

# **HISTORY OF INDIA UPTO 650 C.E.**

**B.A.(History) –First Year**

**Paper –V**

**PaperCode:BAHS 1915**



**PONDICHERY UNIVERSITY**  
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**B.A. HISTORY - SYLLABUS**  
**Paper code: BAHS 1915**

**PAPER -V**

**HISTORY OF INDIA UPTO 650 C.E.**

- UNIT-1:** Sources of Early Indian History- Literary, Archaeological: Epigraphy, Numismatic, Greaco- Roman textual Sources- Pre-Historic period- Harappan Culture- Town Planning, Society, Economy and Belief systems
- UNIT-2:** The Vedic Period –Polity, Society, Economy and Religious beliefs- Rise of Buddhism and JainismMahajanapadas - Rise of Magadha- Campaigns of Alexander –Socio-economic impact.
- UNIT-3:** The Mauryan Empire- Chandragupta Maurya, Asoka and his policy of Dhamma–Mauryan Administration, Society and Economy.
- UNIT-4:** Post- Mauryan Period- The Indo-Greeks, Minander -The Satavahanas- Kushanas, Kanishka- Socioeconomic changes in Post-Mauryan Period
- UNIT-5:** Gupta Empire- Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta II- Society, Economy, Education, Religious revival, Architecture and Literature- Hunas, Mihirakula- Harshavardhana



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## UNIT.1

### **Lesson 1.1: Sources of Early Indian History**

#### **Structure:**

- 1.1.1: Objectives
- 1.1.2: Introduction
- 1.1.3: Archaeological Sources
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  - 1.1.3.2: Epigraphy
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  - 1.1.4.2: Secular Literary Tradition
  - 1.1.4.3: Tamil literary Tradition
  - 1.1.4.4: Greco-Roman and Chinese Textual Sources
- 1.1.5: Summary
- 1.1.6: Keywords
- 1.1.7: Self-Assessment Questions

#### **1.1.1: Objectives:**

- To define the meaning of ‘Source Materials for Reconstructing History’.
- To acquaint with the Dimensions, Perspectives, and Interpretations of the source materials which reveal the Social, Economic, Cultural, and Political history of ancient India.
- To understand the chronology of ancient Indian history.
- To know about the various historiographical trends.

#### **1.1.2: Introduction:**

History is not merely a study of the past. It also sheds light on the present and the future. In fact, it helps us to understand contemporary social reality. The present

has evolved through events and development which occurred in the past. Similarly, the experience of the past guides us in determining the future course of our development. Source material for the reconstruction of India's historical past is very rich and varied, yet a clear chronological history of the region remains to be the desideratum. The reconstruction of an uninterrupted history of ancient India is difficult on account of the lack of historical materials in a proper order, mixture of facts and fictions in the already available presentations, etc. In spite of all these difficulties, there are certain sources which help in the reconstruction of ancient Indian past for one who is willing to approach them in a very systematic and unbiased manner. These sources can be divided into two sections, viz., Archaeological and Literary; and their sub-divisions such as material remnants, Epigraphy, Numismatics, Veda-Itihasa-Purana tradition, Secular literary tradition, Tamil literary tradition, and Greco-Roman textual sources.

### **1.1.3: Archaeological Sources**

#### **1.1.3.1: Material remnants:**

Archaeological material remains help us to recover the cultural and economic context of the past, in the form of stone tools, plant and animal remains starting from the prehistoric age. The stone temples in south India and the brick monasteries in eastern India still stand to remind us of the great building activities of the past. Though the major part of these remains lies buried in the mounds scattered all over the country, only a few have been exposed to give us some knowledge of the life of the ancient people. A part of earth that is elevated and incorporates the remnants of ancient habitation is known as the archaeological mound. Both single and multi-culture mounds may be found in a given area.





**Figure 1. PGW shreds**

The predominance of only one cultural sequence in a mound of the site can be termed as single culture site. The Painted Grey Ware (PGW) (*Figure 1*) culture, the culture of the Satavahanas and of the Kushanas is such examples. The overlap of many different cultural sequences in succession creates a multi-culture mound. The excavation of a mound provides a better understanding towards the succession of each layer stratigraphically bearing numerous archaeological artifacts and tools. Both vertical and horizontal excavation can be done in a mound (*Figure 2*). A vertical excavation is done from the topsoil towards the lower part of the mound keeping a vertical profile. These types of excavations unearth the sequence of the archaeological remains through specific periods. A particular part of the site is selected for vertical excavation.



**Figure 2. MohenjoDaro Mound**

On the contrary in horizontal excavation most of the site is excavated without any discreet selection of a particular area. Horizontal excavation informs us about the culture of the site in specific periods in totality. While several archaeological sites are dug vertically, they often provide a good chronological control and sequence of the material culture. Horizontal excavations being extremely expensive get conducted rarely. Therefore, we do not obtain a thorough understanding regarding ancient Indian history and its material life through vertical excavations. Moreover, several of the excavated mounds represent a poor degree of preservation. Normally the arid climatic zones of Rajasthan, western Uttar Pradesh and north-western India support better preservation of the archaeological remains. In the mid-Gangetic plains and deltaic regions, the antiquities suffer from corrosion due to moist climate and high humidity. This type of climate damages iron artefacts and mud structures cannot be identified as well. Stone and burnt brick structures somehow withstand the moist and humid climatic conditions. Archaeological sites characterized as agricultural settlements older than 7000 BCE in the north-western part of India have been excavated.

The second millennium BCE sites from the Gangetic plains and their material culture also get reported from various excavations. The excavations portray the layout of the settlements, their material culture, food habits and social organization. Megalithic structures have been quite common in many parts of South India, where ancient people were found buried with many different types of artefacts like ceramics, stone tools, beads and other related objects. These structures are made of stone and many different types of such structures are found as well, particularly in the Deccan region and South India during and after the Iron Age.

Different types of sites can be dated by various techniques. Among all the dating techniques radiocarbon is used quite frequently. Radiocarbon is a form of carbon isotope ( $C^{14}$ ) or Carbon 14 that is present in all the living organisms. The radiocarbon decays in a steady rate, like any other radioactive elements. In a living organism the uptake of radiocarbon through air and food neutralizes the decay of radiocarbon. The actual loss of ( $C^{14}$ ) can be measured in a dead organism and therefore it can be dated in absolute terms. Among several dating techniques, radiocarbon is one of the best

accepted absolute dating methods.  $C^{14}$  is present in all the living organisms which decay at a steady rate.

Carbon 14 or radiocarbon decay rate can be calculated through time. In the living organisms, the constant decay of the radiocarbon isotope gets neutralized through the intake of  $C^{14}$  present in the air and food. The age of any organic material can be determined by measuring the loss of radiocarbon, the radioisotope that got elapsed through time. After the death of any organic body, it no longer absorbs carbon isotope 14 from the air, food and atmosphere. And the already accumulated radiocarbon starts decaying in a steady-state within the organic body after its death. This steady decay rate is called the half-life of the radioisotope and for radiocarbon, the estimate is 5568 years. This means that in 5568 years the radioactive content within the organic material would become half and similarly in 11,136 years the radioactive material or  $C^{14}$  present within the organic material would turn one-fourth since the death of the living organism. Conventionally, 70,000 years is the upper limit of the radiocarbon date.

Beyond this time, it is not possible to obtain any convincing date. The analysis of plant residues and pollen remains from the archaeological record provides a lot of information regarding the history of climate and vegetation. This data supports the understanding that approximately around 7000-6000 BCE agriculture was practiced in Rajasthan and Kashmir. The metal artifacts have been analyzed scientifically and the components can now be traced to the respective mines from where the metals were mined. Therefore, the stages and developments of metal technology can now be identified. The analysis and examination of animal bones provide information about their status whether they were domesticated or not. This also informs us about why and how they got domesticated.

#### **1.1.3.2: Epigraphy:**

Inscriptions help us to reconstruct our past. It is a primary source material to understand the history of any region and dynasties. Epigraphy is essentially the study of inscriptions. Whereas the study of old writings used in various inscriptions and other ancient documents and materials is known as palaeography. Inscriptions can be found

recorded and carved on various materials like copper plates, stone pillars, temple walls, rocks, seals, wooden tablets, images, bricks and terracotta. Conventionally, the earliest inscriptions are found on stones and stone pillars in India. Copper plates began to be used for recording land donations in the early centuries of the Common Era.

South India has a long tradition of carved inscriptions, made on stone pillars on a large scale. Many inscriptions in South India are found carved on temple walls and they denote donative records. The earliest epigraphical hints of Indian subcontinent are identified from Sri Lanka in the Tamil form of Brahmi script, on stones and potsherds. They date back to the fifth century BCE. Brahmi script with inscriptions appeared in the country proper in about third century BCE. They seem to be introduced through Asokan edicts and early Tamil- Brahmi inscriptions. The earliest inscriptions in India are found to be in Prakrit and Tamil languages. Sanskrit was a later introduction and only started appearing as a language in the epigraphs by around second century CE. During the fourth and fifth centuries CE Sanskrit received its prominent place as a language of the epigraphs, however, Prakrit was also in use during the same timeframe. The influence of local languages in the epigraphs can be seen in the ninth and tenth centuries CE. *Epigraphia Indica* and *Corpus Inscriptionum-Indicarum* provide a lot of information related to the inscriptional history of the Maurya, post-Maurya and Gupta periods. In the case of South India epigraphical publications such as *Topographical lists of Inscriptions*, *South Indian Inscriptions*, *Epigraphia Carnatica* and *Epigraphia Andhrica* have been published as a series of collections.

However, a large number of inscriptions are still waiting for systematic decipherment and publication. Brahmi and Kharoshti, both being primary scripts in Asokan inscriptions were written from left to right and right to left, respectively. Northern and North-Western part of India experienced the prevalence of Brahmi script. (Figure 3) Present day Pakistan and Afghanistan have evidence of Greek and Aramaic scripts used in Asokan inscriptions. Brahmi script retained its supremacy in terms of usage by the end of Gupta period.

+	ᳵ	᳸	ᳺ	᳼	᳾	᳿	᳽	᳾	᳿
ka	kha	ga	gha	ña	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
[kə]	[kʰə]	[gə]	[gʰə]	[ɲə]	[cə]	[cʰə]	[ʃə]	[ʃʰə]	[ɲə]
ꣳ	ꣴ	ꣵ	ꣶ	ꣷ	꣸	꣹	꣺	ꣻ	꣼
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	ta	tha	da	dha	na
[ṭə]	[ṭʰə]	[ḍə]	[ḍʰə]	[ṇə]	[tə]	[tʰə]	[də]	[dʰə]	[nə]
ꣽ	ꣾ	ꣿ	꤀	꤁					
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma					
[pə]	[pʰə]	[bə]	[bʰə]	[mə]					
ꣿ	꤂	꤃	꤄	꤅	꤆	꤇	꤈	꤉	
ya	ra	la	va	śa	ṣa	sa	ha	ḷa	
[jə]	[rə]	[lə]	[və]	[ʃə]	[ʂə]	[sə]	[hə]	[ḷə]	

**Figure 3. Brahmi Script**

Regional variation like any other instrument of knowledge was also the case for Brahmi script. In South India the variation was Tamil variant of Brahmi called Damili or Tamil, generally known as Tamil-Brahmi. This is the earliest known writing system attested in many parts southern peninsular India, especially in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Sri Lanka. Tamil-Brahmi records are mainly found on the caverns, stones, stone beds, potsherds, jars, urn burials, coins, seals, etc. These inscriptions are dated on the palaeographic ground to the period between third century BCE and third century CE. Harappan inscriptions of 2500 BCE from the protohistoric period are still awaiting decipherment. The deciphered inscriptions so far which are the earliest related to Indian history are from Iran, which belong to the sixth - fifth centuries BCE. Both Old Indo-Iranian and Semitic languages are found in the cuneiform scripts.

They mostly talk about the Iranian occupation of the Sindh region. The earliest deciphered Asokan inscriptions in India are found to be in Brahmi and Prakrit languages. Asokan inscriptions shed light on Maurya history in general and Asoka's



achievements in particular. Firoz Shah Tughlaq found two Asokan pillars with inscriptions, one in Haryana at Topra and another at Meerut in UP in the fourteenth century CE. After having them brought to Delhi he asked the court Pundits to decipher the inscriptions. But they were unsuccessful. James Prinsep first deciphered the Asokan inscriptions in 1837. However, the British discovered the remaining of the Asokan inscriptions by the end of the eighteenth century and prior to James Prinsep, they also had to face the problems of the decipherment of the Asokan epigraphs.

We have various types of epigraphs related to Asoka the Great Maurya. These epigraphs have diverse contents. They speak about administrative duties, lives of the people in general, socio-economic and socio-political conditions, religious issues and votive records of the devotees from different religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism et cetera. The followers and devotees of different sects and religions construct temples and tablets, erect pillars, put up various types of images to show respect and offer devotion to the respective religious sects and cults. There are some specific types of votive offerings that eulogize the life history and conquests of the kings and the emperors, neglecting the failures and defeats. The Prayag Prasasti of Samudragupta belongs to this category.



**Figure 4. Copper Plate Inscription**

Votive recordings also talk about the land grant, cattle and donation of money for religious purposes. Artisans, merchants, priests also used to make votive offerings, besides the kings, princes and emperors. The inscriptions that detail the land grant records gifted by the chiefs, princes and kings are the main sources to understand the

land revenue system and administrative issues in ancient India. Most of them are copper plate (Figure 4) inscriptions. The records of the land grants detail the revenues and number of villages made to the hermits, priests, temples, chiefs, officials, serfs and monasteries. The land grants are found written in several different languages like Sanskrit, Prakrit, Telegu, Tamil and Kannada.

### **1.1.3.3: Numismatics:**

This discipline is related to the study of coins. A lot of coins belonging to different periods and dynasties across the country were found on the surface, however, systematic excavation revealed most of them. The currency of ancient India was metal coins and not paper unlike today. The coins of ancient times were made of copper, silver, gold and lead. The cowries were used as coins as well. But the value of the cowries was much lower when compared to metal coins. Burnt clay coin moulds have been found from many places. Kushana period clay coin moulds have been found in abundance till the third century CE. During the Gupta period the clay coin moulds ceased to exist. Money was generally stored in different kinds of earthen pots and brass containers in ancient times unlike present-day banking system. Sometimes, these earthen wares and brass containers served as hoards that could have been accessed during trying times. Many such hoards have also been unearthed in several different parts across India, containing both Indian and Roman coins. Most of the important museums like Indian Museum, Kolkata, National Museum, New Delhi and other museums in Patna, Jaipur, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and Lucknow have such coins. Similarly, coins of Indian origins are preserved in the museums of several foreign countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Iran. During the British Raj, the officers of the British government transferred many valuable Indian coins to the public and private museums in Britain. However, many such coins and their histories, provenances have been catalogued and published. Such catalogues are present in Indian Museum, Kolkata and British Museum, London. It should be mentioned that a vast number of coins are yet to be catalogued and published properly.

The ancient coins often carry important symbols. Later period coins include the

names, places, dates and images of the kings, deities and important people. The provenance of the coins provides information about ancient geographies, dynasties, kingdoms, circulation, economy and many other aspects of ancient history like the time frame of the rulers, for example, the Indo-Greeks from the second and first centuries BCE that portrayed gods, mythologies, legends, symbols and religious belief systems. The coins inform us about social, political, religious and economic history of various regions and dynasties. Merchant guilds and goldsmiths used to issue coins as well after having received the necessary permissions from the rulers. This implies that crafts and commerce were gaining gradual importance.



**Figure 5. Indo-Greek Coins**

Coins (Figure 5) were an important medium of trade and exchange. Post - Mauryan period yielded most of the coins in terms of numbers. Gold, silver, copper, tin, bronze and lead coins are found from this period. However, most of the gold coins are found from the Gupta period. This again implies that during the post-Mauryan and most part of the Gupta dynasties trade and commerce activities gradually flourished. But post-Gupta times provide evidence of only a few coins that signify the gradual decline in trade and commerce during this time.

#### **1.1.4 Literary Sources:**

##### **1.1.4.1: Veda-Itihasa-Purana Tradition:**

Religious themes and issues have been the primary topics for our ancient books. These books of the Hindu religion include the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Brahmanas* and epics



like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. These ancient texts provide much information regarding the socio-cultural milieu, conditions and contexts of ancient lifeways. However, the timeframe and place issues discussed in these books cannot be verified. Scholars assigned the *Rig Vedic* texts to the 1500 – 1000 BCE time bracket. However, the other important Vedas, like the Atharva Veda, Yajur Veda and the Brahmanas and Upanishads could be attributed to 1000 – 500 BCE time bracket. Interpolations occur in every vedic texts. Often they appear in the beginning or at the end. However, sometimes they are found in the middle of the texts as well. The Rig Vedic texts primarily possess a collection of prayers. The later vedic texts on the other hand not only contain prayers but also various types of magic, mythological stories and rituals. The *Upanishads*, however, mostly consist of philosophical quests. Thorough knowledge of the *Vedangas* was necessary to understand the Vedic texts properly. *Vedangas* are also called the limbs of the Vedas that are actually supplementary texts. The *Vedangas* consist of rituals (*Kalpa*), etymology (*Nirukta*), metrics (*Chanda*), astronomy (*Jyotisha*), phonetics (*Shiksha*) and grammar (*Vyakarana*). These subject matters both independently and cumulatively gave rise to a good deal of literature.

They were written in the precept form of prose which is also called sutras due to the brevity of the contents. Panini's treatise on grammar is one of the examples which is conventionally dated back to approximately around 400 BCE. Panini opened up a great detail regarding the social, cultural and economic lifeways of the ancient times in his book while detailing the principles of grammar. His *Ashtadhyayi* is significant for providing much information on the *Janapadas* of pre-Mauryan times. The major *Puranas* and two epics were supposed to have been completed by c.400 CE. Of the two major epics, Mahabharata is the earliest one and dated back to approximately 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE to 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The actual name was Jaya Samhita which comprised of 8800 verses talking about victory. These verses later hiked to 24000. Its name was then Bharata after one of the earliest vedic indigenous populations of the then times. The same named *Mahabharata* or *Satasahasri Samhita* when the verses were raised to 100000 and got compiled accordingly. The Mahabharata contains many stories in narrative, descriptive

and didactic forms. The *Kaurava-Pandava* war episodes generally belong to later vedic periods. The descriptive portion might be of post-vedic times and the didactic part denotes the post-Mauryan and Gupta times. Accordingly, *Ramayana* as well originally had 6000 verses which were raised to 12000 verses, and finally to 224000. The didactic part of *Ramayana* got composed and introduced much later than the didactic portions of *Mahabharata*. The *Puranas* which are eighteen in number detail a lot of historical materials. The *Puranas* talk about the dynasties and their histories upto the initial phases of Gupta rule.

The contents of the *Puranas* are encyclopedic in nature. The cause-effect relationship of various events and their places are mentioned in the Puranic tales. The subject matter of the *Puranas* was often mentioned in the future tense, however, they were mentioned in the texts after the actual events took place. Four ages have been mentioned in the *Puranas*, namely *Krita*, *Treta*, *Dvapara* and *Kali*. Every succeeding age has been purported as worse than the previous one while mentioning that social and moral evils would enhance in each succeeding one. Time, place and important aspects of history are all mentioned in these four phases of time in a linear fashion. The *Puranas* alleged that Dharma would become Adharma as time progresses towards *Kali Yuga*. A huge body of ritual literature is found from the post-Vedic period. In the *Srautasutras*, it is said that men belonging to three higher varnas could make public sacrifices, especially the kings, princes and chiefs. Most of the times, they represented grand royal ceremonies.

In the *Grihyasutras*, the rites of passages related to birth, marriage, death, sacred thread ceremony, name giving ceremony and other pertinent domestic rituals are prescribed. Both the *Srautasutras* and *Grihyasutras* are dated back to around c.600 – 300 BCE. The *Sulvasutras* provide a lot of information regarding the preparation of fire alters and sacrificial alters following mathematical precision. This text details the principles of geometry and mathematics. Buddhist and Jain religious books talked about important historical persons and places. Pali was the main language of the early Buddhist texts and was predominantly in use around the Magadha region of South Bihar. Pali language was a form of Prakrit.

The Prakrit texts were mostly compiled in Sri Lanka during the first century BC. However, the canonical parts provide much information about the life and times of Buddha in India. Apart from the Jataka stories the Buddhist literatures also impart much insights related to the rulers of Magadha, the then South and North Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Jataka stories which are non-canonical literature detailed about the previous 550 births of Gautam Buddha where he was born as various types of animals. Each birth story is popularly known as a *Jataka* tale. The time around fifth century BCE is well documented in the Jataka stories including the socio-economic conditions. Political life during the times of Buddha is also mentioned in the Jataka stories. In Valabhi, Gujarat the Jaina texts were composed in Prakrit language during the sixth century CE. The Jaina texts mostly talked about trade, economy and traders. The life and time of Mahavira including the political history of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is well depicted in the *Jaina* texts.

#### **1.1.4.2: Secular Literary Tradition:**

The law books that are *Dharmasutras* and *Smritis* and their commentaries together are called *Dharmasastras*. They were compiled around 500 BCE – 200 BCE. The principal *Smritis* are dated back to sixth century CE. They mostly lay down the principles and duties that must be performed by the kings, priests, officials and people of various varnas. The property, inheritance rights and marriage rules are codified here. Particularly, how the properties were held, sold and later on inherited have been described in the *Smritis*.

Different types of punishments have also been enlisted here for the people guilty of several different types of crimes like theft, murder, adultery and assault. The *Arthashastra* of *Kautilya* is an important law book. The entire text can be found divided into fifteen books. Books II and III among these could be of an earlier date and perhaps they were written by different people at different points of time. The completion of the entire book perhaps took place by the beginning of the Christian era, however, the society, polity and economy of the Mauryan times got primary weightage in the book.

Similarly, the works of Kalidasa, Sudraka, Bhasa and Banabhatta are equally important. Apart from the literary value, the works reflected the times and the then conditions of the society during the lifetime of the authors. Kalidasa mostly wrote *Kavyas* and dramas, of which *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is the most famous one. The unique creative rhetoric of the *kavyas* of Kalidasa informs us about the socio-cultural life of the Guptas.

#### **1.1.4.3: Tamil literary Tradition:**

In addition to Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit sources, ancient *Sangam* literature has a lot of Tamil texts. The *Sangam* literature evolved over a timeframe of five to six centuries by Tamil poets. The literature and poetry got assembled together in several colleges that received patronage from the Tamil kings and chiefs. The colleges were known as *Sangams* and the total corpus of literature that got produced in these assemblies was known as *Sangam* literature.

The creation of the corpus is attributed during the 300 BCE and 300 CE, although their final codification seems ensured after the sixth century CE. Approximately more than 130,000 lines of poetry are there in *Sangam* literature. Eight anthologies named as *Ettuthokai* give the structure to *Sangam* literature. *Purananuru* are a group of hundred collections of poems. It also means the four hundred of the exterior. *Patinenkilkannakku* (The Eighteen Lower Collections) and *Pattupattu* (The Ten Songs) are the two main groups of collections. It is generally assumed that the former is older than the latter. Accordingly, it carries immense historical significance. Having several layers, the *Sangam* texts cannot be established following some strict criteria of style and content.

However, they can be identified on the basis of stages of social evolution. The *Sangam* texts are not related to religious teachings and performances, unlike the *Vedic* texts. They are secular in nature. The short and long poems were composed by various poets in praise of numerous heroes and heroines. The poems talk about the chiefs and kings and their military exploits and are of quite a high quality. The gifts made by the royals to the bards and soldiers were celebrated and probably they were recited at the

royal courts as well. Often they are compared to the idea of heroism related to the Homeric age since the poems represented warfare and warriors. Though the names, titles, dynasties, territories, wars, etc., mentioned in the poems are real, these texts perhaps cannot directly be used for historical writings and narratives.

Some of the Chola, Chera and Pandya kings included in the *Sangam* literature were portrayed as donors in the inscriptions dated back to the second century BCE. *Kaveripoompattinam* and Muziris, Pattanam et cetera are places and settlements that found inclusion in the *Sangam* texts. Now archaeological excavations and related data support the flourishing existence of these places. The literature talks about the Yavanas who used to come in their vessels to purchase pepper with gold. They supplied wine and women slaves to the natives. Both the archaeological record and Latin and Greek sources testify to this. The *Sangam* literature is a primary source to understand the socio-political and socio-economic lifeways of the ancient people who lived in the ancient *Tamilakam*, which mainly covered present-day Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The several aspects of trade and commerce that are mentioned in the text could be corroborated by the foreign accounts and archaeological findings.

#### **1.1.4.4: Greco-Roman and Chinese Textual Sources:**

Literature and texts occurring from indigenous sources can be complemented by the foreign accounts, travelogues of the foreigners, Greek, Roman and Chinese travelers and by a few religious converts who came to mainland India during the ancient times. These people documented the past in their travelogues as they observed. However, Alexander's invasion has no documentation as far as the Indian primary sources are concerned. All his exploits and the narratives emerged from the Greek literature.

The Greek sources mentioned about prince Sandrokottas who is supposed to be the famous king Chandragupta Maurya, during the 326 BC, a contemporary of Alexander the Great who invaded India. Chandragupta Maurya's accession period is allegedly 322 BC as per the Greek sources. Megasthenes's *Indica* is not beyond disputes and only a few fragments have been found so far. He came to the court of Chandragupta Maurya and several classical writers referred to his work. The fragments

of Megasthenes's Indica provide important information regarding the society, polity, economy, administration and culture of Chandragupta Maurya's time period. Annals of Indian ports during the first and second century CE are found in several Greek and Roman sources. They all spoke about the thriving Indo-Roman trade and related aspects. Both ancient geography and commerce have been dealt in the books of Ptolemy's Geography and Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, written by an anonymous author is dated back to 80 – 115 CE talked about Roman trade in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean area and the book Geography dates back to around 150 CE.

Approximately around the first century Historia Naturalis by Pliny was written in Latin that describes trade between India and Italy. The Alexandrian traveller Kosmos Indikopleustes wrote the Christian Topography around 550 CE, which contains reference on Christianity and horse trade in India. The Chinese travelers Fa-Hsien and Hsuan Tsan were Buddhists and they traveled to mainland India to see the Buddhist shrines and study Buddhism further. Fa-Hsien came to India during the beginning of the fifth century and Hsuan Tsan in the second quarter of the seventh century. While Fa-Hsien chronicled the society, polity and economy of the Gupta times, Hsuan Tsan mostly talked about the times of Harsha.

### **1.1.5: Summary:**

The discovery, exploration, identification, organization and systematic presentation of sources are herculean task for historians and archaeologists. The sources are endless as its explanatory organization is more difficult. The historians make sure that history as a discipline remains open to dialogues and discussions and do not fall back within the realm of generalizations by all.

### **Keywords**

Ancient Indian History - Source Materials - Archaeology - Archaeological Excavation - Vertical Excavation - Horizontal Excavation - C14 Dating - Archaeological Sources - Material Remnants - PGW - NBPW - BRW - Epigraphy - Palaeography - Brahmi Script

- James Prinsep - Asokan Inscription - Samudragupta's Allahabad Pillar inscription - Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum - Topographical lists of Inscriptions - Epigraphia Indica - South Indian Inscriptions - Epigraphia Carnatica - Tamil-Brahmi - Numismatics - Roman Coins - Punch Marked Coins - Literary Sources - Vedas - Puranas - Itihasas - Vedangas - Sutras - Srautasutras - Grihyasutras - Mahabharata - Ramayana - Upanishads - Pali texts - Prakrit texts - Jatakas - Secular Literatures - Smritis- Dharmasutras - Dharmashastras - Arthasastra - Bhasa - Sudraka - Banabhatta - Kalidasa - Abhijnanashakuntalam - Tamil Literatures - Sangam Classics - Ettuthokai - Purananuru - Patinenkilkannakku - Pattupattu - Greco-Roman Textual Sources - Indika - Periplus of the Erythraean Sea - Ptolemy - Geography - Pliny - Historia Naturalis - Kosmos Indikopleustes - Christian Topography - Chines accounts - Fa-Hsien - Hsuan Tsang.

### **1.1.7: Self-Assessment Questions:**

1. 'The reconstruction of ancient history of India is difficult' Do you agree with this statement?
2. Write a brief note on the Indian Epics. Critically point out its importance of writing history.
3. Explain how the system of Carbon14 works for dating ancient objects?
4. Mention the languages and scripts used in the inscriptions of Asoka.
5. Explain the significance of Sangam classics for reconstructing the ancient past of South India.
6. . How does numismatics help the historian in reconstructing past?
7. Explain the term 'Epigraphy'. Inscriptions provide us some detailed aspects of polity, society, culture and economy.
8. Critically analyse the corroborative value of literary sources with archaeological sources.
9. Differentiate the terms 'Secular Literature' and 'Religious Literature' for writing history.
10. Categorically list out and critically evaluates the source materials for writing the history of Mauryan Empire.

## **Lesson 1.2: Pre - Historic Culture**

### **Structure**

- 1.2.1: Objectives
- 1.2.2: Introduction
- 1.2.3: Palaeolithic Culture (Old Stone Age)
  - 1.2.3.1: Palaeolithic Phases
    - 1.2.3.1.1: Lower Palaeolithic Age (Early Old Stone Age)
    - 1.2.3.1.2: Middle Palaeolithic Age (Middle Old Stone Age)
    - 1.2.3.1.3: Upper Palaeolithic Age (Later Old Stone Age)
- 1.2.4: Mesolithic Age (Middle Stone Age)
- 1.2.5: Neolithic Age (New Stone Age)
  - 1.2.5.1: The concept of Neolithic Revolution
- 1.2.6: Pre-Historic Art
- 1.2.7: Chalcolithic Age
  - 1.2.7.1: Significance and Limitations of the Chalcolithic Culture
    - 1.2.7.1.1: Significance
    - 1.2.7.1.2: Limitations
- 1.2.8: OCP Culture
- 1.2.9: Copper Hoard Culture
- 1.2.10: Summary
- 1.2.11: Keywords
- 1.2.12: Self-Assessment Questions

### **1.2.1: Objectives:**

- To know about the term 'Pre-History' in global perspective.
- To know about the pre-historic societies in India.
- To understand a loose chronology of Pre-historic cultures in India.
- To differentiate Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Chalcolithic communities of India.
- To know about the geographical distribution of pre-historic sites in the



subcontinent.

- To apprehend the technological development in various pre-historic phases.
- To signify the Pre-historic social development of hunting-gathering to food-producing.
- To acquaint with the Perspective of Neolithic Revolution.
- **1.2.2: Introduction:**

The ancient human history of India can be dated back to Pre- historic times, and this can be further divided as the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. There is no written and readable evidence available to restructure this period. Because of this, the period is called the prehistoric period. Archaeological evidence like pottery, artefacts, stone tools, etc., discovered from the settlements of pre-historic man is the chief source materials to reconstructing their historical past. On the basis of the peculiarity of stone tools which they used, the Stone Age in India can further be divided as Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age), and Chalcolithic.

### **1.2.3: Palaeolithic Culture (Old Stone Age):**

The earth is over 4000 million years old. The evolution of its crust shows four phases. The fourth phase is known by quaternary, that is again divided into Pleistocene (most recent) and Holocene (present). The chronological duration of Pleistocene is between 2,000,000 years to 10,000 years before present. Holocene began approximately 10,000 years ago. Man emerged on earth during the early Pleistocene times when the true ox, elephant and horse also appeared. However, this event might have occurred in Africa three million years ago. Earliest fossil records of humans are absent in India.

Second glaciation period and the stone tools obtained from the deposits of this time frame approximately around 2,50,000 BCE inform us about the presence of early humans. Artefacts from the site of Bori, Maharashtra are attributed to 1.4 million years of age that confirms the early appearance of man from India. However, this requires further research. The emergence and evolution of lithic technology in the Indian

subcontinent is generally almost contemporaneous to Africa, however, apparently the formation of India happened later than Africa. Barring from the alluvial plains of the Ganga, Yamuna and Indus rivers chipped stone tools (Figure 6) have been discovered from all across India.



**Figure 6. Stone Tools**

Chipped stone tools and chopper-chopping stone tools were used for hunting wild animals. The early Indians from the prehistoric time period had no knowledge of agriculture and house building activities. Till about 9000 BCE this stage continued. Several palaeolithic tools have been found from the Chotanagpur Plateau area that could be dated back to 1,00,000 BCE. From Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh such tools have also been obtained dated back to 20,000 BCE – 10,000 BCE. Bone implements and animal remains have also been found with such stone tool assemblages. Several animal remains from the Belan Valley of Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh demonstrate that sheep, goat and cattle were killed for food. Men used to be hunters and food gatherers during the earliest phases of palaeolithic period. The Puranas talk about people who survived on roots, tubers and fruits and some such small groups of people are found even today, mostly living in the hills, jungles and caves. During the Pleistocene period of Ice age, the old stone age, also known as the Palaeolithic culture of India gradually developed. In the higher altitudes and the peripheries ice sheets belonging to Pleistocene period covered a huge part of the earth's surface area. The ice sheets were absent in the Tropical areas, apart from the mountainous regions. The tropical areas experienced a much higher degree of rainfall.

### **1.2.3.1: Palaeolithic Phases:**

Some phases are in the Palaeolithic culture in India, and climate change along with the stone tool use by the people define these phases appropriately. The first phase is known as Early or Lower Palaeolithic Age (Early Old Stone Age), the second is Middle Palaeolithic Age (Middle Old Stone Age), and the third is Later or Upper Palaeolithic Age (Later Old Stone Age). Detailed information is unavailable for Bori artifacts. Therefore, the first phase may be conventionally placed between 500,000 BCE and 50,000 BCE. The second phase can be placed between 50,000 BCE and 40,000 BCE. Finally, the third phase could be realized between 40,000 BCE and 10,000 BCE. Although in the Deccan plateau, stone tools belonging to both middle and upper palaeolithic ages may be found dated back to between 40,000 BCE and 1500 BCE.

#### ***1.2.3.1.1: Lower Palaeolithic Age (Old Stone Age):***

The Lower Palaeolithic or the Old Stone Age covers the greater part of the Ice Age. “Its characteristic feature is the use of hand-axes, cleavers and choppers. The axes found in India are more or less similar to those of western Asia”. There in Europe and Africa Stone tools were used mainly for chopping, digging and skinning. The Early Palaeolithic Age sites are found in the valley of river Soan (Sohan) in Pakistan Punjab. Several sites have been found in Kashmir and the Thar Desert.

The Early Palaeolithic tools have also been found in the Belan valley in Mirzapur District in Uttar Pradesh. “Those found in the desert area of Didwana in Rajasthan, in the valleys of the Belan and the Narmada, and in the caves and rock shelters of Bhimbetka near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh roughly belong to 100,000 BCE. The rock shelters may have served as seasonal camps for human beings. Hand-axes have been found in a deposit of the time of the second Himalayan inter-glaciation.” In this period climate became less humid.

#### ***1.2.3.1.2: Middle Palaeolithic Age (Middle Stone Age):***

“The Middle Palaeolithic industries are mainly based upon flakes. These flakes are found in different parts of India and show regional variations. The principal tools

are varieties of blades, points, borers and scrapers made of flakes. We also find a large number of borers and blade like tools. The geographical horizon of the Middle Palaeolithic Sites coincides roughly with that of the Lower Palaeolithic sites. Here we notice a crude pebble industry in strata contemporary with the third Himalayan glaciation. The artefacts of this age are also found at several places on the river Narmada, and also at several places, south of the Tungabhadra River.”

#### **1.2.3.1.3: Upper Palaeolithic Age (Late Stone Age):**

The Upper Palaeolithic phase was less humid. It coincided with the last phase of the Ice Age when climate became comparatively warm. In the world context it marks the appearance of new flint industries and of men of the modern type (*Homo sapiens*). In India, we notice the use of blades and burins, which have been found in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, central Madhya Pradesh, southern Uttar Pradesh, south Bihar plateau and the adjoining areas. Caves and rock shelters for use by human beings in the Upper Palaeolithic phase have been discovered at Bhimbetka, about 45km south of Bhopal. An Upper Palaeolithic assemblage, characterized by comparatively large flakes, blades, burins and scrapers has also been found in the upper level of the Gujarat dunes. It would thus appear that Palaeolithic sites are found in many hilly slopes and river valleys of the country; they are absent in the alluvial plains of the Indus and the Ganga.

#### **1.2.4: Mesolithic Age (Microlithic Age):**



**Figure 7. Microlithic Tools**

During this period the climate became warm and dry. This in turn brought about the changes in fauna and flora and made it possible for human beings to move to new areas. The characteristic tools of the Mesolithic Age are Microliths (Figure 7) or the 'Little Tools.' The Mesolithic sites are found in good numbers in Rajasthan, southern Uttar Pradesh, central and eastern India and also south of the river Krishna. Of them, Bagor in Rajasthan is very well excavated, and it had a distinctive microlithic industry, and its inhabitants subsisted on hunting and pastoralism. The site remained occupied for 5000 years from the fifth millennium BCE onwards. Adamgarh in Madhya Pradesh and Bagor in Rajasthan provide the earliest evidence for the domestication of animals; this could be around 5000 BCE.

The cultivation of plants around 7000 – 6000 BCE is suggested in Rajasthan from a study of the deposits of the former Salt Lake, Sambhar. So far only a few finds of the Mesolithic Age have been dated scientifically. "The Mesolithic culture continued to be important roughly from 9000 BCE to 4000 BCE. There is no doubt that it paved the way for the rise of the Neolithic Revolution. It is interesting to note that on the northern spurs of the Vindhyas in the Belan valley all the three phases of the Palaeolithic followed by the Mesolithic and then by the Neolithic have been found in sequence, and so is the case with the middle part of the Narmada valley. But in several areas the Neolithic culture succeeded the Mesolithic tradition, which continued right to the beginning of the Iron Age, roughly even upto 1000 BCE."

#### **1.2.5: Neolithic Age (New Stone Age):**

In the world context, the Neolithic Age or New Stone Age began in 9000 BCE. The only Neolithic settlement in the Indian subcontinent attributed to 7000 BCE, located in Mehrgarh, which is situated in Baluchistan, a present province of Pakistan. In the initial stage, before 5000 BCE, the people of this place did not use any pottery. "Some Neolithic sites found on the northern spurs of the Vindhyas are considered as old as 5000 BCE, but generally Neolithic settlements found in south India are not older than 2500 BCE, in some parts of southern and eastern India they are as late as 1000 BCE. The people of this age used tools and implements of polished stone."

They particularly used stone axes which have been found in large numbers in a good part of the hilly tracts of the country. “This cutting tool was put to various uses by the people. In ancient legends Parasurama became an important axe-wielding hero. Based on the types of axes used by Neolithic settlers, three important areas of Neolithic settlement - north-western, north-eastern, and southern can be found. The north western groups of Neolithic tools represent rectangular axes with curved cutting edge. The north- eastern group shows polished stone axes with rectangular butt.”



**Figure 8. Burzahom Archaeological Site**

They have occasional shouldered hoes. The southern group is distinguished by axes with oval sides and pointed butt. The Kashmiri Neolithic culture in the northwest, was distinguished by its dwelling pits. “The range of ceramics, the variety of stone and bone tools, and the complete absence of the microliths are significant. Another important site is that of Burzahom (Figure 8), which means the place of birch. It is situated 16 km northwest of Srinagar. The Neolithic people lived on a lake side in pits, and probably had hunting and fishing economy. They seem to have been acquainted with agriculture. The people of Gufkral (literally ‘the cave of the potter’), a Neolithic site 41 km southwest of Srinagar, practiced both agriculture and domestication of animals. The Neolithic people in Kashmir used not only polished stone tools, but what is more interesting; they used numerous tools and weapons made of bone. The only

other place which has yielded considerable bone implements in India is Chirand, which is 40 km west of Patna on the northern side of the Ganga.’’ Made of antlers (horns of deer), these implements have been found in a late Neolithic set up in an area with about 100 cm rainfall.

The settlement became possible because of the open land available on account of the joining together of the four rivers - Ganga, Sone, Gandak, and Ghaghraat. It is marked by the paucity of stone tools. The people of Burzahom used coarse grey pottery. Domestic dogs were buried with their masters in their graves. The placing of domestic dogs in the graves of the masters does not seem to be the practice with Neolithic people in any other part of India. The earliest date for Burzahom is about 2700 BCE, but the bones recovered from Chirand cannot be dated earlier than 2000 BCE and they possibly belong to the late Neolithic phase.

The second group of Neolithic people lived in south India, south of the river Godavari. They usually settled on the top of granite hills or on plateaus near the river banks. They used stone axes and also some kind of stone blades. Fire baked earthen figurines suggest that they kept a large number of cattle. They possessed cattle, sheep, and goats. They used rubbing stone querns, which shows that they were acquainted with the art of producing cereals. The third area from which Neolithic tools have been recovered is in the hills of Assam. Neolithic tools are also found in the Garo hills in Meghalaya on the north-eastern frontier of India. In addition to this, we also find a number of Neolithic settlements on the northern branches of the Vindhyas in Mirzapur and Allahabad districts of Uttar Pradesh. Neolithic sites in Allahabad district are noted for the cultivation of rice in the sixth millennium BCE.

Some of the important Neolithic sites that have been excavated include Maski, Brahmagiri, Hallur, Kodekal, Sanganakallu, T. Narsipur, Piklihal and Takkalakota in Karnataka, and Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu. Utnur is an important Neolithic site in Andhra Pradesh. The Neolithic phase in south India seems to have covered the period from about 2000 BCE to 1000 BCE. The Neolithic settlers in Piklihal were cattle-herders. They domesticated cattle, sheep, goats, etc. They set up seasonal camps

surrounded by cow pens made with posts and stakes. In these enclosures they accumulated dung. Then the entire camping ground was put to fire and cleared for camping in the next season. Both ash mounds and habitation sites have been found in Piklihal.

The Neolithic settlers were the earliest farming communities. They broke the ground with stone hoes and digging sticks at the end of which ring stones weighing one to half a kilogram were fixed. Besides polished tools of stone, they used microlithic blades. They lived in circular or rectangular houses made of mud and reed. It is held that the primitive people living in circular houses owned property in common. In any case these Neolithic people led a settled life. They produced ragi and horsegram. The Neolithic people of Mehrgarh were more advanced. They produced wheat, cotton, and lived in mud-brick houses. Since in the Neolithic phase several settlements came to be acquainted with the cultivation of cereals and the domestication of animals, they needed pots in which they could store their food grains. They further needed pots for cooking, eating and drinking. Hence pottery first appears in this phase. Hand-made pottery is found in the early stage. Later the Neolithic people used foot-wheels to turn up pots. Their pottery included black-burnished ware, grey-ware, and mat-impressed ware.

