are attribute to Bhasa but it is as yet difficult to establish which of these early were written by this remarkable dramatist. Bhasa also made use of the epic tradition, although his plays were constructed strictly according to the laws of classical drama. Some modern scholars maintain, and with ample justification, that a number of the plays attributed to Bhasa are the most

ancient models of Indian tragedy. This was, there is no doubt a bold innovation on the part of Bhasa who thus defined established artistic canon. This trend in ancient Indian drama was developed by the Shudraka, author of the play *Mrichhakatika* (The title Clay Cart), which tells of the ardent love of an impoverished merchant for a courtesan. Possibly the greatest in ancient Indian literature is the work of Kalidasa, (late fourth-early fifth century), poet and dramatist, whose writings represent an illustrious page in the history of world culture. Translations of Kalidasa's works penetrated to the West at the end of the eighteenth century and were well received.

There is good reason to believe that Kalidasa was native of Mandasor in Malwa. It is, therefore, argued that he was brought up in close touch with the court of Ujjain, an active center of commercial and economic activity in western India. Kalidasa's early descriptive poems, the *Ritusamhara* and the *Meghaduta* probably belong to the reign of Chandragupta-II, and his dramas to that of Kumaragupta.

It appears that Kalidasa was a prolific writer but as yet scholars have only discovered three plays : *Shankuntala*, *Malavikagnimitra*, *Vikramorvasi* (*Urvashi won by Valour*), the poem *Meghadutta* (the Cloud Messenger) and two epic poems : the *Kumarasambhava* (the Birth of Kumara) and *Raghuvansha* (*Raghu's Line*)

The core of all Kalidasa writings is man and his emotions, his worldly concerns, his joys and sorrows; His work represents a significant step forward in comparison with the writings of Ashvaghosha who depicted in idealized image of the Buddha and his faithful disciples. Many of Kalidasa's heroes are kings: the poet not only extolled their exploits, but he also condemned their ignoble deeds. Some of Kalidasa's works bear witness to the growth of the epic poem, the so-called mahakavya. Both in his plays and poems Nature and Man's emotions are distinguished by their lyric quality and humanism. Without swerving from earlier traditions Kalidasa stood out as an innovator in many respects. Also, the very fact that tragic themes do not figure with the exception of *Mrichhakatika* by Shudraka shows that the higher strata of society primarily sought entertainment.

In ancient India considerable advances were also made by the theater. In the Gupta age special treatises concerning dramatic art started to appear, which provided detailed expositions of the aims of the theater and theatrical entertainments, the various genres used in the theater etc. When ancient Indian plays first made their way to Europe, many scholars wrote that the Indian theater owed its roots to ancient Greece. However it has since emerged beyond doubt that the theater in India came into being quite independently. More over Indian theatrical tradition goes further back than that of ancient Greece and is much richer as far as theory is concerned.

In the Gupta age the earliest of the Puranas were compiled. These collections of legends about gods, kings and heroes that embody the mythological and cosmological ideas of ancient

Indians were compiled over a very long period and subjected to far-reaching editing and modification.

Some of the Dharmashastras such as the Laws of Yajnavalkya (third century AD) or the laws of Narada (fourth and fifth centuries AD) also date from the early centuries AD. Worthy of note among the landmarks of Sanskrit literature is the Panchatantra (third and fourth centuries AD) a collection of tales and parables which is very popular both in India and beyond its borders. In the early Middle Ages translations of this work appeared in Pehlevi, Syriac and Arabic. In the Middle East the collection was known as all the influence of the Panchatantra on both Eastern and Western literature was considerable.

It was also in the Gupta period that the first works of literature from Southern India written in Tamil appeared. One of the most famous these early works in Tamil was the Kural a collection of parables. The compilation of which is traditionally ascribed to a representative of the farmers' caste, Triuvalluvar. The Kural was undoubtedly based on material derived from folklore and already in ancient times won enormous popularity. In the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Collections of Lyrical poems in Tamil also appeared. The literature of other south Indian appears later in the early Middle Ages.

In the end it may be noted that both Sanskrit poetry and prose were greatly encouraged through royal patronage. However it was literature of the elites since Sanskrit was known only to them but not to the people. The Sanskrit plays of this period show that the characters of high social status speak Sanskrit: whereas those of lower status and women speak Prakrit. This particular feature throws light on the status of Sanskrit and Prakrit in society.

## **GUPTA ART**

The glories of the Gupta age proper (C. 350-650) have been made permanent through the visible creations of its art. Different forms of art, e.g. sculpture painting and terra-cotta attained a maturity balance and naturalness of expression that have for ever remained unexcelled. Some of our most beautiful monuments representing the very acme of India's artistic achievement among which the immortal Ajanta murals take precedence constitute the cultural heritage of the Gupta period.

It is contended that during the Gupta period the proto-type of Hindu temple came into existence. It is rather unfortunate that many of the temples were destroyed by the iconoclasm of Muslims in the first few centuries of the second millennium. Whatever that remains of the Gupta temples the practice of keeping the principal image in the Garbha-griha (womb-house) began from this period. The structure itself was enclosed by a courtyard which in the later period housed a complex of shrines. Also it is from the Gupta period that temples came to be largely built in stone leading to the evolution of the monumental style in Hindu architecture.

This practice of free standing temples was not taken up by the Buddhists. They continued to excavate hills. Some of their caves were richly adorned with paintings like those of Ajanta. In

the field of art the Gupta age witnessed classical levels in music, Architecture, sculpture and painting. The Gupta sculptures exhibit a gracious dignity never to be repeated again in Indian sculpture. Plain robes flowing over the bodies appear as though they are transparent. Transparent drapery is used not to reveal the charms of the flesh but to conceal them. If the schools of Bharhut, Sanchi and Mathura are marked by a sensual earthiness and that of Amravati by vital excited movement the Gupta sculpture suggests serenity and certitude. It is however in the field of sculpture that classical heights were reached in the Gupta period. The Buddha images at Sarnath reflect serenity and contentment mirroring the religious atmosphere of the age. This practice of carving images was picked up by Hinduism also. Since Hinduism created the image as a symbol the images are not representational just like those of Buddhism. The Hindu gods of the Gupta period were primarily incarnations of Vishnu.

The Gupta sculptural style probably grew out of the Kushan style that survived at Mathura. In early fifth century a distinctive icon was greeted. It is represented by a red sand-stone figure of a standing Buddha with an immense decorated halo. According to authorities the Mathura style was refined and perfected at Sarnath. A great number of Buddhist sculptures were unearthed here. One unique group is known as the 'wet Buddhas' because the sculptures look as if they have been immersed in water. The Mathuran string fold motif is omitted and the sheer muslin Sanghati appears to cling to the body and reveal its basic form.

A great example of Gupta sculpture created at Sarnath is that of the seated Buddha preaching the Law, carved of Chunar sandstone. This piece harmonises refined simplicity and Indian love of decoration. This particular image influenced India and also had a significant and lasting effect on brahmanical art. In this sculpture the Buddha is seated as a yogi on a throne and performs the Dharmas Chakri mudra.

From the end of the fifth century on first under the onslaught of the Huns and later with the advent of Islam, many of the products of the Gupta art, both Buddhist and Hindu were destroyed.

A remarkable piece of Gupta metal-casting found at Sultanganj in Bihar is nearly feet high. Another metal figure but of a smaller size in bronze was found in U.P.

A group of small ivory images of Buddhas and Bodhisattavas found in the Kashmiri area are prime examples of late Gupta art from about the eighth century. Even during the Kushan period sculptures of Hindu subjects such as the Sun God Surya and of Vishnu were produced at Mathura and elsewhere. During the Gupta period an major group of brahminical sculptures appeared dealing with the various aspects of Vishnu. In the Udaigiri rock-cut shrine near Bhopal Vishnu is presented as the cosmic boar Varaha. The figures of Yakshi were also culled in the Udaigiri shrine. They now appear as river deities. This transformation can be clearly seen in a figure from the doorway of a Gupta temple at Besnagar nearby. It appears to represent the sacred river Ganga. The goddess stands in the classic tribhanga.

Paramount among Hindu sculptures of the Gupta period are the reliefs on the exterior walls of the ruins of the Dasavatara Temple at Deogarh near Jhansi. Vishnu is shown asleep on the coils of the giant multi-headed serpent Ananta. Brahma is depicted separately seated on a lotus blossom. In the upper reaches of the relief deities including Indra and Shiva are represented. At the base of this sculptural relief there is a panel depicting events from the epic poem the Ramayana.

Also it is interesting to note that the earliest surviving examples of painting in Ajanta Caves belong to the Gupta period. In Cave 1 we see Gupta architecture wrought from solid stone. This cave is also a virtual museum of Buddhist art. From every part of the cave we see paintings depicting the rich and complex Buddhist world of the late fifth century. The subject matter of the paintings is the various lives and incarnations of the Buddha as told in the Jataka tales. The Bodhisattava Padmapani in the tribhanga pose of sculpture holds a blue lotus. This figure expresses remote calm. The absence of shadows suggests an unworldly light. This light is present in all the paintings of Ajanta and is partly the result of the techniques used by the artists.

Another elegant Bodhisattava figure in Cave in is shown surrounded by his queen and ladies of the court. It recreates an episode from the Jataka story. In cave 19 we have a fully developed Chaitya façade to Gupta style. It has over-abundance of Buddha images.

The characteristic features of Gupta art are refinement or elegance simplicity of expression and dominant spiritual purpose. An ensemble of these characteristics give Gupta art an individuality. In the first place this art is marked by refinement and restraint which are the signs of a highly developed cultural taste and aesthetic enjoyment. The artist no longer relies on volume to give an impression of grandiose but focuses his attention on elegance with is not lost in the exuberance of ornaments. The keynote of his art is balance and freedom from the dead weight of conventions. The dictum is at once apparent if we compare the standing life-size figure of the Gupta Buddha of Yasadinna with the colossal standing Bodhisattava in the Sarnath Museum both from Mathura and in red sand stone.

Another characteristic of Gupta art is the concept of beauty for which we have a very appropriate term *rupam* used by Kalidasa. The men and women in this art-loving age applied themselves to the worship of beautiful form in many ways. But aesthetic culture did not weaken the strong structure and stamina of life or bedim its supreme objective of yielding to the riotous worship of the séances. Art was worshipped in order to deepen the consciousness of the soul and awaken it to a new sense of spiritual joy and nobility. Kalidasa the supreme genius and poet of this age has expressed this attitude of life devoted to beauty in a sentence addressed to Paravati the goddess of personal Charm by her consort Siva: 'O fair damsel the popular saying that beauty does not lead to sin is full of unexceptional truth'. The path of virtue is the path of beauty- this appears to be the guiding impulse of life in the Gupta age. To

create lovely forms and harness them to the needs of higher life - this was the golden harmony that made Gupta art a thing of such perpetual and in-exhaustible attraction.

## **GUPTA RELIGION**

Both Buddhism and Hinduism were widely prevalent. The characteristic features of Hinduism enabled it to survive till today; whereas the new features of Buddhism led to its final decline. Although Buddhism still appealed in matters of ritual making it to be regarded as a sect of the latter. Jainism escaped from this fate. It remained unchanged; and therefore it continued to be supported by the merchant communities of western India. Added to this in some areas of the Deccan royalty patronized Jainism although it ceased in the 7th century A.D. Although Buddhism gradually declined within the country it spread beyond the frontiers of India first to central Asia and then to China and also to South-East Asia.

Another important development of the 5th century was the emergence of a curious cult associated with the worship of women deities and fertility cults. These became the nucleus of a number of magical rites which later came to be known as antiracism Buddhism too came under this influence leading to the evolution of a new branch of Buddhism in the 7th century called vajrayana or Thunderbolt Vehicle Buddhism. In this Buddhism female counterparts came to be added to the male figures known as taras. This particular cult exists even today in Nepal and Tibet.

Devi worship - the cult of the mother goddess the oldest of all religions - also seems to have received the imprimatur of orthodoxy during this period. We have the evidence of Gunadhya that tantric forms of worship were prevalent in the first century B.C. Kalidasa himself seems to have been a worshipper of the Devi. His name itself proclaims it as it is obviously an assumed one which means the servant of Kali. Besides the benedictory verse in Raghuvamsa clearly states the Sakta doctrine of the indivisibility of Siva and parvati. The God Mahakala of Ujjain whose worship the poet describes with manifest devotion was as we know from Gunadhya's story incorporated in Kathasarit Sagara adorned with tantric rites. In fact not only the different modes of Devi worship but the ceremonials of the tantric system in their various forms were well-known in the Gupta period.

While the above developments occurred in Buddhism and Jainism Hinduism developed some distinct characteristics which exist even till today. The first is the worship of images which superseded sacrifices. The sacrifices of the olden days were transformed into symbolic sacrifices into the images in the poojas. This naturally led to the decline of the priests who were dominant in sacrifices. Worship of god indeed became the concern of the individual but regulating individual social behaviour still remained the concern of the Brahmin. Man-made traditions of the past began to be treated as sacred laws. Orthodoxy attempted to maintain its power by rigid rules of exclusion. However seeing the difficulty of enforcing the sacred laws a broader frame of difference came to be evolved as the four ends of man-religion and social law (dharma) economic welfare (artha) pleasure (kama) and salvation of the soul (moksha).



Then onwards it is being maintained that a correct balance of the first three could lead to the fourth.

Among those who practiced religion in a serious manner two sects came into existence - Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Broadly speaking the first was mostly prevalent in northern India while the second in southern India. At this time the tantric beliefs left their mark on Hinduism. Shakti cults came into existence the subtle idea being that the male can be activated only by being united with the female. It was thus that Hindu gods acquired wives and both came to be worshiped. Apart from antiracism the appearance of this feature of Hinduism was probably promoted by the persistence of the worship of the mother Goddess which probably could be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization.

Along with these developments the ground was prepared for the concept of svataras also. Hindu thinkers evolved the concept of cyclical theory of time. The cycle was called a kalpa. The kalpa itself is divided into fourteen periods. At the end of each period, the universe re-emerges with Manu, the primeval man. Each of these kalpas is further divided into great intervals and ultimately into Yugas or periods of time. As per the concept of this theory of time we are in the fourth of the Yugas, that is, the Kaliyuga with which the world will end. The Kaliyuga is also associated with which the world will reach its end 10 the 10th incarnation of Vishnu.

### **Philosophy**

All these developments in Hinduism were associated with disputations between Buddhists and brahmins. These debates centre around six systems of thought which came to be known as the six systems of Hindu philosophy - Nyaya or analysis based on logci, Vaisheshika or brood characteristics according to which the universe is composed of atoms as distinct from the soul' sankhya or enumeration recognizing dualism between matter and soul or athemeis, yoga or application relying on control over the body in order to acquire knowledge of the ultimate law of the Vedas as opposed to pose-Vedic thought, and Vedanta to refute the theories of non-Vedas. As known from the above analysis the first four schools are empirical in nature, whereas, the latter two are metaphysical. In later ages mimamasa and Vedanta gained over the others.

The above discourses were at the elite level and the generally of people came to possess their own books of knowledge. The Puranas as known to us today were composed in this period historical traditions as recorded by the brahmins. They were originally composed in parts but in this period they came to be re-written in

classical Sanskrit. Later, knowledge relating to Hindu sex, rites and customs came to be added to them in order to make them sacrosanct.

### **POST-GUPTA PERIOD**

The political scene in India from the decline of the Guptas until the rise of Harsha was bewildering. Large scale displacement of peoples continued for some time. Small kingdoms vied with each other for the heritage of Guptas. Northern India was divided into four kingdoms of later Guptas of Magadha, the Maukharis, the Pushyabhutis and the Maitrakas. The Maukharis first held the region of western U.P. around Kanauj. Gradually they ousted the later Guptas and made them move to Malwa. The Pushyabhuti is ruled to Thaneshwar north of Delhi. They had a marriage alliance with the Maukharis. After the death of the last Maukhari king, probably the Maukhari kingdom and that of Pushyabhuti were united into one kingdom. Probably the Maitrakas were of Iranian origin and ruled in Gujarat. They developed Vallabhi as their capital which became an important center of learning. On the periphery of these four kingdoms a number of small principalities were continuously fighting with each other. All the kingdoms came into prominence after the Hun invasion since it left a political vacuum in northern India.

Although the political picture was discouraging, there were a few formative trends in this period. The Gupta imperial tradition seems to have continued. Numerous inscriptions of kings reveal that the kings claimed descent from the Gupta-Vakataka dynasties. In the same period even the character of the Hun invaders underwent change. Toramana was no savage but a Hinduised frontier king attacking a decaying empire. He ceased to be a foreigner. His successor, Mihirakula, was undoubtedly one of the known tyrants of history. Let by Baladitya Gupta, the last great monarch of the imperial dynasty, the rulers of north India combined to attack him and overthrow his power in a great battle of 528 A.D. The Hun dynasty ended with it.

After this event the kingdoms of the age carried on the traditions of the empire. The Vindhyas the Vakatakas ruled with effective authority. In the Gangetic valley the Maukhari kings consolidated their rule. True, the imperial tradition was under eclipse, but the country, as a whole was peaceful and prosperous and it was not subject to anarchical disruption.

The University of Nalanda flourished in the sixth century. Saintly Sthiramati was its head in the middle of the sixth century. Dharmapala, who extended his patronage to the university in the latter half of the century, was an eminent scholar. As a matter of fact, Nalanda witnessed its golden period in this period.

It is also to be kept in mind that classical Sanskrit reached its perfection in the sixth century. Bharavi, Kumaradasa and Dandin among the poets and Vishakhadatta among the dramatists lived in the sixth century A.D. Some historians ascribe the development of Indian mathematics and astronomy to the sixth century. Varahamihira is said to have died in 527 A.D. Aryabhata was born in 476. It can equally be said that philosophy, logic and Mimamsa matured during this period. Buddhist and Hindu systems of logic witnessed their golden age. It is also noteworthy that vernacular literatures began to grow. Prakrit evolved into a literary

language possessing its own grammars. It was this development that enabled Rajasekhara and other to create classical literature of Prakrit in the next century.

Thus the old view that the sixth century was a period of anarchy and the age of Harsha that followed it was the last glow of ancient period, cannot be sustained. On the other hand the sixth century was a germinal period which sowed the seeds of later developments.

### **DECLINE OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE**

The last great king of the Gupta was Skanda Gupta was ascended the throne about 455 A.D. Even during the later years of Kumar Gupta's reign, the empire was attacked by a tribe called Pushyamitra but it was repulsed, And immediately after the accession of Skanda Gupta, Hunas made inroads, but they too were repelled.

However, fresh waves of Invaders arrived and shattered the fabric of the Gupta Empire. Although in the beginning the Gupta king Skanda Gupta tried effectively to stem the march of the Hunas into India, his successors proved to be weak and could not cope with the Huna invaders, who excelled in horsemanship and who possibly used stirrups made of metal, Although the Huna power was soon overthrown by Yasodharman of Malwa, the Malwa prince successfully challenged the authority of the Guptas and set up Pillars of victory commorating his conquest (AD 532) of almost the whole of northern India. Indeed Yasodharman's rule was short lived, but he dealt a severe blow to the Gupta empire.