Neolithic celts, axes, adzes, chisels, etc., have also been found in the Orissa and Chotanagpur hill areas. But traces of Neolithic settlements are generally few in parts of Madhya Pradesh and the tracts of the upper Deccan, because of the lack of the types of stone which lend themselves easily to grinding and polishing. The period between 9000 BCE and 3000 BCE witnessed a remarkable progress of technology in western Asia, because the people developed the arts of cultivation, weaving, pot-making, house building, domestication of animals, writing, etc.

The whole process started a little late in India. However, the Neolithic Age in the Indian subcontinent began around the sixth millennium BCE. Some of the important crops, including rice, wheat, and barley, came to be cultivated in the subcontinent in this period and a few villages appeared in this part of the world. It appears that the people were now on the threshold of civilization. The people of the Stone Age suffered from



one great limitation. Since they had to depend almost entirely on tools and weapons made of stone, they could not found settlements far away from the hilly areas. They could settle down only on the slopes of the hills, in rock shelters and the hilly river valleys. Further, even with great effort they could not produce more than what they needed for their basic subsistence.

#### **1.2.5.1: The concept of Neolithic Revolution:**

Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe coined the term 'Neolithic Revolution', in global perspective, by his book *Man Makes Himself* in 1936. "During the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic age, humans grouped together in small societies and subsisted by gathering plants, and fishing, hunting or scavenging wild animals. The Neolithic Revolution references a change from a largely nomadic hunter-gatherer way of life to a more settled, agrarian-based one, with the inception of the domestication of various plant and animal species depending on species locally available and likely also influenced by local culture. There are several competing (but not mutually exclusive) theories as to the factors that drove populations to take up agriculture, including the Hilly Flanks hypothesis, the Feasting model, the Demographic theories, the evolutionary/intentionality theory, and the largely discredited Oasis Theory."

The shift to agricultural food production supported a denser population, which in turn supported larger sedentary communities, the accumulation of goods and tools, and specialization in diverse forms of new labour. The nutritional standards of Neolithic populations were generally inferior to that of hunter-gatherers of early ages, and they worked longer hours and had shorter life expectancy. The proto type of life today, including fire prepared food habit, specialization of labour and skill, systematic settled farming, transportation by wheel, trade, urban and civilized life, cultural transition and transformation, institutionalized political execution, etc., can be identified from the revolutionary transition life in the Neolithic age.

### 1.2.6: Pre-Historic Art:



**Figure 9. Prehistoric Rock Art**

The people of Pre-historic age practised painting. Pre-historic art (Figure 9) appears at several places, but Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh is a striking site. Situated in the Vindhyan range, 45 km south of Bhopal, it has more than 1000 painted rock shelters, distributed in an area of ten square kilometers. “The rock paintings extend from the Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic period and in some series even up to recent times. But a good many rock shelters are associated with the Mesolithic occupation. Many birds, animals and human beings are painted. Obviously, most of the birds and animals that appear in paintings were hunted for the sake of subsistence. Perching birds, which live upon grain, are absent in the earliest group of paintings, which evidently belongs to the hunter-gatherer community.”

It is argued that the pre-historic people practiced art not just for the sake of art. It is suggested that too much complexity been at a very early stage in human history. The early man practised art mixed with rituals to overcome their very life conflicts. Even though we can find a few human figures, animals of various types were depicted frequently. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the pre-historic man depicted

various wild animals to ensure control over them, on account of hunting was their major source of subsistence. Their subsistence cult of painting animals was purely life touching in the context of hunting.

### **1.2.7: Chalcolithic Age:**

The Neolithic period ended with the use of metals. Copper was the first metal used, and several cultures were based on the use of copper and stone implements. This culture is called Chalcolithic, which means the copper–stone phase. Technologically, the Chalcolithic stage is applied to the pre-Harappan phase. In various parts of India, the Chalcolithic cultures followed the Bronze Age Harappa culture. Mostly stone and copper objects were used by the Chalcolithic people.

They occasionally used low grade bronze and even iron. Chalcolithic people were primarily rural communities spread over a wide area with hilly land and rivers. The Harappans on the other hand, used bronze and had urbanized on the basis of the produce from the flood plains in the Indus Valley. Settlements relating to the Chalcolithic phase in India are found in south-eastern Rajasthan, the western part of Madhya Pradesh, western Maharashtra, and in southern and eastern India. In south-eastern Rajasthan, two sites, namely Ahar and Gilund, have been excavated. They lie in the dry zones of the Banas valley. In western MP or Malwa, Kayatha and Eran have been excavated.

Malwa-ware is considered the richest among Chalcolithic ceramics. It is characteristic of the Malwa Chalcolithic culture of central and western India.

Some of its pottery and other related cultural elements also appear in Maharashtra. The most extensive excavations have taken place in western Maharashtra. Several Chalcolithic sites like Jorwe, Nevasa, Daimabad in Ahmednagar district; Chandoli, Songaon, and Inamgaon in Pune district; and also Prakash and Nasik have been excavated. They belong to the Jorwe culture named after Jorwe, situated on the left bank of the Pravara River, a tributary of the Godavari, in Ahmednagar district. The Jorwe culture owed much to the Malwa culture. It also shared elements of the Neolithic

culture of the south. The Jorwe culture dated during c. 1400 to 700 BCE covered modern Maharashtra except parts of Vidarbha and the coastal region of Konkan. Although the Jorwe culture was rural, some of its settlements, such as Daimabad and Inamgaon, had almost reached the urban stage. All these sites in Maharashtra were located in semi- arid areas mostly on brown - black soil. They had ber and babul vegetation but fell in the riverine tracts.

We also have Navdatoli situated on the Narmada. Most Chalcolithic ingredients intruded into the Neolithic sites in south India. Several Chalcolithic sites have been discovered in the Vindhyan region of Allahabad district. In Eastern India, besides Chirand on the Ganges, Pandu Rajar Dhibi in Burdwan district and Mahishdal in Birbhum district in West Bengal are important sites. Some of the important sites excavated include Senuar, Sonpur, and Taradih in Bihar; and Khairadih and Narhan in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The Chalcolithic people used weapons made of stone in which the stone blades and bladelets were an important element. In many places, especially in south India, the stone blade industry flourished and stone axes continued to be used. Certain settlements show a large number of copper objects like the sites of Ahar and Gilund, which were situated more or less in the dry zones of the Banas valley in Rajasthan.

Ahar used no microlithic tools, unlike the other contemporary Chalcolithic farming cultures. Stone axes or blades are virtually absent here. Objects include several flat axes, bangles, several sheets, all made of copper, although there is also a bronze sheet. Copper was locally available. The people of Ahar practised smelting and metallurgy from the very outset. The original name of Ahar is Tambavati or a place that has copper. The Ahar culture is dated to between 2100 BCE and 1500 BCE. Gilund is considered as a regional centre of it. Gilund shows only fragments of copper, but it had a stone blade industry. Flat, rectangular copper axes have been found in Jorwe and Chandoli in Maharashtra, and copper chisels in Chandoli.

Chalcolithic people were well accustomed with different types of pottery, one of which is called 'Black and Red Ware' (BRW). It seems to have been widely prevalent

from nearly 2000 BCE onwards. It was thrown on wheel and occasionally painted with white linear designs. This is true of the settlements in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra but also of habitations found in Bihar and West Bengal. The Chalcolithic people in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar produced channel-spouted pots, dishes-on-stand, and bowls-on-stand.



**Figure 10. Black and Red Ware**

It would be wrong to assume that all the people who used BRW pottery were of the same culture. BRW pottery (Figure 10) from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan was painted. There was a little such painted ware in eastern India. In south-eastern Rajasthan, western Madhya Pradesh, and western Maharashtra they domesticated animals and practised agriculture. Cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and buffaloes were reared. They engaged in hunting of wild deer, and buffalo. They were acquainted with camel. Some animal remains besides camel, are identified as being either of the horse, donkey, or wild ass. Chalcolithic people used to eat beef, though they did not eat pork not in a considerable manner.

What is remarkable is that these people produced wheat and rice. They also cultivated bajra. They produced several pulses such as lentil, black gram, green gram, and grass pea. Most of these food grains have been found at Navdatoli, situated on the bank of the Narmada in Maharashtra. Perhaps no other place in India yielded so many cereals in excavations. The people of Navdatoli produced ber and linseed. Cotton was produced in the black cotton soil of the Deccan. Rai, bajra, and several millets were cultivated in the lower Deccan. Fishhooks have been found in eastern India, in Bihar and West Bengal, where we also find rice. This suggests that the Chalcolithic people in the eastern region lived on fish and rice, which is still a popular diet in that part of the country.

Burnt bricks were probably not known. They were seldom used by the Chalcolithic people, and some remains identified from Gilund around 1500 BCE. Occasionally their houses were made of mud-brick. Mostly these were constructed with wattle and daub, and seem to have been thatched houses. The people in Ahar, however, lived in stone houses. Of the 200 Jorwe sites discovered so far, the largest is Daimabad in the Godavari valley. It is about 20 hectares in extent which could have accommodated 4000 people. It also seems to have been fortified with a mud wall which had stone rubble bastions.

Daimabad is popular for the large scale availability of bronze artefacts. Some of these have culturally continued throughout the Indus culture. In the earlier Chalcolithic phase at Inamgaon, large mud houses with ovens and circular pit houses have been located. The later phase (1300 – 1000 BCE) displayed a house with five rooms, fortification. Chalcolithic culture is well-known for its arts and crafts. They were expert coppersmiths and skillful workers in stone. Tools, weapons, and bangles of copper have been unearthed. They also manufactured beads of semiprecious stones such as carnelian, steatite, and quartz crystal. The people knew the art of spinning and weaving because spindle whorls have been discovered in Malwa. Cotton flax and silk threads made of cotton silk and of semal silk (cotton tree) has been found in Maharashtra.

This shows that these people were well acquainted with the manufacture of cloth.

At various sites we find potters, smiths, ivory carvers, lime makers, and terracotta artisans at Inamgaon. Local variations developed in the case of structure, cereals, pottery, etc. Eastern India produced rice while western India cultivated barley and wheat. Certain settlements in Malwa and central India, such as those in Kayatha and Eran, were established early. Those of western Maharashtra and eastern India belong to a much later date. We can form some idea about the burial practices and religious cults of the Chalcolithic people. People in Maharashtra, buried their dead in urns beneath the floor of their house in the north-to-south position.

They did not use separate cemeteries for this purpose, unlike the Harappans. The practice of depositing vessels, copper objects, and other daily life articles in the graves indicates their belief on life after death. The fertility cult and mother goddess worship was popular among the Chalcolithic people. Terracotta figures of women and some unbaked nude clay figurines were used for worship. A figure of the mother goddess has been found in Inamgaon which is similar to that found in western Asia. Stylized bull terracotta figures in Malwa and Rajasthan, show that the bull was the symbol of a religious cult. The settlement patterns along with the burial practices indicate that the social inequalities in Chalcolithic society were in its early stage. A kind of hierarchy regarding settlements can be seen in several Jorwe settlements in Maharashtra.

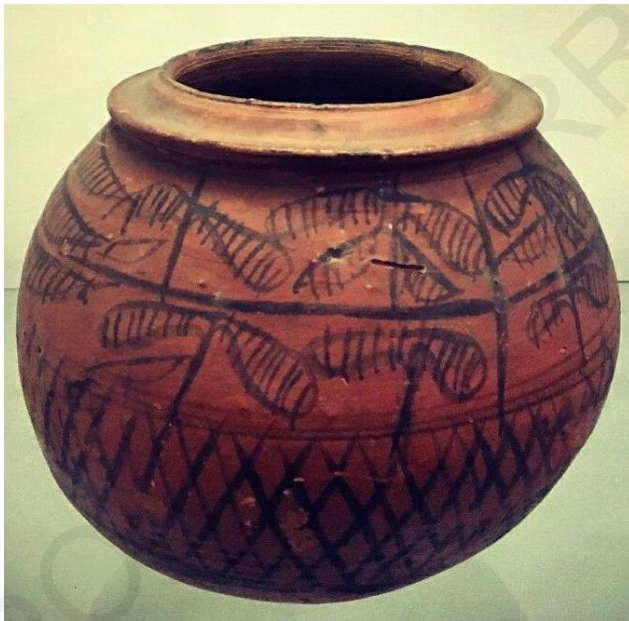
Some of them are as large as twenty hectares. Others measure only five hectares and even less. This would denote two-tier habitations. The difference in the size of settlements suggests that the larger settlements dominated the smaller ones. In both large and small settlements, the chief and his kinsmen, who lived in rectangular houses, dominated others who lived in round huts. In Inamgaon, the craftsmen lived on the western peripheries. The chief lived probably at the centre suggesting social distance between the inhabitants. At Chandoli and Nevasa, some children were buried with copper-based necklaces around their necks. Others had grave goods consisting only of pots. At Inamgaon, an adult was buried with pottery and some copper.

Twenty-nine copper bangles and two unique axes were found in one house in Kayatha. There were also necklaces of semiprecious stones like steatite and carnelian



beads found in pots. These indicate that those who held these affluent objects were better-off than the others.

Ganeshwar which is located close to the rich copper mines of the Sikar-Jhunjhunu area of the Khetri copper belt in Rajasthan deserves mention. The copper objects excavated from this area include arrowheads, spearheads, fish hooks, bangles, chisels, etc. Some of their shapes resemble the objects from Indus sites. A terracotta cake resembling the Indus type was also found. There were also many microliths which are characteristic of the Chalcolithic culture. We also find the Ochre-Coloured-Pottery (OCP) (Figure 11) which is a red-slipped ware. It is often painted in black and largely in vase forms. The Ganeshwar deposits are ascribed to 2800-2200 BCE, and hence, they by and large predate the mature Harappan culture. Ganeshwar supplied copper objects to Harappa although did not receive much from it.



**Figure 11. OCP**

The Ganeshwar people partly lived on agriculture and largely on hunting. Although their principal craft was the manufacture of copper objects, they were unable to urbanize. The Ganeshwar assemblage was neither urban nor a proper OCP/Copper Hoard Culture. With its microliths and other stone tools, much of the Ganeshwar culture, can be considered a Pre-Harappan Chalcolithic culture which contributed to the



making of the Mature Harappan culture. There are several Chalcolithic settlements that can be found chronologically. Some of them are pre-Harappan while others are contemporaneous with the Harappan culture. Some others are post-Harappan. Pre-Harappan strata on some sites in the Harappan zone are also called early Harappan in order to distinguish them from the mature urban Indus civilization. The pre-Harappan phase at Banawali in Haryana and Kalibangan in Rajasthan is distinctly Chalcolithic, as is the case with Kot Diji in Sindh in Pakistan.

Pre-Harappan and Post-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures and those coexisting with the Harappan have been found in northern, western, and central India. The Kayatha culture c. 2000-1800 BCE is an example. Kayatha culture existed towards the end of the Harappan culture. It has some pre-Harappan elements in pottery. It also attests Harappan influence. Many post-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures in these areas are influenced by the post-urban phase of the Harappan culture. Many other Chalcolithic cultures, which are younger in age than the mature Harappan culture, are not connected with the Indus civilization.

The Malwa culture (1700-1200 BCE) found in Navdatoli, Eran, and Nagda is considered to be non-Harappan. That is also the case with the Jorwe culture (1400-700 BCE) which encompasses the whole of Maharashtra except parts of Vidarbha and Konkan. Chalcolithic settlements existed independently of the Harappan culture in the southern and eastern parts of India. The Chalcolithic settlements of the Vindhya region, Bihar, and West Bengal are also not related to Harappan culture. In south India, they are invariably found in continuation of the Neolithic settlements.

Various types of pre-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures promoted the spread of farming communities in Sindh, Baluchistan, Rajasthan, and elsewhere. They created conditions for the rise of the urban civilization of Harappa. Mention may be made of Amri and Kot Diji in Sindh; Kalibangan and even Ganeshwar in Rajasthan. Some of the Chalcolithic farming communities moved to the flood plains of the Indus River. They were acquainted with the bronze metallurgy, and succeeded in establishing cities there. Chalcolithic cultures in central and western India disappeared by 1200 BCE. Only the

Jorwe culture continued until 700 BCE. The Chalcolithic black-and- red-ware (BRW) culture continued into historical times in several parts of India, till the second century BCE. There was a gap of about four to six centuries between the end of the Chalcolithic cultures and the rise of the early historic cultures in central and western India.

The eclipse of the Chalcolithic habitations in western India and western Madhya Pradesh is attributed to a decline in rainfall from about 1200 BCE onwards. In West Bengal and in the mid-Gangetic zone, they continued for a long time. “In western India, probably, the Chalcolithic people were unable to continue for long with the digging stick in the black clayey soil area which is difficult to break in the dry season. In the red soil areas, especially in eastern India, the Chalcolithic phase was immediately followed, without any gap, by the iron phase. It gradually transformed the people into full- fledged agriculturalists. The same is true of the Chalcolithic cultures of the mid-Gangetic plains.” At many places in south India, Chalcolithic culture was improved into the Iron Age culture popularly called Megalithic culture.

### **1.2.7.1: Significance and Limitations of the Chalcolithic Culture:**

#### **1.2.7.1.1: Significance:**

Excluding the alluvial plains and the densely forests, Chalcolithic leftovers have been identified from almost all over the country. Several Chalcolithic sites occur in the alluvial plains of the mid-Gangetic region, particularly near a lake or a river confluence. During this phase, people mostly founded rural settlements on river banks which were not far away from the hills. They used microliths and other stone tools supplemented by some copper tools. It appears that most of them knew the art of copper smelting. Almost all Chalcolithic communities used wheel-turned black-and-red pots. We find that they were the first to use painted pottery, considering their pre-Bronze phase of development.

Their pots were meant for cooking, eating, drinking, and storage. They used both the lota and thali. In south India, the Neolithic phase imperceptibly faded into the Chalcolithic. So these cultures are called Neolithic-Chalcolithic culture. In other parts, especially in western Maharashtra and Rajasthan, the Chalcolithic people appear to have been colonizers. There, the Chalcolithic people’s initial establishments were in Malwa

and central India, specifically in Kayatha and Eran. Their settlements in western Maharashtra were established later. It was much later in Bihar and West Bengal. The authors of the Chalcolithic culture first time established big villages in peninsular India. They cultivated a large quantity of cereals which were generally unknown to the Neolithic people.

They cultivated barley, wheat, and lentil in western India, and rice in southern and eastern India. Their cereal food was supplemented by non-vegetarian food. More animal food was consumed in western India, but fish and rice formed important elements in the diet of eastern India. Remains of more structures have been unearthed in western Maharashtra, western Madhya Pradesh, and south-eastern Rajasthan. The settlements at Kayatha and Eran in Madhya Pradesh, and at Inamgaon in western Maharashtra, were fortified. The remains of structures in Chirand and Pandu Rajar Dhibi in eastern India, on the other hand, were poor, indicating post-holes and round houses. The Chalcolithic burial practices were somewhat different from the Neolithic people; the dead body was placed in the north-south position in Maharashtra, but this was placed in the east-west in southern peninsular India. The extended burials of western India can be categorically differentiated from the fractional burial of eastern India.

#### **1.2.7.1.2: Limitations:**

The Chalcolithic communities tamed cattle, sheep, and goats, which were homesteaded near their residence. The domesticated animals, in all probability, were slaughtered for food and not used for milk and dairy products. Consequently, the Chalcolithic people were not able to make full use of the animals. The Chalcolithic people living in the black cotton soil area of central and western India did not practice cultivation on any intensive or extensive scale. There were hoes or ploughs that have been discovered from the Chalcolithic sites.

Perforated stone discs alone were tied as weights to the digging sticks. They could be used in slash-burn or jhum cultivation. It was possible to sow in the ashes with the aid of such a digging stick. It is significant that, for large scale agriculture activities

on the black soil as well as red soil required the use of iron implements which were seldom made and used in the Chalcolithic culture. The rate of infant mortality was very high in the Chalcolithic society; a large number of baby burials in western Maharashtra attest the fact. Even though a food-producing economy, this could be attributed to lack of nutrition, absence of medical knowledge, or outbreaks of epidemics. In any case, the Chalcolithic social and economic pattern did not promote longevity. The copper–stone culture had an essentially rural background. During its continuance, the supply of copper was limited. Although there are copper mines in eastern India, few copper tools have been found in the Chalcolithic sites of Bihar and the neighbouring states. Some Chalcolithic people primarily used microliths or small stone tools.

The Chalcolithic people were ignorant on the metallurgy of making bronze through mixing tin with copper. “Here it should be remembered that, the far stronger tools made of bronze than copper helped the rise of early civilizations such as Indus, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. If we equate with the people of Bronze Age civilizations, the art of writing as well as the civic life were unknown to the Chalcolithic people. These all significant elements of a civilization (Figure 12) were first introduced in India by the Harappan people.” Even though the most Chalcolithic communities of the subcontinent were junior than the Indus culture, they never obtained any considerable assistance from the Indus people who were well advanced in technology.



**Figure 12. Harappa Bronze Age Civilization**

### **1.2.8: OCP Culture:**

The Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) culture is a Bronze Age culture existed in the Indo-Gangetic Plain, covering the area of Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This phase is roughly assigned to the period between 2000 BCE and 1500 BCE, on the basis of the applications of some scientific dating techniques. The Ochre Coloured Pottery is a red-slipped ware, which generally shows many handled vases. OCP phase was the last stage of Bronze Age, and it was followed by BRW (the Black-and-Red-Ware) and PGW (Painted-Grey-Ware) phases of the Iron Age in North India.

However, after the disappearance of the OCP settlements, in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab until about 1000 BCE it did not have much habitation. We learn of some habitation by people using black-and-red ware. However, their habitational deposits are so thin and the antiquities so poor in quality that we cannot form a distinct idea of their cultural equipment. In the upper part of the doab, settlement begins with the arrival of the Ochre-Coloured Pottery people. Jodhpura, on the border of Haryana and Rajasthan, provides the thickest OCP deposits of 1.1m. It appears that at no place did these settlements last for over a century or so. They were neither large nor spread over a wide territory. It is not clear why and how these settlements came to an end. A suggestion has been made that inundation followed by water logging in an extensive area may have made the area unfit for human settlements.

According to some scholars, the present soft texture of the Ochre-Coloured Pottery is the result of its association with water for a considerable period of time. The OCP people were the contemporary neighbours to the Harappans. Their settlement areas were not far from that of the Harappans. Archaeological remnants of this culture show some similarities with the Harappan culture. There is a good possibility that some socioeconomic and cultural exchanges took place between the OCP communities and the bronze using Harappans.

### **1.2.9: Copper Hoard Culture:**

The 'Copper Hoards' are difficult to define. More than eighty copper hoards

have been found in a wide area ranging from West Bengal and Orissa in the east to Gujarat and Haryana in the west, and from Andhra Pradesh in the south to Uttar Pradesh in the north. This huge hoard of copper artefacts discovered from sites as distinct as Shalozan in Pakistan, Bhagrapir Orissa, and Kallur Andhra Pradesh, have all been lumped together under the designation “Copper Hoards”.

Tool types belonging to these copper hoards are varied in nature, and they include socketed axes, trunnion axes, celts, hatchets, rings, harpoons, antennae swords, spearheads, anthropomorphs (human-like figures), etc. The largest hoard comes from Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh comprising 424 tools and weapons. A substantial number of copper hoards are concentrated in the Ganga - Yamuna doab. We encounter stray finds of copper harpoons, antennae swords, and anthropomorphic figures in other areas. Copper hoard artefacts served several purposes. They were meant not only for fishing, hunting, and fighting but also for artisanal and agricultural activities. They presuppose high technological skill and knowledge on the part of the coppersmith. They cannot have been the handiwork of primitive nomad artisans. At two places in western Uttar Pradesh, in excavations some of these objects have been discovered in association with ochre coloured pots and some mud structures. Stray baked-brick fragments have also been found at one place, as some stone tools. These factors indicate that the people who used the implements of the copper hoards supplemented by some other tools led a settled life. They were among the earliest Chalcolithic agriculturalists and artisans to settle in a substantial part of the doab.

In the upper portion of the doab, many Ochre- Coloured Pottery sites have been found. But stray copper hoards have been discovered in the plateau areas of Jharkhand and other regions. Many copper celts have been found in the Khetri zone of Rajasthan. Some Scholars connected the Copper Hoard with the Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture (OCP), which was contemporary to the late phase of Indus Valley Civilization and some others with the Vedic Culture, which is less evident.

### **1.2.10: Summary**

The history of human settlements in India dates back to prehistoric times that are

significantly marked by various phases of the Stone Age. On the basis of the peculiarity of stone tools which they used, the Stone Age in India had the phases of Palaeolithic phase (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic phase (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic phase (New Stone Age), and Chalcolithic phase. It is called the pre-historic period on account of there is no written or decipherable records available.

The available knowledge is based on archaeological evidence, chiefly in the form of stone tools along with other artefacts, pottery, and inferior metal implements. There were three phases in the Palaeolithic culture in India, viz., the Lower Palaeolithic Age, the Middle Palaeolithic Age, and the Later or Upper Palaeolithic Age. The Lower Palaeolithic phase was between 500,000 BCE and 50,000 BCE; the Middle Palaeolithic between 50,000 BCE and 40,000 BCE; and the Upper Palaeolithic between 40,000 BCE and 10,000 BCE. In 9000 BCE began an intermediate stage in Stone Age culture, which is called the Mesolithic Age or Microlithic Age. It intervened as a transitional phase between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic or New Stone Age. This phase lasted some part of the subcontinent up to 4000 BCE.



**Figure 13. Mehrgarh Site**

The Mesolithic people lived on hunting, fishing and food gathering; and at a later stage they also domesticated animals. In the global context the Neolithic Phase or New Stone Age began in 9000 BCE, but the earliest evidence in Indian subcontinent

attributed to 7000 BCE, lies in Mehrgarh (Figure 13), which is situated in Baluchistan, a present province of Pakistan. New Stone Age was officially recorded by historians up to 1000 BCE, but still practising by communities. The people of this age used tools and implements of polished stone. They particularly used stone axes which have been found in large numbers in a good part of the hilly tracts of the country. Neolithic phase is called the age of revolution in the human history.

The Neolithic Revolution in global perspective, marks a change from a largely nomadic hunter-gatherer way of life to a more settled, agrarian-based one, with the inception of the domestication of various plant and animal species-depending on species locally available and likely also influenced by local culture. The fire prepared food habit, specialization of labour and skill, systematic settled farming, transportation by wheel, trade, urban and civilized life, cultural transition and transformation, institutionalized political execution, etc., are some of the Neolithic highlights.

The Neolithic period ended with the use of first metal, copper. Several cultures were based on the use of copper and stone implements together, called the Chalcolithic Age or the Copper-Stone Phase. Technologically, Chalcolithic cultures were followed by the pre-Harappan and Bronze Age Harappa culture in India. Chalcolithic people were primarily rural communities spread over a wide area with hilly land and rivers.

### **1.2.11: Keywords:**

Pre-history - Palaeolithic - Pleistocene - Holocene - Homo Sapiens - Lithic Technology - flakes - Hand Axes - Cleavers - Choppers Mesolithic - Food Gathering Community - Neolithic - Food Producing Community - Pastoralism - Burzahom - Mehrgarh - Neolithic - Black Burnished Ware - Neolithic Grey Ware - Neolithic Mat Impressed Ware - Neolithic Celts - Neolithic Axes - Neolithic Adzes - Neolithic Chisels- Gordon Childe - Man Makes Himself - Neolithic Revolution - Pre Historic Art - Rock Art - Bhimbetka - Chalcolithic - Tambavati - BRW - OCP and OCP Culture - PGW - Copper Hoard Culture - anthropomorphs.



### 1.2.12: Self-Assessment Questions:

1. What are the phases into which the Palaeolithic Age in India is divided? Differentiate the divisions.
2. Distinguish with the chief characteristics of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic phases in India.
3. Why the Palaeolithic man known as quartzite man?
4. 'Neolithic Age is a Revolution in man's life'. Do you agree? Substantiate.
5. Discuss the use of fire in the development of human culture.
6. Discuss the invention of Wheel in the development of human society.
7. What you know about the Pre-Historic Rock Art of India? Elucidate.
8. Describe the significant characteristics of Chalcolithic Age.
9. 'Chalcolithic cultures marked noteworthy progresses from Stone Age cultures'. Elucidate.
10. Discuss the significance and limitations of the Chalcolithic cultures in India?

## **1.3: Harappan Culture Structure**

### **Structure**

- 1.3.1: Objectives
- 1.3.2: Introduction
- 1.3.3: Excavation, Extent and Antiquity
- 1.3.4: Town Planning
- 1.3.5: Drainage System
- 1.3.6: Harappan Polity
- 1.3.7: Harappan Society
- 1.3.8: Harappan Economy
  - 1.3.8.1: Agriculture
  - 1.3.8.2: Domestication of Animals
  - 1.3.8.3: Trade and Commerce
- 1.3.9: Technology, Craft, and Industries
- 1.3.10: Harappan Writing System
- 1.3.11: Belief System
- 1.3.12: Harappan Legacy
- 1.3.13: Authors of the Civilization
- 1.3.14: Decline
- 1.3.15: Summary
- 1.3.16: Keywords
- 1.3.17: Self-Assessment Questions

### **1.3.1: Objectives:**

- To explore more complex socio-cultural structures than those covered in the previous lesson.
- To define the term ‘Civilization’ in Indian context
- To differentiate the concepts of Culture and Civilization.
- To know about the first experiment of urbanism in the subcontinent
- To investigate the early but inchoate form of state in the subcontinent.

- To differentiate Bronze Age State from the Later States.
- To differentiate Harappan Culture with other world Bronze Age civilizations.
- To understand the incipient stage of social development in the subcontinent covering chiefdom, redistributive economy, and beginning of social stratification.
- To apprehend the technological development in various Harappan cultural phases
- To know the full legacy of cultural continuity of Harappan life.

### **1.3.2: Introduction:**

The Indus or the Harappan culture is older than the Chalcolithic cultures. But as a bronze-using culture it is far more developed than the latter. It developed in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. Many sites in Sindh formed the central zone of pre-Harappan culture. Though Alexander Cunningham noticed a Harappan seal holding a bull and six written letters in the year 1853, he did not realize the significance of it. This culture is popularly known as Harappan because the remnants of this civilization was discovered first in 1921 from Harappa, situated in the province of Punjab in Pakistan.

### **1.3.3: Excavation, Extent and Antiquity:**

Significance of the Indus culture was disclosed to the public by an Indian archaeologist Daya Ram Sahni through his excavations at Harappa. Little later, R.D. Banerjee excavated the site of Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh. A Large-scale excavation was conducted at Mohenjo-Daro by John Marshall in 1931, and then Ernest John Henry Mackay in 1938. M.S. Vats excavated Harappa in 1940 and further Mortimer Wheeler in 1946.

After the independence, excavations were conducted in a number of Harappan sites located in Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, as well as at Pakistan. Archaeologists like J.P. Joshi, B. B. Lal, S.R. Rao, B. K. Thapar, R. S. Bisht, and F. A. Khan are some among them. Kot Diji in the central Indus Valley was excavated by F. A. Khan, and

Gandhara in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan was excavated by A.H. Dani. Along with the native, non-native archaeologists of America, Britain, France, and Italy have worked and still studying many Harappan sites.

Indus Valley culture established and developed into an urban civilization, and the central zone of its mature form lay in Sindh and Punjab, principally in the Valleys of Indus River. “From there it spread southwards and eastwards. The Harappan culture covered parts of Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the fringes of western UP. It extended from the Shiwaliks in the north to the Arabian Sea in the south, and from the Makran coast of Baluchistan in the west to Meerut in the north-east. The area formed a triangle and accounted for about 1,299,600 sq. km which is a larger area than that of Pakistan. It is certainly larger than ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.”

We can't see any other civilized cultural zone in the world was as widespread as the Harappan during the third and second millennia BCE. According to John Marshal, Harappan civilization is about 5000 years old. Marshal's chronology of Harappa has been further supported by the method of  $C^{14}$  dating. Scholars generally come to the conclusion that the Harappan culture can be divided into three periods, viz., Early Harappan, Mature Harappan, and Late Harappan. The early Harappan phase is the period between 3500 BCE and 2600 BCE, the mature phase belongs to the period between 2500 BCE to 1800 BCE, and over the period of 1800 BCE can be considered as Late Harappan phase.

More than 2800 sites related to Harappan culture have so far been located and identified in the Indian subcontinent. Of the entire sites, early and post-urban Harappan sites account for over half the total number. Mature Harappan settlements come to around 1022. Of them, 406 are located in Pakistan and 616 in India. The mature Harappan sites are outnumbered by early and post-Harappan sites. Because of their urban nature, the total area of the mature Harappan sites is larger than that of the early and post-urban sites. Throughout the period of its existence by mature Harappan phase, it seems to have retained the same kind of tools, weapons, and houses. The entire

lifestyle appears to have been uniform.

They maintained same pattern of town planning, same type of seals, uniform terracotta works, the same long chert blades, etc. But this changelessness cannot be claimed too much on account of the significant changes in Harappan pottery, especially of Mohenjo-Daro over a retro of time. The two most important cities of the mature phase were Harappa in Punjab and Mohenjo-Daro (literally, the mound of the dead) in Sindh, both forming parts of Pakistan. Situated at a distance of 483 km, they were linked by the Indus. A third city lay at Chanhudaro is located about 130 km south of Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh. The fourth one is at Lothal in Gujarat at the head of the Gulf of Cambay. A fifth city lay at Kalibangan, which means black bangles, in northern Rajasthan. A sixth, called Banawali, is situated in Hissar district in Haryana. It saw two cultural phases, pre-Harappan and Harappan, similar to that of Kalibangan.

A seventh and eighth can be identified as Sutkagendor and Surkotada, which were the prominent coastal cities of the Harappans. The Indus valley culture is traceable in its mature and flourishing stage to all these eight places, each of which is marked by a citadel. The later Harappan phase is traceable to Rangpur and Rojdi in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat. Dholavira has fortification and all the three phases of the Harappan culture, which is located in the Kutch area of Gujarat. Rakhigarhi, which is much larger than Dholavira, located on the Ghaggar in Haryana, also having these three phases.

#### **1.3.4: Town Planning:**

The Indus people were famed for their town planning system (Figure 14). “Both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had a ‘Citadel’ (Acropolis). This was possibly occupied by members of the ruling class. Below the citadel in each city lay a ‘Lower Town’ with brick houses that were inhabited by the common people. It is remarkable that the arrangement of the houses in the cities is that they followed a ‘Grid System’, with roads cutting across one another virtually at right angles. Mohenjo-Daro was more advanced than Harappa in terms of structures. The monuments of the cities symbolized the ability of the ruling class to mobilize labour and collect taxes.”



**Figure 14. Harappan Town Planning**

The big structures were a symbol of impression, which may be exhibiting the elite status and influence of the ruling class upon the common people. The ‘Great Bath’ could be the most notable public place of Mohenjo-Daro, which is situated in the citadel mound. It is a fine example of beautiful brickwork. It measures about  $11.88 \times 7.01$  m and 2.43 m deep. 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. An outlet from the corner of the bath led to a drain. It has been suggested that the great bath was primarily intended for ritual bathing, which has been so vital to any religious ceremony in India.

The huge tank found in Dholavira could be compared to the great bath of Mohenjo-Daro; both of which probably made with the same intention. The largest building of the Indus culture in Mohenjo-Daro could be the great granary, which is 145.71 m long and 15.23 m wide. We find as many as six granaries in the citadel of Harappa. A series of brick platforms formed the basis for two rows of six granaries. Each granary measured  $15.23 \times 6.09$  m and lay within a few metres of the river bank. The combined floor space of the twelve units would be about 838 sq. m. It was approximately of the same area as the great granary at Mohenjo-Daro. At Harappa to the south of the granaries lay working floors consisting of the rows of circular brick

platforms. These were meant for threshing grain, because wheat and barley were found in the crevices of the floors.

The two-roomed barracks were identified near the granaries at Harappa, which were probably used as shelters of labourers who worked in the granaries. At Kalibangan we noticed granary like brick platforms, which can be located in the southern part of the settlement area. It would appear that granaries played an important role in Harappan cities. The use of burnt bricks in the Harappan cities is remarkable because in the contemporary buildings of Egypt dried bricks were primarily used. We find the use of baked bricks in contemporary Mesopotamia, but they were used to a much larger extent in the Harappan cities.

#### **1.3.5: Drainage System:**

The drainage system of Mohenjo-Daro was very impressive. In almost all the cities, every house, large or small, had its own courtyard and bathroom. In Kalibangan many houses had their own wells. Water flowed from the house to the streets which had drains. Sometimes these drains were covered with bricks and sometimes with stone slabs. The street drains were equipped with manholes. The remains of streets and drains have also been found at Banawali. Altogether, the equality of the domestic bathrooms and drains is remarkable, and the drainage system of Harappa is almost unique. Perhaps no other Bronze Age civilization paid so much attention to health and cleanliness as did the Harappan.

#### **1.3.6: Harappan Polity:**

We have no clear-cut idea about the political organization of the Harappan people. However, if taken into account the cultural homogeneity of the Indus civilization it can be said that this cultural homogeneity would not have been possible to achieve without a central authority. If the Harappan cultural zone is considered identical with the political zone, the subcontinent did not witness such a large political unit until the rise of the Mauryan Empire; the remarkable stability of this unit is demonstrated by its continuity for hundreds of years. In sharp contrast to Egypt and Mesopotamia, no

temples have been found at any Harappan site. No religious structures of any kind have been excavated apart from the great bath, which may have been used for ablutions.

Therefore, it would be wrong to think that priests ruled in Harappa as they did in the cities of lower Mesopotamia. The Harappan rulers were more concerned with commerce than with conquest, and Harappa was possibly ruled by a class of merchants. We can speculate some structure of a state in the Indus Valley. It can be suggested that the entire area was administrated from one capital, with a few regional administrative centers or provincial capitals. However, it is also possible that there were several independent states or kingdoms each with cities like Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Kalibangan, and Lothal as their capitals.

The citadel may have been the seat of sovereign power. The middle town may have been the area where the bureaucrats lived or the seat of government. The great granary may be the state treasury, and the taxes were collected in grain. Fortification of several cities may tell some kind of state features. It is generally believed that the Harappans did not have many weapons which might mean the lack of an effective warrior class. Mackey writes, “the Harappan people were peace loving and unwarlike.” This statement is based on the fact that no defensive weapons such as shields and armour have been found in excavations. The sword was also not seen, but various type of weapons made of copper and bronze were unearthed from Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Their chief weapons were axe, spear, and bow. Though, we have no clear idea of an organized force or standing army, but a heap of sling stones and the depiction of a soldier on a potsherd at Surkotada may suggest a standing army. Whatever it may be, the Harappan State was well established at least in her mature phase.

### **1.3.7: Harappan Society:**

From the various artefacts found in the remains of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa we can draw a picture of the social life of Indus people. They were both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, and ate wheat, barley, rice, millet, sesame seeds, mustard, and ghee. They also ate fish, beef, mutton, and tortoise. We can have some ideas about their dresses and fashions through the study of contemporary cultures and terracotta figurines.



Men were wearing a dress which would be wrapped round the lower half of the body with one end worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm like the modern saree. The other dress was a kilt and shirt worn by both men and women. Both cotton and woolen clothes were used. The discovery of needles and threads conforms that clothes were also sewn. The men arranged their hairs in various ways. They used headbands.

Men used many more ornaments than the modern Indian men. They wore ring, bracelets, ornaments around their neck and hands. Growing beard was fashionable but they would shave their moustaches. Women seem to have used ornaments on their waist, and they wore a large number of necklaces, and wearing a large number of bangles too was in fashion. There was no end to the number of ways in which they arranged their hair; men and women alike had long hair. The life of Harappan people was not very dull; they loved music and dancing. They were also played various games such as chess and dicing, and the latter was a common pastime of the Harappans. The men further enjoyed hunting, fishing, bull fights and gambling, though, children used to play with toys made of clay. The Harappan society seems to have been divided into various sections.



**Figure 15. Harappan Site Rakhigarhi**

Excavations indicate a hierarchy in urban habitation (Figure 15). Although only two localities are attributed to the city of Harappa, its structure evidences three distinct

localities, and the latter is true also of Kalibangan and Dholavira. The citadel or the first locality was where the ruling class lived and the lowest town was where the common people dwelt. The middle settlement may have been meant for bureaucrats and middle-class merchants. Some of the craftsmen and labourers resided outside the fortified settlement area are also noticeable.

At Kalibangan it appears that the priests lived in the upper part of the citadel and performed rituals on the fire alters in the lower part of it. There is no doubt that the cities were inhabited by different housing groups which were not of the same size. Social differentiation is indicated by different residential structures, with the number of rooms varying from one to twelve. The Harappan cities also attested the presence of two-storied houses, probably meant for the wealthier or the upper sections. At burials in Harappan sites the dead were generally laid in pits, but sometimes, there were differences in the way the burial pit was made. In some instances, the hollowed outer spaces were lined with bricks, could be an indication of social differences, but we are not sure. Some graves of both men and women contain pottery and Jewelry, perhaps indicating their faith of richness, even after the life.” In the excavations at the cemetery in Harappa, a set of ornament consisting of three shell rings, jasper beads and hundreds of micro beads was found near the skull of a male. On some instances the dead were buried with copper mirrors.

The luxuries and costly artefacts which are made of valuable materials are generally concentrated in large settlements like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa and are rarely found in the smaller settlements. For example, miniature pots of faience, perhaps used as perfume bottles, are found mostly in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, and there are none from small settlements like Kalibangan. Here it is reasonable to say that a kind of social stratification was existed in the Harappan society; but whether these divisions were based purely on occupations or other economic factors, or had a socio-religious basis we cannot say at the present.

### **1.3.8: Harappan Economy**

The Harappan economy was based on irrigated surplus agriculture cattle rearing,

expertise in various crafts and brisk trade both internal and external. Here we will analyse the various aspects of Harappan economy, mainly agriculture, Domestication of animals, crafts and industries, and trade and commerce.