The Gupta empire was further undermined by the rise of the feudatories. The governors appointed by the Gupta kings in north Bengal and their feudatories in Samatata or south-east Bengal broke away from the Gupta control. The later Gutpas of Magadha established their power in Bihar. Besides, the Maukharis rose to power in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and had their capital at Kanauj. Proably by AD 550 Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and passed out of Gupta hands. And the rulers of Valabhi established their authority in Gujarat and Western Malwa

#### **ANOTHER CAUSE:**

After the reign of Skanda Gupta (467 AD) any Gupta coin or inscription has been found in western Malwa and Saurashtra. The migration of guild of Silk weavers from Gujarat to Malwa in AD 473 and their adoption of non-productive professions show that there was not much demand for cloth produced by them. The advantages from Gujarat trade gradually disappeared. After the middle of the fifth century the Gupta kings made desperate attempts to maintain their gold currency by reducing the content of pure gold in it. The loss of western India complete by the end of the fifth century, must have deprived the Gutpas of the rich revenues from trade and commerce and crippled them economically, and the princes of Thaneswar established their power in Haryana and then gradually moved on to Kanauj.

#### **DYNASTIC DISSENSIONS AND WEAK RULERS:**

There is evidence to show that following the death of Kumaragupta and Skandagupta, there were civil wars and struggles for the throne. For instance, we have the successors of

Buddhagupta, highlighting the rule of more than just one king. Those were Vinayagupta in Bengal and Bhanugupta in Iran.

Absence of law of primogeniture along with strong centralized authority in ancient and medieval periods led to chaos. Thus we see that the resources of the empire were frittered away in petty squabbles and wars for the throne.

Besides circumstances weakening the Gupta monarchy, the very personalities of the later Gupta Kings contributed to the ultimate fall of this dynasty. They were not only men of weak character but also some of them followed pacifism that affected other spheres of administration, particularly that of military efficiency.

#### FOREIGN INVASIONS:

Foreign invasions was the second major factor in the decline and disappearance of the Guptas. The invasion of barbaric tribe Pushyamitra was not the decisive. A far more important invasion was that of the White Huns, who, after settling in the Oxus valley, invaded India. First appeared during the reign of Buddhagupta. Again they reappeared under the command of Toramana who annexed a large portion of the north-western region including parts of Modern U.P. He followed by his son, Mihirakula, who became the overlord of north India. Indeed he was defeated by Yashodharman of Malwa but the repercussions of these invasions were disastrous for the Gupta Empire.

#### INTERNAL REBELLIONS :

As a result of the weakening of Central Authority a number of feudal chieftans, principally those of the north-western region, assumed the status of independent rulers with more or less some names in this regard such as Maitrakas (of Kathiawar), Panivarajaks (of Bundhelkhand), Unchalpas, Laxman in Allahabad. Etc.

After the reign of Buddhagupta, the status of certain, governors of North Bengal and Yamuna - Narmada area around Magadh too assumed independence and became to be known as the later Guptas.

By far one of the most important rebellions was that of Yashodharman of western Malwa who became independent and established his kingdom. He defeated Mihirakula and seems to have made extensive conquests from the Himalayas to Brahmaputra. However, his empire did not last very long. Nevertheless, it set a pattern for other feudal chieftans, who in due course, broke away from Central authority.

Last but not the least, we might note that the change in the Gupta polity from one of militancy to that of pacifism greatly affected the composition of the empire. We do have instance some of the later Gupta kings who changed from Hinduism to Buddhism and this was reflected in the total military inefficiency of the later Guptas.

Apart from these three major groups of causes, that led to the final disappearance of the Gupta empire, it is to be borne mind that no empire after the Mauryas was a reality. Ver often they were total fictions. With the disappearance of the Mauryan empire no empire in its full connotation came into existence in India since we had no tradition like that of the Greeks where it is held that the State comes into existence for the necessities of life but continues to exist for the good of life, and man, by nature, is a political animal. Somehow, after the Mauryan era the thinking of India became apolitical. The first factor that contributed for this outlook of Indians was the emergence of feudalism about which evidence is there from the days of the Satavahanas. This tendency grew in the Christian ara and was firmly established by the seventh century AD.

Along with this development one more saboteur of political consciousness was the religious perception of ancient Indians. Beginning before the Christian are it came to be gradually established that the kingship has its own dharma known as rajya-dhrma while the people had a handul of dharmas like varnashrama dharma and the grihadharma. All these dharmas led the individual loyalty or perception towards a non-political entity. This thinking is given religious sanction by the priestly order. This thinking is given religious sanction by the priestly order of the day. Thus the State never was the architectonic factor in the life of ancient Indian except during the Mauryan era. It is this perception of ancient India that made the emergence and disappearance of hundreds of States mere non-events.

## **HARSHA**

Harsha on coming to the throne set himself to bring the whole of Aryavarta under his sway, which he did in some cases by conquest, in some cases by alliance as with Madhava-Gupta of Magadha and Kumara of Kamarupa. Nepal and Kashmir were also within his empire, While his authority north of the Vindhya was complete Harsha's arms met with a definite set back when he advanced towards the south. The emperor of Aryavarta was opposed and defeated on the banks of the Tapti by pulakesin II, the monarch of Chalukyas, who himself assumed the title of emperor on the basis of his victory over Harsha. After the defeat at the hands of Pulakesin, he seems to have turned more to the arts of peace. Himself a dramatist and a poet of great distinction, Harsha's court attracted the greatest writers of the day, like Bana, Mayura, Hardatta and Jayasena. The Chinese pilgrim lived at his court and we have therefore a trustworthy description of the life of the times. In his personal religion Harsha was a follower of the Buddha; but as in the case of other Buddhist kings he remained a Hindu. In his own books it is to Shiva that he prays. Daily he fed five hundred brahmins along with a thousand Buddhist monks. At all ceremonial festivals of the king, Shiva and Vishnu received full honours along with the Buddha.

However, artificial glow illumines the reign of Harsha. It is important to note that Harsha's empire was one which was composed of powerful independent monarchs, who accepted the suzerainty of Harsha more as a personal homage than as subordination to an empire. The

great dynasty of the Maukharis, though allied to that of Harsha, ruled over the eastern portion of their hereditary dominions. Madhava-Gupta of Magadha was a powerful monarch. The Maitrekas of Vallabhi and Kumara Bhaskara of Kamarupa were hardly vassals of the empire. The only thing is that all of them recognized the personal greatness of Harsha and accepted him as a suzerain. Thus, his dazzling personality alone gave a semblance of unity to the empire which extended from the Indus to the Brahmaputra.

### **ADMINISTRATION OF HARSHA**

The administration of Harsha is one in name only. Whatever information we have on it does not speak well of it. And the only relieving feature of this picture is the striking personality of Harsha. Harsha's interest indirect supervision of administration is one plus point. Hiuen-tsang writes that "If there was any irregularity in the manners of the people in the cities, he went amidst them." Inscriptions reveal that Harsha had stayed in two places during his travels. Harsha traveled in great state and his camps looked very impressive because he was surrounded by a number of guests. Hiuen-Tsang writes: "The king's day was divided into three periods of which one was given to the affairs of government, and two were devoted to religious work. He was indefatigable, and the day was too short for him." The way in which Harsha worked was recorded by Bana also. The emperor appointed provincial governors known as Lokapalas who were posted at chosen centers in different quarters. The provinces were known as Bhuktia, districts as Vishayas, sub-divisions of districts as Patakas and Villages as gramas.

Next to the sovereign were the chief minister and the mantriparishad. According to Bhandi, a cousin of Rajayavardhana, Harsha's accession to throne was approved by the parishad. This account is corroborated by the Chinese pilgrim. Avanti was the supreme minister of war and peace, according to Bana. For maintaining law and order, a great number of military and executive officers were employed. At times, some of the high officers were combined in one and the same persons. A few other names also are known: Simhanada was Harsha's senapati. Harsha treated him with great respect as he was a scholarly man. Also, we hear of a handful of officials who themselves were chiefs indicating that in all probability Harsha's sovereignty was of a confederate nature. According to Hiuen-Tsang, both ministers and officials received land grants instead of salaries. One-fourth of the crown land was set apart for the endowment of great public servants and another one-fourth for the expenses of government and State worship.

The army of Harsha was organized into four traditional divisions. Probably 60,000 elephants and 100,000 horses. However, some of the regions were not free from brigands as is known from the experience of Hiuen-Tsang who was waylaid.

Lawlessness was not the order of the day but there were plots against kings including one against Harsha. The offender was punished by imprisonment for life. For offence against social morality the punishment was either mutilation of limbs or deportation. Trial by ordeal

was common. Justice was harsh, but as the Chinese pilgrim maintains, the government was very generous and did not make any large demands either on the liberties or pockets of the people.

In general, the country was not entirely free from brigands who made traveling very risky. Hiuen-Tsand himself twice had narrow escapes from the clutches of bandits; Villagers haunted by the fear plunder often questioned the right of the King to rule according to Bana. However, as Hiuen-Tsand states that since the government was honestly administered, the people lived on good terms and the criminal class was very small.

Regarding administration of provinces and villages very meager information is available. The territory of the empire was called *rajya* or *desa*, which was divided into *bhuktis*, *visayas* and *gramas*. The governor of the provinces was, at times, a member of the royal family. The governor appointed his subordinate officials. Probably, the officials mentioned in the Gupta period continued to work in the time of Harsha. Besides the officials of states non-official element was also associated with the local administration. The Madhuban plate of Harsha (grant of an *agrahara* to some persons) states that the grant was made in the presence of all his chief officers and the resident people who were summoned as witnesses to this transaction. Such orders of the king were, at times, signed by Harsha himself. The Banskhera plate was signed by Harsha and described as one given under his own hand and seal. Often the king's orders were delivered through messengers to local officers, who in turn, grew up necessary charters and handed over the grant to the grantees.

Finally, regarding fiscal administration we get some information from inscriptions. In all probability, land was surveyed measured and divided into holdings with well-defined boundaries. The holdings were of different sizes. At times these were served by common land which in certain cases, had irrigation wells. The names of owners of land were entered in the village records. It appears that record of village census was also kept. It is certain that land revenue was only a modest percentage of total yields. Taxation was light-revenue from crown lands amounted to only one -sixth of the crop, according to traditional standard. The other sources of revenue were trade, and duties at ferries and barrier stations.

The enlightened character of Harsha's administration is shown by the creation of a department of records and achieves. Both good and bad were faithfully recorded in officials' annals and state papers while instance of public calamities of good fortunes are set forth in details. Taxation was light. The land tax was one-sixth of the crop. According to tradition, standard revenue was also derived from trade

In this manner, we have very sketchy knowledge of Harsha's administration. Indeed the administration was not well integrated as Harsha domain itself was so shaky. However, the fact that the king devoted himself to the welfare of the people by traveling in the country and the generosity with which he gave grants, shows that he was one of the illustrious rulers of India the manner of Ashoka and Shalivahana.

## **Biggest Political Dominations: Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas**

The decline of the Gupta empire in the 6th century A.D. was followed through the rise of a number of ruling homes such as the Maukhri of Kanauj and Pushyabhuti of Thanesar. Harshavardhana who belonged to the family of Pushyabhuti of Thanesar became the ruler of Kanauj, filling the vacuum after the death of his brother-in-law, the Maukhri ruler of Kanauj. Ever as Harshavardhana made Kanauj the capital of his empire, it remained the imperial centre of North Indian politics for many centuries, even though its political fortunes changed regularly. This implied a shift in political domination from the east to the west. Pataliputra, which was a significant centre throughout the reigns of both the Mauryas and Guptas, was now replaced through Kanauj since the centre of North Indian political dominance.

We shall most strive to understand the political history of the biggest local dominations of North India. Later as suggested, talk about the intricate procedures of formation of polity which have been understood in dissimilar methods through dissimilar historians. Before engaging with those, it is necessary to have an overview of the succession of ruling dynasties that ruled in these areas throughout the early medieval era since also the sequence of significant battles won and lost through these dynasties. To start with, let us seem at Bengal. Bengal had been section of the Maurya and Gupta empires. For extensive stretches of its early history Bengal is not recognized to have played an significant role in the political history of India even after the decline of the Guptas. The first significant ruler of Bengal was Sasanka who ruled roughly flanked by 606-637 A.D. Sasanka is measured the first historically recognized ruler of the region that constituted Bengal. He was also the first in this area to have extended his political sovereignty in excess of regions that place distant beyond the geographical frontier of Bengal. Sasanka had become the master of the entire of Bengal with his capital at Karnasuvarna, and had possibly extended his rule since distant since Orissa. He even advanced against Kanauj which was engaged through the rulers of the Maukhari dynasty at that time. Sasanka's military adventures proved successful and this ultimately led to the development of hostilities flanked by him and the rulers of Thanesar. Harshavardhana, who eventually became king of Thanesar, set out to defeat Sasanka but was unsuccessful. Ultimately, Harsha succeeded in his

conquest of Sasanka's empire only after the latter's death. The death of Sasanka was followed through a era of political decline in the fortunes of Bengal. It was attacked through Yasovarman of Kanauj and Laitaditya of Kashmir and later on possibly through the king of Kamrupa. It resulted in the weakening of central power and the rise of self-governing chiefs. It looks that the prevailing anarchy led the chiefs to elect someone described Gopala since the ruler of the entire kingdom.

Gopala, who went on to become the founder of the Pala dynasty in Bengal, consolidated his rule in excess of Bengal and brought the much needed continuity and prosperity to the area.



The date of his accession is not recognized in definite conditions but is usually whispered to be in the second half of the 8th century A.D. He died in relation to the 780 A.D. and was succeeded through his son Dharmapala.

R.C. Majumdar defines Dharmapala since one of the greatest kings that ever ruled in Bengal and one who raised the glory of the kingdom to great heights. It may be mentioned that in the well-known tripartite thrash about flanked by the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas, to set up manage in excess of Northern India, Dharmapala played an extremely crucial role. In information for a while he supervised to attain a supreme location in North India. Just as to R.C. Majumdar, Dharmapala spent his entire life in military campaigns. After having suffered defeat at the hands of Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas, he went on to set up an empire that embraced a considerable section of Northern India. Details in relation to his reign are recognized mostly from copper plate inscriptions established at a place described Khalimpur. Separately from his military campaigns, Dharmapala is also recognized for his patronage of Buddhism. He founded several Buddhist monasteries but, it was the well-known Vikramshila University founded through him, that earned him a lot of fame.

Dharmapala was succeeded through his son Devapala who ruled for in relation to the 40 years. Just as to R.C. Majumdar his fame had reached since distant since the far isles of the Indian Archipelago. Devapala also appeared since a powerful king. Devapala was the last in the middle of the row of powerful kings of the Pala dynasty. He was succeeded through Vigrahapala, who ruled for a short era. It is said that Vigrahapala preferred an ascetic life to an aggressive military career. He was followed in succession through Narayanapala, whose reign saw the decline of the glorious rule recognized through the Palas. Of the Pala kings, both Dharmapala and Devapala, won fame and glory through their victories in the well-known Tripartite thrash about. This was a thrash about amongst the Pratiharas, Palas and Rashtrakutas for gaining victory in excess of the imperial capital of Kanauj and for establishing manage in excess of Northern India.

In relation to the similar time that the Palas had recognized a strong monarchy in Bengal, the Pratiharas under their king, Vatsaraja, seemed to have ruled in excess of big sections of Rajputana and Central India. While the Palas were expanding in westward direction, the Pratiharas were expanding their kingdom towards the East. Clash flanked by the two dominations was therefore inevitable. Through the time the first encounter flanked by the two took place, the Palas seemed to have extended their kingdom at least since distant since Allahabad. It is not clear who the Pala king was at that time. It may have been either Gopala or Dharmapala. In the meantime, rulers of the Rashtrakuta dynasty, who had already recognized their supremacy in the Deccan were trying to extend their dominance in excess of North India. The Rashtrakuta king Dhruva having crossed the Vindhyas, first defeated the Pratihara king Vatsaraja and then advanced upon Dharmapala and defeated him. With this encounter which took place somewhere in the Ganga Yamuna doab, began the tripartite thrash about for supremacy flanked by the Palas, Pratiharas and Rashtrakutas.

However the Rashtrakutas achieved complete triumph in the beginning, the death of Dhruva was followed through chaos in the Rashtrakuta kingdom. Dhruva's son Govinda III was occupied in a thrash about against an alliance of twelve kings of South India. The Palas and Pratiharas made exploit of the respite that this growth gave them. Of the two, Dharmapala was quick to recover. He took advantage of this and made his suzerainty to be acknowledged through approximately all significant states of North India. He supervised to capture Kanauj and lay his own nominee on the throne. He held a great imperial assembly in the attendance of a big number of vassal kings at Kanauj. In this assembly he consecrated himself since the overlord of the entire of Northern India. At this time Dharmapala's suzerainty was carried in regions covering Central Punjab, and almost certainly extended upto the Sindhu, Kangra valley, East Punjab, Jaipur, Malwa and almost certainly also Berar. This is inferred from the list of vassal chiefs who attended his imperial assembly. With this event, Bengal appeared from oblivion and rose to the location of a supreme domination in North India. The king of Bengal became the supreme head of an empire that stretched from the Western section of North India to the East up to Central India.

Though, this situation did not last for extensive, given the ever-changing nature of political manage throughout this era. The Pratiharas supervised to recover under the leadership of Nagabhatta, the son and successor of Vatsaraja. Nagabhatta attacked and defeated the nominee whom Dharmapala had placed on the throne of Kanauj, which resulted in a clash with Dharmapala himself. In a battle fought against Dharmapala, Nagabhatta appeared victorious. After this success, Nagabhatta conquered many territories, including a big portion of the territories under the manager of Dharmapala. In this situation, Dharmapala almost certainly sought the aid of Govinda III, the Rashtrakuta king, to check the advances of Nagabhatta. Govinda III, either in response to this or on his own initiative, undertook a military expedition to North India. Nagabhatta who was unable to resist such an onslaught was forced to flee. His territory was overrun through the Rashtrakutas who then proceeded northwards.

Though, even after establishing an empire that stretched from South to North Govinda III was unable to sustain his conquests, due to internal dissensions within the empire. In this scenario, Dharmapala supervised to gain the upper hand. He looks to have recovered his empire to a big extent. At the time of his death approximately 815 A.D., his son Devapala became the undisputed ruler of a big section of North India. He is said to have defeated the Dravidas, Gurjaras and Hunas and conquered Utkala and Kamarupa. The court poet called his empire since extending from the Himalayas in the North to the Vindhya in the South and from the Bay of Bengal in the East to the Arabian sea in the West.

The Palas henceforth ruled since a regional domination in Eastern India. They continually faced invasions and occasional raids through the Kalachuris, Chandellas and Rashtrakutas who sometimes conquered portions of their territory. North and West Bengal were engaged through the Kambojas in the latter half of the 10th century. Taking advantage of this the Kalachuris advanced against the Palas since distant since Mithila. Approximately the similar

time, the Chola king Rajendra Chola and a Chalukya king also invaded the Pala territories. It goes to the credit of Mahipala I, the reigning Pala king of the time, to have defended his kingdom successfully against the Kalachuris, Cholas and Chalukyas and also to have recovered territories from the Kambojas. But South and West Bengal were ruled through many self-governing chiefs and was not under the manage of the Palas.