#### **1.3.8.1: Agriculture:**

Comparatively rainless, the Indus region is not so fertile today, but the prosperous villages and towns of the past testify that it was fertile in ancient times. “Today the rainfall is about 15 cm, but in the fourth century BC, one of the historians of Alexander informs us, that Sindh was a fertile part of India. In earlier times, the Indus region had more natural vegetation which contributed to rainfall. It supplied timber for baking bricks and also for construction. In course of time, the natural vegetation was destroyed by the extension of agriculture, large-scale grazing, and supply of fuel. A far more important reason for the fertility of the area seems to have been the annual inundation of the Indus, which is the longest Himalayan River.”

Walls made of burnt bricks raised for protection indicate that floods were an annual event. Just as the Nile created Egypt and supported its people, so too the Indus created Sindh and fed its people. The Indus people sowed seeds in the flood plains in November, and reaped their harvests of wheat and barley in April, before the next flood. No hoe or ploughshare has been discovered, but the furrows discovered in the pre-Harappan phase at Kalibangan indicate that the fields were ploughed in Rajasthan during the Harappan period. The Harappans probably used the wooden plough drawn by oxen, and camels may also have been used for this purpose.

We do not know whether the plough was drawn by men or oxen. Stone sickles may have been used for harvesting the crops. Gabarbands or Nalas enclosed by dams for storing water were a feature in parts of Baluchistan and Afghanistan, but channel or canal irrigation seems to have been absent. Harappan villages mostly situated near the flood plains, produced sufficient food grains not only to feed themselves but also the town people. They must have worked very hard to meet their own requirements as well as those of the artisans, merchants, and others who lived in the city and were not directly concerned with food-production activities. The Indus people produced wheat, barley,

rice, peas, and the like. Two types of wheat and barley were grown. A good quantity of barley has been discovered at Banawali. In addition to this, they cultivated sesame and mustard. However, the position seems to have been different with the Harappans at Lothal. It seems that as early as 1800 BCE, the people of Lothal grew rice, the remains of which have been found. Food grains were stored in huge granaries in both Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, and possibly in Kalibangan. Probably, cereals were received as taxes from peasants and stored in granaries for the payment of wages as well as for use during emergencies.

This can be assumed from the analogy of Mesopotamian cities where wages were paid in barley. The Indus people produced cotton; in the entire world it was first produced in the Sindh area, and the Yavanas (Greeks) called it as Sindon, which is possibly derived from Sindh.

#### **1.3.8.2:2 Domestication of Animals:**

Although the Harappans practised agriculture, animals were raised on a large scale. Oxen, buffaloes, goats, sheep, and pigs were domesticated. Humped bulls were favoured by the Harappans. From the very beginning dogs were regarded as pets. Cats were also domesticated, and the feet of both dogs and cats have been noticed. They also kept asses and camels which were obviously used as beasts of burden.

Evidence of the horse comes from a superficial level of Mohenjo-Daro and from a doubtful terracotta figurine from Lothal. “The remains of a horse are reported from Surkotada, situated in west Gujarat, and belong to around 2000 BCE, but the identity is doubtful. In any case, the Harappan culture was not horse-centred. Neither the bones of a horse nor its representations appear in early and mature Harappan cultures. Elephants were well known to the Harappans, who were also acquainted with the rhinoceros.” The contemporary Sumerian cities in Mesopotamia produced virtually the same food grains and domesticated the same animals as did the Harappans. But the Harappans in Gujarat produced rice and domesticated elephants which were not the case with the people of Mesopotamian cities.

### **1.3.8.3: Trade and Commerce:**

Significance of trade in the Harappan society is supported not only by granaries found at Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and Lothal but also by finds of numerous seals, a uniform script, and regulated weights and measures covering a wide area. The Harappans conducted considerable trade in stone, metal, shell, etc., within the Indus culture zone. Though, their cities did not have the necessary raw material for the commodities they produced. They did not use metal money, and in all probability carried exchanges through a barter system. In return for finished goods and possibly food grains, they procured metals from the neighbouring areas by boat and bullock-cart.

Possibly they sailed across the coast of the Arabian Sea for procuring metals. The Indus people were well aware of the use of the wheel, and carts with solid wheels were in use in Harappa. It appears that the Harappans used a form of the modern ekka but not with the spoked wheel. The people of Indus Valley had commercial links with Rajasthan, and also with Afghanistan and Iran. They set up a trading colony in northern Afghanistan which evidently facilitated trade with Central Asia. Their cities also had commercial links with the people of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Many Harappan seals have been discovered in Mesopotamia, and it is probable that they imitated certain kind of cosmetics popular among the Mesopotamians. The people of Indus seem engaged on far-distance trading of lapis lazuli. The objects made of lapis, jasper, and other precious and semi-precious materials may have helped to elevate the social status of the ruling and other leading strata in the Harappan society. The cuneiform records, even from about 2350 BCE onwards, refer to trade relations with one Meluhha, which may be the ancient name of the Indus region for the Mesopotamians. Mesopotamian records also speak of two intermediate trading stations called Dilmun and Magan, which lay between Mesopotamia and Meluhha. Dilmun can be identified as Bahrain on the Persian Gulf.

### **1.3.9: Technology, Crafts and Industries:**

The rise of towns in the Indus zone was based on agricultural surplus, the

making of bronze tools, various other crafts, and widespread trade and commerce.

This is known as the first urbanization in India, and the Harappan urban culture belongs to the Bronze Age. The people of Harappa used many tools and implements of stone, but they were very well acquainted with the manufacture and use of bronze. Ordinarily bronze was made by smiths by mixing tin with copper, but they occasionally also mixed arsenic with copper for this purpose. As neither tin nor copper was easily available to the Harappans, bronze tools do not abound in the region. The impurities of the ores show that copper was obtained from the Khetri copper mines of Rajasthan, although it could also be brought from Baluchistan. Tin was possibly brought with difficulty from Afghanistan, although its old workings are stated to have been found in Hazaribagh and Bastar. The bronze tools and weapons recovered from the Harappan sites contain a smaller percentage of tin.

However, the kits used for the manufacture of bronze goods left by the Harappans are so numerous as to suggest that the bronze smiths constituted an important group of artisans in Harappan society. The Harappans produced not only images and utensils but also various tools and weapons such as axes, saws, knives, and spears. The Harappan artisans made beautiful images of metal. A woman dancer made of bronze is the best specimen, and she, apart from wearing a necklace, is naked. A few pieces of Harappan stone sculpture have been found. One steatite statue wears an ornamented robe passing over the left shoulder under the right arm like a shawl, and the short locks at the back of the head are held in place by a woven fillet.

Many other significant crafts prospered in the Harappan cities. A piece of woven cotton has been recovered from Mohenjo-Daro, and textile impressions have been found on several objects. Spindle whorls were used for spinning. Weavers wove cloth of wool and cotton. Huge brick structures suggest that bricklaying was an important craft, and attest to the existence of a class of masons.

The Harappans also practised boat-making. Seal making and terracotta manufacturing were also important crafts. The goldsmiths made jewelries of silver, gold, and precious stones; the gold and silver they may have been obtained from

Afghanistan, and the precious stones from southern peninsular India. The Harappans were also expert in bead making. The Harappans had great expertise in the use of the potter's wheel. The potter's wheel was widely used, and the Harappans produced their own typical classy and shiny ceramic wares. Discovered specimens are all red and include dish-on-stand. Numerous pots have been found painted with a variety of designs. Harappan pots were generally decorated with the designs of trees and circles, and images of men also figure on some pottery fragments. We have many Indus figurines made of fire-baked earthen clay, commonly called terracotta.

These were either used as toys or objects of worship. They represent birds, dogs, sheep, cattle, and monkeys. Men and women also find a place in the terracotta objects, and the second outnumbered the first. The seals and images were manufactured with great skill, but the terracotta pieces represent unsophisticated artistic works. The contrast between the two sets indicates the gap between the classes that utilized them, the first being used by members of the upper strata and the second by the subaltern class. The Harappans were poor in artistic works made of stone. We do not come across any massive work of art in stone as we find in the case of sculptures of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The two great Indus cities such as Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro shows significant absent of stone tools, and the reason behind it may be the inadequate local availability of stones. However, the case is different in the case of Dholavira of Kutch region. The citadel of Dholavira built of stone is a monumental work and this might be the most significant and impressive of citadels among the Harappan cities. Stone-slabs are used in three types of burials in Dholavira, and in one of these, above the grave there is a circle of stones resembling an Iron Age Megalithic monument. It is also remarkable that the dressed stones along with mud bricks are used as masonry in Dholavira. The Harappans had the knowledge of a script that must have helped in recording private property and the keeping of accounts.



**Figure 16. Harappan Weight Systems**

The urban people of the Indus region also needed and used weights and measures for trade and other transactions. Numerous articles used for weights (Figure 16) have been found. They show that in weighing mostly 16 or its multiples were used; for instance, 16, 64, 160, 320, and 640. Remarkably, the tradition of 16 has continued in India till modern times and till recently 16 annas made one rupee. The Harappans also knew the art of measurement. We have come across sticks inscribed with measure marks; one of these is made of bronze.

The greatest artistic creations of the Harappan culture are seals. About 2000 seals have been found, and of these a great majority carry short inscriptions with pictures of one horned bull/unicorn, buffalo, tiger, rhinoceros, goat, elephant, antelope, and crocodile. Seals were mainly made of steatite or faience. Probably the Harappan seals were served as symbols of authority by authorized stamping. There were a few stamped objects called sealing have been identified. It is reasonable to suppose that the Harappan seals were also used for religious purposes.



### **1.3.10: Harappan Writing System:**

The Harappans invented the art of writing like the people of ancient Mesopotamia. Although the earliest specimen of the Harappan script was discovered in 1853 and the complete script by 1923, it has not yet been deciphered. Some scholars try to connect it with the Dravidian or the proto-Dravidian language, others with Sanskrit, and yet others with the Sumerian language, but none of these readings are satisfactory. As the script has not been deciphered, we can neither judge the Harappan contribution to literature, nor say anything about their ideas and beliefs.

More than 5000 specimens of Harappan writing on stone seals and other objects have been unearthed. “Unlike the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, the Harappans did not write long inscriptions. Most inscriptions were recorded on seals and contain only a few words. These seals may have been used by the people to mark and identify their private property. Altogether we have about 250 to 400 pictographs, and in the form of a picture each letter stands for some sound, idea, or object. The Indus script is not alphabetical but largely pictographic.” Attempts have been made to compare it with the contemporary scripts of Mesopotamia and Egypt, but it is the indigenous product of the Indus people and does not indicate connection with the scripts of any other Asian or western cultures.

### **1.3.11: Belief System:**

In Harappa numerous terracotta figurines of women have been found. In one figurine, a plant is shown growing out of the embryo of a woman. Probably, the image represents the fertility goddess related to earth, and it was intimately connected with the origin and growth of plants.

The Harappans, therefore, looked upon the earth as a goddess and worshipped her in the same manner as the Egyptians worshipped the Nile goddess Isis. But, we do not know whether the Harappans were a matriarchal people like the Egyptians. In Egypt, the daughter inherited the throne or property, but we do not know about the nature of inheritance in Harappan society. Some Vedic texts signify a reverence to the

earth goddess, although she is not given any prominence. It took a long time for the worship of the supreme mother goddess to develop in Hinduism. Only from the sixth century CE onwards various mother goddesses such as Durga, Amba, Kali, and Chandi, etc., came to be regarded as goddesses in the Puranas and in Tantric literatures.

In course of time every village came to have its own separate goddess. The male deity is represented on a seal. This god has three-horned heads, and is represented in the sitting posture of a yogi, placing one foot on the other. This god is surrounded by an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and has a buffalo below his throne. At his feet appear two deer. The depicted god is identified as Pasupati Siva (Pashupati Mahadeva), but the identification is doubtful, because horned gods also appear in other ancient civilizations.

We also come across the prevalence of the phallus worship, which became so intimately connected with Siva in later times. Numerous symbols of the phallus and female sex organs made of stone have been found in Harappa. They were possibly meant for worship. The Rig Veda speaks of non-Aryan people who were phallus worshippers. The phallus worship which started in the days of Harappa came to be recognized as a respectable form of worship in Hindu society. The people of the Indus region worshipped trees. On a seal, the picture of a deity is represented amidst branches of the pipal tree. This tree continues to be worshipped even in the present. Animals were also worshipped in Harappan times. Many of them are represented on seals.

The most important of them is the one-horned unicorn which may be identified with the rhinoceros. The humped bull was another important animal to be worshiped by the Harappans. The animals surrounding Pasupati Siva indicate that these were also worshipped. Here it seems safe to presume that the inhabitants of the Indus region worshipped gods in the form of trees, animals, and human beings. It appears that the gods were not placed in temples, a practice that was common in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. We are not sure of the religious beliefs of the Harappans without being able to read their script. Amulets have been found in large numbers. There is a good probability that the Harappans believed in ghosts and evil forces. Those were capable of harming them and, therefore, they used amulets against them. The Atharva Veda, which

is associated with the non-Aryan tradition, contains many charms and spells. It recommends amulets to ward off diseases and evil forces.

### **1.3.12: Harappan Legacy:**

The Harappan cities suggest well-planned growth, but their Mesopotamian counterparts show haphazard growth. Rectangular houses with brick-lined bathrooms and wells together with their stairways are found in all Harappan cities. Such town planning is not evident in the cities of western Asia. No other people in antiquity had built such an excellent drainage system except perhaps those of Crete in Knossos. The people of western Asia did not show such skill in the use of burnt bricks as did the Harappans. The Harappans produced their own characteristic pottery and seals. Above all, they invented their own script, which neither resembled the Egyptian nor the Mesopotamian. No contemporary culture spread over such a wide area like the Harappan civilization.

Though the civilization of Mesopotamia can easily be connected in the case of general development with the civilizations of the west, the Harappans cannot be claimed such. But contributions made by the authors of Indus valley civilisation to India's cultural continuity are significant and full of legacy. The cults of Pashupati Siva and of the mother goddess and phallic worship seem to have come down to us from Harappan tradition. Similarly, the cult of sacred places, rivers or trees and scared animals show a distinct continuity in the subsequent historic civilizations of India. The evidence of fire worship and sacrifice in Kalibangan and Lothal is significant.

These were the most vital elements of the Vedic religion. It is not unlikely that the Aryans have learnt these practices from the Harappan priesthood. Many aspects of domestic life like the house plan, disposition of water supply and attention to bathing survived in the subsequent period. The traditional weight and currency system of India was already present in the Harappan civilization, and may have been derived from them. The technique of marking potter's wheel in modern India is similar to those used by the Harappans. Bullock carts and boats used in modern India were already present in the Harappan cities. As such we can say that many elements of the Indus Valley civilization

survived in the subsequent historical tradition.

### **1.3.13: Authors of the Civilization:**

This regards the authorship of Harappan culture, there are different views. Some scholars are of the view that there was a close relationship between Indus civilization and the culture developed in the Vedic Age. They argued that Vedic culture was a developed form of Indus culture. But John Marshall and a certain other scholars have observed otherwise.

They may have compared both civilizations at length; however, they concluded that these two cultures were widely different from each other. They observed that the Indus culture was chiefly urban. The people lived in big towns and cities and were involved in different trades as their occupation. The Vedic culture, on the contrary, was rural, and they lived in small house and agriculture was their main occupation.

The Indus community was peace loving one and there had no place for war; they seldom made use of weapons like sword, armour, or helmet. But the Aryans loved war and often fought battles. The Indus culture did not recognize the importance of the cow and the horse while the Aryans attached special significance to these two animals. The use of iron was a prominent feature of the Aryans, though iron was unknown to the Harappans. The Indus people were icon worshipers, and they worshiped Pasupati Siva, mother goddess, trees and animals; though, in the case of Vedic society there was no icon worship, but they worshiped nature in the form of *Varuna*, *Indra*, etc.

### **1.3.14: Decline:**

While the ancient culture of the Mesopotamia continued to exist even after 1900 BCE, the urban Harappan culture disappeared at about that time. The two important cities of Harappan culture, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, disappeared by the nineteenth century BCE. But the Harappan culture at other sites faded out gradually. It continued in its degenerate form in the outlying fringes of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh until 1500 BCE. It is difficult to account for this cultural

collapse.

Various causes have been suggested. Some scholars point out that the Harappan culture was destroyed by the Aryans, but there is very little evidence for this. The environmental factor may have been the most significant one which led to its final collapse. The decreasing fertility on account of the increasing salinity of the soil caused by the expansion of the neighbouring desert may have adversely affected agriculture and stockbreeding.

It is held that the amount of rainfall in the Indus region slightly increased around 3000 BCE and then decreased in the earlier part of the second millennium BCE. A sudden subsidence or uplift of the land might have caused due to the floods. Earthquakes possibly caused for changes in the course of the Indus Mohenjo-Daro. In the Harappan zone, both the Yamuna and Sutlej moved away from the Sarasvati or the Hakra around 1700 BCE.

This meant loss in water supply as well. Similarly, rainfall decreased at about that time. Some speak of dam formation in the Indus leading to a massive flooding of Mohenjo-Daro. These factors may have worked adversely, but failure in human activities cannot be discounted. It appears that crafts and commerce collapsed because of the sudden end of the long-distance land and sea trade with Mesopotamia. This trade in luxurious articles, including lapis lazuli, beads, etc., mainly passed through Elam, which was located on the eastern border of Mesopotamia and covered a substantial part of Iran.

The emergence of Elam as a powerful state around 2000 BCE interrupted the supply of Harappan goods to Mesopotamia and the Mesopotamian imports, including tin, to the Harappan settlements. Beads of hard materials, especially stone, were made in the Harappan zone and sent outside. The break in their exports to Mesopotamia deprived the craftsmen of their livelihood. Similarly, the break in the supply of tin to the Valley dealt a great blow to the artisans employed in making bronze. The exhaustion of the soil may have diminished cereal production and starved the urban people. Once the aristocracy living in the cities failed to exercise its control over crafts and cultivation,

Harappan culture collapsed.

The consequences of the disintegration of this leading Bronze Age cultural entity are still to be clarified. We do not know whether the urban eclipse led to the migration of merchant and craftsmen, and the dissemination of the elements of Harappan technology and way of life in the countryside. Something is known about the post-urban situation in Sindh, Punjab, and Haryana. We find agricultural settlements inside the Indus region, but their connection with the preceding culture is not clear. We need clear and adequate information.

### **1.3.15: Summary:**

Once the decline of the Harappan civilization set in what we see is the gradual disappearance of hallmarks of urban phase of this civilization. Features such as town planning, grid patterns, drainage system, standard weights and measures etc., slowly disappear and a kind of ruralisation takes place with distinctive regional variations. Three regions can be broadly detected: north Indian late Harappan culture which includes the areas of Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Pakistan part of Punjab; Gujarat and Maharashtra and Baluchistan.

These cultures interacted with the then existing Chalcolithic cultures of different regions. In all these three areas certain distinct residual features like some shapes of pottery, bronze tools, beads and other small objects provide their link with Harappan civilization. Though the Harappan civilization disappeared, a number of cultural traits developed in this civilization can be seen as a part of our daily cultural and material life.

### **1.3.16: Keyword**

Civilization-Bronze Age Civilizations-Culture-Urbanism-Indus Valley-Harappa-Mohenjo-Daro- Mound of the Dead-Kalibangan-Lothal-Chanhudaro-Dholavira-Rangpur-Rojdi-Banawali- Alexander Cunningham-R.D.Banerjee-Daya Ram Sahni-John Marshall-Early-Mackay-Harappan- Mature Harappan-Late Harappan-Citadel/Acropolis-Lower Town-Grid System-Great Bath- Drainage System-Housing Pattern-Gabarbands/Nalas-Sindon-Ekka-Dilmun and Makan- Terracotta-Harappan Seal-

Harappan Script-Fertility Goddess-Phallus Worship-Pipal Tree- Pashupati Siva-Yogi Posture- Dancing Girl-Social Stratification-Harappan Legacy.

### 1.3.17: Self-Assessment Questions

1. Write short notes on the following:

- a) Harappan Housing Pattern
- b) Harappan Drainage System
- c) Harappan Weights and Measures
- d) Great Bath
- e) Harappan Seals
- f) Harappan Script

2. 'Harappan Civilization was a Bronze Age Civilization', Why?

3. 'Indus Valley Civilization is generally called Harappan Civilization', Why?

4. Discuss the extent, settlement, and antiquity of the Harappan Civilization.

5. Describe the characteristic features of Harappan Town Planning.

6. Mention the technological achievements of the Harappans.

7. Write a note on the contact of Harappans with the contemporary civilizations.

8. Discuss the Economic Life of the Indus people.

9. Even though the Harappan Culture was more ancient than most of the Chalcolithic cultures, in what respect did the former mark an advance on the latter? Explain with examples.

10. 'Harappan belief system is inherited by Hinduism.' Do you agree? Substantiate.

## UNIT. 2

### Lesson: 2.1: The Vedic Period

#### Structure:

- 2.1.1: Objectives
- 2.1.2: Introduction
- 2.1.3.: Geographical Extent
- 2.1.4: Antiquity
- 2.1.5: Vedic Polity
  - 2.1.5.1: Early Vedic Polity
  - 2.1.5.2: Later Vedic Polity
- 2.1.6: Vedic Society
  - 2.1.6.1: Early Vedic Society
  - 2.1.6.2: Later Vedic Society
- 2.1.7: Vedic Economy
  - 2.1.7.1: Early Vedic Economy
  - 2.1.7.2: Later Vedic Economy
- 2.1.8: Vedic Religion
  - 2.1.8.1: Early Vedic Religion
  - 2.1.8.2: Later Vedic Religion
- 2.1.9: Summary
- 2.1.10: Keywords
- 2.1.11: Self-Assessment Questions

#### 2.1.1: Objectives:

- To differentiate the Bronze Age Harappan Culture from the Iron Age Vedic Culture.
- To know the process of reconstruction through which we have arrived at a conception of the Vedic society.
- To differentiate the Early Vedic Society with the Later Vedic Society.
- To know the nature of Early Vedic society through the textual references in Rig Veda.



- To know the nature of Later Vedic society through the later Vedic textual references.
- To understand the developments of Early Vedic Pastoralism to Later Vedic Agro -Culture.
- To apprehend the technological developments and implementation of Vedic People.
- To mark the Vedic social changes-increasing social stratification in the Later Vedic Age.
- To identify the Socio-economic, and Political changes on account of the emergence and use of a new material, iron.

### **2.1.2: Introduction:**

The authors of the Vedic culture, which is entirely opposite to the Harappan civilization, were the Indo-Aryans, probably an immigrant people, whose first arrival in India can be dated between c.2000 BCE and c.1500 BCE. After settling in Indian subcontinent the Vedic people composed a series of religious hymns, which were eventually compiled into a text known as *Rig Veda*. Our knowledge on the Vedic people's earliest activities is primarily come from Rig Veda, and subsequently from the later texts like the *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, etc.

It is believed that the hymns of Rig Veda were first composed between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE, and the later Vedic texts were between 1000 BCE and 500 BCE. The history of the Vedic Age can be divided into two parts - the Early Vedic Period and the Later Vedic Period. The Early Vedic Period, also called *Rig Vedic Period*, is the period when Rig Veda was composed. History of the Later Vedic Period is based mainly on the later Vedic texts which were compiled after the age of the Rig Veda.

### **2.1.3: Geographical Extent:**

It is generally said that, in the centuries following 2000 BCE, north-west India was invaded and then settled by some nomadic tribes from the Central Asia called Aryans. And it is further said that they ultimately occupied the greater part of northern

India and forced the natives to migrate to the south. “According to some of the descriptions in *Rig Veda*, the Vedic tribes established their first settlements in Sapta-sindhu, a region that included Punjab, Kashmir, Sindh, Kabul, and Kandahar; and they called this region as Brahnavarta. When they had extended their geographical limits to the whole of north they called their region as *Aryavarta*, and setup small kingdoms like Kosala, Magadha, Mithila, etc. Again in due course of time they extended their authority over Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. In the way the Indo-Aryans spread over the whole of India till the later Vedic period.”

#### **2.1.4: Antiquity:**

Antiquity of the Vedas and the Vedic people has been the subject of a keen controversy. Friedrich Max Muller, a German philologist, who first dealt with this question, came to the conclusion that the hymns of *Rig Veda* must have been composed before 1200 BCE-1000 BCE. But he could not say whether this date could be fixed 1000, 1500, 2000, or 3000 years before Common Era.

As Winternitz observed, later scholars have, without offering any new argument, regarded 1200 BCE-1000 BCE as the date of the composition of *Rig Veda*. Another set of scholars believe that *Rig Veda* was composed in 1000 BCE. Scholars like Jacobi and Balagangadhara Tilak have referred the date of *Rig Veda* to a much higher antiquity. Tilak ascribed the Vedic texts to a period as far back as 6000 BCE. According to Jacobi, the Vedic civilization flourished between 4500 BCE and 2500 BCE.

Winternitz, a great authority on the subject remarked that “the available evidence merely proves that the Vedic Age extends from an unknown past, say ‘X,’ to 500 BCE. None of the dates 1200BCE-500 BCE, 1500 BCE-500 BCE, and 2000 BCE-500 BCE, which are usually assumed, being justified by facts. Only it may be added, as a result of recent researches, that 800 BCE should probably be substituted for 500 BCE. That the unknown date ‘X’, more probably falls in the third rather than in the second millennium Before Common Era”.

## 2.1.5: Vedic Polity:

### 2.1.5.1: Early Vedic Polity:

The administrative machinery of the Indo-Aryans in the Early Vedic Period or Rig Vedic period functioned with the tribal chief, called *Rajan* for his successful leadership in war, at the centre. It appears that in the Rig Vedic period, the king's post had become hereditary. However, Rajan did not exercise unlimited power, having to reckon with the tribal organizations. We have evidences of the election of the king by the tribal assembly called the Samiti. The king was called the protector of his tribe. Rajan protected its cattle, fought its wars, and offered prayers to the gods on its behalf. Several tribal or kin-based assemblies such as the *Sabha*, *Samiti*, *Vidatha*, and *Gana* are mentioned in the Rig Veda. They exercised deliberative, military, and religious functions. In Rig Vedic times, even women attended the Sabha and Vidatha.

The Sabha and the Samiti mattered a great deal in early Vedic times. The chiefs or the kings showed an eagerness to win their support. In the day-to-day administration, the king was assisted by a few functionaries. The most important functionary seems to have been the *Purohita*. The two priests who played a major role in Rig Vedic times were *Vasishtha* and *Vishvamitra*. Vasishtha was a conservative and Vishvamitra a liberal. Vishvamitra composed the gayatri mantra to widen the Aryan world. Whoever recited the gayatri was admitted to the Aryan fold. Eventually, this mantra was made the monopoly of the three higher varnas. Priests did not permit women and shudras to recite it.

The Vedic priests inspired the tribal chiefs into action. They lauded chiefs' exploits in return for handsome rewards in cows and women slaves. Next in rank to the king was the *Senani* or the head of the army, who used spears, axes, swords, etc. We do not learn of any officer concerned with the collection of taxes. Probably the people made voluntary offerings called bali to the Rajan. Presents and the spoils of war were perhaps distributed in some Vedic assemblies.

The Rig Veda does not mention any officer for administration of justice. It was

not, however, an ideal society. Rig Vedic kings never maintained any regular or standing army, but in times of war he mustered a militia whose military functions were performed by different tribal groups called *vrata*, *gana*, *grama*, *sardha*. By and large it was a tribal system of government in which the military element was strong.

There was no civil system or territorial administration because people were in a stage of perpetual expansion, migrating from one area to another. We know little about the weapons of the adversaries of the Indo-Aryan people, although we hear of many defeats inflicted by Indra on the enemies of the Aryans. In the Rig Veda, Indra is called *Purandara* which means that he was the breaker of forts. But we cannot identify forts held by the Indo-Aryans or pre-Aryans.

Some of them may have been situated in Afghanistan. The Indo- Aryans succeeded everywhere because they had chariots drawn by horses. They introduced them for the first time into West Asia and India. The Indo-Aryan soldiers were probably also equipped with coats of mail (*varman*) and better arms. The Indo-Aryans were engaged in two types of conflicts. First, they fought with the pre-Aryans, and secondly, they fought amongst themselves. Intra-tribal conflicts rocked the Indo-Aryan communities for a long time. The Aryans were divided into five tribes called *Panchajana*, according to tradition. But there might have been other tribes also. The Aryans fought amongst themselves and sometimes enlisted the support of the non-Aryan peoples. The *Bharatas* and the *Tritsu* were the ruling *Aryan* clans. They were supported by priest Vasishtha.

The country '*Bharatavarsha*' which is first mentioned in the Rig Veda was eventually named after the tribe Bharata. The Bharata ruling clan was opposed by a host of ten chiefs. Five of them were heads of Indo-Aryan tribes and the remaining five of the non-Aryan people. The battle that was fought between the Bharatas on the one hand and the host of ten chiefs on the other is known as the 'Battle of Ten Kings'. This battle was fought on the river *Parushni*, identical with the river Ravi, and it gave victory to Sudas and established the supremacy of the Bharatas. Of the defeated tribes, the most important was that of the Purus. Subsequently, the Bharatas joined hands with the Purus

and formed a new ruling tribe called the Kurus. The Kurus combined with the Panchalas, and they together established their rule in the upper Gangetic basin where they played an important role in later Vedic times.

#### **2.1.5.2: Later Vedic Polity:**

In later Vedic times, the Rig Vedic tribal assemblies lost importance, and royal power increased at their cost. The Vidatha completely disappeared; the Sabha and samiti continued to hold their ground, but their character changed. They came to be dominated by chiefs and rich nobles. Women were no longer permitted to sit in the Sabha, and it was now dominated by warlords and priests.

In the later Vedic age, the Tribal authority tended to become territorial. The term *rashtra*, which indicates territory, first appears in this period. It was indicated the later term *rajya*, denoting the sovereign power. The formation of big kingdoms made the chief or the king more powerful. In the beginning each area was named after the tribe that first settled there; at first Panchala was the name of a people, and then it became the name of a region. But when the Prince or chief started rule over tribes, the tribe which he belonged to become the leading tribe. And, usually the ruler gave his tribe's name to the territory which he ruled even that territory might be inhabited by tribes other than his own.

Traces of the election of the king appear in later Vedic texts. The one who was considered the best in physical and other qualities was elected as the Raja (rajan). A person who pioneered settlements, showed skill in farming and fought bravely was elected the chief of his tribe. This may have been the case with the Raja. He received voluntary presents called bali from his ordinary kinsmen or the common people called the Vis. Gradually these voluntary presents evolved into tributes that were forcibly collected. The ruler, however, sought to perpetuate the right to receive presents and enjoy other privileges pertaining to his office by making it hereditary in his family. The post generally went to the eldest son. However, this succession was not always smooth. The Mahabharata tells us that Duryodhana, the younger cousin of Yudhishtira, usurped power. For the sake of territory, the families of the Pandavas and Kauravas virtually

destroyed themselves. The Bharata battle shows that kingship knows no kinship. Ritual strengthened the king's influence. He performed the *Rajasuya* sacrifice, which was supposed to confer supreme power on him. The King performed the *Ashvamedha*, which meant unquestioned control over an area in which the royal horse ran uninterrupted. He also performed the *Vajapeya* or the chariot race, in which the royal chariot drawn by a horse was made to win the race against his kinsmen. All these rituals impressed the people with the increasing power and prestige of the king. During later Vedic period the collection of taxes and tributes seems to have become common. Probably, these were deposited with an officer called *Sangrihitri* who worked as the king's companion. The epics inform us that at the time of a grand sacrifice, large-scale distributions were made by the princes. All sections of people were fed sumptuously.

The king was assisted by the priest in the discharge of his duties. The commander, the chief queen, and a few other high functionaries were also important. At the lower level, the administration was possibly run by village assemblies. They may have been controlled by the chiefs of the dominant clans. These assemblies also tried local cases. Even in the later Vedic times the king did not have a standing army. Tribal units were gathered in times of war. Interestingly, according to one ritual relating to war success, the king had to eat together with his subjects from the same bowl.

## **2.1.6: Vedic Society**

### **2.1.6.1: Early Vedic Society:**

In the early Vedic society, Kinship was the basis of the social structure. "A man was identified by the tribe to which he belonged, as can be seen in the names of several Rig Vedic kings. The people's primary loyalty was to the tribe, which was called Jana. In one of the early verses, the combined strength of the warriors of two tribes is given as twenty-one. This suggests that the total number of members in a tribe may not have exceeded 100. The term Jana occurs at about 275 places in the Rig Veda, but the term Janapada or territory is not used even once. The people were attached to the tribe because neither control over territory nor the kingdom was yet established."

The Rig Vedic Janas or tribes were further divided into a number of clans called Vis. The term *Vis* is found mentioned 170 times in Rig Veda. Probably the Vis was again divided into much smaller units called *Gramas*. When the Gramas clashed with one another called *Samgrama*, represents war. The most numerous Varna of the Vaishyas perhaps arose out of the Vis or the mass of the tribal people in later times. The term Kula, for family is rarely mentioned in the Rig Veda. It comprised not only mother, father, sons, slaves, etc., but many other people too. Perhaps family in the early Vedic phase was represented by the term *Griha*, which often occurs in the Rig Veda. A single word is used to denote nephew, grandson, cousin, etc in the earliest Indo-European languages.

This would imply that differentiation in family relationships leading to the setting up of separate households had not thus far occurred. The family was a very large joint unit. It was a patriarchal family headed by the father, as was the case in the ancient Roman society. It appears that several generations of the family lived under the same roof. As it was a patriarchal society, the birth of a son was repeatedly desired. People prayed to the gods for brave sons to fight the wars. In the Rig Veda no desire is expressed for daughters. The desire for children and cattle is however a recurrent theme in the hymns. Women could attend assemblies and offer sacrifices along with their husbands. In an instance we have five women who composed hymns. The later texts mention twenty such women. The hymns were composed orally, and nothing written relates to that period. The institution of marriage was established. The symbols of primitive practices however survived. We have a marriage proposal made by Yami, the twin-sister of Yama, to establish love relations. But the offer is resisted by Yama. Some indications of polyandry are present. The Maruts or (storm gods), for instance, are stated to have one common wife Rodasi. The two Asvin brothers are represented as living with Surya, the daughter of the sun god. But such instances are rare. Probably they indicate matrilineal elements.

In a few examples of sons are named after their mother, as in the case of Mamateya. In the Rig Veda, we also come across the practice of levirate (marriage with brother's widow) and widow remarriage. There are no instances of child marriage. But

the eligible age for marriage in the Rig Veda appears to have been 16 to 17. Rig Veda indicates some kind of negative consciousness on the physical appearance of people. Varna was the term used for colour. It appears that the Indo-Aryan language speakers were fair while the indigenous inhabitants were dark in complexion.

Colour may have provided the identifier for social orders. Its importance, however, has been exaggerated by those western writers who believe in Rig Vedic evidences of gifts as cattle, chariots, horses, slaves, etc., to the privileged sections of the society such as priests and princes. Social inequalities were created by unequal distribution of the spoils of war. This aided the rise of princes and priests at the cost of the common tribal people. As the economy was mainly pastoral and not food producing, the scope for collecting regular tributes from the people was very limited. Gifts of land and even gifts of cereals are rare in the early Vedic time. We find domestic slaves but not wage-earners. The tribal elements in society were stronger. Social divisions based on the collection of taxes or accumulation of landed property did not exist. Hence, the society was still tribal and egalitarian in nature.

#### **2.1.6.2: Later Vedic Society:**

The later Vedic society came to be divided into four varnas called the *Brahmana*, *Rajanya* or *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*. The growing cult of sacrifices enormously added to the power of the Brahmanas. In the beginning the Brahmanas were only one of the sixteen classes of priests, but they gradually overshadowed the other priestly groups and emerged as the most important class. The rise in importance of the Brahmanas is a peculiar development which is not found in Indo-European societies outside India. It appears that non-Aryan elements had some role to play in the formation of the Brahmana Varna. The Brahmanas conducted rituals and sacrifices for their clients and for themselves. They officiated at the festivals associated with agricultural operations. Brahmanas prayed for the success of their patron in war, and, in return, the king pledged not to do anything to harm them. For positions of supremacy, sometimes the Brahmanas came into conflict with the Rajanyas, who represented the order of the warrior nobles. But whenever the two upper orders had to deal with the lower strata, they shelved their



differences. It began to be emphasized since the end of the later Vedic period, that the two shoulders together should cooperate to rule over the rest of society. The *Vaishyas* constituted the common people. They were assigned producing functions such as agriculture, cattle-breeding, and the like. Some of the *Vaishyas* also worked as artisans. They began to engage in trade towards the end of the Vedic period.

The *Vaishyas* seem to be the only tribute payers in later Vedic times. The *Brahmanas* and *Kshatriyas* are represented as living on the tributes collected from the *Vaishyas*. The process of subjugating the mass of the tribesmen to the position of tribute payers was long and protracted. Several rituals are prescribed for making the refractory people (*Vis* or *Vaishya*) submissive to the prince (*Raja*) and also to his close kinsmen called the *Rajanyas*. This was done with the help of the priests who also fattened themselves at the cost of the *Vaishyas*. One common feature was shared by all the three higher *varnas* that they were entitled to *Upanayana* (investiture) with the sacred thread according to the Vedic mantras.

*Upanayana* heralded the beginning of education in the Vedas. The fourth *Varna* was deprived of the *Upanayana* ceremony. The women were denied Vedic education and sacred thread right. The *Aitareya Brahmana*, a text of the later Vedic period, represents the *Brahmana* as a seeker of livelihood. He is an acceptor of gifts from the *Rajanya* king but also removable by him. The king, who represented the *Rajanya* order, sought to assert his authority over all the three other *Varnas*. A *Vaishya* is merely meant for tribute-paying, and to be beaten and oppressed at will by the upper strata. Unfortunately, the worst position is reserved for the *Shudra*. A *Shudra* is called the servant of another, to be made to work at will by another, and to be beaten at will. Generally, the later Vedic texts draw a line of demarcation between the three higher orders on the one hand, and the *Shudras* on the other. There were, several public rituals connected with the coronation of the king in which the *Shudras* participated. They were presumably survivors of the original Indo-Aryan community. Certain sections of artisans, such as the *Rathakara* or chariot maker, enjoyed a high status and were entitled to the sacred thread ceremony.

Therefore, Varna distinctions, therefore, had not advanced very far in later Vedic times. We notice the increasing power of the father in the family, who could even disinherit his son. The right of primogeniture was getting stronger in princely families. Male ancestors came to be worshipped. Women were generally given a lower position. Some women theologians took part in philosophical discussions and some queens participated in coronation rituals. But, ordinarily women were thought to be inferior and subordinate to men. The institution of gotra appeared in later Vedic times. Literally, it means the 'cow pen' or the place where cattle belonging to the entire clan are kept.

In course of time it signified descent from a common ancestor. People began to practise gotra exogamy. Marriage was forbidden between persons belonging to the same gotra or having the same lineage. The Ashrama Dharmas or the four stages of life were not well established in Vedic times. The post-Vedic texts speak of four Ashramas: *Brahmacharya*, *Grahashtya*, *Vanaprastha*, and *Sannyasa*. These four Ashramas were meant for *Brahmachari* (student), *Grihasthin* (householder), *Vanaprasthin* (hermit), and *Sannyasin* (ascetic-one who completely renounced the worldly life). In the later Vedic texts only the first three are mentioned the last or the fourth stage was not well established. Ascetic life was not unknown. Even in the post-Vedic times also only the *Grahashtya* or the householder Ashrama was often well practised by most sections in the society.

### **2.1.7: Vedic Economy**

#### **2.1.7.1: Early Vedic Economy:**

“We have some idea of the economic life of the Rig Vedic Indo-Aryans. There are several references to the cow and the bull in the Rig Veda. The Rig Vedic people can be called a predominantly pastoral people. Most of their wars were fought over cows. The terms for war in the Rig Veda is *gavishthi* or search for cows. Cow appears to have been the most important form of wealth. The gifts made to priests usually consist of cows and women slaves and never of land. The Rig Vedic people may have occasionally occupied pieces of land for grazing, cultivation, and settlement. However, land did not form a well-established type of private property. The Rig Vedic people had

a superior knowledge of agriculture. The pre-Aryans who lived in the area associated with the Vedic people were well versed with Agriculture. Ploughshare is mentioned in the earliest part of the Rig Veda. Some consider it to be an interpolation, and was possibly made of wood. They were acquainted with sowing, harvesting, and threshing. They knew about the different seasons. However, we have no clear evidence of the existence of regular trade by the early Indo-Aryans. The Rig Vedic people perhaps principally used the land routes. The word samudra mentioned in the Rig Veda primarily indicates a stretch of water. Rig Veda mentions artisans like carpenter, chariot-maker, weaver, leather worker, potter, etc. which indicates that they practised all these crafts. The term *ayas* used for copper or bronze, shows that metalworking was known. When they settled in the western part of the subcontinent, they perhaps used copper supplied by the Khetri mines in Rajasthan. They owed their success with the use of horses, chariots. Possibly they were added by some better arms made of bronze of which we have very little archaeological evidence. The early Indo-Aryans introduced the spoked wheel. It made its initial entry in the Caucasus area in 2300BCE.”

A site at Bhagwanpura in Haryana and three other sites in Punjab have yielded Painted Grey Ware (PGW) along with ‘Late Harappan’ pottery. The date assigned to the Bhagwanpura finds ranges from 1600 BCE to 1000 BCE. It also roughly corresponds to the period of the Rig Veda. The geographical area of these four sites also coincides with that of a substantial portion of the area represented by the Rig Veda. Although PGW has been found at all these sites, iron objects and cereals are missing. Therefore, we may assume of a pre-iron phase of the PGW which coincided with the Rig Vedic phase.

Cattle bones have been found in good quantity in all these sites. From the Bhagwanpura site, horse bones have also been found. The Indo-Aryans were not well acquainted with the city life. They might have lived in some kind of fortified mud settlements which still await satisfactory identification by archaeologists. They were also familiar with caves in the mountains. It is interesting to note that the Bhagwanpura site reported a thirteen-roomed mud house whose dating has not been confirmed. This might indicate either a house for a large extended family or of a tribal chief.

### 2.1.7.2: Later Vedic Economy:

The most noteworthy aspect of the later Vedic period is the well and systematic use of Iron, which made some significant changes in the economic life of the Vedic people. In our subcontinent, iron is sometimes ascribed to Lothal and some other Harappan sites in Afghanistan. But those substances never represent pure iron metal; they were copper objects consist of iron ores. These ores have not been separated from copper and given a distinct and separate identity as a pure iron metal. Around 1000 BCE the pure iron appears first time in Dharwar in Karnataka, but how it spread from here is not clear. However, from the same time onwards iron was used in the Gandhara area of north-west Pakistan.

Iron implements buried with dead bodies have been discovered in substantial numbers. They have also been found in Baluchistan. At about the same time, iron was used in eastern Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Excavations show that iron weapons, such as arrowheads and spearheads, came to be commonly used in western Uttar Pradesh from about 800 BCE onwards. With iron weapons the Vedic people may have defeated the few adversaries that they may have faced in the upper portion of the doab. The iron axe may have been used to clear the forests in the upper Gangetic basin although, because rainfall ranged between 35 cm and 65 cm, these forests may not have been very dense. Towards the end of the Vedic period knowledge of iron spread in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha. The earliest iron implements discovered in this area relate to the seventh century BCE.

In the later Vedic texts, the iron metal is referred as Shyama or Krishna Ayas (black metal). Agriculture was the chief means of subsistence of the later Vedic people. Archeological finds attest a few agricultural tools made of iron. Later Vedic texts mention six, eight, twelve, and even twenty - four oxen yoked to the plough. Ploughing was done with a wooden ploughshare. This could function in the light soil of the upper Gangetic plains. Because of cattle slaughter in sacrifices sufficient bullocks could not have been available. Although agriculture was primitive, there is no doubt about its wide prevalence. The *Satapatha Brahmana* speaks at length about the ploughing rituals.

Sita's father Janaka, the king of Videha, according to ancient legends, lent his hand to the plough. In those days, even kings and princes did not hesitate to take to manual labour. Krishna's brother Balarama was called *Haladhara* or wielder of the plough. In a Bodh-Gaya sculpture Gautama Buddha is depicted ploughing with oxen. Eventually ploughing was assigned to the lower orders and prohibited for the upper varnas.

The Vedic people continued to produce barley. During the later Vedic period rice and wheat became their chief crops. Wheat became the staple food of the people in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh in subsequent times. The Vedic people became acquainted with rice in the doab for the first time. The word *vrihi* was used in the later Vedic texts to denote rice. Remains of *vrihi* have been recovered from Hastinapur date back to the eighth century BCE. Rice was also grown at around the same time in Atranjikhhera in Etah district. The use of rice is recommended in Vedic rituals. But wheat was recommended only rarely. Later Vedic people also produced various kinds of lentils.

The later Vedic period saw the rise of diverse arts and crafts. We have references to smiths and smelters, who certainly had something to do with iron working from about 1000 BCE. From the very outset, the Vedic people were familiar with copper. Numerous copper tools of the pre-1000 BCE period found in western Uttar Pradesh and Bihar might indicate the existence of coppersmiths in non - Vedic societies. The Vedic people may have used the copper mines of Khetri in Rajasthan. In any event, copper was one of the first metals to be used by them. Copper objects are found in Painted Grey Ware sites. They were primarily used for war and hunting. They were also used for ornaments. Weaving was confined to women but practised on a wide scale. Leather work, pottery, and carpentry were also popular. The later Vedic people were acquainted with four types of pottery- black-and-red ware (BRW), black-slipped ware (BSW), Painted Grey Ware (PGW), and red-ware (RW).

Red ware was the most popular, and is found almost all over western Uttar Pradesh. The most distinctive pottery of the period however, is known as Painted Grey Ware. It consisted of bowls and dishes that were used either for rituals or for eating or

for both. Glass hoards and bangles found in the PGW layers perhaps were used as prestige objects by a few persons. Both Vedic texts and excavations indicate the specialization of crafts. Jewellers are frequently mentioned in later Vedic texts. They possibly catered to the needs of the richer sections of society.

Agriculture and various crafts enabled the later Vedic people to lead a settled life. Excavations and explorations offer us some idea about settlements in later Vedic times. Widespread Painted Grey Ware sites have been found in western Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, which was the Kuru- Panchala area. They are also spread in the adjoining parts of Punjab and Haryana, the Madra area, and in those of Rajasthan, that constituted the Matsya area. We can count nearly 700 sites, mostly in the upper Gangetic basin. Only a few sites such as Hastinapur, Atranjikhhera, and Noh have been excavated. As the thickness of the material remains of habitation ranges from one to three metres, it seems that these settlements lasted from one to three centuries. These were by and large, entirely new settlements which had no immediate predecessors. People lived in mudbrick houses or in wattle-and-daub houses erected on wooden poles. The structures are poor. But ovens and cereals (rice) recovered from the sites show that the Painted Grey Ware people, probably identifiable with the later Vedic people, were farmers who led a settled life. As they generally cultivated with the wooden ploughshare, the peasants were unable to produce enough to feed those engaged in other occupations.

Hence, they would not contribute much to the rise of towns. The term *nagara* is used in later Vedic texts. But only the faint beginnings of towns appear towards the end of the later Vedic period. Hastinapur and Kausambi (near Allahabad) seem to be primitive towns belonging to the end of the Vedic period. They may be called proto-urban. The Vedic texts also mention seas and sea voyages. This suggests some kind of commerce which may have been stimulated by the rise of new arts and crafts. Most of the later Vedic phase witnessed a great advance in the material life of the people. The pastoral and semi-nomadic forms of living were relegated to the background while agriculture became the primary source of livelihood. Life became settled and sedentary. The Vedic people equipped with diverse arts and crafts, now settled permanently in the upper Gangetic plains. The peasants living in the plains produced enough to maintain

themselves. They were also able to spare a marginal part of their produce for the support of chiefs, princes, and priests.

### **2.1.8: Vedic Religion**

#### **2.1.8.1: Early Vedic Religion Indo-Aryan culture developed amidst the nature.**

Nature had significantly influenced all sort of their life including religion. Early Vedic people worshipped the force of nature as gods and goddesses. It was difficult for them to explain the coming of the rains, the appearance of the sun and the moon, and the existence of the rivers, mountains, etc. So they personified these natural forces and looked upon them as living beings to which they attributed human or animal attributes.

A large number of such divinities are mentioned in the Rig Veda. It is replete with hymns composed in their honour by the poets of sundry families. The most important divinity in the Rig Veda is Indra. He is called Purandara or destroyer of dwelling units. Indra played the role of a warlord, leading the soldiers to victory against the demons. There are 250 hymns devoted to Indra. He is considered to be the rain god and thought to be responsible for causing rainfall. The second position is held by Agni, the fire god. To the God Agni, 1200 hymns devoted. Because of its use in burning forests, cooking, etc. Fire played a significant part in the life of primitive people.

The cult of fire occupied a central place not only in India but also in Iran. Fire acted as a kind of intermediary between the gods, on the one hand, and the people, on the other in Vedic times. The oblations offered to the god Agni were supposed to be carried in the form of smoke to the sky. Thus, they were transmitted to the gods. The third important position is occupied by Varuna who personified water. Varuna was supposed to uphold the natural order. Whatever happened in the world was thought to be the reflection of his desires. *Soma* was considered to be the god of plants. Soma was an intoxicating drink named after him. Many hymns in the Rig Veda explain the methods of preparing this drink from plants that have not so far been satisfactorily identified. The Maruts personify the storm. Many hymns are devoted to the river Sarasvati. Saraswati was considered an important goddess.

Thus we have many deities who represent the different forces of nature in one form or another. They are also assigned human activities. We also find some female divinities such as Aditi, and Usha who represented the appearance of the dawn. However, they were not prominent at the time of the Rig Veda. In the patriarchal set-up of the period the male gods were far more important than the female. The prevailing mode of worshipping the gods was through the recitation of prayers and performance of sacrifices. Prayers played an important part in Rig Vedic times. Both collective and individual prayers were made. Every tribe (*Jana*) or clan (*Vis*) was the devoted follower of a special god. It appears that prayers were offered to the gods in chorus by the members of an entire tribe. This also happened in the case of sacrifices. Agni and Indra were invited to partake of sacrifices made by the tribe as a whole. Offerings of vegetables, barley, etc., were made to gods. But in Rig Vedic times this was not accompanied by any ritual or sacrificial formulae. The magical power of the word was not considered at this stage as important as it became in later Vedic times.

During the early phase of the Vedic culture people essentially prayed gods for *Praja* (children), *Pashu* (cattle), food, wealth, health, etc. They have not prayed for their spiritual upliftment or for ending the miseries of existence.

#### **2.1.8.2: Later Vedic Religion:**

The later Vedic period is marked by a certain significant changes in the case of the evolution of religion. During this phase the upper Ganga-Yamuna doab emerged as the cradle of the Indo - Aryan culture under Brahminical influence. All the later Vedic literature seems to have been compiled in this area in the land of the Kuru-Panchalas. The cult of sacrifices accompanied by rituals and formulas developed with much significance in the phase.

The two important Rig Vedic gods, Indra and Agni, lost their former importance. Prajapati, on the other hand, the creator, came to occupy the supreme position in the later Vedic pantheon. Some of the other minor gods of the Rig Vedic period also came to the forefront. Vishnu came to be conceived of as the preserver and protector of the people. They now led a settled life rather than a semi-nomadic one. Rudra, the god of



animals, became important in later Vedic times. Society became divided into social classes, such as *Brahmanas*, *Rajanyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *shudras*. Some social orders began to have their own deities.

Even though in the age of the *Rig Veda* cattle rearing was the primary Indo-Aryan occupation, the new god called *Pushan*, who was supposed to tend to cattle, came to be regarded as the god of the *shudras* in the later Vedic times. In addition, some objects began to be worshipped as symbols of divinity; signs of idolatry appear in later Vedic times.

People worshipped gods for the same material reasons in this period as they did in earlier times. The mode of worship however, underwent substantial change. Prayers continued to be recited. They however, ceased to be the dominant mode of appeasing the gods. Sacrifices became far more important. They assumed both a public and domestic character. Public sacrifices involved the king and the entire community. In many cases they coincided with the tribe. Private sacrifices were performed by individuals in their houses. During this period the Vedic people maintained regular households. Individuals offered oblations to Agni. Each of these took the form of a ritual or a sacrifice.

Sacrifices were accompanied by formulae that had to be carefully enunciated by the sacrificer. The sacrificer was known as the *yajamana*, the performer of *yajna*. Much of his success depended on the magical power of words uttered correctly during the sacrifices. These formulae and sacrifices were invented, adopted, and elaborated by the priests called the *Brahmanas*. *Brahmanas* claimed a monopoly of priestly knowledge and expertise. They invented numerous rituals, some of which were adopted from the non-Aryans. The reason for the invention and elaboration of the rituals is not clear, but mercenary motives cannot be ruled out. We hear that as many as 240,000 cows were given as *dakshina* (gift) to the officiating priest in the *Rajasuya* sacrifice.

In addition to cows, which were usually given as sacrificial gifts, gold, cloth, and horses were also donated. Sometimes the priests claimed portions of territory as *dakshina*, but the grant of land as sacrificial fee is not established in the later Vedic

period. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* states that in the Ashvamedha, the north, south, east, and west should all be given to the priest. If this really happened, then what would remain with the king? This, therefore, merely indicates the desire of the priests to grab as much property as possible. In reality, however, considerable transfer of land to priests could not have taken place. There is a reference in which land, which was being given to the priests, refused to be transferred to them. Some rituals performed by the Indo-Aryans are common to the Indo-European peoples. Several of them seem to have been developed on the Indian soil.

The guests are mentioned as *Goghna* or one who was fed on cattle in the Vedic texts. Sacrifices involved the killing of animals on a large scale led to the loss of cattle wealth which was one of the basic tools of agriculture production in ancient India. A strong reaction arose against priestly domination towards the end of the Vedic period, against cults and rituals.

This was especially in the land of the Panchalas and Videha where, around 600 BCE, the Upanishads were compiled. The philosophy of Upanishadic texts strongly criticized the Vedic rituals and priestly practices. They laid stress on the value of right belief and knowledge. They emphasized that knowledge of the Atman (self) should be acquired. And, they further emphasized on the proper understanding of the relation of Atman with Brahman by oneself. Gradually the Brahman emerged as a supreme entity that was comparable to the powerful kings of the period. Some of the Kshatriya princes in Panchala and Videha also cultivated this form of thought. They created the atmosphere for the reform of the priest-dominated religion. Their teachings promoted the cause of stability and integration. Emphasis on the changelessness, indestructibility, and immortality of the Atman or soul served the cause of stability. This was necessary to sustain the rising state power headed by the Kshatriya Raja. Stress on the relation of *Atman* with *Brahman* fostered allegiance to a superior authority.

### **2.1.9: Summary:**

In comparison with the Rig Vedic age, there were some notable changes occurred in later Vedic period. The territorial kingdoms called Janapadas were

developed under the Kshatriya rulers. Wars were fought not only for the possession of cattle but also for territory. The famous Mahabharata war, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, is assigned to this period. The predominantly pastoral society of early Vedic times had turned agricultural. The tribal pastoralists were transformed into farmers who could maintain their chief with frequent tributes. Chiefs, called Janapadin or Raja, grew at the expense of the tribal peasantry. They handsomely rewarded the priests who supported their patrons against the common people called the Vaishyas. The Shudras were still a small serving order. The tribal society broke up into a Varna-divided society. But Varna distinctions could not be agreed much far. Although there was the support of the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas could not establish a mature state system. A state cannot be set up without a regular taxation system and a standing army; but here the existing mode of agricultural setup neither allowed nor sufficient for any regular mode of taxation or tribute payment.

#### **2.1.10: Keywords**

Indo Aryans - Veda -Rig Veda - Yajur Veda - Sama Veda - Atharva Veda- Sapta Sindhu - Brahnavarta - Aryavarta - Max Muller - Jacobi - Balagangadhara Tilak - Winternitz - Rajan - Sabha - Samiti - Vidatha - Gana - Purohita - Vasishtha - Vishvamitra - Mantra - Bali - Vrajapati - Gramani - Kulapa - Vrata - Gana - Grama - Sardha - Panchajana - Bharatas - Tritsu - Bharatavarsha - Battle of Ten Kings - Parushni - Purus - Kurus - Panchalas - Rashtra - Ashvamedha - Vajapeya - Sangrihitri-Jana - Vis - Samgrama - Kula - Griha - Dasas - Dasyus - Varna - Arya Varna - Dasa Varna - Brahmana - Rajanya/Kshatriya - Vaishya - Shudra - Upanayana - Aitareya Brahmana - gotra - Ashrama Dharmas - Brahmacharya - Grahasthya - Vanaprastha - Sannyasa - Brahmachari - Grihasthin - Vanaprasthin - Sannyasin - Grahasthya - Gavishthi - Ayas - Bhagwanpura - PGW - Krishna Ayas - Shatapatha Brahmana - Vrihi -Black and Red Ware (BRW) - Black Slipped Ware (BSW) - Painted Grey Ware (PGW) - Red Ware(RW) - Indra - Purandara - Agni - Varuna - Soma - Maruts - River Sarasvati - Aditi - Usha - Praja - Pasu - Vishnu - Pushan - Yajna - Yajamana - Dakshina - Rajasuya - Goghna - Atman - Brahman.

### 2.1.11: Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms and concepts:

Jana - Panchajana - Vis - Gavishthi - Samgrama - Sabha - Samiti - Dasa - Dasyu -  
Yajna - Upanayana - PGW.

2. Write short notes on the following;

- a) Sapta-Sindhu
- b) Aryavarta
- c) Brahmavarta
- d) Ashrama System

3. Write a brief note on the Rig Vedic polity.

4. Write a brief note on the Later Vedic polity.

5. Trace the expansion of the Vedic People in the Later Vedic period.

6. 'Vedic Literature is the chief source of information to understand the Vedic Culture'.  
Explain.

7. 'Rig Vedic period is more advanced than later Vedic period.' Do you agree with the  
statement? Substantiate your view.

8. Give an account of the occupational life of the later Vedic society in comparison with  
the Rig Vedic society.

9. 'Caste system in Indian society has its origin in Chaturvarnya system of later Vedic  
period.' Do you agree with the statement? Explain.

10. 'Vedic religion was entirely different from Harappan religion.' Do you agree?  
Substantiate.

## **Lesson: 2.2: Rise of Buddhism and Jainism**

### **Structure**

- 2.2.1: Objectives
- 2.2.2: Introduction
- 2.2.3: Causes of Origin: Material Milieu of Sixth Century BCE
- 2.2.4: Buddhism
  - 2.2.4.1: Life of Buddha
  - 2.2.4.2: Principles of Buddhism
  - 2.2.4.3: Spread of Buddhism and Its Causes
  - 2.2.4.4: Decline of Buddhism
  - 2.2.4.5: Impact of Buddhism
- 2.2.5: Jainism
  - 2.2.5.1: Life of Mahavira
  - 2.2.5.2: Principles of Jainism
  - 2.2.5.3: Spread of Jainism
  - 2.2.5.4: Decline of Jainism
  - 2.2.5.5: Impact of Jainism
- 2.2.6: Summary
- 2.2.7: Keywords
- 2.2.8: Self-Assessment Questions

### **2.2.1: Objectives:**

- To understand the material milieu of sixth century BCE which leads to the development of Buddhism and Jainism in North India
- To be familiarised with the course and spread of Buddhism and Jainism in Central and Peninsular India.
- To get general idea about the factors which led to the popularity of Buddhism and Jainism in India
- To understand the spirit of spiritual reform by Buddha and Jina which had a significant bearing on the social change in ancient India

- To comprehend the lessons and life-relevance of the principle doctrines of Buddha and Jina.
- To know the striking resemblances in the doctrines of Buddha and Jina.
- To be traced the historicity of Buddhism and Jainism by their different fundamental conceptions if any.
- To understand why Buddhism spread far and wide in different parts of the world, Jainism not ever.

### **2.2.2: Introduction:**

In sixth–fifth centuries BCE, numerous religious sects arose in the mid-Gangetic plains, we hear of as many as sixty-two of them. Many of these sects were based on regional customs and rituals practised by different peoples living in north-east India. Jainism and Buddhism were the most important of these sects. They emerged as the most potent religious reform movements.

### **2.2.3: Causes of Origin: Material Milieu of Sixth Century BCE:**

There were a number of factors including social and economic elements which ultimately led to the rise and development of Buddhism and Jainism in north India. When we look into the social aspects, we found that the Post-Vedic society was clearly divided into four varnas, viz., *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *shudras*. Each Varna was assigned well-defined functions. The varna was based on birth, and the two higher varnas captured power, prestige and privileges at the cost of the lower varnas. The Brahmanas, who were allotted the functions of priests and teachers, claimed the highest status in society. Brahmanas demanded several privileges, including those of receiving gifts and exemption from taxation and punishment. Post-Vedic texts contain many instances of such privileges enjoyed by them. The *Kshatriyas*, who ranked second in the varna hierarchy, fought and governed. They lived on the taxes collected from the peasants. The *Vaishyas* were engaged in agriculture, cattle rearing, and trade. Vaishyas appear as principal taxpayers. Above said three varnas were placed in the category of Dvija or the twice-born. The Dvija were entitled to wear the sacred thread and study the Vedas.

The *shudras* were meant to serve the three higher varnas. Along with women, they were barred from Vedic studies. In post-Vedic times they worked as domestic slaves, agricultural slaves, craftsmen, and hired labourers. They were described as cruel, greedy, and thieving in their habits.

“Some of them were treated as untouchables. The higher varnas enjoyed more privileges in the society, but the lower varna was considered as offenders and most of the time they were undergone severe punishments for even a minor crime. Obviously the varna-divided society seems to have generated tensions. We have no means of ascertaining the reactions of the Vaishyas and the shudras.”

But the Kshatriyas, who functioned as rulers, reacted strongly against the ritualistic domination of the Brahmanas. Kshatriyas seem to have led a kind of protest movement against the importance attached to birth in the varna system. The Kshatriya reaction against the domination of the Brahmanas, who claimed various privileges, was one of the causes of the origin of new religions like Buddhism and Jainism. Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira who were the founders of Buddhism and Jainism respectively belonged to the Kshatriya clan, and both questioned the authority of the Brahmanas.

The economic cause of the rise of Buddhism and Jainism were the spread of a new agricultural economy in north-eastern India. North-east India, including the regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern and southern Bihar, has about 100 cm of rainfall. They were densely forested and could not be easily cleared without the aid of iron axes, before these areas were colonized on a large scale. Some people lived in these areas prior to the sixth century BCE. They used implements of bone, stone, and copper. They generally led a precarious life on the banks of lakes and rivers and river confluences where land was opened to settlement through the process of erosion and flooding. Large-scale habitations in the mid-Gangetic plains began towards the end of the sixth century BCE.

This was the period when iron began to be used in this area on some scale. Because of the moist nature of the soil in this area, not many iron tools of the earliest

times have survived. But a fair number of axes have been found from the layers of c. 600-500 BCE. The use of iron tools made clearance, agriculture, and large settlements possible. The agricultural economy based on the iron ploughshare required the use of bullocks. It could not flourish without animal husbandry.

The Vedic practice of killing cattle indiscriminately in sacrifices hampered the progress of the new agriculture. Because the cows and bullocks were being killed in the course of the numerous Vedic sacrifices, the cattle wealth was gradually decimated. The non-Vedic tribal people living on the southern and eastern fringes of Magadha also killed cattle for food. This killing had to be halted if the new agrarian economy was to stabilize; sixth century BCE attests the rise of a large number of cities in north-eastern India. Examples are there like Kaushambi near Allahabad, Kusinagar, Varanasi, Vaishali, Chirand, Bodh-Gaya, Pataliputra, Rajgir, and Champa.

Both Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha were associated with several of these cities. Many artisans and traders of these cities minted coins for the first time. Earliest of the coins they used can be assigned to the fifth century BCE, and they coins can generally be included in the category of punch-marked coins. They were circulated for the first time in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The use of coins facilitated trade and commerce, which added to the importance of the Vaishyas. In the Brahminical society, the Vaishyas, as we have noted, ranked third, after the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas.

The Vaishyas sought a religion that would improve their position. Besides the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas extended generous support to both Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. The merchants, called the Settles, made handsome gifts to Gautama Buddha and his disciples. There were some reasons for this behaviour. Firstly, Jainism and Buddhism at the initial stage did not attach any prominence to the existing varna system; secondly, they preached the gospel of non-violence. Nonviolence would put an end to wars between different kingdoms and consequently promote trade and commerce; thirdly, the Brahminical law-books, called the Dharmasutras, decried lending money at an interest.



They condemned those who lived on interest. On account of that the money lending class called Vaishyas, who had wealthy wellbeing through trade and commerce, were held in low esteem and looked for better social position. Then again, we also notice a strong reaction against various forms of private property. Old- fashioned people did not like the use and accumulation of coins made certainly of silver and copper and possibly of gold. They disliked the new dwellings and clothes. They also disliked new luxurious systems of transport, war and violence.

“Social inequalities were created by the new forms of property. They caused misery and suffering to the mass of ordinary people. The common people yearned to return to a primitive lifestyle, to the ascetic ideal which dispensed with the new forms of property and the new style of life. Jainism and Buddhism propounded simple, puritan, ascetic living.”

The Buddhist and Jaina monks were asked to forego the good things of life. They were not permitted to touch gold and silver. They were allowed to accept only as much from their patrons as was sufficient to keep body and soul together. They rebelled against the material advantages offered by the new lifestyle in the Gangetic basin. The present kind of reaction against changes in material life in the mid-Gangetic plain, in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, can be compared with one occurred against the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution of modern times. During the coming of Industrial Revolution, many people and communities desired a return journey to the pre-machine life. Here in the case of a few of ancient Indian communities wanted their pre-Iron Age life and style.

#### **2.2.4: Buddhism**

##### **2.2.4.1: Life of Buddha:**

Lord Buddha was a contemporary of Mahavira. Tradition said that, Gautama Buddha or Siddhartha was born in 567 BCE in a Shakya Kshatriya family in Lumbini in Nepal near Kapilavastu. This is identified with Piprahwa in Basti district and is close to the foothills of Nepal. Gautama's father seems to have been the elected ruler of

Kapilavastu, and headed the Sakya republican clan. Siddhartha's mother was a princess from the Kosala dynasty.

Gautama belonged to a noble family, but had inherited some egalitarian beliefs which were common in the republican Janapadas of sixth century BCE. Onwards in his early childhood, Gautama showed a meditative mind set. He got married very early of his age, but family life was not much interested for him. He was moved by the misery suffered by people in the world. He sought a solution. He left home at the age of 29. Gautama wandered from place to place for about seven years and then attained enlightenment at the age of 35 at Bodh-Gaya under a pipal tree. From this time onwards he began to be called the Buddha or the enlightened one. Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath in Banaras. He undertook long journeys and carried his message far and wide. He was able to walk 20 to 30 km a day. Buddha kept wandering, preaching, and meditating continually for forty years. He rested only during the annual rainy season.

During this long period, he encountered many staunch supporters of other sects, including the Brahmanas. He defeated them in debates. His missionary activities did not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and man and woman. Buddha passed away at the age of 80 in 487 BCE at a place called Kusinagara, coterminous with the village called Kasia in Deoria district in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

#### **2.2.4.2: Principles of Buddhism:**

Lord Buddha was pragmatic in reforms; more concerned on the realities of his time. He did not involve himself in fruitless controversies regarding the *Atman* (soul) and *Brahman* (the supreme entity) which raged in his time, but addressed himself to worldly problems. These basic identifications led to his basics of doctrines called *Aryasatya* or Four Noble Truth and its stress on *Ashtanga Marga* or Eight Fold Path. Buddha's Aryasatya said that; (i) The world was full of sufferings; (ii) The suffering is caused by human desires; (iii) The desire can be ended by the observance of the Ashtanga Marga. Ashtanga Marga or *Ashtangika Marga* of Gautama Buddha recommended eight life Paths for the elimination of human misery. This is

recommended as the way for the attainment of Nirvana.

It is also known as the 'Middle path' since it stood between the two extreme of worldliness and asceticism. These paths are attributed to him in a text of about the third century BCE. The Ashtanga Marga or The Eight Fold Path or The Middle Path recommended by Buddha is following; (i) Right Observation (ii) Right Determination (iii) Right Speech (iv) Right Livelihood (v) Right Action (vi) Right Exercise (vii) Right Memory (viii) Right Meditation. He said that if a person follows this eight fold path, he would free himself from the machinations of priests, and would reach his destination. Buddha's 'Middle Path' teaching us that a person should avoid an excess of both luxury and austerity, and has to follow a middle mode of life. Buddha also laid down a code of conduct for his followers, which are common to the social conduct ordained by virtually all religions. The code of conduct put forwarded by Buddha is following; (i) Do not commit violence (ii) Do not covet the property of others (iii) Do not use intoxicants (iv) Do not tell a lie (v) Do not indulge in sexual misconduct and adultery. Buddha made emphasis on Karma.

He held that Karma determines man's destiny. It is simply mean 'we reap what we sow'. Our future consequences unavoidably shaped by our own present actions; good actions in life help to reap worthy fruit, and the bad actions will provide worst fruit as a future life or as a life in the next birth. Buddhism urged to lead a pure life to attain salvation. It laid stress on *Ahimsa*. Compared to Jainism, Buddhism was moderate in its stress on the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the concept of God. Buddhism was liberal and democratic in nature. The admission of women to the Sangha was an attempt at equality. Buddha's principles were mainly based on more qualities such as truth, benevolence, obedience, charity, and kindness.

#### **2.2.4.3: Spread of Buddhism and its Causes:**

Buddhism does not recognize the existence of God and Soul which can be seen as a kind of revolution in the history of Indian religions. Early Buddhism was not enmeshed in the claptrap of philosophical discussion. It appealed to the common people. "Buddhism particularly won the support of the lower orders because it attacked

the Varna system. People were accepted by the Buddhist order without any consideration of caste. Women too were admitted to the Buddhist Sangha (monastic order) and thus brought on a par with men. Buddhism was liberal and democratic in comparison with Brahmanism. Buddhism particularly appealed to the people of the non-Vedic areas where it found virgin soil for conversion. The people of Magadha responded readily to Buddhism because they were looked down upon by the orthodox Brahmanas. Magadha was placed outside the pale of the holy Aryavarta, the land of the Aryans, covering modern Uttar Pradesh.



**Figure 17. Buddhist Art**

The personality of the Buddha and the method adopted by him to preach his religion helped the spread of Buddhism. Buddha sought to fight evil by goodness and hatred by love. He refused to be provoked by slander and abuse.” He maintained his poise and calm under difficult circumstances. “Buddha tackled his opponents with wit and presence of mind. The use of Pali, a form of Prakrit, which began around 500 BCE, contributed to the spread of Buddhism (Figure 17). Pali facilitated the spread of Buddhist doctrines amongst the common people. Gautama Buddha also organized the

Sangha or the monastic order, whose doors were open to all irrespective of caste, creed, and sex.

However, slaves, soldiers, and debtors were not admitted. The monks were required to observe the rules and regulations of the Sangha faithfully. Once they were enrolled as members of the Buddhist church, the monks had to take the vow of continence, poverty, and faith. There are thus three principal elements in Buddhism, viz., *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*. Buddhism made rapid strides even during Buddha's lifetime due to the organized preaching under the auspices of the Sangha. The monarchies of Magadha, Kosala, and Kaushambi, and several republican states and their people adopted this religion. Ashoka, the great Mauryan king, embraced Buddhism two hundred years after the death of the Buddha. This was an epoch-making event. Ashoka spread Buddhism into Central Asia, West Asia, and Sri Lanka through his missionaries.

He thus transformed Buddhism into a world religion. Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Tibet, and parts of China and Japan profess Buddhism even today. Although Buddhism disappeared from the land of its birth, it continues to hold ground in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia, and East Asia.

#### **2.2.4.4: Decline of Buddhism; by the twelfth century:**

Buddhism became virtually extinct in India. Buddhism had continued to exist in an altered form in Bengal and Bihar till the eleventh century. But after that period Buddhism almost completely vanished from India. What caused this? At the outset every religion is inspired by the spirit of reform. But eventually it succumbs to the rituals and ceremonies it originally denounces.

Buddhism underwent a similar transformation. Buddhism became a victim to the evils of Brahmanism against which it had initially fought. The Brahmanas reformed their religion to meet the Buddhist challenge. They stressed the need to preserve the cattle wealth. They assured women and shudras of admission to heaven. Buddhism, on the other hand, changed for the worse. Buddhist Sanghas lost the limpidness. Buddhist monks were cut off from the mainstream of people's lives. The monks gave up Pali, the

language of the people, and took to Sanskrit, the language of intellectuals. The monks practised idol worship from the first century onwards, on a large scale and received numerous offerings from devotees. The rich offerings supplemented by generous royal grants to the Buddhist monasteries made the life of monks easy. Some of the monasteries like Nalanda, collected revenue from as many as 200 villages. The Buddhist monasteries had come to be dominated by ease-loving people by the seventh century. They became centres of corrupt practices which had been prohibited by Gautama Buddha''. The new form of Buddhism was known as *Vajrayana*. The enormous wealth of the monasteries with increasing sexual activity led to further degeneration. Buddhists began looking upon women as an object of lust. The Buddha is reported to have said to his favourite disciple Ananda: "If women were not admitted into the monasteries Buddhism would have continued for one thousand years, but because this admission has been granted it will last only five hundred year.

The Brahmana ruler Pushyamitra Sunga is said to have persecuted the Buddhists. Several instances of persecution occur in the sixth-seventh centuries. The Huna king Mihirakula, who was a worshipper of Shiva, killed hundreds of Buddhists.

The Saivite Shashanka of Gauda felled the Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gaya where the Buddha had attained enlightenment. Hsuan Tsang states that 1600 stupas and monasteries were destroyed, and thousands of monks and lay followers killed. This may not be without some truth. The Buddhist reaction can be seen in some pantheons in which Buddhist deities trample Brahminical deities. Both the Saivites and Vaishnavites bitterly opposed the Buddhists in early medieval times in south India. Such conflicts may have weakened Buddhism. For their riches the monasteries came to be coveted by the Turkish invaders. They became special targets of the invaders' greed. The Islamic Turks killed a large number of Buddhist monks in Bihar, although some of the monks managed to escape to Nepal and Tibet. By the twelfth century, Buddhism had virtually disappeared from the land of its birth.

#### **2.2.4.5: Impact of Buddhism:**

As an organized religion it made a great impact on Indian society and economy

despite its disappearance. The Buddhists showed a keen awareness of the problems that the people of north-east India faced from about 500 BCE. The iron ploughshare-based agriculture, trade, and the use of coins enabled the traders and nobles to accumulate wealth. We hear of people possessing eighty kotis of wealth. This naturally created sharp social and economic inequalities. Buddhism therefore advised people not to accumulate wealth. According to Buddhism, poverty breeds hatred, cruelty, and violence. To eradicate these evils Buddha taught that farmers should be provided with grain and other facilities, traders with wealth, and the unemployed with employment. Buddhism also preached that if the poor gave alms to the monks, they would be born wealthy in the next world. The code of conduct prescribed for the monks represents a reaction against the material conditions of north-east India in the fifth-fourth centuries BCE. The code of conduct imposes restrictions on the food, clothing, and sexual behaviour of the monks. Monks could not accept gold and silver, could not resort to sale and purchase. These rules were relaxed after the death of the Buddha. But the early rules suggest a return to a kind of primitive communism, a characteristic of the tribal society in which people did not practise trade and advanced agriculture.

The code of conduct prescribed for monks partially reflects a revolt against the use of money, private property and luxurious living that was prevalent in the fifth century BCE in north-east India. At that time property and money were considered luxuries. Thus, the rules and teachings of Gautama Buddha took full account of the new changes in the material life of the time and strengthened them ideologically. Undoubtedly the objective of Buddhist teaching was Nirvana, meant to secure the salvation of the individual. Those who found it difficult to adjust themselves to the break-up of the old egalitarian society and the rise of gross social inequalities on account of private property were provided with some way of escape, but it was limited to the monks. No escape was provided for the lay followers.

They were taught to come to terms with the existing situation. Buddhism made an important impact on society by keeping its doors open to women and Shudras. Both women and Shudras were placed in the same category by Brahmanism. They were neither given the sacred thread nor allowed to read the Vedas. Their conversion to

Buddhism freed them from such marks of inferiority. Buddhism did not deprecate manual labour. In a second-century sculpture from Bodhi-Gaya, the Buddha is depicted ploughing with oxen. Buddhism boosted the cattle wealth of the country with its emphasis on non-violence and the sanctity of animal life.

The earliest Buddhist text, *Suttanipata*, declares cattle to be givers of food, beauty, strength, and happiness (*annada, vannada, balada, sukhada*). Thus pleads for their protection. This teaching came, significantly, at a time when the non-Aryans slaughtered animals for food, and the Indo-Aryans in the name of religion.

The Brahminical insistence on the sacredness of the cow and non-violence was apparently derived from Buddhist teachings. Even though Buddhism tried to mitigate the evils resulting from the new material life in the fifth century BCE, it also negatively consolidated changes in the social and economic life of the people. The rule that debtors were not permitted to be members of the Sangha helped the moneylenders and richer sections of society from whose clutches the debtors could not be saved. Similarly, the rule that slaves could not join the Sangha helped slave owners. The Buddhist monks had renounced the world and repeatedly criticized the greedy Brahmanas. However, in several ways they resembled the Brahmanas. Both of them did not participate directly in production, and lived on the alms or gifts given by society. They emphasized the virtues of carrying out family obligations, protecting private property, and respecting political authority. Both supported the social order based on classes. For the monks, the Varna was based on action and attributes. But for the Brahmanas it was based on birth. Buddhism created and developed a new awareness in the field of intellect and culture.

Buddhism taught the people not to take things for granted but to argue and judge them on merits. The place of superstition was taken by logic, promoting rationalism among people to a certain degree. In order to preach the doctrines of the new religion, the Buddhists compiled a new type of literature. They enormously enriched Pali by their writings. Early Pali literature can be divided into three categories. The first contains the sayings and teachings of the Buddha. The second deals with the rules to be observed by members of the Sangha. The third presents a philosophical exposition of the Dhamma.



By blending Pali and Sanskrit in the first three centuries of the Christian era, the Buddhists created a new language which is called Hybrid Sanskrit.

The literary activities of the Buddhist monks continued even in the Medieval Period. Some famous *Apabhramsa* writings in east India were composed by them. The Buddhist monasteries developed as great centres of learning, and can be called residential universities. Mention may be made of Nalanda and Vikramasila in Bihar, and Valabhi in Gujarat. Buddhism left its mark on the art of ancient India. The first human statues worshipped in India were probably those of the Buddha. Faithful devotees of the religion portrayed the various events in the life of the Buddha in stone. The panels at Bodhi-Gaya in Bihar, and at Sanchi and Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh are illuminating examples of artistic activity. Panel images of Gautama Buddha began to be made from the first century onwards. The Greek and Indian sculptors worked together to create a new form of art on the north-west frontier of India known as Gandhara art. The images of Gandhara betray Indian as well as foreign influence. For the residence of the monks, rooms were hewn out of the rocks. Thus began the cave architecture in the Barabar hills in Gaya and also in western India around Nasik. Buddhist art flourished in the Krishna delta in the south and in Mathura in the north.

#### **2.2.5: Jainism:**

The Jainas believed that their most important religious teacher Vardhamana Mahavira had twenty- three predecessors. Each one of them was known as *Tirthankara*. The origin of Jainism would go back to the ninth century BCE if Mahavira is taken as the last or the twenty-fourth Tirthankara.

Some Jainas believe that Rishabha Dev was the first *Tirthankara* or teacher of Jainism. But he is associated with Ayodhya which was settled on any scale only by 500 BCE. Most Tirthankaras, up to the fifteenth, were supposed to have been born in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. But their historicity is extremely doubtful. No part of the mid-Gangetic plains was settled on any scale until the fifth century BCE. The mythology of the Tirthankaras, most of whom were born in the mid-Gangetic basin and attained Nirvana in Bihar seems to have been created to endow Jainism with antiquity. The

earliest important teachings of Jainism are attributed to Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara. He hailed from Banaras. He abandoned royal life and became an ascetic.

#### **2.2.5.1: Life of Mahavira:**

Mahavira was the spiritual successor Parsvanatha, and he is considered as the real founder of Jainism. It is difficult to fix the exact dates of the birth and death of the great reformer Vardhamana Mahavira.

According to one tradition, Mahavira was born in c.540 BCE in a village near Vaishali, which is coterminous with Basarh in Vaishali district of north Bihar. His father Siddhartha was the head of a famous Kshatriya clan. His mother, Trishala, was the sister of the Lichchhavi chief Chetaka, whose daughter was married to the Magadhan king Bimbisara. Thus, Mahavira's family was connected with the royal family of Magadha, and such high connections made it easy for him to approach princes and nobles in the course of his spiritual mission. At the outset, Mahavira led the life of a householder, but in his quest for truth he abandoned the material life at the age of 30 and became an ascetic.

He wandered for twelve years from place to place, not staying for over a day in a village and more than five days in a town. During the course of his long journey of twelve years it is said he never changed his clothes, and abandoned them altogether at the age of 42 when he attained *Kaivalya* (omniscience). Through *Kaivalya* he conquered misery and happiness of the material life, and became *Kevalin*. Because of this life conquest he is popularly known as Mahavira (The Great Hero), or Jina (The Conqueror). And, his followers are known as Jainas. He propagated his religion for thirty years, and his mission took him to Kosala, Magadha, Mithila, Champa, and elsewhere.

He passed away at the age of 72 in c.468 BCE at a place called Pavapuri near modern Rajgir. Another tradition says that he passed away in 527 BCE. The towns and other settlements with which he was associated did not come into existence till 500 BCE.

#### **2.2.5.2: Principles of Jainism:**

Jainism mainly taught five doctrines or principles. They are (i) Ahimsa: Non-violence (ii) Satya: Truth-speaking (iii) Asteya: Non-stealing (iv) Parimita-parigraha: Evading superfluous extravagance and paraphernalia and restraining oneself to the unadorned needs of life. (v) Brahmacharya: Observance of celibacy. It is believed that only the fifth doctrine was added by Mahavira, and the other four were taken over by him from previous teachers. Jainism principally aims at the attainment of freedom from worldly bonds. No ritual is necessary for such liberation. Liberation can be obtained through Triratna or Three Jewels or Three Gems.

The Triratna are, Right Knowledge, Right Faith, and Right Action. Jainism recognized the existence of the Gods but placed them lower than the Jina. It did not condemn the Varna system as Buddhism did. According to Mahavira, a person is born in a high or in a lower Varna as a consequence of his sins committed or virtues acquired by him in his previous birth. Mahavira looks for human values even in the lowest strata of society including utmost importance to Ahimsa or non-injury to living beings. Jainism prohibited the practice of war and even agriculture for its followers because both involve the killing of living beings. Consequently, the Jainas confined themselves mainly to trade and mercantile activities. Doctrine of Ahimsa sometimes led to absurd results. Some Jaina kings ordered the execution of persons guilty of killing animals. Parsvanatha, Mahavira's predecessor, had asked his followers to cover the upper and lower portions of their bodies.

But Mahavira asked his followers to discard their clothing altogether which implies that the followers are supposed to lead a more austere life. Because of one of this main reasons, Jainism split into two sects in later times, viz., Digambaras who remained naked and Svetambaras or those who donned white garments.

#### **2.2.5.3: Spread of Jainism:**

Mahavira organized an order of his followers in order to spread the teachings of Jainism. They admitted both men and women. Mahavira preached his teachings in

Prakrit which was the language of the common people. It is believed that his followers numbered 14,000, which is not a large figure. Jainism failed to attract the masses since Jainism did not very clearly differentiate itself from the Brahminical religion. However, Jainism gradually spread into south and west India where the Brahminical religion was weak. The spread of Jainism in Karnataka, according to a late tradition, is attributed to Chandragupta Maurya (322- 298 BC). The emperor became a Jaina. He gave up his throne, and spent the last years of his life in *Shravanabelagola*, in Karnataka, as a Jaina ascetic. This tradition is not corroborated by any other source, except some early medieval inscriptions from Shravanabelagola. The second cause of the spread of Jainism in south India is believed to have been the great famine that took place in Magadha 200 years after Mahavira's death. The famine lasted for twelve years. In order to protect themselves, many Jainas migrated to the south under the leadership of Bhadrabahu. However, the rest of them stayed back in Magadha under the leadership of Sthalabahu. The emigrant Jainas spread Jainism in south India.

They returned to Magadha after the end of the famine. But they developed differences with the local Jainas. Those who returned from the south claimed that even during the famine they had strictly observed the religious rules. These Jains alleged too that the Jaina ascetics living in Magadha had violated those rules and had become lax. A council was convened in Pataliputra, modern Patna, in order to sort out these differences and to compile the principal teachings of Jainism.