Though, Mahipala's successor, Nayapala and his successor Vighrahapala III sustained to be occupied in a consistent thrash about against the Kalachuris of Tripuri. Vighrahapala III was succeeded through his son Mahipala II whose reign witnessed a lot of upheavals. Few of the vassal chiefs rose against him. Mahipala II tried to resist these vassals, but was defeated and killed. Divya, an official who belonged to the Kaivarta caste recognized manage in excess of North Bengal. Mahipala II's brothers Surapala II and Ramapala took shelter in Magadha. Surapala II died soon after and Ramapala took in excess of, but through this time practically the entire of Bengal had passed out of Pala manage. A dynasty of kings with names ending in Varman, ruled in excess of East Bengal, while Divya the rebel Kaivarta chief ruled in excess of North Bengal. The remaining territories of

Bengal were under the manage of dissimilar self-governing chiefs who possibly still nominally acknowledged the over lordship of the Palas.

Ramapala was able to mobilize the support of a big number of chiefs who helped him to defeat and kill the son of Divya and wrest back North Bengal. Ramapala also forced the Varman ruler of East Bengal to submit to his power. He also conquered Kamarupa and sent an expedition against the Gahadavalas. He also interfered in the politics of Orissa. In short, Ramapala was successful in restoring the strength and prestige of the Pala kingdom to a big extent. Though, the Pala kingdom disintegrated throughout the reign of his two sons Kumarapala and Madanapala. Even while Madanapala was busy defending his kingdom from invasions, a new dynasty described the Senas rose in West Bengal. The first significant ruler of this dynasty was Vijayasena, who defeated Madanapala and conquered Bengal. He advanced since distant since Assam and Mithila and also conquered a section of Magadha, although the Pala king still ruled in excess of a portion of Magadha.

Vijayasena was succeeded through his son Ballalasena. Ballalasena who was a powerful king since well since a learned scholar, was succeeded through his son Lakshmanasena. Lakshmanasena whose reign began in 1178 A.D., had an illustrious military career. He achieved few success in Orissa, fought against the Gahadavalas and was able to advance successfully since distant since Banaras and Allahabad and was also in possession of a big section of Bihar. Lakshmanasena was also a learned scholar and a patron of poets. With him ended the reign of the Sena dynasty and Bengal passed into the hands of the Turkish rulers of Delhi.

Let us now analyze the political growths in the area of Orissa which also appeared since a significant local kingdom with its distinctive local custom. We have already learnt in relation

to the Sasanka's conquest of Orissa. After the death of Sasanka, Orissa, since we already know was overrun through Harsha. Approximately the transitional of the 7th century A.D. Sainyabhit Madhavavarman, the ruler of the Sailodbhava dynasty declared independence. The Sailodbhavas were a dynasty that ruled in excess of Kongoda, a area extending from Chilka lake to Mahendragiri mountain in the Ganjam district. After Sasanka conquered Orissa, this dynasty sustained since his feudatory. After going however this brief sketch of political measures of the early medieval era in North India you may be wondering how to create sense of all these details of dynastic explanations, battles, victories and defeats. After all, the revise of history goes distant beyond mere listing of political measures, and trade most with the analysis of political procedures and social and economic formations. Of what exploit, then are these sketches of dynastic histories of the dissimilar areas, to a contemporary day historian. Well, since B.D. Chattopadhyay points out, Even the seemingly bewildering diversity of details of the political history of early medieval India – the absurdly extensive genealogies, the inflated records of attainments of microscopic kingdoms, the rapidity of the rise and fall of centres of domination – are ultimately manifestations of the method in which the polity evolved in the era and hence is worthy, not therefore much of cataloguing, but of serious analysis.

## Module IV

### Early Tamilakam

#### **Megalithic culture.**

Megalithic were the huge stone slabs erected over the burials. The culture in which huge stone slabs were used encircle burial places was called the megalithic culture. Several such graves have been found in south India. The megalithics are the most important archeological findings of the ancient period of South Indian history. Menhirs, Rock cut chambers, Dolmens, hat stone, (Topikallu), and umbrella stones (Kudakallu) are the various types of megalithics found in Kerala. The rock cut chambers are of rectangular shape with a small entrance connected with the flight of steps. Rock cut stone benches are seen inside the chamber.

Kerala is noted particularly for its megalithic monuments lying scattered all over the area. The megalithic types found in Kerala form a part of the megalithic complex common to South India and are associated with the cult of the dead. With the beginning of the Iron Age, the burial custom was either to cremate or expose the died bodies to the elements and inform specific bones collected from the spot. The ashes from the cremated bodies along with their tools, weapons, beads, ornaments, utensils and the like were also similarly informed. The interment was usually done in urns or Jars in pits or cist or rock cut caves. The burial urns of jars have been unearthed from different parts of South India.

### Early Tamil literature

Historians and Indologists regard the Sangam period as the 'classical age' of the Tamils analogous to the age of the classics in Greece and Rome and to that of the Renaissance of later period in Europe. Some even consider the Sangam age as the 'Golden age' of the Tamils, which marked a unique epoch in the history of the Tamilakam. The archaeological sources found from different explored or excavated sites throw light on the various aspects of the political, social, economic, religious and cultural life of the Sangam age people. However, the precious literary finds of this period discovered from various places in South India provide us with the significant information in this regard. In other words, the Sangam literature is the major source for the study of the Sangam age.

#### The term 'Sangam'

The term 'Sangam' literally means 'confluence'. However, in the context of early South Indian history this term can be rendered into English as an assembly, a college or an academy of learned people, held under the patronage of the Pandyan kings, who were great lovers of literature and the fine arts. The Sangam was a voluntary organization of poets. It was similar to a Round Table Conference, which allowed sitting room only to an authentic poet. This academy or assembly of learned people including the Sangam poets produced literary works of high quality.

## Chronology

There is controversy among the scholars regarding the chronology of the Sangam age. The main reason behind this is the lack of unanimity concerning the age of the Sangam works, which are of great historical value for the study of the Sangam age. On the basis of the composition of Sangam literature K.A.N. Sastri traces the Sangam age to the period A.D. 100-250. According to tradition, the Tolkappiyam is the oldest among extant Tamil works. M. Arokiaswami holds that as Tolkappiar, the author of Tolkappiyam, flourished sometime in the 4th or 3rd c.B.C., the same date can be assigned to this literary work. The corroboration of the literary sources with archaeological data enables us to place the Sangam age in the chronological span of roughly about 600 years from c. 300 B.C to A.D 300.

## The Tradition of the three Sangams

The theory of the three Sangams establishes that these were successive and not contemporary. The traditional accounts of Iraiyanar Ahapporul mention that there were three Sangams (I, II and III) held, which flourished for 9990 years at frequent intervals. These were attended by 8598 scholars. Sage Agastyar was the founding father. The Ahapporul commentary also mentions about their successive order and the deluges occurring during the intervals between them. These Sangams or academies were patronized by 197 Pandyan kings. According to the tradition, of the three successive Sangams the first two belong to prehistory. All the three were held in the capital of the Pandyas. As the capital was shifted from time to time, old Madurai was the headquarters of the first Sangam, and the second academy was held at Kapatapuram. Both these centres were washed away by the sea during successive deluges. The third Sangam was located in modern Madurai.

The date of the third Sangam can be established with more probability than the other Sangams. This date is taken to be the first two centuries of the Christian era and probably the century immediately preceding the Christian era. The age of Tolkappiar is believed to be in the second Sangam era and the third Sangam era coincides with the Indo-Roman trade with the contemporary Imperial Rome. This dating is based on the evidence available in the accounts of the Greek writers of the time. There are several references to the overseas trading activities between the Mediterranean world and Tamil region. The same is also attested by the Sangam literature. Thus, the third Sangam witnessed the production of numerous extant works. The Sangams can be compared to the French Academy in Europe in modern times, which aimed at maintaining the purity of the language and literary standards. In the beginning, admission to the Sangam was by co-option, but later it was by means of miraculous contrivance by the Lord Siva, who was the permanent president of this august body.

## The Corpus of Sangam Literature

As mentioned earlier, the Sangam works contain mines of information for the study of early history of Tamilakam. They reflect the matter of great historical importance. Tolkappiyam, a treatise on Tamil grammar and poetics, composed probably during the second Sangam, is the oldest extant literary work in Tamil. Whereas, the earliest Tamil poetry now available, generally known as Sangam poetry, is said to have been produced during the period of the third Sangam.

Modern scholarship use the term 'Sangam Literature' for only those works in verse (prose is of much later origin), which are comprised in the Ettutogai (Eight collections), Pattupattu (Ten songs) and Patinenkilkanakku (The Eighteen Minor Works), which are judged to have been produced in that order during the period A.D 150-250. The so called 'Five Epics' ('the five great poems') include Jivakachintamani, Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Valayapathi and Kundalakesi. These are assigned much later dates. Of these the last two are not extant. So, of the three 'great poems' that we now have, Silappadikaram and Manimekalai are called the 'twin epics' because they form a continuous story narrating the story of a single family – Kovalan (the rich merchant prince of Puhar), Kannagi (Kovalan's chaste wife), Madhavi (the dancer) with whom Kovalan lived in wedlock and Manimekalai, the child of this wedlock. Ilango Adigal was the author of Silappadikaram. In the epic, Ilango is mentioned as the brother of the reigning Chera king Senguttuvan. Manimekalai was written by Sathanar mainly to propound the Buddhist doctrine among Tamils. Nonetheless, these poetical works describe about the social, religious, economic and political conditions of Tamilakam with the focus on the cities like Madurai, Puhar (Poompuhar/ Kaveripattinam), Vanji (Karur) and Kanchi.

While the individual poems included in the above mentioned three groups may be taken to have been produced within the first three centuries of the Christian era, they were very probably collected and arranged in the order in which they are now found, at a much later date. Length of the poem was one of the very important basis for the classification into three broad divisions. The poems in the 'Eight collections' run from three to thirty one lines, whereas in the 'Ten Songs', the shortest poem runs to 103 lines and the longest has 782 lines. The 'Eighteen Minor Works' include the ethical and didactic literature. The didactic literature, which includes the world famous Tirukkural is mostly in stanzaic form, the stanza having from two to five lines.