But the Jainas who had returned from the south boycotted it and refused to accept its decisions. Since then the southerners began to be called Digambaras and the northerners Svetambaras. The tradition that refers to drought as the cause relates to a later period. It is considered doubtful. It is beyond doubt that the Jainas were divided into two sects. The epigraphic evidence of the spread of Jainism in Karnataka is not earlier than the third century CE. In subsequent centuries, especially after the fifth century, numerous Jaina monastic establishments, called Basadis sprang up in Karnataka. They were granted land and other endowments by the king for their support. At least in the third century BCE, Jainism seems to have reached the southern peninsular India including Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and even crossed the Sea to reach Sri Lanka.

Jainism spread to Kalinga in Orissa in the fourth century BCE. In the first century BCE, it enjoyed the patronage of the Kalinga king Kharavela. In later centuries Jainism penetrated Malwa, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. Even now these areas have a substantial number of Jainas who are principally engaged in trade and commerce.

#### **2.2.5.4: Decline of Jainism:**

Jainism did not completely extinguish and retained its presence in various parts of India. However, the past glory and popularity of Jainism declined due to a number of factors. They are; (i) The split of Jainism into two major sects, viz., Digambaras and Svetambaras. (ii) The absence of able leadership after Mahavira. (iii) The lack of royal patronage in the later phase. (iv) Difficulty of the common people to follow rigorous religious practices. (v) Failure of the religion to attract poor peasantry. (vi) Failure of Jainism to hold against the overwhelming appeal of Buddhism. (vii) Assimilation of Jaina principles by Hinduism. (viii) The lack of an efficient missionary organisation to spread the religion. Jainism did not win as much state patronage as did Buddhism and did not spread very rapidly in early times. But Jainism still retains its hold in the areas where it spread. On the other hand, Buddhism virtually disappeared from the Indian subcontinent.

#### **2.2.5.5: Impact of Jainism:**

Jainism (Figure 18) made the first serious attempt to mitigate the evils of the Varna order and the ritualistic Vedic religion. The early Jainas discarded the Sanskrit language which was principally patronized by the Brahmanas.



**Figure 18. Jain Art**

The Jainas adopted Prakrit, the language of the common people to preach their doctrines. Jaina religious literature was written in *Ardhamagadhi*. The texts were eventually compiled in the sixth century CE in Gujarat at a place called Valabhi which was a great centre of education. The adoption of Prakrit by the Jainas helped the growth of this language and its literature. Many regional languages developed out of Prakrit, particularly Sauraseni from which the Marathi language developed. The Jainas composed the earliest important works in *Apabhramsa*. They compiled its first grammar. In early medieval times, the Jainas also made substantial use of Sanskrit and wrote many texts in it. They contributed to the growth of Dravidian languages like Kannada and Tamil in which they wrote extensively.

Jaina literature comprises Epics, Puranas, Novels, and Drama. A large percentage of Jaina writing is still in the form of manuscripts that have yet to be published. They are found in the Jaina shrines in various part of the Country, especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan. In the beginning, like the Buddhists, the Jainas were not image worshippers. Later Jainas began to worship Mahavira and also the twenty-three Tirthankaras. Beautiful and sometimes massive images in stone were sculpted for this purpose. They are found especially in Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Jaina art in ancient times is not as rich as its Buddhist counterpart. But

Jainism contributed substantially to art and architecture in medieval times.

### **2.2.6: Summary:**

There are striking resemblances in the doctrines of Buddha and Jina. Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the concept of God; but Buddhism does not recognize the existence of God and Soul. “Jainism recognized the existence of the Gods but placed them lower than the Jina. Both Buddhism and Jainism started with truthful recognition of the fact that the world is full of sorrows and the salvation of a man means his deliverance from the eternal chain of birth and death; both derived their basic principles from the Upanishads. Both Buddha and Jina laid great stress upon a pure and moral life, especially non-injury to living beings; both emphasized the effects of good and bad deeds upon a man’s future births and ultimate salvation; both decried casteism; both of them preached spiritual ideas by the language of common strata; both encouraged the idea of giving up the world, and organised a church of monks and nuns. Both can be traced through distinct historic organizations but, they differ in fundamental conceptions about salvation and certain other matters. The Jaina conception of soul, for example, is radically different from that of a Buddhist.

Again, Jainism laid great stress upon asceticism and practiced it in a very rigorous manner, whereas, Buddha decried it, and asked his disciples to follow the ‘Middle Path’ between a life of ease and placid on one hand, and regress asceticism on the other. Besides, Buddha denounced the practice of going out naked, and the Jaina attitude of ahimsa or non-injury to animals was carried to far greater excesses than was ever contemplated by Buddhism.

It may be said that within five hundred years Buddhism spread far and wide in different parts of the world. However, Jainism never spread beyond the boundaries of India. On the other hand, while Buddhism declined considerable in the land of its birth Jainism is still a living force in India, and has got a stronghold upon a large and influential section of the society.

### 2.2.7: Keywords:

Material Milieu of Sixth Century BCE - Varna - Dvija - Veda-Dharmasutras - Siddhartha - Shakya - Lumbini - Kapilavastu - Piprahwa - Kosala Dynasty - Bodh Gaya - Kusinagara - Atman/Soul - Brahman/The Supreme Entity - Aryasatya - Four Noble Truth- Ashtanga Marga/The Eight Fold Path/The Middle Path - Karma - Buddha - Dhamma - Sangha - Asoka - Vajrayana - Mahayana - Hinayana - Pali - Apabhramsa - Nalanda - Vikramasila - Valabhi - Tirthankara - Parsvanatha - Mahavira - Nirvana - Kaivalya - Kevalin - Jina - Ahimsa - Satya - Asteya - Parimita Parigraha - Brahmacharya - Triratna - Digambaras - Svetambaras - Shravanabelagola - Chandragupta Maurya - Bhadrabahu - Sthalabahu - Kalinga Kharavela - Prakrit - Ardhamagadhi - Sauraseni.

### 2.2.8: Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Write short notes on the following; a. Nirvana b. Karma c. Jina d. Ahimsa e. Sangha
2. Discuss the main teachings of Buddhism. Discuss its impact on Indian Society.
3. Discuss the main teachings of Jainism. Discuss its impact on Indian Society.
4. Why did Buddhism decline, while Jainism continued to be influential in India.
5. Why did Buddhism spread beyond India, but Jainism not?
6. Discuss the material changes that took place about sixth century BCE in north India which favoured the formation of Jainism and Buddhism.
7. Describe the similarities and differences between Jainism and Buddhism.
8. Evaluate the contributions of Buddhism and Jainism to the cultural plurality of India.



## **Lesson 2.3: Mahajanapadas and Rise of Magadha**

### **Structure**

- 2.3.1: Objectives
- 2.3.2: Introduction
- 2.3.3: The Sixteen Janapadas
- 2.3.4: Rise of Magadha
- 2.3.5: Causes of Magadhan Success
- 2.3.6: Summary
- 2.3.7: Keywords
- 2.3.8: Self-Assessment Questions

#### **2.3.1.: Objectives:**

- To understand the political environment of North India during sixth and fifth centuries BCE
- To differentiate the post-Vedic Janapada from the Vedic Jana
- To comprehend the material setting which facilitated the development of Janapadas and to Mahajanapadas
- To locate and list out the major sixteen Janapadas of North India
- To know about the political development of Magadha as the first Empire of India during two centuries preceding the establishment of Mauryan Empire
- To look into the major material factors which instigated Magadhan Success

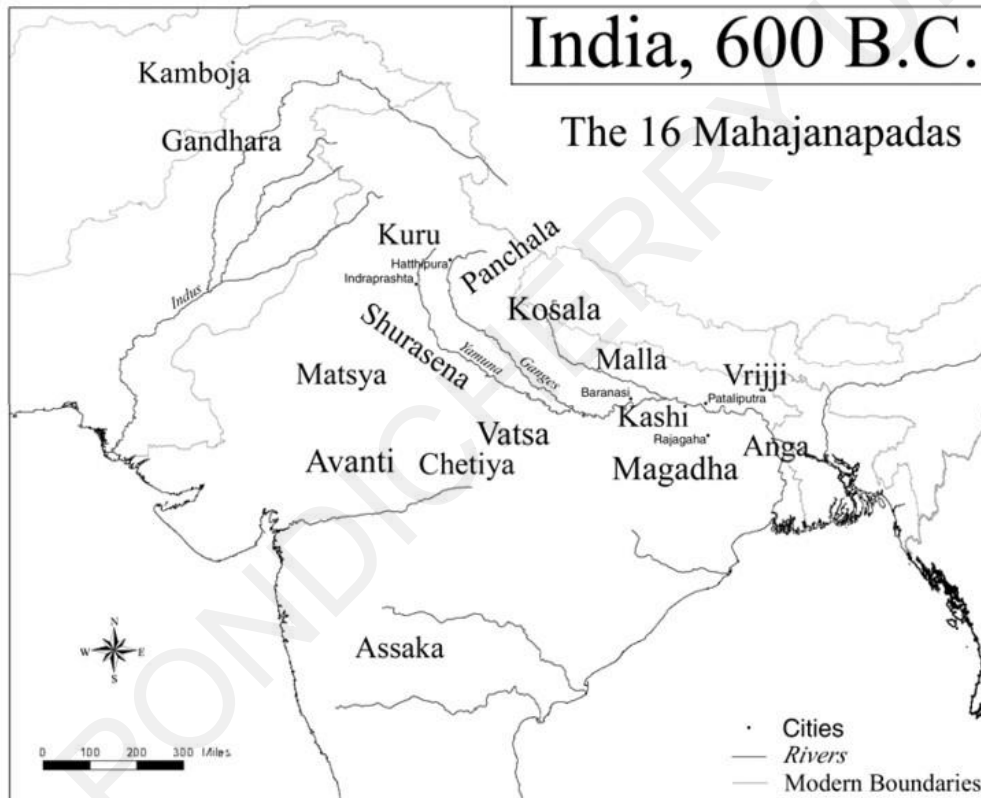
#### **2.3.2: Introduction:**

The increasing use of iron in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar from the sixth century BCE onwards, created conditions for the formation of large territorial states. The warrior class, armed with iron weapons, now played an important role. The new agricultural tools and implements enabled the peasants to produce far more food

grains than required for their consumption.

The extra produce could be collected by the princes in order to meet their military and administrative needs. The surplus could also be supplied to the towns that had sprung up in fifth century BCE. These material advantages enabled the people to remain on their land. They could also to expand at the cost of the neighbouring areas. The territorial idea was strengthened with the rise of large states with towns as their base of operations. People owed strong allegiance to the Janapada or the territory to which they belonged rather than to their Jana or tribe.

### 2.3.3: The Sixteen Janapadas:



**Figure 19. Sixteen Mahajanapadas**

It is above already said about the rise of a few Janapadas even the end of the Vedic-period. With the progress in agricultural activities and established settled life by 500BCE, this political phenomenon became a common feature.

About 450 BCE, over forty Janapadas covering even Afghanistan and south-eastern Central Asia are referred by Panini. However, the major part of southern India was excluded for the same. The Pali textual sources attest that the mere Janapadas grew into greater Janapadas, and they were much larger states or even countries. The Pali texts mention sixteen of them, generally called *Mahajanapadas* or Sodasa Janapadas (Figure 19). We can find all the sixteen Mahajanapadas in the age of the Buddha. Most of these states arose in the upper and mid-Gangetic plains, including the doab area covered by the Ganges, Yamuna, and their tributaries. The Janapadas were mostly situated north of the Vindhyas and extended from the north-west frontier to Bihar.

They are *Anga, Magadha, Malla, Vajji, Kosala, Kasi, Chedi, Kuru, Panchala, Vatsa, Matsya, Surasena, Avanti, Asmaka, Gandhara, and Kamboja*. Of these, Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa, and Avanti seem to have been powerful. Beginning from the east, we hear of the kingdom of Anga which covered the modern districts of Monghyr and Bhagalpur. Anga had its capital at Champa, which shows signs of habitation in the fifth century BCE. There is a mud fort dating to that century. Eventually the kingdom of Anga was swallowed by its powerful neighbour Magadha.

**Magadha:** This state embraced the former districts of Patna, Gaya, and parts of Shahabad. Magadha grew to be the leading state of the time. “Its earlier capital was Rajgir, and later Pataliputra. Both were fortified, and show signs of habitation around the fifth century BCE.

**Vajji:** In Tirhut division, north of the Ganges, laid the state of the Vajji which included eight clans. The most powerful dynasty however, was that of the *Lichchhavis*. Their capital was at Vaishali which is coterminous with the village of Basarh in Vaishali district. The Puranas push the antiquity of Vaishali to a much earlier period”.

**Kasi:** We find the kingdom of Kashi further west with its capital at Varanasi. Excavations at Rajghat revealed that the earliest habitations started around 500 BCE, and the city was enclosed by mud embankments at about the same time. Initially Kashi appears to have been the most powerful of the states. Eventually however, it succumbed to the power of Kosala.

Kosala: This state embraced the area occupied by eastern Uttar Pradesh and had its capital at Sravasti. Sravasti is coterminous with Sahet-Mahet on the borders of Gonda and Bahraich districts of Uttar Pradesh. Excavations indicate that Sahet-Mahet was barely settled in the sixth century BCE. However, the beginnings of a mud fort can be seen. Kosala had an important city called Ayodhya.

This is associated with the story in the Ramayana. Excavations show that it was not settled on any scale before the fifth century BCE. Kosala also included the tribal republican territory of the Shakyas of Kapilavastu. The capital of Kapilavastu is identified with Piprahwa in Basti district. Habitation at Piprahwa did not occur earlier than 500 BCE. Lumbini, which is situated at a distance of 15 km from Piprahwa in Nepal, served as another capital of the Shakyas. In an Asokan inscription, it is called the birthplace of Gautama Buddha and it was here that he was brought up.

Malla: In the neighbourhood of Kosala lay the republican clan of the Mallas, whose territory touched the northern border of Vajji state. One of the capitals of the Mallas was at Kusinagara where Gautama Buddha passed away. Kusinagara is coterminous with Kasia in Deoria district.

Vatsa: Further west was the kingdom of the Vatsas, along the bank of the Yamuna, with its capital at Kaushambi near Allahabad. The Vatsas were a Kuru clan who had shifted from Hastinapur and settled at Kaushambi. Kaushambi was chosen because of its location near the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna. Excavations reveal there had a mud fortification dated to the fifth century BCE.

Surasena: Mathura on the bank of the river Yamuna was the capital of Surasena. Archaeological excavations at Mathura show the gradual transformation of a village culture into the urban one. “The earliest cultural phase found there were Painted Grey Ware culture, and it was dated between 1100 BCE and 500 BCE. This was followed by the Northern Black Polished Ware phase dated to 700 BCE-200 BCE. Commercial significance of Mathura made it as a center of trade due to its location where the northern trade route of the Gangetic Plain met with the routes connecting central India and the western coast via Malwa.”

Kuru: The area around Kurukshetra was apparently the site for Kuru Mahajanapada. It moved to a republic form of governance. The epic poem Mahabharata tells a story of conflict between two branches of the reigning Kuru clan.

Panchala: “The capital for northern Panchala was Ahichchatra and Kampilya for its southern regions. The famous city of Kanauj was situated in the Kingdom of Panchala. Later the nature of governance shifted from monarchy to republic. These older states of Kuru and Panchala were well established during the later Vedic Age, but they no longer enjoyed that much political significance they had attained earlier.”

Matsya: It was situated to the west of the Panchalas and south of the Kurus. The capital was at Viratanagara. It is situated around present-day Jaipur, Alwar and Bharatpur area of Rajasthan.

Chedi: The state of referred by Rig Veda. “The capital was Sothivati or Suktimati. It located in the present-day Bundelkhand region of Central India. It is believed that King Sisupala of Chedi was killed by Vasudeva Krishna during the Rajasuya sacrifice of the Pandava king Yudhishtira.

Avanti: The state of Avanti was situated in central Malwa and the adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh. It was divided into two parts. The northern part had its capital at Ujjain, and the southern part at Mahishmati.” Ujjain and Mahishmati became fairly important from the fifth century BCE onwards. Eventually Ujjain surpassed Mahishmati. It developed large scale working in iron and erected strong fortifications.

Asmaka or Assaka: It can be located on the banks of Godavari. It was the only Mahajanapada situated to the south of the Vindhya Range and was in Dakshinapatha. Potali or Podana was the capital of Asmaka. Asmaka included the region of Pratisthan.

Gandhara: In the north-wester part, Gandhara and Kamboja were significant Mahajanapadas. The capital of Gandhara was at Taxila. It can be located in the present day Peshawar and Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Gandhara was significant for international commercial activities. Gandhara was conquered by Persians in the latter part of the sixth century BCE.

Kamboja: It is called as a Janapada in Panini and a Mahajanapada in the Pali texts. Kamboja was located in Central Asia in the Pamir area which largely covered modern Tajikistan. The remains of a horse, chariots and spoked wheels, cremation, and swastika, which are associated with the Indo-Aryan speakers dating to between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE, have been found in Tajikistan. About 500 BCE, both Sanskrit and Pali were spoken in Kamboja. The political history of India from the sixth century BCE onwards was one of struggles among these states for supremacy. Eventually the kingdom of Magadha emerged as the most powerful and founded an empire.

#### **2.3.4: Rise of Magadha:**

Magadha came into prominence under the leadership of Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty. He was a contemporary of the Buddha. Bimbisara began the policy of conquest and aggression. He acquired Anga and placed it under the viceroyalty of his son Ajatasatru at Champa. Bimbisara also strengthened his position by marriage alliances. He had three wives. Bimbisara's first wife was the daughter of the king of Kosala and the sister of Prasenajit, the son and successor of the Kosalan king. The Kosalan bride brought Bimbisara as dowry a Kashi village yielding a revenue of 1,00,000. This suggests that revenues were collected in terms of coins.

The marriage ended the hostility of Kosala and gave Bimbisara a free hand in dealing with the other states. Bimbisara's second wife, Chellana, was a Lichchhavi princess from Vaishali. She gave birth to Ajatasatru. His third wife was the daughter of the chief of the Madra clan of Punjab. Marriage relations with the different princely families lent enormous diplomatic prestige. They paved the way for the expansion of Magadha westward and northward. Magadha's most serious rival was Avanti with its capital at Ujjain. Chanda Pradyota Mahasena, its king, fought Bimbisara. Eventually the two thought it wise to make up. When Pradyota was afflicted by jaundice, at the Avanti king's request, Bimbisara sent the royal physician Jivaka to Ujjain. Bimbisara is also said to have received an embassy and a letter from the ruler of Gandhara.

Pradyota had fought Gandhara unsuccessfully. Thus, through his conquests and diplomacy, Bimbisara made Magadha the dominant state in the sixth century BCE.

Bimbisara's kingdom is said to have consisted of 80,000 villages, a number which sounds conventional. The earliest capital of Magadha was at Rajgir, which was called Girivraja at that time. Rajgir was surrounded by five hills, the openings in which were closed by stone walls on all sides, which made it impregnable. According to the Buddhist chronicles, Bimbisara ruled for fifty-two years, roughly from 544 BCE to 492 BCE.

Bimbisara was succeeded by his son Ajatasatru (492BCE-460 BCE). Ajatasatru killed his father and seized the throne for himself. Ajatasatru's reign saw the high watermark of the Haryanka dynasty. He fought two wars and made preparations for the third. Throughout his reign Ajatasatru pursued an aggressive policy of expansion which provoked a combination of Kashi and Kosala against him. A prolonged conflict between Magadha and Kosala began. Eventually Ajatasatru got the best of the war. The Kosalan king was compelled to purchase peace by giving his daughter in marriage to Ajatasatru and leaving him in sole possession of Kashi. Ajatasatru was no respecter of relations. Although his mother was a Lichchhavi princess, this did not prevent him from making war against Vaishali.

The excuse was that the Lichchhavis were the allies of Kosala. Ajatasatru sowed dissension within the ranks of the Lichchhavis and eventually ended their independence by invading their territory and defeating them in battle. It took full sixteen years. Ajatasatru was eventually successful in doing so because of a war engine like a catapult which was used to hurl stones. Ajatasatru also possessed a chariot to which a mace was attached which facilitated mass killings. The Magadhan empire was thus enlarged with the addition of Kashi and Vaishali. Ajatasatru faced a stronger rival in the ruler of Avanti. Avanti had defeated the Vatsas of Kaushambi and now threatened an invasion of Magadha.

Ajatasatru began the fortification of Rajgir to meet this threat. However, the invasion did not materialize during his lifetime. Ajatasatru was succeeded by Udayin (460 BCE-444 BC). Udayin's reign is important because he is said to have built a fort at the confluence of the Ganges and Son at Pataliputra (modern Patna). This was built

because Pataliputra lay at the centre of the Magadhan kingdom, which now extended from the Himalayas in the north to the hills of Chotanagpur in the south. Patna's position was crucially strategic. Udayin was succeeded by the dynasty of Sisunaga, who temporarily moved the capital to Vaishali. King Sisunaga was a viceroy of Banaras and later captured the power of Magadha. Sisunaga was succeeded by his son Kalasoka. The second Buddhist council was held during his reign at Vaishali.

The greatest achievement of the Sisunagas was the destruction of the power of Avanti with its capital at Ujjain. This brought to an end the hundred-year-old rivalry between Magadha and Avanti. Since then Avanti became a part of the Magadhan Empire and continued to be so till the end of Maurya rule. Sisunaga dynasty ruled for a half a century and was overthrown by the usurper Mahapadma Nanda who established the Nanda rule. This is disputed by some historians who consider Ugrsena as the founder of the Nanda Dynasty.

The Nandas are considered to be the first of a number of non- Kshtriya ruling dynasties in India. They proved to be the most powerful rulers of Magadha. Their power was so great that Alexander, who invaded Punjab at that time, dared not move towards the east. They defeated a number of Kshtriya rulers and extended their kingdom by annexing Panchal, Kasi, Asmaka, Kuru, Malla, etc. They extended the Magadhan power by conquering Kalinga from where they brought an image of Jina as a victory trophy. All this took place during the reign of Mahapadma Nanda. Mahapadmananda claimed to be ekarat, the sole sovereign who had destroyed all the other ruling princes.

The Nandas were fabulously rich and enormously powerful. It is believed that they maintained 200,000 infantries, 60,000 cavalries, and 3000 to 6000 war elephants. Such a huge army could be maintained only through an effective taxation system. "These considerations obviously prevented Alexander from advancing against the Nandas. The later Nandas proved to be weak and unpopular. Their rule in Magadha was supplanted by that of the Maurya dynasty under which the Magadhan Empire reached the apex of glory."



### 2.3.5: Causes of Magadhan Success:

The political development of the Magadhan Empire during the two centuries preceding the establishment of the Mauryan Empire can be equated with the development of the Iranian or Persian Empire during the same period.

As a result of the work of several enterprising and ambitious rulers such as Bimbisara, Ajatasatru, Udaya, and Mahapadma Nanda the formation of the largest state in India was possible during this period. They employed all the means in their power, fair and foul, to enlarge their kingdoms and to strengthen their states. This was not the only reason for the expansion of Magadha. There were some other important ones. Magadha enjoyed an advantageous geographical position in the age of iron. The richest iron deposits were situated not far away from Rajgir, the earliest capital of Magadha.

The ready availability of the rich iron ores in the neighbourhood enabled the Magadhan princes to equip themselves with effective weapons. They were not easily available to their rivals. Iron mines are also located in eastern Madhya Pradesh. They were not far from the kingdom of the Avanti with their capital at Ujjain. Iron was certainly forged and smelted around 500 BCE in Ujjain, and probably the smiths manufactured weapons of good quality. Consequently, Avanti proved to be Magadha's most serious competitor for supremacy in north India. It took Magadha about a hundred years to subjugate Ujjain.

Magadha enjoyed certain other advantages. The two capitals of Magadha, the first at Rajgir and the second at Pataliputra, were situated at very strategic points. Rajgir was surrounded by a group of five hills. Hence it was impregnable in those days when there was no easy means of storming citadels such as canons. The Magadhan princes shifted their capital from Rajgir to Pataliputra in the fifth century BCE. It occupied a pivotal position commanding communications on all sides. Pataliputra was situated at the confluence of the Ganges, the Gandak, and the Son, and the fourth river called the Ghaghra joined the Ganges not far from Pataliputra. The position of Pataliputra itself was rendered invulnerable because it was virtually surrounded by rivers. The Ganges and the Son girdled it on the north and west while the Poonpun girdled it on the south

and east. Pataliputra was therefore a true water fort (*Jaladurga*), and it was not easy to capture this town in those days. Magadha lay at the centre of the mid-Gangetic plains, the Ganges providing a means of both transport and agricultural facilities.

Since most of the Mahajanapadas were located in the Gangetic plains, they could be reached by navigating the rivers. There was also an abundance of timber as can be seen in the palisades of the sixth century BCE found south of Patna. Megasthenes speaks of the wooden walls and houses in Pataliputra. Boats could be easily manufactured and they played an important part in promoting the advance of Magadha towards the east and the west. Likewise, environmental factors conducive to agriculture helped Magadha. The alluvium, once cleared of jungles, proved immensely fertile. Because of the heavy rainfall, the area could be made productive even without irrigation.

The countryside produced varieties of paddy, which are mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. This area was more productive than the areas to the west of Allahabad. This naturally enabled the peasants to produce a considerable surplus, which could be utilized by the rulers in the form of taxes. The princes of Magadha were benefited from the rise of towns and use of metal money. A Pali text mentions twenty towns in the age of the Buddha. Most of them were located in the mid-Gangetic plains.

They contributed to trade and commerce in north-east India which enabled the princes to levy tolls on the sale of commodities and accumulate wealth to pay and maintain their army. Magadha enjoyed a special advantage in military organization. Although the Indian states were well acquainted with the use of horses and chariots, it was Magadha which first used elephants on a large scale in its wars against its neighbours. The eastern part of the country could supply elephants to the princes of Magadha. We learn from Greek sources that the Nandas maintained 6000 elephants.

Elephants could be used to storm fortresses and to advance across marshy and other areas lacking roads and other means of transport. We may also refer to the unorthodox character of Magadhan society. Magadha was inhabited by the Kiratas and Magadhas, who were held in low esteem by the orthodox Brahmanas. It however underwent a happy ethnic admixture with the coming of the Vedic people. Since

Magadha had been recently vedicized, it demonstrated a greater enthusiasm for expansion than the kingdoms that had been brought under the Vedic influence earlier. Because of all these reasons, Magadha succeeded in defeating the other kingdoms and in founding the First Empire of India.

### 2.3.6: Summary

The widespread use of Iron created conditions for the formation of large territorial states in north India. When the use of iron became popular weapons of iron were made in large numbers. The warrior classes now played an important part. The new agricultural tools and implements increased agricultural production considerably.

This material advantage naturally enabled the people to stick to their land. They tried to expand at the cost of neighbouring areas. The rise of large states with towns strengthened the territorial idea. People began to show strong allegiance to the territory they own called *Janapada* than their *Jana* or tribe. On account of this political phenomenon, a large number of Janapadas were developed in various part of the country, and some among them later became Mahajanapadas by establishing political dominance over the weaker Janapadas. Among sixteen Mahajanapadas, the material rich Magadhans turn out to be the first empire builders in India. The Magadha was cosmopolitan in nature. It was the mingling place of diverse races, religions and cultures. The Vedic culture and conservatism did not strike deep roots here as in some other parts of India. Magadha which was the meeting ground of Brahmanical Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism naturally had become suitable for the development and continuance of Magadha as an Empire for a very long time.

### 2.3.7: Keywords:

Jana-Janapada - Mahajanapada - Solasa Janapadas - Panini - Pali Textual Sources - Anga - Magadha - Malla - Vajji - Kosala - Kasi - Chedi - Kuru - Pancha - Vatsa - Matsya - Surasena - Avanti - Asmaka - Gandhara - Kamboja - PGW - NBPW - Bimbisara - Ajatasatru - Prasenajit - Chanda Pradyota - Rajgir - Girivraja - Pataliputra -

Udayin - Sisunaga - Kalasoka - Mahapadma Nanda - Ekarat - Jaladurga - Kiratas and Magadhas.

### **2.3.8: Self-Assessment Questions:**

1. Write short notes on the following; a. Kosala and Kasi b. Vajji and Malla c. Gandhara and Kamboja d. Girivraja and Pataliputra e. Mahapadma Nanda
2. Describe the political condition of India in the sixth century BCE with reference to the Janapadas and Mahajanapadas.
3. Discuss the reason for the rise of Magadhan imperialism.
4. Trace the expansion of the Magadhan Empire. Describe the methods adopted by the rulers of Magadha for this.
5. 'It was Bimbisara who launched Magadha upon a career of imperial conquest'. Examine the validity of this statement.
6. Describe on the historical evolution from Mahajanapadas to the first empire builders in India.

## **Lesson: 2.4: Campaigns of Alexander**

### **Structure**

- 2.4.1: Objectives
- 2.4.2: Introduction
- 2.4.3: Alexander's Invasion of India
- 2.4.4: Impact of Alexander's Invasion
- 2.4.5: Summary
- 2.4.6: Keywords
- 2.4.7: Self-Assessment Questions

#### **2.4.1: Objectives:**

- To discuss the political ambiance of North-West India before Alexander's invasion.
- For the basic understanding of Achaemenian imperial expansion to North - West India.
- To identify the initial institution of Persian Satrapy System in India.
- To examine different aspects of Alexander's invasion.
- To analyse the effects of Alexander's invasion on India.
- To be revisited the triumphant success of Alexander's Indian campaign.

#### **2.4.2: Introduction:**

In north-east India, smaller principalities and republics gradually merged with the Magadhan Empire. North-west India presented a different picture in the sixth century BCE. Several small principalities, such as those of the Kamboja, Gandhara, and Madras fought one another. This area lacked any powerful kingdom like that of Magadha to weld the warring communities into one organized kingdom. Since the area was fertile and rich in natural resources, it attracted the attention of its neighbours.

It could also be easily penetrated through the passes in the Hindu Kush. The Achaemenian rulers of Persia (Iran), who expanded their empire at the same time as the

Magadhan princes, took advantage of the political disunity on the northwest frontier. The Persian ruler Darius penetrated north-west India in 516 BCE. He annexed the Punjab, west of the Indus, and Sindh. This area was converted into the twentieth province or satrapy of Persia. Persia had a total number of twenty-eight satrapies. The Indian satrapy included Sindh, the north-west frontier, and the part of Punjab that lay to the west of the Indus.” Darius was succeeded by Xerxes, but India was continued to be a part of the Persian Empire till its invasion by Alexander.

### 2.4.3: Alexander’s Invasion of India:



**Figure 20. Alexander's Campaign in India**

In the fourth century BCE, the Greeks and the Persians fought for the supremacy of the world. Under the leadership of Alexander of Macedonia, the Greeks eventually destroyed the Persian Empire.

“Alexander conquered Asia Minor, Iraq and Iran. Alexander (Figure 20) marched to India from Iran, obviously attracted by its great wealth. Herodotus and other Greek writers had painted India as a fabulous land, which tempted Alexander to invade it. He also had a strong passion for geographical inquiry and natural history. Alexander had heard that the Caspian Sea continued on the eastern side of India. He was also inspired by the mythical exploits of past conquerors. Alexander wanted to emulate and

surpass them. The political condition of north-west India suited his plans. North-west India parceled out into many independent monarchies and tribal republics. They were strongly wedded to the soil and had a fierce dedication to the principality in which they lived.”

Alexander found it easy to conquer these principalities one by one. Among the rulers of these territories, two were well known. They were Ambhi, the prince of Taxila, and Porus whose kingdom lay between the Jhelum and the Chenab. Together they might have effectively resisted Alexander’s advance.

They could not put up a joint front and hence the Khyber Pass remained unguarded. Alexander moved on to Kabul following the conquest of Iran. From Kabul he marched to India through the Khyber Pass in 326 BCE. It took him five months to reach the Indus. Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, readily submitted to the invader, augmenting Alexander’s army and replenishing his treasure. When Alexander reached on the banks of the river Jhelum, he encountered the first and the strongest resistance from Porus. By the battle of Hydaspes Alexander defeated Porus. He was impressed by the bravery and courage of the Indian prince. Alexander therefore restored his kingdom to him and made him his ally. Alexander then advanced as far as the Beas River. Alexander wanted to move still further eastward, but his army refused to accompany him. The Greek soldiers had grown war-weary, and diseased.

The hot climate of India and ten years of continuous campaigning had made them terribly homesick. They had also had a taste of Indian fighting qualities on the banks of the Indus. It made them desist from advancing further. As the Greek historian Arrian tells us: “In the art of war the Indians were far superior to the other nations inhabiting the area at that time”. The Greek soldiers were told of a formidable power on the Ganges. This was obviously the kingdom of Magadha ruled by the Nandas who maintained an army far outnumbering Alexander’s. Despite the repeated appeals by Alexander for their advance, the Greek soldiers did not budge an inch.

The king who had never known defeat at the hands of his enemies had to accept defeat from his own men. From his words: ‘I am trying to rouse the hearts that are

disloyal and crushed with craven fears'. Finally, Alexander was forced to retreat, and his dream of an eastern empire remained unfulfilled. On his return march Alexander vanquished many small republics until he reached the end of the Indian frontier. He remained in India for nineteen months (326 BCE - 325 BCE) of continual battle, leaving him barely any time to organize his conquests. Still, he made some arrangements. "Most of the conquered states were restored to their rulers who submitted to his authority. His own territorial possessions were however divided into three parts and placed under three Greek governors. He also founded a number of cities to maintain his power in this region."

#### **2.4.4: Impact of Alexander's Invasion:**

Alexander's campaign was a triumphant success? Alexander added to his empire an Indian province which was much larger than that conquered by Persians.

Even though the Greek possessions in India were soon lost to the Mauryan rulers, his invasion made some significant socio-economic as well as cultural and political impacts on the Indian soil. Alexander's Indian expedition provided the first occasion when ancient Europe came into close contact with ancient South Asia. The most important outcome of this invasion was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in various fields. The mutual contact with Greeks helped Indians to study astronomy and coinage. Similarly, Greeks acquired knowledge of Indian religion and philosophy.

The emergence of Gandhara Art was due to the influence of Hellenic culture of Greece. Alexander's campaign opened up four distinct routes by land and sea which paved the way for Greek merchants and craftsmen. It increased the existing facilities for trade. Although we hear of some Greeks living on the north-west even prior to Alexander's invasion, the invasion multiplied Greek settlements in this area. The most important result of these conquests was the city of Alexandria in the Kabul region, Boukephala on the Jhelum, and Alexandria in Sindh.

Although the entire area was conquered by the Mauryas, the Greeks continued to



live under both Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka. Alexander was deeply interested in the geography of the mysterious ocean which he saw for the first time at the mouth of the Indus. Alexander therefore dispatched his new fleet under his friend Nearchus to explore the coast and search for harbours from the mouth of the Indus to that of the Euphrates. Consequently, Alexander's historians left valuable geographical accounts and also clearly dated records of Alexander's campaign. These enable us to definitively establish Indian chronology for subsequent events. Alexander's historians also provide us with important information about the social and economic conditions of the time. They inform us about the Sati system, the sale of girls in marketplaces by poor parents, the fine breed of oxen in north-west India, etc. Alexander sent from here 200,000 oxen to Macedonia for use in Greece. The art of carpentry was the most flourishing craft in India, and carpenters built chariots, boats, ships, etc., chronicled. The political unification of India had begun with his invasion.

Tribes and small powers were destroyed by the invasion. By destroying the power of petty states in north-west India, Alexander's invasion paved the way for the expansion of the Maurya Empire in that area. The military system of Greeks provided new information to Mauryan rulers, particularly to Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Maurya Empire, in his military organization. According to tradition, Chandragupta Maurya had seen something of the working of Alexander's military machine and had acquired some knowledge that helped him to destroy the power of the Nandas. It is not unreasonable to say that the political unification and the establishment of an empire under Chandragupta Maurya was the direct result of the void created by Alexander's departure from India.

#### **2.4.5: Summary:**

The invasion of Alexander the great has been recorded in minute details by the Greek writers who naturally felt elated at the triumphant progress of their hero. It is a great puzzle that why Indian tradition should have remained silent over such an event, was it because Alexander only touched the western border of the then India and returned without leaving any lasting impact on Indian people. His campaign can hardly be called

a great military success as the only military achievement to his credit was the conquest of petty republics and small states. The exertion he and his army had to make against Porus, the ruler of small state, do not certainly favour the hypothesis that he could have faced the might of Nandas with ease. Further, whatever little he could conquer in this campaign was lost within three months of his departure, as most of the conquered areas asserted their independence.

#### **2.4.6: Keywords:**

Achaemenian Rulers - Persia/Iran - Darius - Satrapy - Xerxes - Herodotus - Taxila - Porus - Khyber Pass - Battle of Hydaspes - River Jhelum - River Beas - Arrian - Direct Contact with Greece - Emergence of Gandhara Art - Influence of Hellenic - Alexandria of Kabul and Sindh- Boukephala - Nearchus - Indian Chronology - Political Unification of India.

#### **2.4.7: Self-Assessment Questions:**

1. Write short notes on the following; a. Satrapy b. Darius c. Battle of Hydaspes d. Gandhara Art and Hellenic influence
2. Describe the Achaemenian expansion on Indian territories.
3. Give an account of Alexander's invasion of India.
4. What were the effects of Alexander's invasion?
5. 'Alexander's Indian campaign was truly a triumphant success'. Do you agree with the statement? Substantiate.

## UNIT.3:

### **Lesson 3.1: The Mauryan Empire**

#### **Structure**

- 3.1.1: Objectives
- 3.1.2: Introduction
- 3.1.3: MAURYAN EMPIRE: Chandragupta Maurya (321 BCE-297 BCE)
- 3.1.4: Asoka (273 BCE-232 BCE)
  - 3.1.4.1: Asokan Edicts
  - 3.1.4.2: Asokan Policy of Dhamma
  - 3.1.4.3: Essence of Asoka Dhamma
- 3.1.5: Mauryan Administration
  - 3.1.5.1: Concept of a State under the Mauryas
- 3.1.6 & 7: Mauryan Society and Economy
- 3.1.6: Mauryan Society
- 3.1.7: Mauryan Economy
  - 3.1.7.1: Agriculture
  - 3.1.7.2: Trade and Trade Routes
  - 3.1.7.3: Crafts and Industries
- 3.1.8: Decline of the Mauryan Empire
- 3.1.9: Summary
- 3.1.10: Keywords
- 3.1.11: Self-Assessment Questions

#### **3.1.1: Objectives:**

- To outline the process of Socio-Economic, and Political formations in India during the Mauryan Age.
- To study the Mauryan Administration in terms of the nature of Mauryan Polity and Politics.
- To comprehend the moral teachings in Asoka Dhamma.
- To focus on the Economic Structure of the Mauryan Society.

- To comprehend the diverse Ethnic and Cultural components of the Mauryan Society.

### 3.1.2: Introduction:

The fourth century BCE witnessed the establishment of an extensive empire under Chandragupta Maurya (Figure 22) in Magadha. The Mauryan Empire was the first and one of the greatest empires to be established in Indian history. By overthrowing the Nandas, the Mauryas founded a powerful administrative setup in India.

Chandragupta Maurya not only overthrew the Nandas from Magadha, but also the Greek satraps from the north-western frontier and unified a large part of India, including the Deccan, under his centralized government. This vast empire stretching from the valley of Oxus in the north to Kaveri delta in the south was given a well-knit common administration. Mauryan dynasty was the first ruling family who followed up the political unification of India by extending their conquests beyond the barriers of the Vindhyas so as to bring both north and south under the umbrella of one paramount power. An advantage of Mauryan history lies in the abundant, authentic and variety of its sources, and most important among them are the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, the *Indika* of Megasthenes, the Jain and Buddhist literature and the inscriptions of Asoka. These sources shed light on the socio-economic, political and cultural contributions of the Mauryan time.

### 3.1.3: Chandragupta Maurya (321 BCE-297 BCE):

Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty, seems to have belonged to an ordinary family. According to the Brahminical tradition, he was born of *Mura*, a *Shudra* woman in the court of the Nandas. An earlier Buddhist tradition however, speaks of the Mauryas as the ruling clan of the little republic of Pipphalivana in the region of Gorakhpur near the Nepalese terai. In all probability, Chandragupta was a member of this clan. Chandragupta took advantage of the Nandas in the last days of their rule. With the help of Chanakya, who is also known as Kautilya, Chandragupta overthrew the Nandas and established the rule of the Maurya dynasty. The

maneuverings of Chanakya against Chandragupta's enemies are described in detail in the *Mudrarakshasa*, a play written by Visakhadatta in the ninth century CE.

Several plays have been based on it in modern times. A Greek writer, Justin says that Chandragupta overran the whole of India with an army of 600,000. This may or may not be true, but Chandragupta liberated north-western India from the thralldom of Seleucus I Nicator, who ruled over the area west of the Indus. In the wars with the Greek viceroy (305 BCE-303 BCE), Chandragupta seems to have emerged victorious. Peace was eventually concluded between the two. In return for 500 elephants, Seleucus gave him not only his daughter but also eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and the area west of the Indus.

The Mauryas also conquered the republics or Samghas which Kautilya considered obstacles to the growth of the empire. Chandragupta thus built up a vast empire which included Bihar and substantial parts of Orissa, Bengal, western and north-western India, and the Deccan. Aside from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and parts of north-eastern India, the Mauryas ruled over almost the entire subcontinent. In the north-west, Mauryas held sway over certain areas that did not even form part of the British Empire.

#### **3.1.4: Asoka (273 BCE-232 BCE):**

Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by Bindusara. His reign is important for its continuing links with the Greek princes. His son, Asoka, is the greatest of the Maurya rulers. According to Buddhist tradition, he was so cruel in his early life that he killed his ninety-nine brothers to win the throne. As this statement is based on a legend, it may be mythical. Asoka's biography, written by Buddhist authors, is so full of fiction that it cannot be taken seriously.

##### **3.1.4.1: Asokan Edicts:**

The history of Asoka is reconstructed on the basis of his edicts in inscriptions. His edicts are actually 39 in number, but those had a number of copies and versions which are identified in various places of the subcontinent.

Altogether, they appear at 47 places, and the total number of versions is 82 including two edicts which are considered spurious. Asokan edicts are generally classified into Major Rock Edicts, Minor Rock Edicts, Separate Rock Edicts, Major Pillar Edicts, and Minor Pillar Edicts. The name Asoka occurs in copies of Minor Rock Edict I found at three places in Karnataka and at one in Madhya Pradesh. Altogether, the name Asoka occurs four times. It is significant that Asoka's name does not occur in any of his inscriptions from north or north-west India.

The inscriptions which do not carry his name mention only Devanampiya Piyadasi, dear to the gods, and leave out the name Asoka. The title Devanampiya or 'Dear to Gods' adopted by Asoka was not unique but also adopted by his ancestors. Piyadasi or 'Good Looking' however, seems to have been his unique title. Asoka the great Maurya was the first Indian king to speak directly to the people through his inscriptions which carry royal orders. The inscriptions throw light on Asoka's career, his external and domestic policies, and the extent of his empire. Asokan inscriptions have been discovered in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

It is significant that Asokan inscriptions which were generally located on ancient highways have been found at six places in Afghanistan. They were composed in Prakrit and were written in Brahmi script in the greater part of the subcontinent. In the north-western part of the subcontinent they appeared in Aramaic language and Kharoshti script. In Afghanistan they were written in both Aramaic and Greek scripts and languages. Asoka's inscriptional edicts are called *Dhammalipi*, which cover not only religion and morality but also embrace social and administrative matters. Asokan inscriptions can be compared to the Dharmashastras or law-books written in Sanskrit under Brahminical influence. Though the Dhammalipis were written in Prakrit under Buddhist influence, they try to regulate the social order like the Dharmashastras. They can be also compared to the Sasanans or royal edicts issued in Sanskrit by the Brahmanized kings.

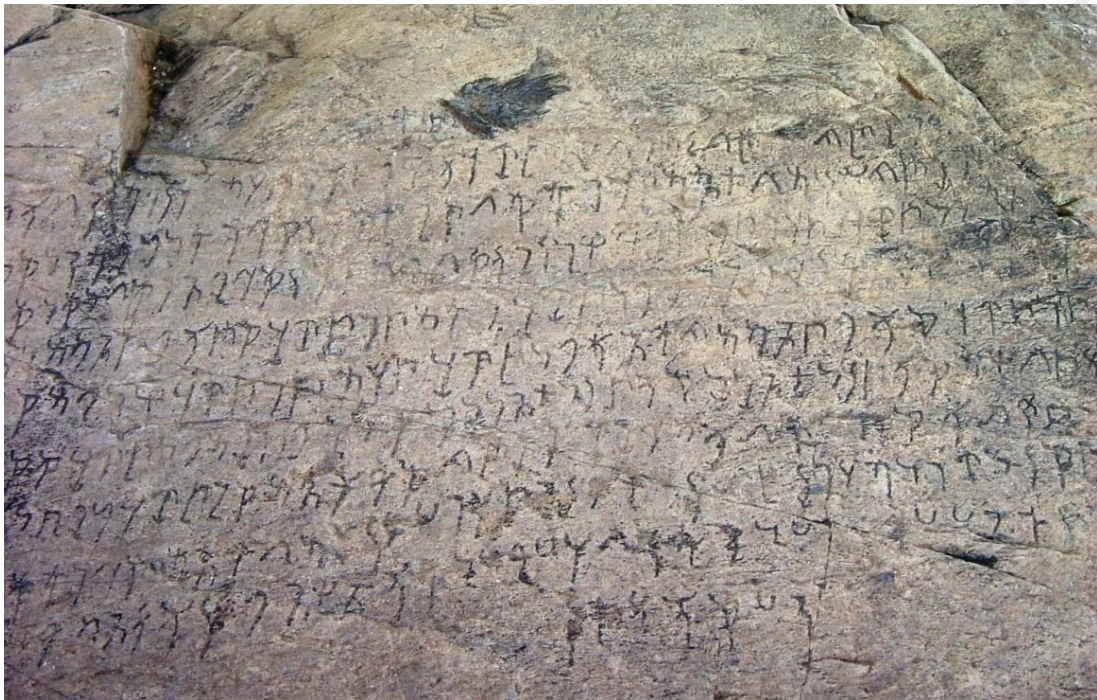
The broad objective was to preserve the social order. Asoka ordained that people should obey their parents, pay respect to the Brahmanas and Buddhist monks, and show

mercy to slaves and servants. Above all, the Dhammalipi asks the people to show firm devotion (dridha bhakti) or loyalty to king. These instructions are found in both the Buddhist and Brahminical faiths.

#### **3.1.4.2: Asokan Policy of Dhamma:**

The ideology of Buddhism guided Asoka's state policy at home and abroad. The State Policy of Asoka popularly known as Dhamma or Dharma. After his accession to the throne, Asoka fought only one major war, it was at Kalinga in Orissa. According to him, 100,000 people were killed in the course of it. Several lakhs died, and 150,000 were taken prisoners. These numbers seem to be exaggerated, because the number 'a hundred thousand' is used as a cliché in Asokan inscriptions. It appears that the king was deeply moved by the massacre in this war. The war caused great suffering to the Brahmana priests and Buddhist monks. This in turn brought upon Asoka much grief and remorse. After the Kalinga war Asoka abandoned the policy of physical occupation in favour of one of cultural conquest. *"Bherighosha was replaced with Dhammaghosha. A quote of Asoka from his Thirteenth Major Rock Edict: "When he had been consecrated eight years the Beloved of the Gods, the King Piyadasi, conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Afterwards, now that Kalinga was annexed, the Beloved of the Gods very earnestly practised Dhamma, desired Dhamma, and taught Dhamma. On conquering Kalinga the Beloved of the Gods felt remorse, for when an independent country is conquered the slaughter, death and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to the Beloved of the Gods and weighs heavily on his mind. What is even more deplorable to the Beloved of the Gods, is that those who dwell there, whether Brahmanas, Sramanas, or those of other sects, or householders who show obedience to their teachers and behave well and devotedly towards their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, slaves, and servants, all suffer violence, murder and separation from their loved ones ... Today if a hundredth or a thousandth part of those people who were killed or died or were deported when Kalinga was annexed were to suffer similarly, it would weigh heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods ... The Beloved of the Gods considers victory by Dhamma to be the foremost victory".* If we rely on the

Buddhist tradition, Asoka was converted himself into Buddhism and he became a monk, made huge gifts to the Buddhists, and undertook pilgrimages to the Buddhist shrines. His visits to the Buddhist shrines are also suggested by the Dhamma Yatras mentioned in his inscriptions. Asoka also held the third Buddhist council (*Sangiti*) attested by Buddhist tradition.



**Figure 21. Asokan Rock Edict**

As a saint-prince Asoka set a very high ideal for himself, and this was the ideal of paternal kingship. Asoka (Figure 21) now made an ideological appeal towards the tribal people and the frontier kingdoms. The tribal peoples were asked to follow the principles of Dhamma. The subjects of the independent states in Kalinga were asked to obey the king as their father. They were asked to repose confidence in him. The officials appointed by Asoka were instructed to propagate this idea among all sections of his subjects.

He appointed Dhamma Mahamathras to propagate his idea of Dhamma among various social groups including women. The officials, as agents of the king, were asked to take care of the people. Asoka repeatedly asked his officials to tell his subjects that the king looked upon them as his children. Asoka disapproved of rituals, especially



those observed by women. He forbade killing certain birds and animals and prohibited the slaughter of animals in the royal kitchen. Asoka forbade the slaughter of animals in sacrifices. He interdicted social functions in which people indulged in an excess of revelry. Asoka no longer treated foreign dominions as legitimate areas for military conquest. He sent ambassadors of peace to the Greek kingdoms in West Asia and Greece. Missionaries were sent not only to south India but also to Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), and other countries to convert the people there. Brahmi inscriptions of the second and first centuries BCE which have been found in Sri Lanka attest the fact.

Asoka took steps for the welfare of men and animals in foreign lands, which was a new thing considering the conditions in those times. Asoka, as an enlightened ruler, tried to enlarge his sphere of influence through propaganda. It would be wrong to think that the Kalinga war caused Asoka to become an extreme pacifist. He did not pursue the policy of peace for the sake of peace under all circumstances. He adopted the practical policy of consolidating his empire.

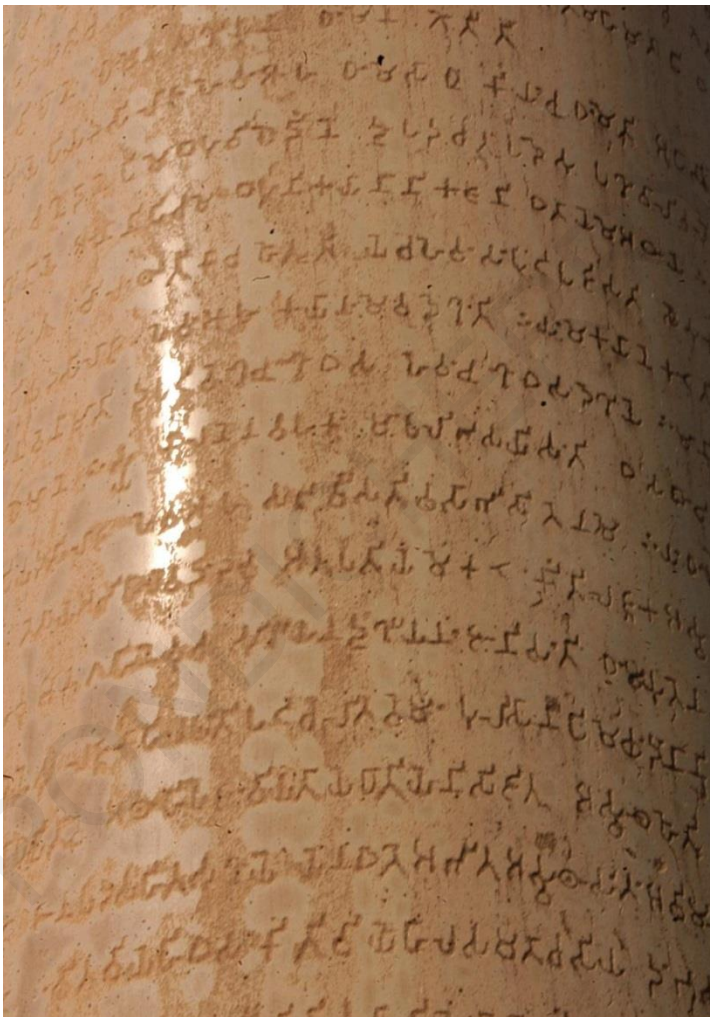
He retained Kalinga after its conquest and incorporated it into his empire. There is also nothing to show that he disbanded the huge army maintained from the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Although Asoka repeatedly asked the tribal people to follow the policy of Dhamma, he threatened adverse consequences if they violated the established rules of social order and righteousness (Dhamma or Dharma). Within his empire Asoka appointed a class of officers known as the *Rajukas*, who were vested with the authority not only to reward people but also to punish them when necessary.

Asoka's policy of consolidating the empire in this way bore fruit. The Kandahar inscription speaks of the success of his policy with the hunters and fishermen, who gave up killing animals and possibly took to a settled agricultural life.

#### **3.1.4.3: Essence of Asoka Dhamma:**

Dhamma in Prakrit is equivalent to the Sanskrit word Dharma. *Dhamma* mean the universal law or righteousness. The concept of Asoka's Dhamma is an extensive one. It was primarily an 'Ethical Code' aimed at building up an attitude of social

responsibility among the people. It was a 'Moral Law' and a 'Code of Conduct'. By the Second Pillar Edict Asoka (Figure 22) explicates the two basic concepts of his Dhamma; they are 'Good Deeds' and 'Few Faults'. Thus Dhamma aimed at nothing but good actions in life. Asoka put forward a number of Dhamma Codes to be observed by his subjects, and the most important of them are; (i) To be obedient to teachers, mother and father (ii) To be truthful (iii) Ahimsa or Abstain from killing of living being (iv) Maintained to be moral (v) Preserved to be Pure in life (vi) Proper treatment of ascetics, Brahmins, poor and miserable (vii) To be Tolerant to all sects Asoka's Dhamma was not a narrow Dharma and cannot be regarded as a sectarian faith.



**Figure 22. Asokan Pillar Edict**

Although Asoka's personal religion was Buddhism and he believed in Buddha, Sangha, and Dhamma, he respected all sects and faiths and believed in the unity of moral values. Seventh Rock Edict of Asoka clearly exhorts for the toleration among all the sects of his empire. His Kandahar Greek inscription further preaches amity between the sects. By this inscriptional references prove that his policy of Dhamma does not merely indicate the virtue resulted from good deeds inspired by any formal religious faith. Diverse religious interests existed in India during the reign of the Mauryas. The ideological conflict between *Vedic* and *Sramana* religions created social and religious tensions. This factor principally encouraged Asoka to initiate the policy of Dhamma to eliminate religious tensions and to promote harmony.

By Dhamma Asoka tried to stress not only on sectarian harmony, but a moral law in all aspects of life. The Dhamma emphasised non-violence. The First Rock Edict contains prohibition of animal sacrifice. The relevant texts run thus, 'here no living thing is to be killed and sacrificed'. The social welfare measures were also included in the Asoka Dhamma, which are clearly mentioned in the Second Rock Edict, included medical centers for men and animals, construction of roads, etc. The Asokan Policy of Dhamma having the quality of secular teaching.

Precisely, Asoka Dhamma taught people to live and let live. It emphasized compassion towards animals and proper behaviour towards relatives. Dhamma teachings were meant to strengthen the institution of family and the existing social classes. Dhamma held that if the people behaved well they would go to heaven. But it never said that they would attain Nirvana, which was the goal of Buddhist teachings. Dhamma teachings were thus pragmatic in nature, and it simply intended to maintain the existing social order on the basis of tolerance. The diversities of the Mauryan Empire by its different social, religious and cultural interests might have encouraged Asoka to adopt the Policy of Dhamma to make an atmosphere of peace, harmony, and unity in the society.

### **3.1.5: Mauryan Administration:**

The Mauryas organized a very elaborate system of administration. It is attested

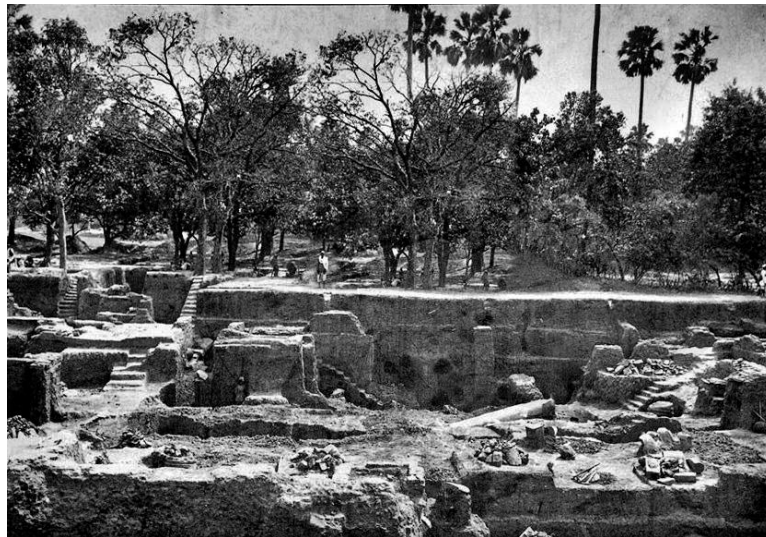
from the account of Megasthenes and the Arthashastra of Kautilya. Megasthenes was a Greek ambassador sent by Seleucus to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He lived in the Maurya capital of Pataliputra where he wrote an account not only of the administration of the city of Pataliputra but also of the Maurya Empire as a whole. Megasthenes' account does not survive in full.

But quotations from it occur in the works of several subsequent Greek writers. These fragments have been collected and published in the form of a book entitled *Indika*. *Indika* throws valuable light on the administration, society, and economy of Maurya times. Megasthenes' account can be supplemented by the Arthashastra of Kautilya.

Although the Arthashastra was finally compiled a few centuries after Maurya rule, some of its books contain material that provides authentic information about the Maurya administration and economy. These two sources enable us to draw a picture of the administrative system of Mauryas in general and Chandragupta Maurya in particular. Chandragupta Maurya was an autocrat who concentrated all power in his hands. If a statement in the Arthashastra is to be believed, the king had set a high ideal. He stated that in the happiness of his subjects lay his happiness and in their troubles lay his troubles. We are not certain how far the king acted up to these ideals. According to Megasthenes, the king was assisted by a council whose members were noted for wisdom. There is nothing to show that their advice was binding on him. However, the high officers were chosen from among the councillors. The empire was divided into a number of provinces, and each of these was placed under a prince who was a scion of the royal dynasty. The provinces were again divided into smaller units. Arrangements were made for both rural and urban administration. The excavations revealed that a large number of towns relate to Mauryan times.

Pataliputra (Figure 23), Kaushambi, Ujjain, and Taxila were the most important cities. Megasthenes states that numerous cities existed in India, but he considered Pataliputra to be the most important. He calls it Palibothra. This Greek term means a city with gates. According to Megasthenes Pataliputra was bounded by a deep ditch and

a wooden wall crowned with 570 towers, and had 64 gates. The ditch, timber palisades, and wooden houses have been found in excavations. According to Megasthenes, Pataliputra was 9.33 miles long and 1.75 miles wide. This size tallies with that of Patna even today, because Patna is all length with little breadth. Owing to this conformity, it is possible to trust Megasthenes' other statements.



**Figure 23. Patliputra Site**

Megasthenes refers to the administration of Pataliputra, the capital of the Mauryas. The city was administered by six committees, each of which consisted of five members. These committees were entrusted with sanitation, care of foreigners, registration of birth and death, regulation of weights and measures, and similar other functions.

Various types of weights belonging to Maurya times have been discovered in several places in Bihar. According to Kautilya, the central government maintained about two dozen departments. They controlled social and economic activities at least in the areas that were in proximity to the capital. The most striking feature of Chandragupta's administration was its maintenance of a huge army. A Roman writer called Pliny states that Chandragupta maintained 600,000 foot soldiers, 30,000 cavalymen, and 9000 elephants. Another source tells us that the Mauryas maintained 8000 chariots. It appears that the Mauryas also maintained a navy. According to Megasthenes the administration of the armed forces, was carried on by a board of thirty

officers divided into six committees, each committee consisting of five members.

It appears that each of the six wings of the armed forces, the army, the cavalry, the elephants, the chariots, the navy, and the transport, was assigned to the care of a separate committee. The Mauryas' military strength was almost three times that of the Nandas. This was apparently because of a much larger empire and thus far greater resources. How did Chandragupta Maurya manage to meet the expenses of such a huge army? If we rely on the Arthashastra of Kautilya, it would appear that the state controlled almost all the economic activities in the realm. With the aid of cultivators and Shudra labourers the state brought new land under cultivation. The virgin land that was opened to cultivation yielded handsome income to the state in the form of revenue collected from the newly settled peasants.

Probably the taxes collected from the peasants varied from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce. Those who were provided with irrigation facilities by the state had to pay for it. In times of emergency, peasants were compelled to raise more crops. Tolls were also levied on commodities brought to town for sale. They were collected at the gate. The state enjoyed a monopoly in mining, sale of liquor, manufacture of arms, etc. This brought vast resources to the royal exchequer. Chandragupta thus established a well-organized administrative system and provided it with a sound financial base.

#### **3.1.5.1: Concept of a State under the Mauryas:**

The Brahminical law-books repeatedly stressed that the king should be guided by the laws laid down in the Dharmashastras and by the customs prevalent in India. Kautilya advises the king to promulgate Raja Dharma when the social order based on the Varnas and Ashramas (stages in life) collapses. He calls the king Dharma Pravarthaka or promulgator of the social order.

That the royal orders were superior to other orders was asserted by Asoka in his inscriptions. Asoka promulgated Dharma (Dhamma) and appointed officials to inculcate and enforce its essentials throughout India. An assertion of royal absolutism was a natural culmination of the policy of military conquest adopted by the princes of

Magadha. Anga, Vaishali, Kashi, Kosala, Avanti, Kalinga, etc., one by one were annexed to the Magadhan Empire. Military control over these areas eventually turned into a coercive control over the lives of the people. Magadha had the requisite power of the sword to enforce its overall authority. The state had to maintain a vast bureaucracy in order to control various spheres of life. In no other period of ancient history do we hear of as many officers as in Maurya times. Important officials were called Tirthas. It appears that most functionaries were paid in cash, the highest among whom, *Mantrin* (minister), *Purohita* (priest), *Senapati* (commander-in chief) and *Yuvaraja* (crown prince), were paid generously. The administrative mechanism was backed by an elaborate system of espionage.

Various types of spies collected intelligence about foreign enemies and kept an eye on numerous officers. They also promoted superstitious practices to collect money from credulous people. The highest officials received as much as 48,000 panas. The lowest officers in sharp contrast were given 60 panas in consolidated pay. Some employees were paid as little as 10 or 20 panas. Thus there was great disparity in the salaries of employees. If we rely on the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, it would appear that the state appointed twenty-seven *Adhyakshas* or superintendents. Their main duty was to regulate its economic activities. *Adhyakshas* controlled and regulated agriculture, trade and commerce, weights and measures, crafts such as weaving and spinning, mining, and the like. The state also provided irrigation facilities and regulated water supply for the benefit of agriculturists. Megasthenes informs us that in the Maurya Empire the officials measured the land as in Egypt.

They inspected the channels through which water was distributed into smaller channels. According to the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, a striking social development of the Maurya period was the employment of slaves in agricultural operations. Megasthenes states that he did not notice any slaves in India. But there is little doubt that there had been domestic slaves from Vedic times onwards. It appears that during the Maurya period slaves were engaged in agricultural work on a large scale. The state maintained farms on which numerous slaves and hired labourers were employed. About 150,000 war-captives who were brought by Asoka from Kalinga to Pataliputra may have been

engaged in agriculture.

But the number 50,000 seems to be exaggerated. However, ancient Indian society was not a slave society. The tasks that slaves performed in Greece and Rome were undertaken by the shudras in India. The *shudras* were regarded as the collective property of the three higher varnas. *Shudras* were compelled to serve them as slaves, artisans, agricultural labourers, and domestic servants. “Several reasons indicate that royal control was exercised over a very large area, at least in the core of the empire. This was because of the strategic position of Pataliputra, from where royal agents could sail up and down the Ganges, Son, Poonpun, and Gandak rivers. The royal road ran from Pataliputra to Nepal through Vaishali and Champaran. We also hear of a road at the foothills of the Himalayas which passed from Vaishali through Champaran to Kapilavastu, Kalsi (in Dehra Dun district), Hazra, and eventually to Peshawar. Megasthenes mentions a road connecting north-western India with Patna. Roads also linked Patna with Sasaram, and from there they ran to Mirzapur and central India. The capital was also connected with Kalinga via a route through eastern Madhya Pradesh.”

Kalinga in turn was linked with Andhra and Karnataka. All this facilitated transport in which horses may have played an important part. In the northern plains the Ganga and other rivers were routes of communication. The Asokan inscriptions appear on important highways.

The stone pillars were made in Chunar near Varanasi from where they were transported to north and south India. Maurya control over the settled parts of the country may have matched with that of the Mughals and perhaps of the East India Company. In the distant areas the Maurya imperial authority may not have been effective. Pataliputra was the chief centre of royal power. But Tosali, Suvarnagiri, Ujjain, and Taxila were seats of provincial power. Each of them was governed by a governor called *Kumara* or prince.

Thus every governor hailed from the royal family. The princely governor of Tosali administrated Kalinga and parts of Andhra. The Governor of Suvarnagiri ruled the Deccan area. Similarly, the princely governor of Ujjain ruled the Avanti area while



that of Taxila (Figure 24) the north-western frontier area. The princely governors may have functioned as autonomous rulers. Some governors oppressed their subjects; Asoka's authority was never seriously questioned.



**Figure 24. Taxila Site**

The Maurya rulers did not have to deal with a large population. Their army did not exceed 650,000 men. If 10% of the population was recruited, the total population in the Gangetic plains may not have been over six and a half million. Asokan inscriptions show that royal writ ran throughout the country except in the extreme east and south. Nineteen Asokan inscriptions have been found in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. But rigid state control may not have proved effective much beyond the mid-Gangetic zone owing to difficulty in means of communications. The Maurya period constitutes a landmark in the system of taxation in ancient India. Kautilya mentions many taxes which were collected from peasants, artisans, and traders.

This required strong and efficient machinery for assessment, collection, and storage. The Mauryas attached greater importance to assessment than to storage and deposit. The *Samaharta* was the highest officer in charge of assessment and collection. The *Sannidhata* was the chief custodian of the state treasury and storehouse. *Samaharta*, the assessor-cum-collector was far more important than the chief treasurer *Sannidhata*. The damage inflicted on the state by the first was thought to be more serious than any inflicted by the second. Elaborate machinery for assessment was first set up during the Maurya period. The list of taxes mentioned in the *Arthashastra* is

impressive.

If these were really collected, very little would have been left to the people to live on. The epigraphic evidence of rural storehouses shows that taxes were also collected in kind. These granaries were probably also meant to help local people in times of famine, drought, etc. It appears that the punch-marked silver coins, which carry the symbols of the peacock and crescented hill, formed the imperial currency of the Mauryas. They have been discovered in large numbers. Copper coins were also punch-marked. Cast copper coins and die-struck coins were also issued. All these different types of coins helped the collection of taxes and payment of officers in cash. Because of its uniformity, the currency must have facilitated market exchange in a wider area.

### **3.1.6 & 7: Mauryan Society and Economy:**

The social and economic factors play a decisive role on the political and administrative structure of a country. The Mauryan Empire was also an outcome of these socio-economic developments. We have plethora of information regarding the social and economic life from the Greek accounts, Kautilya's Arthashastra and other literary texts of the period.

#### **3.1.6: Mauryan Society:**

According to Dharmashastras, a state should be safeguarded its social order based on the Varna and Ashrama system. In this respect the standpoint of the Arthashastra is not much different from that of the Dharmashastras. However, Kautilya was not as rigid on the Varna system as the earlier Smriti writers. It is noteworthy that the Arthashastra refers to warriors recruited from all the four Varnas.

Still more significant is the fact that the Arthashastra looked upon the Shudras as an Aryan community, which is distinguished from Mlechha or non-Aryan community. Arthashastra forbids the selling or pledging of a minor belonging to any of the four varnas, adding that the Mlechhas may sell or pledge their children, but that no Aryan shall be made a slave. In the Arthashastra an attempt is made to assimilate the masses of

settled communities in the *Indo-Aryan* fold. Greek and Latin sources refer to various classes of Mauryan India. The majority of these references may be they collected from the *Indika* of Megasthenes.

According to *Indika*, Indian society was divided into seven classes. These he lists as philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsman, artisans, magistrates and councillors. The 'Classes' which Megasthenes mentioned above appear to have been economic than social. The emphasis laid on endogamy and hereditary occupation clearly implies that Megasthenes did mean to describe the 'caste system'. Probably Megasthenes did not hear of the theory of Four Varnas and mixed castes which appear so large in the *Smriti* works.

He was seemed to be carried away by a desire, common to the Hellenistic Greek, to establish a similarity between Egypt and India in social system. The Philosophers of Megasthenes could be the Brahmins. "They were the intellectual classes. Brahmins enjoyed respect in the court and society. They were entitled for their maintenance to a definite portion of the revenue allotted to them in one way or another. They were the custodians of education and culture of the community. A Brahmin who committed a crime was exempt from torture; he was branded on his forehead with a sign that proclaimed the nature of his crime, and then banished from the kingdom. Kshatriyas or fighting class was second in number. They had only military duties to perform. They enjoyed supreme freedom in life next to Brahmins. But according to Megasthenes, the Agriculturists were the second class who formed the bulk of the Mauryan population. Megasthenes observed that their occupation was clearly defined by social norms, possibly by cast rules." The sixth and seventh classes of Megasthenes were magistrates and Councillors respectively, but are contradictory. Here he clearly confounds caste with craft or occupation.

Those two castes are really made up of government servants of different grades. The seventh caste is made up of what are called the Councillors and Assessors. Here it is to be noted that even a passing mention of the orthodox term Varna to denote four varnas are not found in the Asokan inscriptions. Asokan inscriptions speak of Brahmins

and Sramanas but not of *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas*, or *Shudras*, terms which, it has been suggested, were employed only in theoretical discussions and did not correspond to definite social groups. The Mauryan state did not look with favour on the inroads made into the social system, and the growth of the ascetic orders with large claims upon the livelihood of the people. Kautilya forbade the practice of abandoning domestic life, and made it a rule that only old men could become ascetics, and then only after making adequate provision for their dependents and getting sanction from the Dharmasthas.

Mauryan society generally practiced joint family system, but it could be dissolved at will. The marriage age for girls and boys assigned to 12 and 16 respectively. Eight types of marriages were practiced, of which only four are regular. Though, Kautilya adds that there is no prohibition against any form of marriage that produces satisfaction to all concerned. Marriage could be dissolved by mutual consent or prolonged absence. A married woman had property her own in the form of bride-gift (*Stridhana*) and jewels, and these were to some extent at her disposal in case of widowhood. If she remarried a relative of her deceased husband with her father-in-law's consent she retained properties given by her father-in-law or her first husband. Cruelty by either party to a marriage partner was punishable. In the absence of a male issue, a man was free to take another wife without paying compensation to his first wife.

The law concerning marriage and the relations between husband and wife is fully stated in three chapters of Kautilya's Arthashastra. Similarly, widows in this text appear to enjoy a much freer life and occupied an honoured place in society, and as such, their use in secret service is recommended. Regarding the position of Women, they occupied a high position and freedom in the society. For instance, while divorce is unthinkable in the *Smritis*, Kautilya has permitted it. Women were employed as personal body-guards of the king, spies and for other diverse jobs.

The ruling class was known to have been polygamous. We know that Asoka had as many as four queens. Sati, noticed by Greek writers, was rarely practiced and would appear to have been limited to the women of the higher classes. There is frequent mention of women of the commonalty moving about with freedom and engaging

themselves in gainful occupations. Offences against women of all kinds were severely punished, and Kautilya lays down penalties against officials in charge of workshops and prisons who misbehaved towards them. The Social Women (Ganikas) played a great role in the court and in the public sphere. They were mainly included spies, actresses, dancers, musicians, artists, etc. The profession of courtesans was intended to be regulated by the state. There were landless agricultural labourers worked as domestic servants on the basis of free food and some wages in cash. Industrial labour included free labourers (*Kammakaras*) and Dasas or Serfs.

The former worked on the basis of a wage contract. Concerning Slavery, we did not have any source to prove the fact; except the statement of Megasthenes that it was not prevalent in the Mauryan society. According to Megasthenes, the Dasas of India were not slaves, specifically not identical with the Greek *doulos*, because they could not be employed in servile labour, and they could hold and transmit property, and under certain conditions regain their freedom as a matter of right. In the times of distress, a man might agree to become a Dasa of another; but usually Dasas came from the class of Mlechhas and captives in war. It appears that Megasthenes was thinking of slavery in its full legal sense as it obtained in the West. Asoka refers to the categories of labourers in his edicts and lays particular emphasis on their being treated with kindness.

Kautilya as well talks much about the relations of labourers with their master. Arthashastra attests that there was a widespread belief in magical practices and superstitions of all kinds in the Mauryan society. It mentions numerous magical rites and practices for finding favour with the king, for obtaining inexhaustible wealth, for afflicting enemies with disease, for securing a long life, for getting a son, etc. The Fourteenthbook of Arthashastra, called *Aupanisadika*, describes a number of rites and practices which are supposed to produce occult manifestations or miraculous effects.

### **3.1.7: Mauryan Economy:**

The political unification of India, the creation of a strong centralized government, restoration of law and order, opening up of the Western trade-routes by Alexander, measures taken by the Mauryan state for the promotion of agriculture, trade,

commerce, industries and crafts gave great impetus to economic development during the period. The increased attention paid by the Mauryan State to the laying out and the maintenance of roads and waterways led naturally to a great expansion in the industry and commerce of India.

The vastness of India's agricultural and mineral resources and the extraordinary skill of her craftsmen were mentioned with admiration by Megasthenes and other Greek accounts of the period.

#### **3.1.7.1: Agriculture:**

Mauryans took great care to promote agriculture. They extended agriculture by encouraging the surplus population to settle down at new or abandoned areas for cultivation. The land- revenue on agricultural land varied from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce. Villages were well organized from the fiscal point of view and cultivable land and pastures were carefully surveyed.

They cultivated rice of different varieties, coarse grain (*Kodrava*), sesamum, pepper, saffron, pulses, wheat, linseed, mustard, vegetables and fruits of various kinds, and sugarcane. The government set up model farms which were of great use for the improvement of agriculture in the country. The state maintained cattle-farms, stud-farms and dairy farms. Irrigation was the concern of the state as an important source of revenue derived from the water- rates levied in accordance with the means of irrigation employed. Land grants without the right of alienation were made to rural officers. Village life was built upon the basis of private property, security of life and property, communications and public works.

#### **3.1.7.2: Trade and Trade Routes:**

Arthashastra attested the significance of roads and market towns in an empire. Kautilya makes an intelligent appreciation of the relative value of different trade routes; thus the routes leading to the Himalayas were better than those leading to the *Dakshinapatha* (South India).

With the establishment and spread of the Mauryan power, however, the balance of trade shifted in favour of the south. More routes leading to that part of the south opened out and the volume of trade increased. The Mauryan empire controlled not only all the internal trade routes but most of the land and sea routes leading outside. The royal highway from the north-west to Pataliputra was considered an important one.

It has continued to be so through the centuries, being popularly known as the Grand Trunk Road. Megasthenes refers to government officers-in-charge of roads and records how signboards were set up at intervals to indicate turnings and distances. He also refers to the royal road from the north-west to Pataliputra as a road existing in earlier times. “The routes of immemorial antiquity which connected India with Babylonia were more important and better developed. They touched on Seleucia on the Tigris, the great political and commercial city of Seleucus I. *Tamralipti* or Tamluk on the east coast and Broach and Sopara on the west coast were the most important sea-ports of India in those times. The foreign trade by land and sea was regulated by passport and other state control measures. State had supply contact with Syria, Egypt, and also with a number of Western countries. They mainly supplied indigo, cotton, silk, and various medicinal substances. To promote a brisk and uninterrupted trade with India, the Bactrian rulers such as Antiochus I and Seleucus (285 BCE - 280 BCE) issued coins of Indian standard instead Attic one.” Asoka’s religious missions to the West and East perhaps helped to establish trade-routes to those regions. The inland trade was carried on by carts and caravans.

According to Kautilya, trade routes (*Vanikpatha*) are to be established as ways of profit. He does not agree with the view that water route is preferable to land route for the transport of goods. Kautilya classifies sea-ways into the ways along the coast and the ways through mid-ocean to foreign countries. He prefers the former as a source of greater profit. Besides these two there was the river which served as the water-ways. Bridges were not known, but only ferries and boats. The eighteen chief handicrafts of the time like woodwork, metalwork jewellery, etc., were organized in guilds called *Srenis* each under its president called *Pramukha* and the elderman called *Jetthaka*. The Mauryan state itself was a vast industrial and trading concern and employed in its

service vast numbers of artisans and merchants. Hence the state had to control its entire trade to safeguard its own interests.

Regulating the relations between state concerns and private enterprise was a delicate task and the Arthashastra gives clear evidence that the Mauryan state performed this task with considerable success. Some of the trade regulations are the following; (i) Every trader had to get licence for sale. (ii) Superintendent of Commerce fixed the wholesale prices of goods allowing a margin of profit for the retailer. (iii) Smuggling and contamination of goods were severely punished. (iv) Speculation and hoarding to influence prices were not allowed. (v) State controlled weights and measures. (vi) Taxation on trade and trading goods by export and import duties, octroi and exciseduties. If trade was thus strictly regulated and taxed, there was adequate benefit in the form of assured state protection on trade and trading goods. The transit was to be made good by the government. Artisans and craftsmen were specially protected by the State and offences against them were severely punished. Knowledge on water transit and Ship-building has a great history since before the Mauryan times.

Alexander on his return journey was supplied with a large number of boats and ships by the Indians. Strabo writes that the Mauryans maintained ship building as a State monopoly. The ships of those times were large enough to accommodate hundreds of passengers. The Pali books mention shore-sighting birds used when ship's location became doubtful.

### **3.1.7.3: Crafts and Industries:**

The textile manufacture was perhaps the most important major industry. It is said that the Malavas presented a vast quantity of cotton cloth with other items to Alexander. The *Palitexts* well speak of Benares cloth and cloth from the Sibi (Sivi) country. Kautilya mentions Madura, the Pandyan capital, Aparanta (on the west coast), Kasi, Vanga, Vatsa and Mahisha (either Mahishamati on the Narmada, or the Mysore country) as the sources of the finest cotton fabrics. He refers to the varieties of Dukula (a fabric of uncertain nature) produced in Vanga-desa (Bangladesh/East Bengal), Pundra (West Bengal) and Suvarnakudya (in Assam). Kasi and Pundra were noted for linen



fabrics (Kshauma), and textiles from fabrics of trees Patroma were made in Magadha, Pundra and Suvarnakudya. Buddhist Pali texts frequently refer to Silk, the costliest among cloths. Kautilya mentions Kauseya from the Chihumi which seems to mean either China or the land of the Shin (Shina) tribe (southern Gilgit-Baltistan). Silk may have come from China as well, which is being called China- Patta. Woollen manufacture of different kinds, including varieties of blankets and rain proof cloth, came chiefly from Nepal.

Gold embroidered cloth was used for turbans and worn on festive occasions by the well-to-do. A wide variety of skins, particularly from the Himalayan regions, is listed by Kautilya. Arrian alludes to the skill of Indian leather-workers by saying that the Indians 'wear shoes made of white leather and these are elaborately trimmed, while the soles are variegated, and of great thickness to make the wearer seem taller'. Forest produce included fragrant woods of various kinds which entered largely into international trade. Kautilya speaks of *chandana*, *agaru*, *taila-parnika*, *bhadrari* and *kaleyaka*, and distinguishes them according to their places of origin, colour and other qualities.

Woodwork and ivory carving had reached a high level of efficiency. The making of boats, ships, carts, chariots, and the manufacture of machines are all mentioned besides house-building. Stonecutting was another highly developed art in which Mauryan craftsmen reached a height never surpassed since. Mining and metal work had a long history beginning from pre-Vedic times. Kautilya gives many details of metallurgy. He refers to the manufacture of copper, lead, tin, bronze, iron and other wares. The bell or lotus-shaped capital of Asokan pillar of Ramapurva is joined on to the shaft by a bolt of pure copper of the form of a barrel, which is an excellent specimen of the coppersmith's art. Pearls, jewels, diamonds and coral are discussed at length by Kautilya from the standpoint both of the jeweller and the trader.

The jewel art was highly developed and specialisation may be seen from Kautilya's mention of five varieties of pearl necklaces and of several varieties of ornaments for the head, arms, feet and waist. The manufacture of military equipment

was a State industry, and the making of sword, armour, and war chariots were mostly controlled by the state. Other industries included the manufacture of dyes, gums, drugs, pottery, etc., were also significant.

We did not have much authentic information about the Mauryan currency, except the Arthasastra. It talks about the silver *Pana* with its sub-divisions as the standard coin, while the copper *Mashaka* with its division ranks as a token currency. The *Mashaka* was one-sixteenth in value of the silver *Pana*. The punch-marked silver coins that have been found in large numbers all over India have been identified with silver *Karshapana*, *Mashaka* and *Dharana* of the Arthasastra.

### **3.1.8: Decline of the Mauryan Empire:**

The Magadhan Empire, which had been reared by successive wars culminating in the conquest of Kalinga, began to disintegrate after the exit of Asoka in 232 BCE. Several causes seem to have brought about the decline and fall of the Maurya Empire.

We may recall that Magadha owed its expansion to certain basic material advantages. Once the knowledge of the use of these elements of culture, as a result of the expansion of the Magadhan empire spread to central India, the Deccan, and Kalinga the Gangetic basin, which formed the heart of the empire, it lost its special advantage. The regular use of iron tools and weapons in the peripheral provinces coincided with the decline and fall of the Maurya Empire. New kingdoms could be founded and developed on the basis of the material culture acquired from Magadh. This explains the rise of the Sungas and Kanvas in central India, of the Chetis in Kalinga, and of the Satavahanas in the Deccan.

Oppressive rule in the provinces was an important cause of the break-up of the empire. The citizens of Taxila, in the reign of Bindusara, bitterly complained against the misrule of wicked bureaucrats (*dushta-amatyas*). Their grievance was redressed by the appointment of Asoka. But when he became emperor, a similar complaint was made by the same city. The Kalinga edicts reveal that Asoka was much concerned about oppression in the provinces. Therefore, he asked the Mahamathras not to tyrannize the

townsmen without due cause. For this purpose, Asoka introduced rotation of officers in Tosali of Kalinga, Ujjain and Taxila. He himself spent 256 nights on a pilgrimage which may have helped administrative supervision. However, it failed to stop oppression in the outlying provinces.

After his rule Taxila took the earliest opportunity to throw off the imperial yoke. Since Asoka was primarily preoccupied with missionary activities at home and abroad, he was unable to pay attention to safeguarding the passes through the north-western frontier. This had become necessary in view of the movement of tribes in Central Asia in the third century BCE. The Scythians were in a state of constant flux. They were a nomadic people principally reliant on the use of the horse. They posed a serious danger to the settled empires in China and India. The Chinese ruler Shih Huang Ti (247 BCE-210 BCE) constructed the Great Wall of China (Fig.25) in about 220 BCE to shield his empire against the attacks of the Scythians.



**Figure 25. The Great Wall of China**

But Asoka took no such measures. Naturally, when the Scythians made a push towards India, they forced the Parthians, the Sakas, and the Greeks to move towards Indian subcontinent. The Greeks had set up a kingdom in north Afghanistan which was known as Bactria. They were the first to invade India in 206 BCE. This was followed by a series of invasions that continued till the beginning of the Christian era. The

Maurya Empire was finally destroyed by Pushyamitra Sunga in 185 BCE. Although a Brahmana, Pushyamitra Sunga was a general of the last Maurya ruler called Brihadratha. He is said to have killed Brihadratha in public and forcibly usurped the throne of Pataliputra. The Sungas ruled in Pataliputra and central India. They performed several Vedic sacrifices to mark the revival of the Brahminical way of life. They are said to have persecuted the Buddhists.