The Sangam collections at present consist of 2279 poems of varying lengths from 3 lines to about 800 lines. Some of these works are attributed to a single author, while others like the Naladiyar, contain the contributions of many poets. This Sangam poetry available to us runs to more than 30,000 lines. These were composed by 473 poets including women besides 102 being anonymous. Among the poets nearly 50 were women poets.

These works reflect fairly advanced material culture. They also show that by the Sangam age, Tamil as a language had attained maturity and had become a powerful and

elegant medium of literary expression. The language is inevitably archaic, though not perhaps more difficult to understand for the modern Tamil.

The Sangam poems are of two varieties, though scholars have divided them into various categories on the basis of their subject matter. The two varieties are – the short ode and the long poem. For a historian the short odes are of greater value than the long lyrics. However, generally the historical value of these sources are irrespective of their length.

The odes are collected in 9 anthologies. The anthologies in which these are collected include – Ahananuru, Purananuru, Kuruntogai, Narrinai, Kalittogai, Paripadal, Aingurunuru, and Patirrupattu. These are collectively called Ettutogai. The ten long lyrics or descriptive poems (10 idylls) known as Pattupattu is said to be the ninth group. These consist of – Tirumurugarrupadai, Sirupanarrupadai, Porunarrupadai, Perumbanarrupadai, Nedunalvadai, Kurinjippattu, Maduraikkanji, Pattinappalai, Mullaipattu and Malaipadukadam. Of these Tirumurugarrupadai is a devotional poem on Lord Muruga; Sirupanarrupadai deals with the generous nature of Nalliyakkodan who ruled over a part of the Chola kingdom; Perumbanarrupadai describes about Tondaiman Ilantiraiyan and his capital Kanchipuram; Porunarrupadai and Pattinappalai sings in the praise of Karikala, the great Chola king; Nedunalvadai and Maduraikkanji deal with Talaiyalanganattu Nedunjeliyan, the great Pandyan king; Kurinjippattu portrays the description of the hilly regions and hill life; and Malaipadukadam refers to the Chieftain Nannan and also to the music and songs to encourage the army, to celebrate the victory won by the king in a war, etc. Nevertheless, these works reflect the worth of the poets in Sangam age.

### **Tinai Concepts**

In the Sangam age Kerala was a part of Tamilakam. The Sangam literature divided the land into five regions or Tinai on the basis of soil formation and Topography. The Tinai were the physiographic division or eozones. There were five such Tinai which are collectively called Ainthinai. These are Kurinchi (Hill and Forest) Mullai (Pastures and Jungles) Palai (Dry land) Marutham (Cultivable land) and Neytal (Sea coast) Each of the Tinai had its Typical geographical features, distinct occupational groups and favourite deities.

The Kurinchi was hilly and forest regions. It was inhabited by Kuravar, Vetar and Kanavar. Their main occupations were hunting and food gathering. They practiced punam or shifting cultivation. Their favourite deity was Murugan or Velan.

The Mullai was pastoral and jungle areas. This Tinai had the Itayar and Ayar as its inhabitants. Their chief occupation was cattle rearing. Agriculture was their secondary occupation. They worshipped Mayon.

The Palai region was dry and unfertile area. It comprised the middle portion of the land. It was inhabited by war like tribes like Maravar kallar; vettuvar etc. They resorted to plunder



and warfare. Plunder was their main occupation. It was their job to supply forces of fighting to the chieftains who controlled the hill forts. They worshipped the war goddess Kottavai.

The fertile wetland was called Marutham. The uzhar and the vellalar lived in this region. Agriculture was their main occupation. They practiced regular cultivation with the help of plough. The term Uzhar denotes the use of the plough and vellalar the proprietor of the soil. Paddy was the main product of the region. The cultivators of the Marutham Tinai produced food grains also for the people of the society. Their God was Indra.

The coastal region was called Neythal. The inhabitants of the Neythal territory were the Parathevar, Valayar, Minavar, Nulayar etc. The main occupations of the people were fishing and salt making. Their favourite deity was Kantalon or Varunan.

The Tinai concept had its social and economic implication. It can be called as echo-zones, as the inhabitants of each region depended on the geographical environment to earn their livelihood. They had developed their peculiar life style according to the geographical peculiarities. There was no centralized economy based on organized production or distribution of the necessities of life.

### **Polity**

The Sangam poems present a sketch reflecting the evolution of the state system in South India for the first time. These works indicate the process of historical evolution in which we find the tribes decreasing in number but existing as well established units by the side of the king. So, the evidences suggest that state as an organized political structure had come into existence although it was not yet stable. Though the democratic conception of the state government had not yet become established the administration of the times partook of the character of the monarchy tempered by the best effects of the democratic principle.

### **Muventars**

Of the three muventars (three crowned monarch) the Cholas controlled the fully irrigated fertile Cauvery (Kaveri) basin with their capital at Uraiyur, the Pandyas ruled over the pastoral and littoral parts with the capital at Madurai, and the Cheras had their sway over the hilly country in the west with Vanji (Karur) as the capital. The Sangam works mention the names of so many kings that ascertaining both their genealogy and chronology are highly problematical. However, the genealogy of the Chola kings Uruvapher Ilanjetchenni, his son Karikala and his two sons, Nalankilli and Nedunkilli have been confirmed to a great extent by the scholars. The kings of other two dynasties include Muthukudumi Peruvaludi, Ariyapadaikadantha Nedunjelian, Verriverchelian and Talayalakanathu Ceruvenra Nedunjelian among the Pandyas and Imayararamban Nedumceralatan, Cheran Senguttuvan and Mantaram Cheral Irumporai among the Cheras.

Monarchy was the prevalent form of government. The “king” was called ventan. He was the head of the society and government. As the head of the society, he took the lead in every event of social importance like the festival of Indra, inaugurations of dance performances, etc. The “king” assumed important titles at the time of coronation. He was equated with gods so as to provide divine sanctity. The ancient Tamils considered the drum, the sceptre and the white umbrella as the three great insignia of his office.

According to the Sangam classics, kingship descended by heredity from father to son. The king was responsible for maintaining the law and order in the state. He also looked after the welfare of his subjects, worked hard for their good and frequently toured the country to put things in order. The king also had recourse to advisers in the course of his administration. The literature frequently mentions them as surram which literally means the men who always surrounded the king giving him advice whenever needed.

### Chieftains

This was not only a period of great kings but also of great chieftains who were subordinate to the kings. They are divided into two – velir and non-velir. Some of them were great patrons of letters. Some of the great chieftains of the period included Palayan Maran of Mohur (near modern Madurai), Nannan Venman and Villavan Kothai (both of the West Coast of the Peninsula), Nalliyakodan of Oimanadu (in modern South Arcot), Tithyan (Tinnevely region) and the whole band of Velir chieftains like Pari of Parambunad, Vel Pegan of the Palni region, Vel Evvi of Pudukottai region, Vel Avi and Irukkuvel of Kodumbalur and others. The later Sangam period witnessed greater consolidation of monarchical power with the reduction of the traditional chieftains to the position of royal officers. However, in the post-Sangam period the royal officers grew stronger and the centre became weak gradually.

### Administration

The policies of the king were controlled by a system of checks and balances in the councils. Silappadikaram refers to the two types of councils — Aimperunkulu and Enperayam. The aimperunkulu or the council of five members was the council of the ministers. The enperayam or the great assembly (perayam) consisted of 8 members (government officers). This worked as an administrative machinery of the state. These two assemblies that of the Five and that of the Eight functioned as administrative bodies, though their function was generally advisory in character. However, their advice was rarely rejected by the king. Their important function was judicial though the aimperunkulu seems to have been solely in charge of it as described by Maduraikkanji.

It is important to note that in spite of all the glory attached to the ancient king, the ethos of Indian administration has been in the direction of limited or popular monarchy. This can be observed in South India from very early times even more than in the north and each followed its own model of administration. Every local unit, however small and in whatever corner it was situated, was administered by a local assembly. The avai and the

manram are the terms used for this unit in Sangam works. Such assembly is commonly referred to as arankuravaiyam, which were known for its just decision. These can be taken to be the forerunner of our modern panchayat.

### Defence

Major ruling dynasties and chieftains maintained large standing army. The wars were frequent and were fought not only for defence but also with a desire to extend one's territories or to save suffering people of neighbouring kingdoms from tyranny or misrule. Sometimes the wars occurred for matrimonial alliances. Such was the mental state of the people that almost everyone trained himself for war and besides the army maintained by the kings potential soldiers were all over the country to join the royal force in times of need. Even kings trained themselves in such activities.

The king maintained all the four kinds of armies mentioned in Sangam literature — the chariot, the elephant, the cavalry and the infantry. There are references to the navy of the Chera that guarded the sea-port so well that other ships could not enter the region. The Sangam texts also mention about the army camp on the battle field. The king's camp was well made and even in camp he slept under his white umbrella and many soldiers slept around him mostly without sword. The camps of ordinary soldiers were generally built with the sugarcane leaves on the sides and cut paddy crop on the top with paddy hanging from it. Generals and officers of high rank were accompanied by their wives on the campaign and stayed in the special camps built for the officers. The king frequently visited the camp of soldiers and officers to enquire about their welfare. He did so even in the night and in pouring rain.

Tamil people had a great respect for the warrior and particularly the hero who died in the battle field. Suffering a back-wound was considered as highly disreputable as there are instances of kings who died fasting because they had suffered such a wound in battle. The herostones were erected to commemorate heroes who died in war. There was the provision for the prison which indicate the coercive machinery of the state.

Sangam polity was influenced by the North Indian political ideas and institutions in many aspects. Many rulers sought their origin and association with deities like Siva, Vishnu and ancient sages. Many kings are said to have participated in the Mahabharata war like their North Indian counterparts. The rulers of Sangam age were also the patrons of art, literature and performed yajnas (sacrifices).