They were succeeded by the Kanvas who were also Brahmanas. The Brahminical reaction began as a result of Asoka's policy. There is no doubt that Asoka adopted a tolerant policy and asked the people to respect even the Brahmanas. But he issued his edicts in Prakrit and not in Sanskrit. He prohibited the killing of birds and animals, and derided superfluous rituals performed by women. The anti-sacrifice attitude of Buddhism adopted by Asoka adversely affected the incomes of Brahmanas. Further, Asoka appointed Rajukas to govern the countryside and introduce *Vyavahara Samata* and *Danda Samata*. They denote the same civil and criminal law for all varnas. But the Dharmashastras compiled by the Brahmanas prescribed varna discrimination. This policy infuriated the Brahmanas. Some new kingdoms that arose on the ruins of the Maurya Empire were ruled by the Brahmanas. The Sungas and the Kanvas, who ruled in Madhya Pradesh and further east on the remnants of the Maurya Empire, were Brahmanas. Likewise, the Satavahanas, who founded kingdom in the western Deccan and Andhra, claimed to be Brahmanas.

These Brahmana dynasties performed Vedic sacrifices that were discarded by Asoka. The enormous expenditure on the army and payment to the bureaucracy created a financial crisis for the Maurya Empire. In ancient times the Mauryas maintained the largest army and the largest regiment of officers. Despite the range of taxes imposed on the people, it was difficult to maintain this huge superstructure. It appears that Asoka made large donations to the Buddhist monks which left the royal treasury empty. Towards the end, they were obliged to melt gold images in order to meet expenses.

### **3.1.9: Summary:**

The fourth century BCE is marked by establishing the first great Empire in the

Indian subcontinent by the Mauryas which is generally considered as a landmark in the study of early Indian history. The Mauryas carved out an almost pan Indian empire and it stretched from Afghanistan in the north to Karnataka in the south and from Kathiawar in the west to perhaps north Bengal in the east. Obviously this vast empire was a melange of diverse ethnic and cultural components. It, however, goes to the credit of the Mauryas to have reduced the tremendous cultural gaps between different regions of the subcontinent. It has been argued that the Maurya Empire consisted of three zones viz. metropolitan state (Magadha in Bihar), core areas like existing states of Gandhara, Kalinga, Saurashtra, Malwa, and perhaps peripheral regions. It also included a number of peripheral regions could be anything from hunting gathering to food producing societies. These may have included a large part of the peninsula as also some parts of the northern subcontinent. It is to be argued that Mauryas were the first dynastic power in the entire political history of India who unified most part of the subcontinent beyond geopolitical perspective by assimilating various cultural and ethnic societies which will still be around forming unique Indian identity.

### **3.1.10: Keywords:**

Chandragupta Maurya - Magadha - Overthrowing the Nandas - Greek Satrap - Valley of Oxus - Arthashastra of Kautilya/Chanakya - Indika of Megasthenes - Mudrarakshasa of Visakhadatta - Greek Writer Justin - Seleucus I Nicator - Bindusara - Asoka - Asokan Edicts - Major Rock Edicts - Minor Rock Edicts - Separate Rock Edicts - Major Pillar Edicts - Minor Pillar Edicts- Devanampiya Piyadasi - Prakrit - Brahmi - Kharoshti - Aramaic - Greek - Dhammalipi - Sasanas - Dridha Bhakti - Dhamma/Dharma - Kalinga War - Bherighosha - Dhammaghosha - Thirteenth Major Rock Edict - Dhamma Yattras - Sangiti III - Dhamma Mahamathras - Rajukas - Kandahar inscription of Asoka - The First Rock Edict of Asoka - Palibothra - Raja Dharma - Tirthas - Mantrin - Purohita - Senapati - Yuvaraja - Adhyakshas - Kumara - Samaharta - Sannidhata - Mlechha - Dharmasthas - Stridhana - Ganikas - Kammakaras - Dasas - Doulos - Aupanisadika - Dakshinapatha - Antiochus I - Vanikpatha - Srenis - Pramukha - Jetthaka - Sibi/Sivi - Aparanta - Kasi - Vanga - Vatsa - Mahisha - Dukula - Pundra - Suvarnakudya -

Kshauma - Patroma - Kauseya of Chindhumi - China Patta - Chandana - Agar - Taila  
Parnika - Bhadrari - Kaleyaka - Dushta Amatyas.

### 3.1.11: Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Explain the following terms and concepts;
  - a) Dhammalipi
  - b) Devanampiya Piyadasi
  - c) Bherighosha and Dhammaghosha
  - d) Dhamma Mahamathras
  - e) Adhyakshas
2. What are the important sources that help us to understand the conditions of the Mauryan period?
3. How Chandragupta did establish the Mauryan Empire?
4. What was the impact of Kalinga War?
5. Throw light on historical significance of Asoka's inscriptions.
6. Examine the significance of Asoka's Rock Edicts for establishing the extent of Mauryan Empire.
7. Write a brief essay on the contents of Asoka's Dhamma and the reasons for Asoka's keenness to propagate Dhamma.
8. Examine the nature of Mauryan State. Bring out the features of their administrative system.
9. Write a brief essay on the Social and economic conditions under the Mauryas.
10. Do you agree with the view that the Mauryas were the first political power who unified most part of Indian subcontinent beyond geopolitical perspective by assimilating various cultural and ethnic societies? Substantiate your view.

**UNIT.4:**  
**Lesson 4.1: Post-Mauryan Period.**

**Structure**

- 4.1.1: Objectives
- 4.1.2: Introduction
- 4.1.3: Indo-Greeks
- 4.1.4: Sakas
- 4.1.5: Parthians
- 4.1.6: Kushans
- 4.1.7: Kushano-Sassanians
- 4.1.8: Satavahanas
  - 4.1.8.1: Satavahana Administration
  - 4.1.8.2: Satavahana Society
  - 4.1.8.3: Satavahana Religion
- 4.1.9: Changes in Post-Mauryan Period
  - 4.1.9.1: Political Changes
  - 4.1.9.2: Social Changes
  - 4.1.9.3: Economic Changes
    - 4.1.9.3.1: Development of Crafts and Industries
    - 4.1.9.3.2: Guild System
    - 4.1.9.3.3: Development of Urban Centers
    - 4.1.9.3.4: Development of Foreign Trade
    - 4.1.9.3.5: Development of Coinage System
  - 4.1.9.4: Cultural Changes
    - 4.1.9.4.1: Religious Developments
    - 4.1.9.4.2: Mahayana Buddhism
    - 4.1.9.4.3: Development of Art
    - 4.1.9.4.4: Development of Language and Script
    - 4.1.9.4.5: Development of Literature
    - 4.1.9.4.6: Development of Science

#### 4.1.9.4.7: Development of Technology

#### 4.1.10: Summary

#### 4.1.11: Keywords

#### 4.1.12: Self-Assessment Questions

### 4.1.1: Objectives:

- To understand the loose chronology of Post-Mauryan ancient India.
- To understand the political environment of North India and Deccan during second century BCE to third century CE.
- To focus on the Social Structure of Post-Mauryan India.
- To focus on the Economic Structure of Post-Mauryan Society.
- To comprehend the diverse acculturated components of Post-Mauryan Society. To know the changes underwent by Indian religions during post-Maurya times.
- To know the Post-Mauryan Aesthetic development.
- To signify the Post-Mauryan developments in the field of Science and Technology.
- To compare the Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan Society with the Post-Mauryan Society.

### 4.1.2: Introduction:

The period that began in about 200 BCE did not witness a large empire like that of the Mauryas, but it is notable for intimate and widespread contacts between Central Asia and India. Decline of the Mauryan Empire was followed by a period of political uncertainty in north India. In north-western India Mauryas were succeeded by a number of dynasties from Central Asia. These petty tribal kingdoms which were very often called Secondary States. North western part of India was first occupied by the Indo-Greeks supplemented by the Sakas, Parthians, and Kushans (Kushanas). Of them, the Kushans became the most famous and established one. The Gangetic plain was administered by the Sungas, then the Kanvas. Kalinga (Orissa) was ruled by the Cheti (Cheta) dynasty, and Western Deccan by the Satavahanas. Existence of a highly



centralized and bureaucratic state could not be seen after the decline of the Mauryas till the late medieval time when Akbar was able to establish an all India empire.

#### **4.1.3: Indo-Greeks:**

A series of invasions began in about 200 BCE. The first to cross the Hindu Kush were the Greeks, who ruled Bactria (Bahlika), situated south of the Oxus River in the area covered by north Afghanistan.

The invaders came one after another, but some of them ruled simultaneously. One important cause of the invasions was the weakness of the Seleucid Empire that had been established in Bactria and the adjoining areas of Iran called Parthia. On account of growing pressure from the Scythian tribes, the later Greek rulers were unable to sustain power in this area. With the construction of the Chinese wall, the Scythians were pushed back from the Chinese border. They therefore turned their attention towards the neighbouring Greeks and Parthians. Pushed by the Scythian tribes, the Greeks, who are called the Indo-Greeks or Indo-Bactrians, were forced to invade India. The successors of Asoka were too weak to stem the tide of foreign invasions that began during this period. In the beginning of the second century BCE, the Indo-Greeks occupied a large part of north- western India, a much larger area than that conquered by Alexander. It is said that they pushed forward as far as Ayodhya and Pataliputra. Strabo says that the Indo-Greeks trampled the Ganga and Pataliputra. Patanjali states that they besieged Saketa and Madhyamika (Chittor, Rajasthan), Gargi Samhita says that they reached up to Matura. All of these conquests were most probably directed by Demetrius II assisted by Apollodotus and Menander.

The Greeks failed to establish united rule in India. Two Greek dynasties simultaneously ruled north-western India on parallel lines.



**Figure 26. Coin of Menander**

#### **4.1.3.1: Menander:**

The most famous Indo-Greek ruler was Menander (165 BCE - 45 BCE), also known as Milinda. He ruled for a long time from his capital at Sakala (modern Sialkot) in the Punjab. From Punjab he invaded the Ganga-Yamuna doab. His kingdom covered an area extending from Kabul to Mathura. He had a great many cities in his dominions including Sakala and Mathura. He is known for the variety and wide spread of coins in his dominions. His coins represent him in all stages of his life, from youth to old age. He was converted to Buddhism by Nagasena. Nagarjuna, who is popularly known as Nagarjuna, was a great Buddhist philosopher and teacher. Menander asked Nagasena many questions relating to Buddhism. These questions and Nagasena's answers were recorded in the form of a book known as *Milinda Panho* or the Questions of Milinda. It is said that when Menander (Figure 26) died, many cities desired to get a share of his ashes, as they did at the death of Buddha. Another Indo-Greek king called Apollodotus probably the same as the Bhagadatta of the Mahabharata. His territory extended from Barygaza to Kapisa and Gandhara. He was removed by Eucratides and restructured his coins. Eucratides was assassinated by his son Heliocles. He and his successors, including Antialkidas, ruled from Pushkalavati to Taxila till 25BCE, and then they were replaced by the Pahlavas. Antialkidas was a famous Indo-Greek king as he sent Heliodorus to the court of the king of Besnagar.

Heliodorus erected a Garuda pillar at Besnagar and etched an inscription in which he professes to be a follower of Vasudeva. In the Punjab region, the Euthydemus line of Indo-Greeks continued till they were overthrown by the Sakas in the first century BCE. Strato was one of the last Indo-Greek kings of this line known to us. Indo-Greek rule is important in the history of India because of the large number of coins the Greeks issued. The Indo-Greeks were the first rulers in India to issue coins that can be definitively attributed to particular kings. This is not possible in the case of the early punch-marked coins (Figure 27). They cannot be assigned with certainty to any particular dynasty. The Indo-Greeks were the first to issue gold coins in India. The gold coins increased in number under the Kushans. Greek rule introduced features of Hellenistic art in the north-west frontier of India.



**Figure 27. Punch Marked Coin**

However, this was not purely Greek but the outcome of Greek contact with non-Greek conquered peoples after Alexander's death. The best example of this was Gandhara art; will be discussed by following pages.

#### **4.1.4: The Sakas:**

The Indo-Greeks were followed by the Sakas. The Sakas or the Scythians destroyed Greek power in both Bactria and India. They controlled a much larger part of India than the Greeks.

Five branches of the Sakas held their seats of power in different parts of India and Afghanistan. One branch of the Sakas settled in Afghanistan. The second chose

Punjab with Taxila as their capital. The third branch was in Mathura where they ruled for about two centuries. The fourth established its hold over western India, where the Sakas continued to rule until the fourth century. The fifth branch established its power in the upper Deccan. The Sakas did not face any effective resistance from the rulers and peoples of India. The king of Ujjain effectively fought against the Sakas and succeeded in driving them out during his reign. He called himself Vikramaditya. An era called Vikrama Samvat is reckoned from his victory over the Sakas in 57 BCE. Since then Vikramaditya became a coveted title. Whoever achieved anything great adopted this title just as the Roman emperors adopted the title Caesar to demonstrate their great power. We have as many as fourteen Vikramadityas in Indian history, as a result of this practice, Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty being the most famous of them. The title continued to be fashionable with the Indian kings till the twelfth century CE. It was especially prevalent in the western part of India and the western Deccan. The Sakas established their rule in different parts of the country. However, only those who ruled in western India held power for any considerable length of time, for about four centuries or so. Sakas benefited from the sea-borne trade in Gujarat and issued numerous silver coins. The most famous Saka ruler in India was Rudradaman (130 CE-50 CE).

He ruled over Sindh, and also over a substantial part of Gujarat, Konkan, the Narmada valley, Malwa, and Kathiawar. Rudradaman is famous in history because of the repairs he undertook to improve the Sudarsana Lake in the semi - arid zone of Kathiawar. This had been in use for irrigation for a long time and dated back to the Mauryas. He was a great lover of Sanskrit. Although he had Central Asian ancestry, he issued the first-ever long inscription in chaste Sanskrit. All the earlier longer inscriptions that we have in India were composed in Prakrit. Prakrit was once the Mauryan imperial language.

#### **4.1.5: The Parthians:**

The Saka domination in north-western India was followed by that of the Parthians, and in many ancient Indian Sanskrit texts, the two people are mentioned together as Saka-Pahlavas. “In fact, both of them ruled over India in parallel for some

time. The Parthians or the Pahlavas originally lived in Iran from where they moved to India. In comparison to the Greeks and the Sakas, they occupied only a small portion of north-western India in the first century CE. The most famous Parthian king was Gondopernes. During his reign St. Thomas is said to have come to India to propagate Christianity. In course of time, the Parthians, like the Sakas before them, became an integral part of Indian polity and society.’’

#### **4.1.6: The Kushans:**

The Parthians were followed by the Kushans, who are also called Yuechis or Tocharians. The Tocharians were considered to be the same as the Scythians. The Kushans were one of the five clans into which the Yuechi tribe was divided.

“They were nomadic people from the steppes of north Central Asia living in the neighbourhood of China, first occupied Bactria or north Afghanistan by displacing the Sakas. Gradually they moved to the Kabul valley and seized Gandhara by crossing the Hindu Kush by replacing the rule of the Greeks and Parthians in these areas. Kushanas eventually established their authority over the lower Indus basin and the greater part of the Gangetic basin. Their empire extended from the Oxus to the Ganges, from Khorasan in Central Asia to Pataliputra in Bihar. A substantial part of Central Asia, a portion of Iran, a portion of Afghanistan, almost the whole of Pakistan, and almost the whole of northern India were brought under one rule by the Kushans. Hence, the Kushan Empire is sometimes called a Central Asian Empire. The empire in any case, created a unique opportunity for the interaction of peoples and cultures. This process gave rise to a new type of culture which embraced nine modern countries. We come across two successive dynasties of the Kushans. The first dynasty was founded by a house of chiefs who were called Kadphises. They ruled for 28 years from about 50 CE. It had two kings. The first was Kadphises I, who issued coins south of the Hindukush. He minted copper coins in imitation of Roman coins. The second king was Kadphises II. He issued a large number of gold money and spread his kingdom east of the Indus. The house of Kadphises was succeeded by that of Kanishka. Its kings extended Kushan power over upper India and the lower Indus basin.’’

The early Kushan kings issued numerous gold coins. They had a higher degree of metallic purity than is found in the Gupta gold coins. The gold coins of the Kushans are found mainly west of the Indus. But their inscriptions are distributed not only in north-western India and Sindh but also in Mathura, Sravasti, Kaushambi, and Varanasi.



**Figure 28. Emperor Kanishka**

Therefore, besides the Ganga-Yamuna doab they had established their authority in the greater part of the middle Gangetic basin. Kushan coins, inscriptions, constructions, and pieces of sculpture found in Mathura indicate that it was their second capital in India. The first was Purushapura or Peshawar, where Kanishka (Figure 28) erected a monastery and a huge stupa or relic tower which excited the wonder of foreign travellers. He was the most famous Kushan ruler. Although outside the borders of India, he seems to have suffered defeat at the hands of the Chinese. Kanishka extended his wholehearted patronage to Buddhism. Kanishka held a Buddhist council in Kashmir,

where the doctrines of the Mahayana form of Buddhism were finalized. Kanishka was also a great patron of art and literature. His successors continued to rule in north-western India till about 230 CE, and some of them bore a typical Indian name such as Vasudeva.

In the mid- third century, the Kushan Empire in Afghanistan and in the area west of the Indus was supplanted by the Sassanian power which originated in Iran. Kushan principalities however, continued to exist in India for about a century. The Kushan authority appears to have prevailed in the Kabul valley, Kapisa, Bactria, Khorezm, and Sogdiana (coterminous with Bokhara and Samarkand in Central Asia) in the third-fourth centuries. Many Kushan coins, inscriptions, and terracottas have been found in these areas. At a place called Toprak-Kala in Khorezm, situated south of the Aral Sea on the Oxus, a huge Kushan palace of the third-fourth centuries has been unearthed. It housed an administrative archive containing inscriptions and documents written in Aramaic script and the Khorezmian language.

#### **4.1.7: Kushano-Sassanians:**

By the middle of the third century, the Sassanian Empire of Persia (Iran) had occupied Afghanistan and the western Indus region. From the declining Kushans, the Sassanian warlords captured Sogdiana, Bactria, and Gandhara in 225 CE. Warlords were appointed as the governors of captured territories, but they gradually acted like independent kings.

Indo-Sassanian rule in India sometimes regarded as a form of sub kingdom under the Sassanian Empire of Persia. Some of the governors minted their own coinage and took the title Kushanshas (Kings of the Kushans); now they are known as the Kushano-Sassanians. Indo-Sassanians rule in India continued till 370 CE. The Kushano - Sassanians ruled in north-western India for less than a century. However, they contributed to Indian economy by issuing a large number of coins. Initially they called this region Hindu, not in the sense of religion but in the sense of the Indus people. A Sassanian inscription dated 262 CE uses the term Hindustan for this region.

#### 4.1.8: Satavahanas:

The most important of the native successors of the Mauryas in the north were the Sungas followed by the Kanvas.

The Satavahanas succeeded the Mauryas in the Deccan and in central India, although after a gap of about 100 years. The Satavahanas are considered to be the same as the Andhras who are mentioned in the Puranas. The Puranas speak only of Andhra rule and not of Satavahana rule. The name Andhra does not figure in Satavahana inscriptions. At many sites in the Deccan Pre-Satavahana settlements are indicated by the finds of red-ware (RW), black-and-red ware (BRW), and russet-coated painted ware (RCPW). Most of these are associated with the iron using Megalith builders. They were stimulated to new activity by contacts with the material culture from the north. The use of the iron ploughshare, paddy transplantation, the growth of urbanism, writing, etc., created conditions for state formation under the Satavahanas. According to some Puranas, the Andhras ruled altogether for 300 years although this period is assigned to the rule of the Satavahana dynasty. The earliest inscriptions of the Satavahanas relate to the first century BCE, when they defeated the Kanvas and established power in parts of central India. The early Satavahana kings ruled in Andhra, north Maharashtra and parts of Northern Karnataka as well, where their earliest coins and inscriptions have been found.

Their greatest competitors were the Sakas, who had established power in the upper Deccan and western India. For some time, the Satavahanas were dispossessed of their dominions by the Sakas in Maharashtra and western India. The fortunes of the family were restored by Gautamiputra Satakarni (106 CE- 30 CE) who called himself the only Brahmana. Gautamiputra defeated the Sakas and destroyed many Kshatriya rulers. He claimed to have ended the Kshaharata lineage to which his adversary Nahapana belonged.

This claim is true because over 8000 silver coins of Nahapana were found near Nasik. They bear the marks of having been re-struck by the Satavahana king. Gautamiputra also occupied Malwa and Kathiawar which were controlled by the Sakas.



It appears that the empire of Gautamiputra Satakarni extended from Malwa in the north to Karnataka in the south. He possibly also exercised general authority over Andhra. Rudradaman I (130 CE-50 CE), the Saka ruler of Saurashtra (Kathiawar), defeated the Satavahanas twice, but did not destroy them because of shared matrimonial relations.

Yajna Sri Satakarni (165 CE-194 CE) was the last great king of the Satavahana dynasty. He recovered north Konkan and Malwa from the Saka rulers. Yajna Sri was a patron of trade and navigation. His coins appear not only in Andhra but also in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. His enthusiasm for navigation and overseas trade is demonstrated by the representation of a ship on his coins. Although the Successors of Yajna Sri Satakarni kept the court until about 220 CE, Satavahanas became insignificant in the history of Deccan. Prakrit was the official language of the Satavahanas. All their inscriptions were composed in Prakrit and written in the Brahmi script, as was the case in Asokan times. Some Satavahana kings may have composed Prakrit books. One Prakrit text called *Gathasattasai* (Gathasaptasati), is attributed to a Satavahana king called Hala. It consisted of 700 verses, all written in Prakrit. But it appears to have been finally re-touched much later, possibly after the sixth century.

#### **4.1.8.1: Satavahana Administration:**

The Satavahana rulers strove for the royal ideal set forth in the Dharmashastras. The king was represented as the upholder of Raja Dharma. To him were assigned new divine attributes. The Satavahana king is represented as possessing the qualities of mythical heroes such as Rama, Bhima, Kesava, and Arjuna.

The king is compared in prowess and lustre to these legendary figures and to supernatural forces. “This was meant to attribute divinity to the Satavahana kingship. The Satavahanas retained some administrative structures of Asokan times. Their district was called Ahara, as it was known in the time of Asoka. Their officials were known as Amatayas and Mahamathras, as was the case in Maurya times. We notice certain military and feudal traits in the administration of the Satavahanas. The Senapati was appointed as provincial governor. It was necessary to keep them under strong military control since the tribal people in the Deccan were not thoroughly brahmanized and reconciled to

the new rule. The administration in the rural areas was placed in the hands of an officer called *Gaulmika*. He was the head of a military regiment consisting of 9 chariots, 9 elephants, 25 horses, and 45 foot-soldiers. The head of this regiment was posted in the countryside to maintain peace and order.” The military character of Satavahana rule is also indicated from the common use of such terms as *Kataka* and *Skandhavara* in their inscriptions. These were military camps and settlements which served as administrative centres when the king was there. Coercion played a key role in the Satavahana administration.

The Satavahanas started the practice of granting tax-free villages to Brahmanas and Buddhist monks. The cultivated fields and villages granted to them were declared free from intrusion by royal policemen, soldiers, and other royal officers. These areas became small independent islands within the Satavahana kingdom. The Brahmanas helped enforce the rules of the varna system which promoted social stability. Probably the Buddhist monks also preached peace and spelt out rules of good conduct to the people among whom they lived. They taught them to respect political authority and social order. The Satavahana kingdom had three grades of feudatories. The highest grade was formed by the king who was called *Raja*. He had the right to strike coins. The second grade was formed by the *Mahabhoja*, and the third grade by the *Senapati*. It appears that these feudatories and landed beneficiaries enjoyed some authority in their respective localities.

#### **4.1.8.2: Satavahana Society:**

The most interesting social attribute about the Satavahanas relates to their family structure. The Satavahanas maintained a matrilineal social structure. It was customary for their king to be named after his mother. The names such as Gautamiputra and Vashishthiputra indicate that in their society the mother enjoyed a great deal of importance. Sometimes an inscription is issued both under the authority of the king and his mother. Queens made important religious gifts in their own right.

Some of them acted as regents. However, the Satavahana ruling family was basically patriarchal because succession to the throne passed to the male member.

Increasing craft and commerce during this period brought many merchants and artisans to the forefront. Merchants took pride in naming themselves after the towns to which they belonged. Artisans and merchants made generous donations to the Buddhist cause. They set up small memorial tablets. Among the artisans, the Gandhikas or perfumers are repeatedly mentioned as donors. At a later stage the term '*Gandhika*' became much general as to connote all kinds of shopkeepers. The modern title 'Gandhi' is derived from this ancient term. The Satavahanas originally appear to have been a Deccan tribe. They however were so brahmanized that they claimed to be Brahmanas. Their most famous king, Gautamiputra Satakarni, described himself as a Brahmana. He claimed to have established the fourfold varna system which had fallen into disorder. Gautamiputra boasted that he had put an end to the intermixture between the people of different social orders. Such confusion was probably caused by the Saka infiltration and by the superficial brahminization of the tribes living in the Deccan. The absorption of the Sakas in brahmanical society as Kshatriyas was facilitated by intermarriage between the Sakas and the Satavahanas.

Likewise, the indigenous tribal people were increasingly acculturated by the Buddhist monks who were induced by land grants to settle in western Deccan. It is suggested that traders too supported the Buddhist monks because the earliest caves seem to have been located on the trade routes. The Satavahanas were also the first rulers to make land grants to Brahmanas. However, we find more instances of such grants being made to Buddhist monks. According to the Dharmashastras, it was the function of the Kshatriyas to rule, but the Satavahana rulers called themselves Brahmanas. Gautamiputra boasted that he was the true Brahmana. Since the Andhras are identified with the early Satavahanas, they were probably a local tribe who were converted to Brahmanism. The orthodox Brahmanas looked upon the Andhras as a mixed caste. This shows that Andhras were a tribal people who were brought within the fold of brahmanical society as a mixed caste.

#### **4.1.8.3: Satavahana Religion:**

The Satavahana rulers were elevated to the status of Brahmanas, and they

represented the march of triumphant Brahmanism. Kings and queens, from the very outset, performed such Vedic sacrifices as *Ashvamedha*, and *Vajapeya* paying liberal sacrificial fees to the Brahmanas.

They also worshiped a large number of Vaishnava gods such as Krishna and Vasudeva. The Satavahana rulers promoted Buddhism as well by granting land to the monks. The Mahayana form of Buddhism commanded a considerable following in their kingdom, especially amongst the artisan class. Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh became important seats of Buddhist culture under the Satavahanas. They were popular too under their successors, the Ikshvakus. Buddhism flourished in the Nasik and Junar areas in western Deccan in Maharashtra, where it seems to have been supported by traders.

#### **4.1.9: Changes in Post-Mauryan Period:**

##### **4.1.9.1: Political Changes:**

The Central Asian conquerors imposed their rule on numerous petty native princes. This led to the development of a feudatory organization. The Kushans adopted the pompous title of ‘king of kings’, which indicates that they collected tributes from numerous small princes.

The Sakas and Kushans strengthened the idea of the divine origin of kingship. Asoka called himself ‘dear to the gods’. But the Kushan kings called themselves ‘sons of god’. This title was adopted by the Kushans from the Chinese. The Chinese called their king the son of heaven. It was naturally used in India to legitimize the royal authority. The brahmanical lawmaker Manu asks people to respect the king even if he is a child because he is a great god ruling in the form of a human being. The Kushans strengthened the Satrap system of government adopted by the Sakas. The empire was divided into numerous Satrapies. Each was placed under the rule of a Satrap. Some curious practices such as hereditary dual rule, that is, two kings ruling in the same kingdom simultaneously, began. Instances of father and son ruling jointly at the same time were seen. It appears that there was less of centralization under these rulers. The

Greeks also introduced the practice of military governorship, the governors called Strategos. Military governors were needed to maintain the power of the new rulers over the conquered people. We come across two embassies being exchanged between the Indian kings and their Roman counterparts. Embassies were sent from India to the court of the Roman emperor Augustus in 27 CE-28 CE and also to the Roman emperor Trajan in 110 CE-120 CE. They introduced better cavalry and the use of the riding horse on a large scale. They popularized the use of horse bridle, and saddle, which appear in the Buddhist sculpture of the second and third centuries CE.

The Sakas and the Kushans were excellent horsemen. Their passion for horsemanship is shown by numerous equestrian terracotta figures of Kushan times discovered from Begram in Afghanistan. Some of these foreign horsemen were heavily armoured and fought with spears and lances. Perhaps they also used some form of toe stirrup made of rope which facilitated their movements. The Sakas and Kushans introduced the turban, tunic, trousers, and heavy long coat. The Central Asians also brought in cap, helmet, and boots which were used by warriors. Due to these advantages, they made a clean sweep of their opponents in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Later, when this military technology spread in India the dependent princes turned them to good use against their former conquerors.

#### **4.1.9.2: Social Changes:**

In the period beginning with 200 BCE, India witnessed the coming of several new people from western and central Asia; not only as conquerors, but there was an increase in trade also. As a result of both of these a new population was being formed within the Indian social structure. “There were people not born into the cast society and they were to be assimilated. This must have been a problem to the Brahmins because they were intent to maintain the existing stratification of the cast based society. The presence in India of foreigners who achieved political and economic importance posed threat to the cast system proposed by Brahmanas.” It seemed that the Brahmins were eager to protect the traditional Varna order now in close contact with outside people. Outsiders could not be dubbed as outcastes further; on the contrary the Brahminic

orthodoxy had to come to terms with them.

We have evidence from the Mahabharata which indicated efforts to assimilate foreign people into Indian society. In no other period of ancient Indian history were foreigners assimilated into Indian society on such a large scale as they were in post-Maurya times. This process of assimilation took place not only in the heartland of north India but also in western and south India too where also we have the alien Yavanas in large numbers. The Greeks, the Sakas, the Parthians, and the Kushans eventually lost their identity in India. In the course of time they were completely indianized. Since most of them came as conquerors they were absorbed in Indian society as Kshatriyas.

Their placement in the brahmanical society was explained in a curious way. The Manu Dharmashastra states that the Sakas and the Parthians were Kshatriyas who had deviated from their duties and they are 'fallen Kshatriya' (Vratya Kshatriya). In other words, they came to be considered degraded Kshatriyas or second class Kshatriyas. Rise of a variety of arts and crafts as a result of the increase in trade also caused the formation of several Upajathis and their absorption into the cast structure. Reverse to the social status, they gained in economic status on account of the progress of crafts and commerce. However, there was no marked shift in the living condition of the majority Shudras; they were mostly hired labourers or slaves. Manu laid down a number of laws which adversely affected their social and economic position. According to him, Shudras were meant for serving the upper varnas.

In the inscription of the period recording donations by people to different sects, the donors identify themselves not necessarily by Varna or Jati but by occupation and place of residence. It was because, during this period other than birth and occupation one basic requirement of a stable Varna identity was a fixed place of living which established locational identity. For example, the lower castes were to be located in the particular areas where they carried out their occupation. The untouchables were expected to remain outside the city limit.

#### 4.1.9.3: Economic Changes

##### 4.1.9.3.1: Development of Crafts and Industries:

Arts and crafts witnessed remarkable change and growth during the period. We do not hear of so many kinds of artisans in the earlier texts as are mentioned in the writings of the period.

The *Digha Nikaya*, which relates to pre-Mauryan times, mentions nearly two dozen occupations, but the *Mahavastu*, which relates to this period, catalogues kinds of workers living in the town of Rajgir, and the list is not exhaustive. The *Milinda Panho* (Questions of Milinda) enumerates as many as 75 occupations, 60 of which are connected with various crafts. A Tamil text known in English as The Garland of Madurai supplements the information supplied by the two Buddhist texts on crafts and craftsmen. This text does not distinguish between craftsmen and shopkeepers. According to it, many artisans work in their shops, including painters, weavers, clothiers, florists, goldsmiths, and coppersmiths. Such artisan-shopkeepers were found in both urban and rural areas, but in the literary texts, craftsmen are mostly associated with towns. Some excavations indicate that they also inhabited villages.

In a village settlement in Karimnagar in Telangana, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, potters, and the like, lived in separate quarters, and agricultural and other labourers lived at one end. Eight crafts were associated with the working of gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, brass, iron, and precious stones or jewels. Various types of crafts associated with brass, zinc, antimony, and red arsenic are also mentioned. This indicates great advance and specialization in mining and metallurgy. Technological knowledge about iron work had made great progress, and iron artefacts have been discovered in large numbers in Kushan and Satavahana layers at sundry excavated sites. The Telangana region of Andhra seems to have been the richest in this respect, and in addition to weapons, balance rods, socketed axes and hoes, sickles, ploughshares, razors, and ladles have been discovered in the Karimnagar and Nalgonda districts of this region. Indian iron and steel, including cutlery, were exported to the Abyssinian ports, and they enjoyed great prestige in western Asia.

The techniques of cloth-making, silk-weaving and the manufacture of arms and luxury articles also developed. Mathura was a great centre for the manufacture of a special type of cloth which was called Shataka. Dyeing was a thriving craft in some south Indian towns. A brick-built dyeing vat has been unearthed at Uraiur, a suburb of Tiruchirapalli town in Tamil Nadu, and similar dyeing vats were excavated at Arikamedu. These structures relate to the first-third centuries CE when the handloom textile industry in these towns flourished. The manufacture of oil increased because of the use of the oil wheel. The inscriptions of the period mention weavers, goldsmiths, dyers, workers in metal and ivory, jewellers, sculptors, fishermen, smiths, and perfumers as constructors of caves, and also as donors of pillars, tablets, cisterns, etc., to the Buddhist monks. All this suggests that their crafts were in a flourishing condition.

Of the handicrafts meant for manufacturing luxury articles, ivory work, glass manufacture, and bead-cutting may be mentioned; the shell industry was thriving. Many products of crafts have been found as a result of digging in the Kushan complexes.

Indian ivories have been found in Afghanistan and Rome. They are likened to ivory objects found in excavations at Satavahana sites in the Deccan. Roman glass objects are found in Taxila and in Afghanistan, but it was around the beginning of the Common Era that the knowledge of glass-blowing reached India and attained its peak. Similarly, large numbers of beads of semiprecious stones have been found in post-Maurya layers, which show numerous beads and bangles made of shell. Coin-minting was an important craft, and the period is noted for numerous types of coins made of gold, silver, copper, bronze, lead, glass, and potin. The craftsmen also made fake Roman coins.

Various coin moulds relating to the period have been found in both north India and in the Deccan. A coin mould from a Satavahana level shows that it could turn out half a dozen coins at a time. Coin moulding and other urban handicrafts were supplemented by the manufacture of beautiful pieces of terracotta, which abound at several places. They have been found at almost all the Kushan and Satavahana sites, but Yelleshwaram in Nalgonda district deserves special mention.



There the largest number of terracottas and the moulds in which they were manufactured has been excavated. Terracottas and their moulds are also found at Kondapur, located about 65 km from Hyderabad. Terracottas were used largely by the upper classes in towns. It is significant that with the decline of towns in the Gupta, and especially in the post-Gupta period, such terracottas virtually went out of fashion. The Saka-Kushan phase saw a distinct advance in building activities. Excavations have revealed several layers of construction, sometimes over half a dozen, at various sites in north India. In them we find the use of burnt bricks for flooring and tiles for both flooring and roofing. However, the use of tiles may not have been adopted from outside. The period also saw the construction of brick- walls. The characteristic pottery is Red Ware, both plain and polished, with medium to hefty in fine fabric.

The distinctive pots are sprinklers and spouted channels. They remind us of red pottery with thin fabric found in the same period in Kushan layers in Central Asia. Red pottery techniques were widely known in Central Asia and are to be found even in regions such as Farghana which lay on the peripheries of the Kushan cultural zone.

#### **4.1.9.3.2: Guild Systems:**

Artisans and merchants were organized into guilds. There are textual and inscriptional mentions about at least 24 guilds of artisans and merchants in this period. Among them the most familiar professional association of merchants and artisans was the *Sreni*. *Mahavastu* and *Milinda-Panho* well refers to *Sreni*, along with *Ayatana*, but how these organizations functioned is not indicated by both the Buddhist texts.

Head of the *Sreni* was called the *Jyestha*. Srenis fixed rules of work, quality of the finished products, and its price. The *Sreni* dharma or the customary usage of the guild was ensued through a court which monitored the behaviour of the members. The working of *Sreni* in some way is similar to that of the *Ganasanghas*. Buddhist texts as well as Brahmi inscriptions from Tamil Nadu mention a guild of merchants called *Nigama*. The chief merchant of the *Nigama* is known as *Shresthi*. *Vanijgramo* was another guild, but it was a caravan merchant organisation. The head of the *Vanijgramo* was *Sarthavaha* or the caravan leader. Buddhist texts also speak of nearly half a dozen

petty merchants called *Vanija*. They dealt in fruits, roots, cooked food, sugar, bark cloth, sheaves of corn or grass, and bamboo. We also hear of many shopkeepers in a Tamil text. They sold sweet cakes, scented powder, and flower garlands.

These merchants thus met the varied needs of the urban folk including food, clothing, and housing. To them we can add perfumers or all-purpose merchants called *Gandhika*. Various types of oilmen, some of them dealing in perfumed oils, are covered by the term. The term *Vyavahari*, that is, one who transacts business is also used, but the term *Vyapari* or trader seems to be missing. Most artisans known from inscriptions were confined to Deccan and south India which lay on the trade routes leading to the ports on the western and eastern coasts. The Indian guild is not identical with the European guild. There are various observations on the social and economic nature of guild system in India. One opinion is that it was a group of persons who performed the same professional work, either belonging to the same caste or to various castes.

It seems that usually they preferred to give membership for those with caste connections. However, both merchants and craftsmen were divided into high, low, and middle ranks under the guild and such categorisation possibly depends on their skills in profession. In the second century CE in Maharashtra, lay devotees of Buddhism deposited money with the guilds of potters, oilmen, and weavers to provide the monks with robes and other necessities. During the same century, money was deposited by a chief with the guild of flour-makers at Mathura so that its monthly income could daily feed a hundred Brahmanas.

#### **4.1.9.3.3: Development of Urban Centers:**

The growing arts and crafts, trade and commerce, and the increasing use of money, promoted the prosperity of numerous towns during this period. Important towns in north India, such as Vaishali, Pataliputra, Varanasi, Kaushambi, Sravasti, Hastinapur, Mathura, and Indraprastha are all mentioned in literary texts, and some of them are also described by the Chinese pilgrims.

Most of them flourished during the Kushan period in the first and second

centuries. Excavations have revealed superior constructions of the Kushan age. Several sites in Bihar such as Chirand, Panr, Sonpur, and Buxar, and others in eastern Uttar Pradesh such as Khairadih and Mason saw prosperous Kushan phases. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, towns such as Sohgauro, Bhita, Kaushambi, Shringaverapur, and Atranjikhara were prosperous. Rangmahal in Rajasthan and many other sites in the western areas thrived in Kushan times. The excavations at Sonkh in Mathura reveal as many as seven levels of the Kushan phase, and only one of the Gupta phase. Recent excavation shows Sachnan Kot, 50 km from Lucknow, to be the largest Kushan town in Northern India. It covers 9 sq. km and contains many brick-houses and copper coins. Again, sites in Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Ropar, all located in Punjab, and several Haryana sites reveal the quality of Kushan constructions. In many instances, the Gupta period structures were poorly built and made of used Kushan bricks. On the whole, the material remains from the Kushan phase indicate urbanization at its peak. Cultural urbanization of the period is also applicable to the Saka towns of Malwa and western India. The most important town was Ujjain as the nodal point of two routes, one from Kaushambi and the other from Mathura. It was however also important because of its export of agate and carnelian stones. Excavations show that agate, jasper, and carnelian were worked on a large scale for the manufacture of beads after 200 BCE.

This was possible because the raw material could be obtained in abundance from the trap bedrock in the bed of the Sipra River in Ujjain. Towns thrived in the Satavahana kingdom during the same period as they did under the Sakas and Kushans. Tagar (Ter), Paithan, Dhanyakataka, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Broach, Sopara, Arikamedu, and Kaveripoompattinam were prosperous towns in western and south India, during the Satavahana period.

Several Satavahana settlements, some of which may be coterminous with the thirty walled towns of the Andhras mentioned by Pliny, have been excavated in Telangana. They had originated much earlier than the towns in coastal Andhra although not much later than those in western Maharashtra. The decline of towns in Maharashtra, Andhra, and Tamil Nadu generally started in the mid-third century CE or later. Towns prospered in the Kushan and Satavahana empires because they conducted thriving trade

with the Roman Empire. India then traded with the eastern part of the Roman Empire as well as with Central Asia. Towns in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh thrived because the centre of Kushan power lay in north-western India. Most Kushan towns in India lay exactly on the north-western or Uttarapatha route passing from Mathura to Taxila. The Kushan Empire ensured security along the routes, and its demise in the third century dealt a great blow to these towns. The same thing happened in the Deccan.

The end of the Satavahana power together with the ban on trade with India imposed by the Roman Empire in the third century impoverished the urban artisans and merchants. Archaeological excavations in the Deccan clearly suggest a decline in urban settlements after the Satavahana phase.

#### **4.1.9.3.4: Development of Foreign Trade:**

The Age of the Sakas, Kushans and Satavahanas along with the early Tamil states was the most flourishing period in the history of trade and commerce in ancient India. Foreign trade in particular witnessed remarkable growth during the period.

The coming of the Central Asian people established intimate contacts between Central Asia and India. India received a great fund of gold from the Altai Mountains in Central Asia. Gold may also have been received by it through trade with the Roman Empire. “The Central Asian powers, especially Kushans, in India controlled the Silk Route, which started from China and passed through their empire in Central Asia and Afghanistan to Iran, and western Asia which formed part of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean zone. This route was a source of substantial income for the Indo-Greeks and Kushans, and they built a large prosperous empire on the strength of the tolls levied from traders. The most important economic development of the period was the thriving trade between India and the eastern Roman Empire. Initially, a substantial amount of this trade was conducted overland, but the movement of the Sakas, Parthians, and Kushans disrupted overland trade. Although the Parthians of Iran imported iron and steel from India, they presented great obstacles to India’s trade with the lands further west of Iran.” However, since the first century CE trade was conducted mainly by sea. It seems that around the beginning of the Common Era, the monsoon was understood,

and this enabled the sailors to sail in much less time directly from the eastern coast of the Arabian Sea to the western coast, and easily call at the various ports along the route such as Broach and Sopara situated on the western coast of India, and Arikamedu and Tamralipti situated on the eastern coast.