### Economy: Agriculture

The prosperity of people in the Sangam age was rooted in the fertility of agriculture and expansion of trade. The Maduraikkanji refers to the agriculture and trade as the main forces of economic development.

Agriculture was the main source of revenue for the state. The importance attached to cultivation is also seen in the interest people showed in cattle rearing. The Sangam poems frequently refer to milk and milk-products such as curd, butter, ghee and butter milk. The importance of cattle is also attested by the cattle raids on enemy country mentioned in the literary works. One of the primary duties of the king was to protect the cattle of his kingdom. The cattle wealth in turn enhanced the wealth of the farmer. Silappadikaram also relates the happiness and prosperity of the people to the agriculture.

The paddy and sugarcane were the two important crops cultivated in a large quantity. Besides these chief crops, other varieties of crops and fruits included gram, beans, roots like Valli (a kind of sweet potato), jack-fruit, mango, plantain, coconut, arecanut, saffron, pepper, turmeric, etc.

The kings of the Sangam age took great measures for the development of agriculture. It is well-known that Karikala Chola dug tanks for irrigation and his embankment of the river Cauvery (Kaveri) proved to be very useful for agriculture. Tank irrigation helped in feeding agriculture as mentioned in many poems. For example, Maduraikkanji mentions “rivers filling the tanks as they run towards the eastern ocean”. From the sources it is very evident that the prosperity of the king very much depended on the prosperity of the land.

### Industry

The Sangam age also witnessed the industrial activities on a large scale. The poems refer to various kinds of craftsmen including the goldsmith, the blacksmith, the coppersmith, the potter, the sculptor, the painter and the weaver. Manimekalai mentions the collaboration of architects from Maharashtra, blacksmiths from Malwa, carpenters from Greece and Rome and jewellers from Magadha with their counterparts of the Tamil region. The occupation or profession was generally hereditary or handed down from father to the son. According to Silappadikaram, men of different occupation lived in different streets. This led to progress in various trades and industries and also resulted in making these men skilled in their art.

The art of building reached a high level during this period. In this context the works of carpenters are noteworthy. This can be observed in the use of boats with face of the horse, elephant and lion mentioned by Silappadikaram. Moreover, the thriving trading activities with the Mediterranean world and other distant lands could have been facilitated only with well-built and highly seaworthy ships. Other building activities included the construction of moats, bridges, drainage, lighthouse, etc.

The painter's art was commonly practised and appreciated by people. Paripadal refers to the existence of a museum of paintings in Madura (Madurai) and the sale of pictures is mentioned by Silappadikaram. The walls of houses, roofs, dress, bed-spreads, curtains and many other articles of day-to-day use were painted and were in great demand.

The art of weaving, however, commanded popularity not only among the Tamils but also among the foreigners. Garments with woven floral designs are frequently mentioned in Sangam literature. Dresses were woven not only from cotton, silk and wool but also from rat's hair and colouring yarn was known. The Indian silk, for its fineness, was in great demand by the Roman merchants. However, the weaving industry was a domestic industry in which all the members of the family, especially women, took part.

The leather-workers, potters and other craftsmen also contributed to the industrial development. But one of the most noteworthy fact in this regard is the introduction of Greek sculpture and other foreign workmanship into South India during this period. Literary works like Nedunalvadaï, Mullaippattu and Padiruppattu refer to the beautiful lamps made by the foreigners, Roman pots and wine jars etc. The Graeco-Roman influence in the contemporary period can also be seen in the sculptures of Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh) and Ceylon.

### **Trade**

The Tamils of the Sangam age had trading contacts with the Mediterranean world (Greece and Rome), Egypt, China, Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. The literary works like Silappadikaram, Manimekalai and Pattinappalai frequently refer to the contact with the Greek and Roman traders. This period marked the height of the Indo-Roman trade. The Periplus of Erythrean Sea and other accounts of foreigners such as those of Pliny, Ptolemy, Strabo and Petronius mention various ports and the articles traded during the period. The archaeological excavations and explorations at various sites have also yielded the artefacts confirming to the trading relations between the Tamil regions and other countries. The discovery of coin hoards at many places also attest this fact.

The Sangam texts mention prominently only the ports of Musiri, Puhar (Kaveripattinam) and Korkai, the three great ports of the three great rulers of the times. However, the Periplus refers to the ports of Tondi, Musiri and Comari (Cape Comorin / Kanyakumari), Colchi (Korkai), Poduke (Arikamedu) and Sopatma. According to Periplus there were three types of vessels in use in South India. These included small coasting vessels, large coasting vessels and ocean-going ships. There is also the mention of large vessels called Colandia sailing from the Tamil Coast to the Ganges.

The commodities exported to Rome fetched high returns. Living animals like tiger, leopard, monkeys and peacocks were exported to Rome. The chief animal products of export included ivory and pearl. Plant products like aromatics and spices (pepper, ginger, cardamom, cloves, nutmegs, etc.), coconut, plantain, jaggery, teak wood, sandal wood, cotton cloth of special variety called argaru (from Uraiyur) were also among the chief exports. Mineral products like diamonds, beryl, steel, semiprecious stones, etc. were also exported from South India.

The main articles of import from Rome consisted of the coins, coral, wine, lead, tin and jewellery. The beads manufactured at many sites in South India in the contemporary period have been found at several sites of Southeast Asia. This suggests the maritime contacts between the two regions. There were settlements of the foreign traders in many towns.

However, it was not only the external trade, which added to the prosperity of the Tamils. Internal trade also flourished in the region with local networks of trade connecting different urban centres. Silappadikaram refers to the bazaar (marked) streets of Puhar while Maduraikkanji describes the market at Madurai, the Pandyan capital.

Besides the coastal ports or towns, the Tamil region also witnessed the growth of urban centres in the inland regions. The prominent among these were Madurai, Karur, Perur, Kodumanal, Uraiyur, Kanchipuram and others. While Korkai on the East Coast was famous for pearl fishing, Kodumanal in the interior part was known for its beryl. However, the trade was not confined to cities alone. The remotest villages were also linked with the trading network. The carts were the important mode of transport for inland trade. These were in use for either carrying goods or people including the traders.

The trade was mostly conducted through barter. The geographical diversity of the Tamil region necessitated the exchange of goods/products between the different regions. However, the use of coins for trading purpose can not be ruled out even in the context of internal trade.

Trade was a very important source of the royal revenue. Transit duties were collected from merchants who moved from one place to another. Spoils of war further added to the royal income. But the income from agriculture provided the real foundation of war and political set-up. However, the share of agricultural produce claimed and collected by the king is not specified.

### Society

The earliest phase of Sangam society as described by Tolkappiyam was based on the five-fold classification of the land — the hill, the pastoral, the agricultural, the desert and the coastal. Different kinds of people inhabited these various classified lands and developed certain fixed customs and ways of life as a result of their interaction with respective environment. The ecological variations also determined their occupations such as hunting, cultivation, pastoralism, plunder, fishing, diving, sailing, etc.

### Social Composition

Anthropological studies have shown that the earliest social element consisted of Negroid and Australoid groups with mixture of another racial stock which migrated from the earliest Mediterranean region. In its early phase these societies had small population and social classes were unknown. As a result there existed great unity among the people of each region, who moved freely among themselves and their ruler. The only classification Tamil

society knew at this time was that of the arivar, ulavar, etc. based on their occupation such as the soldiers, hunters, shepherds, ploughmen, fishermen, etc.

The existence of numerous tribes and chieftains was seen in the later half of the Sangam age. The four Vedic varnas were distinctly of a later period. But it is interesting to note that though the varna system was brought in by the immigrating Brahmanas (1st c.A.D), it did not include Kshatriyas as in the north. Only the brahmins were the dvijas (twice born) who qualified for the sacred thread. There are references to the slaves known as adimai (one who lived at feet of another). The prisoners of war were reduced to slavery. There existed slave markets.

### Women

The women like men, enjoyed certain freedom and went around the town freely, played on the seashore and river beds and joined in temple festivals as depicted in Sangam poems such as Kalittogai. However, the status of women was one of subordination to men, which was an aspect of the general philosophy of the contemporary period. This is well reflected in Kuruntogai which mentions that the wife was not expected to love the husband after evaluating his qualities but because of the fact of his being her husband. In other words, it was not possible for a wife to estimate her husband. Though there are references to women being educated and some of them becoming poetesses, this can not be applied to the general mass. They had no property rights but were treated with considerations. Women remained a widow or performed sati, which was considered almost divine. Marriage was a sacrament and not a contract. Tolkappiyam mentions eight forms of marriage of which the most common was the Brahma marriage. However, there are references to wooing or even elopements, which were followed by conventional marriage.

Prostitution was a recognised institution. However, the prostitutes were taken to be the intruders in peaceful family life. But they figure so prominently in the poems and enjoy such a social standing that there could be no doubt that the harlots of the Sangam age were not the degraded prostitutes of the modern times. Though texts like Kuruntogai refer to the harlots challenging wives and their relations, seducing men, the harlots gave their companions more of a cultural enjoyment than anything else.

### Dress, Ornaments and Fashion

The upper strata of society used dress of fine muslin and silk. Except for nobles and kings, men were satisfied with just two pieces of cloth — one below the waist and another adorning the head like a turban. Women used cloth only to cover below the waist. The tribal population was not in a position to do that even. The tribal women used leaves and barks to cover themselves.

The men and women of Sangam age were fond of using oil, aromatic scents, coloured powders and paints, while the sandal paste was heavily applied on their chests. According to Silappadikaram women had pictures drawn on their bodies in coloured patterns and had their eyelids painted with a black pigment. The ornaments were worn round the neck and on arms and legs by both, the men and women. The chiefs and nobles wore heavy armlets and anklets while the ordinary women wore various other kinds of jewels. Valuable ornaments of gold and precious stones were used for decoration by men and women of upper strata whereas the poor class used bracelets made of conch-shell and necklaces made of coloured beads. Silappadikaram refers to a ceremonial hot bath in water heated with five kinds of seeds, ten kinds of astringents and thirty two kinds of scented plants, the drying of the hair over smoke of akhil and the parting of it into five parts for dressing. Men also grew long hair and wore the tuft tied together with a knot which was sometimes surrounded by a string of beads. Tamils were very much fond of flowers and women used to decorate their hair with flowers, especially water lily as described by Kuruntogai.

### Dwellings

People lived in two kinds of houses – those built of mud and the others built of bricks. According to the Sangam texts the second category of houses were built of suduman, which literally means burnt mud. The poor lived in thatched houses covered with grass or leaves of the coconut or palmyra. Windows were generally small and made like the deer's eye. The literary works describe the well-built storeyed houses of the rich people, which had gopurams for the entrance and iron gates with red paint to prevent from rusting. Silappadikaram mentions that these houses were lighted with beautiful artistic lamps often from Greece and Rome. They were burned with oil extracted from fish.

### Food and Drinks

Non-vegetarianism was the main food habit though brahmin ascetics preferred vegetarian food. The food was very plain and consisted of rice, milk, butter, ghee and honey. Meat and liquor were freely used. Curd was in popular use. Kuruntogai mentions various kinds of sweets made with curd, jaggery, puffed rice, milk and ghee. Spicing of curry and rice is also referred to in the Sangam texts. On the whole the upper class consumed high quality of rice, the choicest meat, imported wine, etc. The brahmins preferred vegetarian food and avoided alcoholic drinks. In urban area, the public distribution of food was made by the charitable institutions.

Feasts were organised for collective entertainment. The custom of feeding guests was a common custom and eating without a guest to partake of the food was considered unsatisfying. Poets and learned were always considered as honoured guests and red rice fried in ghee was given to them as a mark of love and respect.



## Entertainments

There were numerous amusements and plays in which people participated for entertainment. The sources of entertainment included dances, musical programmes, religious festivals, bull-fights, cock-fights, marble-game, hunting, dice, wrestling, boxing, acrobatics, etc. Women amused themselves with the religious dances, playing the dice and varippanthu or cloth ball. Playing in swings made of palmrya fibres was common among girls. Narrinai refers to the games played with decorated dolls. Kuruntogai mentions about children playing with toy-cart and with the sand houses made by them on the seashore.

Dance and music were other popular sources of entertainment. The Sangam poems mention various kinds of dances. Silappadikaram mentions eleven kinds of dances, which are divided into seven groups. It also gives minute details about music. There are further references to the different kinds of musical instruments such as the drums, flute and yal sold in shops at Puhar and Madurai. The performing arts also included the art of drama. The dramas were mostly religious in character but sometimes these were enacted to commemorate great event or persons. Bardism and the system of wandering minstrels going from place to place with their musical instruments singing the glory of either a person or a great event commanded great popularity in the Sangam age. Initially, the bard (porunar) began as an individual to whip up the martial spirit of the soldiers engaged in war and to sing of their victory when the battle was won. However, their activities were not confined to encourage the soldiers in the battle-field alone but also to carry messages from there to the people at home. They had high respect in society and were even honored by the kings. Besides the porunar were the panar who performed for the common people.

## Religion : Beliefs and Rituals

The literary evidence presents a picture of elaborate religious development in the Sangam age. The faiths like Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism coexisted in the Tamil region during this period. Buddhism and Jainism entered the region in the first centuries of the Christian era. The sects of Brahmanism such as Saivism and Vaishnavism were also well-known religions during the period.

The advent of Vedic people and the interaction of their faith with that of the Tamils is well reflected by the Sangam works. Silappadikaram mentions about the “triple sacred fire” the “twice born nature” the “six duties” and other ideas associated with the Brahmanas. Tolkappiyam also refers to the six Brahmanic duties. Brahmanical rites and ceremonies were very much in practice. For example, the Pandyan king is described as “having various sacrificial halls” in many Sangam poems.

The four important deities as mentioned by Tolkappiyam were—Murugan, Tirumal, Vandan (Indra) and Varunan. Indra was worshipped as the rain god and a festival in his honour was celebrated every year. In Pattinappalai worship of Muruga is mentioned. Muruga is the son of Siva. Besides these deities, Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity), Mayon (later Vishnu) as

guardian of the forest region, Baladeva, Kaman (the god of love), the moon-god, sea-god and other divinities were also worshipped.

The people of Sangam age also believed in ghosts and spirits. There is the mention of the “bhuta” in Silappadikaram. Many believed in demons residing on tress, battle-fields and burning ghats “drinking blood and combing their hair with hands soaked in blood.” The same text also refers to minor deities like guardian deities of Madura and Puhar. They also believed in the village gods, totemic symbols and bloody sacrifices to appease ferocious deities. Animism is clearly reflected in their tradition of worshipping the deities believed to be residing in trees, streams and on hill tops. The dead heroes, satis and other martyrs were also defied.

The advent of Buddhism and Jainism in the first centuries of the Christian era influenced the philosophical thoughts of the Tamils in the Sangam age. These ideologies placed knowledge before matter. The Buddhists and Jains called on people to look to the world beyond matter. Many scholars have expressed their views that the two great epics of the period, Silappadikaram was Jain and Manimekalai was Buddhist.

Saivism and Vaishnavism were also important faiths. The term Saivism is mentioned only in Manimekalai. Though Siva as a deity is not mentioned in other texts, he is referred to by his attributes like – “the ancient first Lord”, “the Lord with the blue beautiful throat” and “the god under the banyan tree”. So, in early times both Saivism and Vaishnavism seem to have existed in the Tamil region only in principle and not by name. Though Tolkappiyam refers to the god Muruga (son of Siva) and Mayon (earlier name of Vishnu), there is no clear reference to Saivism and Vaishnavism. Probably, the transition of these cults to these two different sects was taking place during the Sangam age.

### **Alvars**

The alvars, were Tamil poet-saints of South India who espoused bhakti (devotion) to the Hindu god Vishnu or his avatar Krishna in their songs of longing, ecstasy and service. They are venerated especially in Vaishnavism, which regards Vishnu or Krishna as the Supreme Being. Many modern academics place the Alvars date between 5th century to 10th century CE, however traditionally the Alvars are considered to have lived between 4200 BCE -2700 BCE. Orthodoxy posits the number of alvars as ten, though there are other references that include Andal and Madhurakavi, making the number twelve. Andal is the only female saint-poet in the 12 Alvars. Together with the contemporary sixty three Shaiva Nayanars, they are among the most important saints from Tamil Nadu. The devotional outpourings of Alvars, composed during the early medieval period of Tamil history, helped revive the bhakti movement, through their hymns of worship to Vishnu and his avatars. There were 12 Alvars, devotees of Vishnu. The most famous among them are probably Nammalvar, Andal, and Thirumangai Alvar. In the 10th century, their songs were collected by Nathamuni in Nalayira Divya Prabandham. Later, Garudavahana wrote about their lives in Divyasuricharitam

## Nayanars

The Nayanars were a group of 63 saints poets in the 6th to 8th century who were devoted to the Hindu god Shiva in Tamilakam. They, along with the Alvars, influenced the Bhakti movement in Tamil. Some of the most well-known among them are Sundarar, Appar, Sambandar, Manikkavachakar, and Kannappa Nayanmar. The most famous writings of the Nayanars are the Tirutondar Tokai, by Sundarar; the Tirutondar Tiruvantai (a collection of songs) by Nambi Andar Nambi. Later, the lives of the saints were collected in Periyapuram by Sekkilar. The Tirumurai and Tevaram (another collection of hymns) are also part of the Shaivite bhakti legacy. The list of the Nayanars was initially compiled by Sundarar (Sundararmurthi). In his poem, Tiruthonda Thogai, he sings, in eleven verses, the names of the Nayanar saints up to Karaikkal Ammeiyar, and refers to himself as "the servant of servants". The list was expanded by Nambiyandar Nambi during his compilation of material by the poets for the Tirumurai collection, and would include Sundarar himself and Sundarar's parents.

In the 10th century, king Raja Raja Chola I collected Tevaram literature after hearing excerpts of the hymns in his court. His priest Nambiyandar Nambi began compiling the hymns into a series of volumes called the Tirumurai. He arranged the hymns of three saint poets Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar as the first seven books which he called the Tevaram. He compiled Manikkavachakar's Tirukovayar and Tiruvacakam as the eighth book, the 28 hymns of nine other saints as the ninth book, the Tirumandiram of Tirumular and 40 hymns by 12 other poets as the tenth book. In the eleventh book, he created the Tirutotanar Tiruvanthathi, which consisted of 89 verses, with a verse devoted to each of the saints. With the addition of Sundarar and his parents to the sequence, this became the canonical list of the 63 saints. In the 12th century, Sekkizhar added a twelfth volume to the Tirumurai called Periya Puranam in which he expands further on the stories of each of 63 Nayanars. The Nayanars were from various backgrounds, including Channars, Vellalas, oilmongers, Brahmins, and nobles. Along with the twelve Vaishnava Alvars, they are regarded the important saints from Tamil Nadu.

The sophisticated aspect of the Sangam religion was the worship of gods and goddesses in temples. Temple dedicated to Siva, Muruga, Baladeva, Vishnu, Kaman and moon-god are clearly mentioned in various Sangam texts. Manimekalai refers to a very big brick called Cakravahakottam. However, in many cases, as till today, the deities were often set up under trees. The method of worship generally consisted of dancing and offering flowers, rice and meat to the gods. Silappadikaram mentions about the stone images of gods. This is also attested by the archaeological discovery in the form of the lingam dating to the centuries B.C by T.A. Gopinatha Rao.