Of all these ports, Broach seems to have been the most important and prosperous. To it were brought not only commodities produced in the Satavahana kingdom but also the goods produced in the Saka and Kushan kingdoms. The Sakas and the Kushans used two routes from the north- western frontier to the western sea coast. Both these routes converged at Taxila, and were connected with the Silk Route passing through Central Asia. The first route directly ran from the north to the south, linking Taxila with the lower Indus basin from where it passed on to Broach. The second route, called the Uttarapatha, was in more frequent use. From Taxila it passed through modern Punjab up to the eastern bank of the Yamuna. Following the course of the Yamuna, it went southward to Mathura, from Mathura passing on to Ujjain in Malwa, and again from Ujjain to Broach on the western coast. Ujjain was the meeting point of another route which started from Kaushambi near Allahabad. Although the volume of trade between India and Rome seems to have been large, it was not conducted in articles of daily use for the common people. There was a brisk commerce in luxury goods, which are sometimes called articles of aristocratic necessities.

The Romans first started trade with the southernmost part of India, as their earliest coins are found in the Tamil kingdoms which lay outside the Satavahana dominions. The Romans mainly imported spices for which south India was famous, and also muslin, pearls, jewels, and precious stones from central and south India. Iron goods, especially cutlery, formed an important item of export to the Roman Empire. Pearls, ivory, precious stones, and animals were considered luxuries, but plants and plant products served the basic religious, funerary, culinary, and medicinal needs of the people.

Kitchenware may have been included in the items of import, and cutlery may have been important for the higher class of people. In addition to the goods directly

supplied by India, certain articles were brought to India from China and Central Asia and then passed on to the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Silk was directly sent from China to the Roman Empire via the Silk Route passing through north Afghanistan and Iran. However, the establishment of the Parthian rule in Iran and the neighbouring areas created difficulties. Therefore, silk had to be diverted to the western Indian ports through the north-eastern part of the subcontinent. Sometimes it also found its way from China to the east coast of India and from there went to the West. Thus there was considerable transit trade in silk between India and the Roman Empire.

In return for the articles exported by India to the Roman Empire, the Romans exported to India wine, wine-amphorae, and various other types of pottery which were discovered in excavations at Tamruk in West Bengal, Arikamedu near Pondicherry, and at several other sites in south India. Sometimes Roman goods travelled as far as Guwahati. Lead, which was used for making coins by the Satavahanas, seems to have been imported from Rome in the form of coiled strips. The Roman goods do not appear in any substantial quantities in north India, but there is no doubt that under the Kushans, the north-western part of the subcontinent in the second century CE traded with the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

This was facilitated by the conquest of Mesopotamia, which was made a Roman province in 115 CE. The Roman emperor Trajan not only conquered Muscat but also explored the Persian Gulf. As a result of trade and conquest, the Roman goods reached Afghanistan and north-western India. At Begram, 72 km north of Kabul, large glass jars made in Italy, Egypt, and Syria have been found. Also found there were bowls, bronze stands, steel yards, and weights of Western origin, small Greco-Roman bronze statues, jugs, and other vessels made of alabaster.

Taxila, which is coterminous with the modern Sirkap in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, has yielded fine examples of the Greco-Roman sculpture in bronze. Silver ornaments, some bronze pots, one jar, and coins of the Roman emperor Tiberius were also found. However, Arretine pottery, which is regularly found in south India, appears neither in central or western India nor in Afghanistan. Evidently these

places did not receive popular western articles, which have been found mostly south of the Vindhya in the Satavahana kingdom and further south.

Thus the kingdoms of both the Satavahanas and the Kushans profited from trade with the Roman Empire, although the largest profit seems to have accrued to the Satavahanas and the Tamil kings. The most significant Roman export to India was the large number of coins, invariably made of gold and silver, though some Roman copper coins are also found. About 150 finds of Roman coins appear in the subcontinent as a whole, and most of them from the south of the Vindhya. The total number of Roman gold and silver coins that have been found in India does not exceed 6000, but it is difficult to say that only this number of coins came from Rome. The number seems to have been much larger. This justifies the complaint of the Roman writer Pliny, who wrote his account called *Natural History (Historia Naturalis)* in Latin in 77 CE. He believed that Rome was being drained of gold on account of its trade with India. This may be an exaggeration, but as early as 22 CE, we hear of complaints against excessive expenditure on the purchase of pepper from the East.

As Westerners were very fond of Indian pepper, it is called *Yavanapriya* in Sanskrit. There was also a strong reaction against the use of Indian-made steel cutlery for which the Roman nobles paid very high prices. The concept of the balance of trade may not have then been known, but numerous finds of Roman coins and pottery in the Peninsular India leave no doubt that India was a gainer in its trade with the Roman Empire. The loss of Roman money was so deeply felt that eventually steps had to be taken in Rome to ban its trade with India in pepper and steel goods. It seems that the major role in the Indo-Roman trade and shipping was played by the Romans. Although Roman traders lived in south India, there is little evidence of Indian residents in the Roman Empire. Some potsherds with graffiti in Tamil suggest that some Tamil merchants lived in Egypt in Roman times.

#### **4.1.9.3.5: Development of Coinage:**

How did the Indians use the silver and gold currency which came to India from Rome?

The Roman gold coins were naturally valued for their intrinsic worth, but they may also have circulated in major transactions. In the north, the Indo-Greek rulers issued a few gold coins, but the Kushans issued gold coins in considerable numbers. It is significant that the Kushans were the first rulers in India to issue gold coins on a wide scale. It is wrong to think that all Kushan gold coins were minted out of Roman gold. As early as the fifth century BCE, India had paid a tribute of 320 talents of gold to the Persian Empire. This gold may have been extracted from the gold mines in Sindh. The Kushans probably obtained gold from Central Asia, and may also have procured it either from Karnataka or from the gold mines of Dhalbhum in Jharkhand which later came under their sway. On account of the contact with Rome, the Kushans issued the Dinar type of gold coins which became abundant under the Gupta rule. Gold coins may not however have been used in day-to-day transactions, which was carried on in coins of lead, potin, or copper. Both lead and copper deposits are found in Andhra, and gold deposits in Karnataka.



**Figure.29. Silver coin of Vashishtiputra Sri Satakarni**

The Satavahanas issued a large number of lead and potin coins in Deccan (Fig.29). Some punch-marked and early Tamil Sangam age coins have been found at the tip of the Peninsular India. The Kushans issued the largest number of copper coins in northern and north-western India. The Indo-Sassanians, the successors of the



Kushans in lower Sindh, also issued many coins. Copper and bronze coins were used in large quantities by the rulers of some indigenous dynasties: The *Nagas* of central India; the *Yaudheyas* of eastern Rajasthan and adjacent areas of Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh; the *Mitras* of Kaushambi, Mathura, Avanti, and Ahichchatra; etc.

The period between 200 BCE and 300 CE contain the largest number of coins; and these were issued not only by Indian and Central Asian rulers, but also by many cities and tribes. In ancient times, this phase has the highest number of dies and moulds for the manufacture of coins. Perhaps in no other period had the money economy penetrated so deeply into the lives of the common people of the towns and their suburbs as this. This development fits in well with the growth of arts and crafts and India's thriving trade with the Roman Empire.

#### **4.1.9.4: Cultural Changes:**

The Central Asian powers added new ingredients to Indian culture and enriched it immensely. They settled in India for good and completely identified themselves with its culture. As they did not have their own script, written language, or any organized religion, they adopted these components of culture from India and became an integral part of Indian society to which they contributed considerably.

##### **4.1.9.4.1: Religious Developments:**

Some rulers and administrative officials from Central Asia worshipped Vishnu, the god of protection and preservation. The Greek Ambassador Heliodors set up a pillar with an inscription in honour of Vasudeva at Besnagar near Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh around the middle of the second century BCE. A few other rulers adopted Buddhism. The famous Greek ruler Menander became a Buddhist. The questions and the answers that he exchanged with the Buddhist teacher Nagasena, also called Nagarjuna, is a good source for the intellectual history of the post-Mauryan times. The Kushan rulers worshipped both Siva and the Buddha, and the images of these two gods appeared on the Kushan coins. Several Kushan rulers were worshippers of Vishnu, as was certainly the case with

the Kushan ruler Vasudeva, whose very name is a synonym for Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu.

#### **4.1.9.4.2: Mahayana Buddhism:**

Indian religions underwent changes in post-Mauryan times partly due to a great leap in trade and artisanal activity and partly due to the large influx of people from Central Asia. Buddhism was especially affected. The monks and nuns could not afford to lose the cash donations from the growing body of traders and artisans concentrated in towns. Large numbers of coins are found in the monastic areas of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh. All this meant laxity in the day-to-day living of the nuns and monks who led an austere life. They now accepted gold and silver, took to non-vegetarian food, and wore elaborate robes. Some of the renunciants even deserted the religious order (Sangha) and resumed the householder's life. This new form of Buddhism came to be called Mahayana or the Great Vehicle. In the old puritan Buddhism, certain things associated with the Buddha were worshipped as his symbols. These were replaced with his images at the time when the Common Era began.

Image worship started with Buddhism but was followed on a large scale in Brahmanism. With the rise of *Mahayana* the old puritan school of Buddhism came to be known as the Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle. Fortunately for the Mahayana school, Kanishka became its great patron. He convened in Kashmir a council, whose members composed 300,000 words, thoroughly interpreting the *Tripitaka* (Three Pitakas), viz., *Sutta Pitaka*, *Vinaya Pitaka*, and *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. Kanishka got these commentaries engraved on sheets of red copper, enclosed them in a stone receptacle, and raised a stupa over it. If this tradition is correct, the discovery of the stupa with its copper inscriptions could shed new light on Buddhist texts and teachings. Kanishka set up many other stupas to perpetuate the memory of the Buddha.

#### **4.1.9.4.3: Development of Art:**

The foreign princes became enthusiastic patrons of Indian art and literature, and displayed the zeal characteristic of new converts.

The Kushan Empire brought together masons and other artisans trained in different schools and countries. This gave rise to several schools of art such as Central Asian, Gandhara, and Mathura. Pieces of sculpture from Central Asia show a synthesis of both local and Indian elements influenced by Buddhism. Indian craftsmen came into contact with the Central Asians, Greeks, and Romans, especially in the north-western frontier of India in Gandhara.

This gave rise to a new form of art in which images of the Buddha were made in the Greco-Roman style, and his hair fashioned in the Greco-Roman style. The influence of Gandhara Art also spread to Mathura, which was primarily a centre of indigenous art. Mathura produced beautiful images of the Buddha; it is famous for the headless erect statue of Kanishka whose name is inscribed. Mathura Art also produced several stone images of Vardhamana Mahavira. The Mathura school of art flourished in the early centuries of the Common Era, and its products made of red sandstone are found even outside Mathura. Currently the Mathura Museum possesses the largest collection of the pieces of Kushan sculpture in India. During the same period, beautiful works of art were created at several places south of the Vindhyas. Wonderful Buddhist caves were constructed out of rock in Maharashtra. In Andhra Pradesh, Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati became great centres of Buddhist art, and stories associated with the Buddha were portrayed on numerous panels.

The earliest panels dealing with Buddhism are to be found at Bodh Gaya (Bihar), Sanchi and Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh), and relate to the second century BCE. However, further development in sculpture occurred in the early centuries of the Common Era.

#### **4.1.9.4.4: Development of Language and Script:**

The Central Asians were conscious of the fact that the people used various scripts and languages in their dominions, and therefore issued their coins and inscriptions in the Greek, Kharoshti, and Brahmi scripts. “Similarly, they promoted the Greek, Prakrit, and Sanskrit-influenced Prakrit, and towards the end of their rule pure Sanskrit. The rulers thus officially recognized three scripts and four languages. Kushana coins and inscriptions suggest the commingling and coexistence of different scripts and

languages. The Kushan method of communicating with the people also indicates literacy in their times. More importantly, although the Mauryas and Satavahanas patronized Prakrit, some Central Asian princes patronized and cultivated Sanskrit literature. The earliest specimen of the Kavya style is found in the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman in Kathiawar in about 150 CE.” From then onwards, inscriptions began to be composed in chaste Sanskrit, although the use of Prakrit in composing inscriptions continued till the fourth century and even later.

#### **4.1.9.4.5: Development of Literature:**

It appears that some of the great creative writers such as Ashvaghosha enjoyed the patronage of the Kushans. Ashvaghosha wrote the *Buddhcharita*, which is a biography of the Buddha, and also composed *Saundarananda*, a fine example of Sanskrit Kavya. The development of Mahayana Buddhism led to the composition of numerous *Avadanas* (life history and teachings). Most of these texts were composed in what is now known as Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit with the sole objective of communicating the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism to the people. Examples of important books of this genre were *Mahavastu* and *Divyavadana*.

The best example of secular literature is the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana. Attributed to the third century CE, it is the earliest work dealing with the art of lovemaking. It gives us a picture of the life of a city bred person or *Nagaraka* who lived in a period of thriving urbanism. Indian theatre came under the Greek influence, such as the introduction of the curtain (*Yavanika*). This word was derived from the term Yavana, which was a Sanskritised form of Ionian, a branch of the Greeks known to the ancient Indians. In the beginning, the term Yavana referred to the Greeks but subsequently it came to be used for all foreigners. At the caves of Ramgarh hill, 160 miles south of Banaras, both outdoor and indoor theatres as well as a rest house for performers can be identified.

#### **4.1.9.4.6: Development of Science:**

In the post-Mauryan times Indian astronomy and astrology got profited from

contact with the Greeks.

Many Greek terms concerning the movement of planets appear in Sanskrit texts. Indian astrology was influenced by Greek ideas, and from the Greek term Horoscope was derived the term Horasastra that denotes astrology in Sanskrit. The Indians did not owe anything striking to the Greeks in medicine, botany, and chemistry. These three subjects were dealt with by Charaka and Sushruta. The *Charaka Samhita* contains names of numerous plants and herbs from which drugs were prepared. The processes described for pounding and mixing the plants give us an insight into the developed knowledge of chemistry in ancient India. For the cure of ailments, the ancient Indian physician relied chiefly on plants, for which the Sanskrit word is *Oshadhi*, and as a result medicine itself came to be known as *Aushadhi*. The Greek coins, which were properly shaped and stamped, were a great improvement on punch-marked coins. The Greek term *Drachma* came to be known as 'Dramma' in India (Drachma silver coin of ancient Greece, dating from about sixth century BCE, and it was also the former monetary unit). In return, the Greek rulers used the Brahmi script and represented some Indian motifs on their coins. In any case, the Kushan copper coins in India were imitations of Roman coins.

Similarly, gold coins in India were struck by the Kushans in imitation of the Roman gold coins. Dogs, cattle, spices, and ivory pieces were exported by the Greeks, but whether they learnt any craft from India is not clear.

#### **4.1.9.4.7: Development of Technology:**

In the field of technology too, the Indians seem to have benefited from the contact with the Central Asians. The Central Asians introduced better cavalry and the use of the riding horse on a large scale. They popularized the use of horse bridle, and saddle. The Sakas and the Kushans were excellent horsemen and some of them were heavily armoured and fought with spears and lances. They equipped with toe stirrup made of rope which facilitated their easy movements. Possibly the practice of making leather shoes began in India during their period.

The Sakas and Kushans introduced the turban, tunic, trousers, and heavy long coat. Even now Afghans and Punjabis wear turbans, and the sherwani is a successor of the long coat. The Central Asians also brought in cap, helmet, and boots which were used by warriors. Kanishka is represented as wearing war trousers and long boots. Given these advantages, they made a clean sweep of their opponents in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Later, when this military technology spread in India, the dependent princes turned them to good use against their former conquerors. The contacts of Rome with ancient India may have introduced new practices in technology. Working in glass during this period was especially influenced by foreign ideas and practices. In no other period in ancient India did glass-making progress as much as it did during this period.

#### **4.1.10: Summary:**

The post-Mauryan period, 200 BCE to 300 CE, was historically significant from several points of view in north India. A series of invasions from the north-west led to a westward shift in the focus of political power away from the Magadha region. The Deccan and the far south experienced a transition to a state polity and society. City life spread to new regions of the subcontinent. Craft persons produced large quantities and more varied goods than before, trade within the subcontinent and between its regions and other lands flourished, and money was increasingly used as a medium of exchange. New cultural winds blew into the subcontinent in the wake of the invasions and expanding trade, and the North West in particular became a major cultural crossroads. The devotional worship of images in shrines became a cornerstone of religious life, cutting across cultic and sectarian boundaries. The increasing institutionalization of religious activity was reflected in religious texts, permanent religious structures and inscriptions.

#### **4.1.11: Keywords:**

Hindu Kush - Bactria/Bahluka - Parthia - Scythian Tribe - Indo Bactrians - Menander/Milinda - Sakala-Nagasena/Nagarjuna - Milinda Panho - Apollodotus - Bhagadatta - Antialkidas - Heliodors - Garuda pillar-Vasudeva - Euthydemus - Strato -

Vikramaditya - Vikrama Samvat - Rudradaman I - Sudarsana Lake - Saka Pahlavas - Gondophernes - St. Thomas - Yuechis/Tocharians - Central Asian Empire - Kadphises - Kanishka - Purushapura - Saka Era - Toprak Kala - Kushano Sassanians/ Indo Sassanian - Andhras - Gautamiputra Satakarni - Nahapana - Yajna Sri Satakarni - Gathasattasai/Gathasaptasati - Hala-Ahara - Amatyas - Mahamathras - Senapati - Gaulmika - Kataka/Skandhavera - Mahabhoja - Gandhika - 'Dear to the Gods' and 'Sons of God' - Satrap System - Vratya Kshtriya/Fallen Kshtriya - Jati and Upajati - Digha Nikaya - The Garland of Madurai - Shataka - Srenis - Jyestha - Srenidharma - Ganasanghas - Nigama - Shresthi - Vanijgramo - Vanija - Vyavahari and Vyapari - Dinar - Vaishnavism - Buddhism - Nagarjunakonda - Mahayana and Hinayana - Tripitaka - Gandhara School - Mathura School - Central Asian School - Script: Greek, Kharoshti, and Brahmi - Kavya Style and Chaste Sanskrit - Ashvaghosha - Buddhcharita - Saundarananda - Avadanas - Mahavastu - Divyavadana - Nagaraka - Yavanika - Horashastra - Charaka Samhita - Sushruta Samhita - Oshadhi - Drachma.

#### 4.1.12: Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Write short notes on:
  - a) Milinda
  - b) Vikrama Samvat
  - c) Parthians
  - d) Yuechis or Tocharians
  - e) Kushano-Sassanians
2. Who were Indo-Greek and how do we know about them?
3. 'The Gandhara art represented a blending of Indian art and Hellenistic art.' Substantiate the statement.
4. Give an account of the great impact that the Saka and Kushan rules had on Indian polity.
5. What is meant by matrilineal polity in the context of Satavahanas?

6. Give an account of the Satavahana administration.
7. 'The Kushans reached the zenith of its power under Kanishka and his period is historically significant for general cultural development in northern India.' Validate the statement.
8. Describe the political condition of India after Mauryans.
9. How the Central Asian contacts did influence ancient Indian society and culture?
10. 'The craft, commerce and trade were most flourished in between 200 BCE and 300 CE'. Discuss.



## UNIT.5:

### Lesson 5.1: Gupta Empire

#### Structure

- 5.1.1: Objectives
- 5.1.2: Introduction
- 5.1.3: Material Advantages
- 5.1.4: Chandragupta I (319 CE-334 CE)
- 5.1.5: Samudragupta (335 CE-380 CE)
- 5.1.6: Chandragupta II (380 CE-412 CE)
- 5.1.7: Gupta Polity
- 5.1.8: Gupta Society
- 5.1.9: Gupta Economy
- 5.1.10: Gupta Culture
  - 5.1.10.1: Gupta Education
  - 5.1.10.2: Religious Revival
  - 5.1.10.3: Gupta Architecture
  - 5.1.10.4: Gupta Art
  - 5.1.10.5: Gupta Painting
  - 5.1.10.6: Gupta Literature
  - 5.1.10.7: Science under the Guptas
  - 5.1.10.8: Technology under the Guptas
- 5.1.11: Decline of the Gupta Empire
- 5.1.12: Hunas
  - 5.1.12.1: Mihirakula
- 5.1.13: Summary
- 5.1.14: Keywords
- 5.1.15: Self-Assessment Questions

#### 5.1.1: Objectives:

- To understand the loose chronology of Gupta Age.

- To understand the socio, economic, cultural, and political development during Gupta Age.
- To recognise the political ambiance of fourth century CE to sixth century CE North India.
- To focus on the Social Structure of Gupta Society.
- To focus on the significant aspects of Gupta Economy.
- To understand the cultural development of Gupta society.
- To know the religious revival underwent in India during Gupta Age.
- To know the aesthetic and literary development during Gupta Age.
- To signify the scientific and technological development during Guptas.
- To compare the Gupta socio-economic and cultural developments with the Pre-Guptas.
- To look into the Gupta decline and emergence of Hun rule in India.

### **5.1.2: Introduction:**

After the break-up of the Maurya Empire, the Satavahanas and Kushans emerged as the two large powers. The Satavahanas acted as a stabilizing factor in the Deccan and the south to which they provided political unity and economic prosperity on the strength of their trade with the Roman Empire.

The Kushans performed the same role in the north. Both these empires came to an end in the mid-third century CE. On the ruins of the Kushan empire arose a new empire that established its sway over a substantial part of the former dominions of the Kushans. This was the empire of the Guptas, who may have been of Vaishya origin. Different titles are recommended for the different Varnas by the Dharmashastras. The title Sarman or auspicious is recommended for the Brahmana, Varman (armour) for the Kshatriya, Gupta (hidden, also protected) for the Vaishya, and Dasa (servile) for the Shudra. Although the Gupta Empire was not as large as the Maurya Empire, it kept north India politically united for over a century from 335 CE to 455 CE. The original kingdom of the Guptas comprised Uttar Pradesh and Bihar at the end of the third century.

Uttar Pradesh appears to have been a more important province for the Guptas than Bihar, because early Gupta coins and inscriptions are largely found in that state. If we exclude some feudatories and private individuals whose inscriptions are largely found in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh stands out as the most important area in relation to finds of Gupta antiquities. With their centre of power at Prayag, they spread into the neighbouring regions.

### **5.1.3: Material Advantages of the Gupta dynasty:**

The Guptas were possibly feudatories of the Kushans in Uttar Pradesh, and seem to have succeeded them without any considerable time-lag. At many places in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Kushan antiquities are immediately followed by Gupta antiquities.

The Guptas enjoyed certain material advantages. The centre of their operations lay in the fertile land of Madhyadesa covering Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They were able to exploit the iron ores of central India and south Bihar. Also, they took advantage of their proximity to the areas in north India that conducted the silk trade with the eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire. It is likely that the Guptas learnt the use of the saddle, reins, buttoned coats, trousers, and boots from the Kushans. All these gave them mobility and made them excellent horsemen. In the Kushan scheme of things, horse-chariots and elephants had ceased to be important, horsemen playing the central role. This also seems to have been the case with the Guptas on whose coins' horsemen are represented. Although some Gupta kings are described as excellent and unrivalled chariot warriors, their basic strength lay in the use of horses. Given these favourable factors, the Guptas established their rule over Anuganga (along the Ganges in the mid-Gangetic basin), Prayag (modern Allahabad), Saketa (modern Ayodhya), and Magadha. In the course of time, this kingdom became a Pan-Indian empire. The Kushan power in north India came to an end around 230 CE, and then a substantial part of central India fell under the rule of the Murundas, who were possibly kinsmen of the Kushans. The Murundas continued to rule till 250 CE. Twenty-five years later, in about 275 CE, the Gupta dynasty came to power.

#### **5.1.4: Chandragupta I (319 CE-334 CE):**

He was the first important king of the Gupta dynasty. He married a Lichchhavi princess, in all probability from Nepal, which strengthened his position. The Guptas were probably Vaishyas, and hence marriage into a Kshatriya family lent them prestige. He started the Gupta Era in 319-320 CE, which marked the date of his accession. Later many inscriptions of the Guptas came to be dated in Gupta Era.

#### **5.1.5: Samudragupta (335-380CE):**

The Gupta kingdom was enlarged enormously by Chandragupta's son and successor Samudragupta. His court poet Harisena wrote a glowing account of the military exploits of his patron, and, in a long inscription, the poet enumerates the peoples and countries that were conquered by Samudragupta. The eulogy inscription is engraved at Allahabad, historically called The Prayaga Prasasti, on the same pillar that carries the Dhamma inscriptions of Asoka. According to the Prayaga Prasasti, the places and the countries conquered by Samudragupta can be divided into five groups. (i) The princes of the Ganga-Yamuna doab who were defeated and whose kingdoms were incorporated into the Gupta Empire. (ii) The rulers of the eastern Himalayan states and of some frontier states such as Nepal, Assam, and Bengal, which were made to feel the weight of Samudragupta's arms.

It also covers some republics of Punjab. The republics, which flickered on the ruins of the Maurya Empire, were finally crushed by Samudragupta. (iii) The forest kingdoms situated in the Vindhya region known as Atavika-rajyas which Samudragupta brought under his control. (iv) The rulers of the eastern Deccan and south India who were conquered and liberated. Samudragupta's arms reached as far as Kanchi in Tamil Nadu, where the Pallavas were compelled to recognize his suzerainty. (v) The Sakas, Kushans, and some of them ruling in Afghanistan. It is said that Samudragupta swept them out of power and received the submission of the rulers of distant lands.

The prestige and influence of Samudragupta spread even outside India. According to a Chinese source, Meghavarman, the ruler of Sri Lanka, sent a missionary

to Samudragupta for permission to build a Buddhist temple at Gaya. This was granted, and the temple was developed into a huge monastic establishment. If we are to believe the eulogistic inscription at Allahabad, it would appear that Samudragupta never knew defeat. There is no doubt that Samudragupta forcibly unified the greater part of India under him, and his power was felt in a much larger area.

#### **5.1.6: Chandragupta II (380-412 CE):**

The reign of Chandragupta II saw the high watermark of the Gupta Empire. He extended the limits of the empire by marriage alliance and conquest. Chandragupta married his daughter Prabhavati to a Vakataka prince of the Brahmana caste and ruled in central India. The prince died, and was succeeded by his young son. Prabhavati thus became the virtual ruler. As testified to by some of her land charters, which betray the influence of the eastern Gupta writing, she promoted the interests of her father Chandragupta.

Thus Chandragupta exercised indirect control over the Vakataka kingdom in central India, and this afforded him great advantage. With his great influence in this area, Chandragupta II conquered Mathura from the Kushans. More importantly, he occupied western Malwa and Gujarat, which had for about four centuries been under the rule of the Saka Kshatrapas. The conquest gave Chandragupta control over the Western Sea Coast, famous for trade and commerce. This contributed to the prosperity of Malwa, and its chief city Ujjain. Ujjain seems to have been made the second capital by Chandragupta II. The exploits of a king called Chandra are glorified in an iron pillar inscription fixed near Qutb- Minar in Delhi.

If Chandra corresponds to Chandragupta II, it would appear that he established Gupta authority in north-western India and in a substantial part of Bengal. Chandragupta II adopted the title of Vikramaditya, which had been first used by an Ujjain ruler in 57 BCE as a mark of victory over the Saka Kshatrapas of western India. This Ujjain ruler is traditionally called *Sakari* or the slayer of the Sakas. The court of Chandragupta II at Ujjain was adorned by numerous scholars including Kalidasa and Amarasingha. It was during Chandragupta's reign that the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien (399-414 CE) visited

India and wrote an elaborate account of the life of its people.

### 5.1.7: Gupta Polity:

In contrast to the Maurya rulers, the Gupta kings adopted pompous titles such as *Paramesvara*, *Maharajadhiraja*, and *Paramabhattacharaka* which signify that they ruled over many lesser kings in their empire.

Kingship was hereditary, but royal power was limited by the want of a firm adherence to primogeniture. The throne did not always go to the eldest son, creating uncertainties of which the chiefs and high officials took advantage. The Guptas made munificent gifts to the Brahmanas, who expressed their gratitude by comparing the king to different gods. He was looked upon as Vishnu, the protector and preserver. The goddess Lakshmi is invariably represented on Gupta coins as the wife of Vishnu. The numerical strength of the Gupta army is not known. Evidently the king maintained a standing army, which was supplemented by the forces occasionally supplied by his feudatories. Horse chariots receded into the background, and cavalry came to the fore line. Horse archery became an important element in military tactics. During the Gupta period land taxes increased in number and those on trade and commerce decreased. Probably the king collected taxes varying from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce. In addition, whenever the royal army passed through the countryside, the local people had to feed it. The peasants had also to supply animals, food grains, furniture, etc., for the maintenance of royal officers on duty in rural areas. In central and western India, the villagers were also subjected to forced labour called *Vishti* by the royal army and officials. The judicial system was far more developed under the Guptas than in earlier times.

Several law- books were compiled during this period and for the first time civil and criminal laws were clearly demarcated. Theft and adultery fell under criminal law, disputes regarding various types of property under civil law.

Elaborate laws were laid down about inheritance. As in earlier times, many laws continued to be based on Varna differentiation. It was the duty of the king to uphold the

law, and try cases with the help of Brahmana priests. The guilds of artisans, merchants, and others were governed by their own laws. Seals from Vaishali and from Bhita near Allahabad indicate that these guilds flourished during Gupta times. The Gupta bureaucracy was not as elaborate as that of the Mauryas. The most important officers in the Gupta Empire were the *Kumaramatyas*. They were appointed by the king in the home provinces and possibly paid in cash.

As the Guptas were possibly Vaishyas, recruitment was not confined to the upper varnas only, but several offices were combined in the hands of the same person, and posts became hereditary. This naturally weakened royal control.

The Guptas organized a system of provincial and local administration. The Empire was divided into divisions called *Bhuktis*, and each Bhukti was placed under the charge of an *Uparika*. The Bhuktis were divided into *Vishayas* or distracts, which were placed under the charge of a *Vishayapati*. In eastern India, the *Vishayas* were divided into *Vithis*, which again were subdivided into *Gramas* or villages. The *Gramapati* or village headman gained importance in Gupta times, managing village affairs with the assistance of elders.

With the administration of a village or a small town, leading local elements were associated. No land transactions could be effected without their consent. In the urban administration, organized professional bodies were given a considerable say. The sealings from Vaishali show that artisans, merchants, and the head of the guild served on the same corporate body, and in this capacity they obviously conducted the affairs of the town. The administrative board of the district of Kotivarsha in north Bengal (Bangladesh) included the chief merchant, the chief trader, and the chief artisan. Their consent to land transactions was considered necessary. Artisans and bankers were organized into their own separate guilds.

We hear of numerous guilds of artisans, traders, etc., at Bhita and Vaishali. At Mandasor in Malwa and at Indore, silk weavers maintained their own guilds. In the district of Bulandshahar in western Uttar Pradesh, the oil-pressers were organized into guilds. It seems that these guilds, especially those of merchants, enjoyed certain

immunities. In any case, they looked after the affairs of their own members and punished those who violated the laws and customs of the guild. The system of administration described above applied only to north Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and some adjoining areas of Madhya Pradesh, which were ruled directly by the officers appointed by the Gupta kings. The major part of the empire was held by feudatory chiefs, many of whom had been subjugated by Samudragupta. The vassals who lived on the edge of the empire had three obligations to fulfil.

“As subordinate princes, they offered homage to the sovereign by personal attendance at his court, paid tribute to him, and presented to him daughters in marriage. It seems that in return they obtained charters to rule their areas, and these, marked with the royal Garuda seal, seem to have been issued to the vassals. The Guptas thus controlled several tributary princes in Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere. The subordinate position of the princes turned them into feudal vassals. The second important feudal development that surfaced under the Guptas was the grant of fiscal and administrative concessions to priests and administrators. Started in the Deccan by the Satavahanas, the practice became a regular affair in Gupta times, particularly in Madhya Pradesh. Religious functionaries were granted land, free of tax, for posterity, and they were authorized to collect from the peasants all the taxes that once went directly to the emperor. The villages granted to the beneficiaries could not be entered by royal agents, retainers, etc. The beneficiaries were also empowered to punish criminals.”

Whether state officials were paid by grants of land in Gupta times is not clear. The abundance of gold coins would suggest that higher officials continued to be paid in cash, but some of them may have been remunerated by land grants. Since much of the imperial administration was managed by feudatories and beneficiaries, the Gupta rulers did not require as many officials as the Mauryas did. They did not require too many officers also because, unlike the Mauryan state, the Gupta state did not regulate economic activities on any big scale. The participation of leading artisans, merchants, elders, and others in the rural and urban administration also lessened the need to maintain a large retinue of officers. The Guptas neither needed nor possessed the elaborate administrative machinery of Mauryan times, and in some ways their political



system appears to be feudal.

#### **5.1.8: Gupta Society:**

Land grants to the Brahmanas on a large scale suggest that the Brahmana supremacy increased in Gupta times. The Guptas, who probably were originally Vaishyas, came to be looked upon as Kshatriyas by the Brahmanas.

The Brahmanas presented the Gupta kings as possessing god-like attributes. All this helped to legitimize the position of the Gupta princes, who became great supporters of the brahmanical order. The Brahmanas accumulated wealth on account of the numerous land grants made to them and therefore claimed many privileges, which are listed in the *Narada Smriti*, the law book of Narada, a work of about the fifth century CE. The castes proliferated into numerous sub-castes as a result of two factors. A large number of foreigners had been assimilated into Indian society, and each group of foreigners was considered a kind of caste. As the foreigners largely came as conquerors they were given the status of Kshatriya in society. The Hunas, who came to India towards the close of the fifth century CE, eventually came to be recognized as one of the thirty-six clans of the Rajputs.

Even now some Rajputs bear the title Hun. The other reason for the increase in the number of castes was the absorption of many tribal people into brahmanical society through the process of land grants. The tribal chiefs were assigned a respectable origin, but most of their ordinary kinsmen were assigned a low origin, and every tribe became a kind of caste in its new incarnation. This process continued in some ways up to the present times. The position of shudras improved during this period. They were now permitted to listen to recitations of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas. The epics and the Puranas represented the Kshatriya tradition, whose myths and legends won loyalty to the social order. The shudras could also worship a new god called Krishna and were also permitted to perform certain domestic rites which naturally meant fees for the priests.

This can all be linked to some improvement in the economic status of the

Shudras. From the seventh century onwards, they were mainly represented as agriculturists; in the earlier period, they generally figured as servants, slaves, and agricultural labourers working for the three higher varnas. During this period, the number of untouchables increased, especially the *Chandalas*.

The Chandalas entered the society as early as the fifth century BCE. By 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, their number had become so enormous and their disabilities so glaring that these attracted the attention of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien. He informs us that the Chandalas live outside the village and deal in meat and flesh. Whenever they enter the town, they strike a piece of wood to announce their arrival so that others may avoid them. In the Gupta period, like the Shudras, women were also allowed to listen to the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas, and were advised to worship Krishna. However, women of the higher orders did not have access to independent sources of livelihood in pre-Gupta and Gupta times. It was argued that the Vaishya and Shudra women take to agricultural operations and domestic services and are therefore outside the control of their husbands.

In contrast, by Gupta times, members of the higher orders came to acquire more and more land which made them more polygamous and more property-minded. In a patriarchal setup, they began to treat women as items of property, to such a degree that a woman was expected to follow her husband to the next world. The first example of the immolation of a widow after the death of her husband (Sati) occurred during the Gupta period in 510 CE. However, some post-Gupta law-books held that a woman could remarry if her husband was dead, destroyed, impotent, renounced, or excommunicated. The principal reason for the subordination of women of the upper Varnas was their complete dependence on men for their livelihood, and lack of proprietary rights. However, the oldest Smritis or law-books state that gifts of jewellery, ornaments, garments, and similar other presents made to the bride on the occasion of her marriage were considered her property.

Gupta and post-Gupta law - books substantially enlarged the scope of these gifts. According to them, presents received by the bride not only from her parents' side but

also from her parents-in-law at marriage and on other occasions formed the *Stridhana*. Katyayana, a lawmaker of the sixth century CE, held that a woman could sell and mortgage her immovable property along with her Stridhana. This clearly implies that women received shares in landed property according to this lawmaker, but generally a daughter was not allowed to inherit landed property in the patriarchal communities of India. Niyoga, according to which a younger brother or kinsman could marry the wife of the elder brother after the latter's death, was practised by the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas in Vedic times, but was not allowed to them by the law-books of Gupta and earlier times. Similarly, widow remarriage was not allowed to members of the higher orders, but the Shudras could practise both Niyoga and levirate and widow remarriage.

#### 5.1.9: Gupta Economy:

We can glean the economic life of the people of Gupta times from Fa-hsien, who visited different parts of the Gupta Empire.



**Figure.30. Gold Coin of Samudra Gupta.**

“The Chinese traveller informs us that Magadha was full of cities and its rich people believed in and supported it with charitable offerings. In ancient India, the Guptas issued the largest number of gold coins, which were called Dinaras in their inscriptions. Regular in size (Fig.30) and weight, they appear in many types and sub-types. They vividly portray Gupta kings, indicating the latter's love for war and art. Although in gold content the Gupta coins are not as pure as the Kushan ones, they not

only served to pay the officers in the army and administration but also to meet the needs of the sale and purchase of land. After the conquest of Gujarat, the Guptas issued a large number of silver coins mainly for local exchange, in which silver occupied an important position under the Western Kshatrapas. In contrast to those of the Kushans, the Gupta copper coins are very few in number.’’ This would suggest that the use of money did not touch the common people as much as it did under the Kushans. Compared to the earlier period we notice a decline in long-distance trade. Till 550 CE India carried on some trade with the eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, to which it exported silk.

Around 550 CE, the people of the eastern Roman Empire learn from the Chinese the art of growing silk, which adversely affected India’s export trade. Even before the mid-sixth century CE, the demand for Indian silk abroad had slackened. In the mid-fifth century, a guild of silk weavers left their original home in western India in the state of Lata in Gujarat and migrated to Mandasor in Malwa where they abandoned their original occupation and adopted other professions. The striking development of the Gupta period, especially in eastern and central Madhya Pradesh, was the emergence of priestly landlords at the cost of local peasants. Land grants made to the priests certainly brought many virgin areas under cultivation, but these beneficiaries were imposed from above on local tribal peasants who were reduced to a lower status.

In central and western India, the peasants were also subjected to forced labour. On the other hand, a good deal of virgin soil was brought under cultivation, and better knowledge of agriculture seems to have been introduced by the Brahmana beneficiaries in the tribal areas of central India.

#### **5.1.10: Gupta Culture:**

Gupta era is marked by significant developments in various aspects of Indian culture. Under their patronage, this period became India’s classical age of literature, theatre, and visual art. The aesthetic canons that came to dominate all the arts of later India were codified during this time.

This age registered considerable progress in literature and science, particularly in astronomy and mathematics. Great treatises were written on a number of subjects ranging from grammar, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. Aryabhata, who lived during this age, was the first Indian who made a significant contribution to astronomy. The concept of zero was conceived which led to a more practical system of numbering. Arab traders adapted and further developed the concept, and from western Asia the system of “Arabic numerals” travelled to Europe. Sanskrit poetry and prose flourished. The most outstanding literary figure of the Gupta period was Kalidasa whose choice of words and imagery brought Sanskrit drama to new heights. Under the Guptas, Ramayana and the Mahabharata were finally written down in the fourth century CE. During the period, no doubt, there was an outburst of intellectual and artistic activity.

It was mainly due to the frequent contact with foreign cultures and civilizations. Indians had constant communication with China and the Western world. With the extension of the Gupta dominions to the seaports of Saurashtra and Gujarat, India’s foreign trade with the Western world was significantly increased.

#### **5.1.10.1: Gupta Education:**

The Gupta society gave utmost importance to Education and learning. City centers and capitals of kingdoms were the common centers of learning. The core centers of education and learning were Pataliputra, Valabhi, Ujjain and Padmavati, Mathura, Nasik and Kanchi in South. “The Brahmin Agraharas were the chief centers of Vedic learning. The Vedic schools of South India were known as *Ghatikas*, and the Kanchi Ghatika was referred to even by the kadamba inscriptions of Karnataka. Teachers of ancient India were generally known as *Acharya* and *Upadhyaya* (Upadhyaya). The Brahmin Acharyas were entrusted with fundamental teachings of Vedas, Upanishads and Sutras, etc. They considered teaching as charity and refrained from taking fees. The *Upadhyaya* took teaching as a profession and charged the pupils. Syllaby included portions of *Dharmashastras*, *Smritis*, *Itihasa-Puranas* and heterodox scriptures. Secular subjects such as mathematics, science of warfare, astronomy, astrology and medicine were also taught. Vedic education was generally imparted to the society of elite,

particularly to Brahmins. Although the *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* were restricted to some sort of learning, the Shudras were completely deprived off from any light of Vedic Sanskrit education. The interpretation of Vedas and scriptures by scholars led to the emergence of the six systems of Indian philosophy; though based on the Vedas, they have theistic, monistic, atheistic, and dualistic streams.” The people centred learning was commonly imparted in the monastic colleges operated by monks, and they acted as the centers of cultural and social accord. During the Gupta period India became a centre for Buddhist studies by attracting scholars from all parts of the country and also from several foreign countries.

The Gupta rulers encouraged higher learning by patronizing these Buddhist centers of higher education at Nalanda, Taxila, Ujjain, Vikramasila and Valabhi. Nalanda University can be considered as an epitome of education in the Gupta age. Situated in Nalanda near Rajagriha in Bihar the University was probably the highest seat of Indian learning in ancient and early medieval India.

It was an international university and students from all part of the world had come there to pursue their higher education, and it was the largest of its kind in the contemporary world to which scholars of different castes, creeds and races hailing from India and from countries like China, Japan, Korea, Java, Sumatra, Tibet, Mongolia, etc., flocked for advanced studies. It was initially established as a monastery; probably during the reign of the later Gupta king Kumara Gupta I (414-445 CE). But according to the Buddhist tradition it was established by Sakraditya. The University was spread over an area of 1.6 km X 0.8 km, and about 1500 professors and 10,000 students were engaged. There were a hundred lecture halls where classes were held daily. Hsuan Tsang reported that Nalanda was a residential university with a 6 storeyed building, where the staff and students had free board and lodging.

Although all the mounds of Nalanda have not been dug, excavations have exposed a very impressive complex of buildings. These were raised and renovated over a period of 700 years from the fifth century CE onwards. The buildings exposed by excavations do not have the capacity to accommodate 10,000 monks. During the reign

of Harshavardhana, another Chinese pilgrim, I-Tsing, visited Nalanda, and he mentions that only 3000 monks lived there.

Nalanda was supported by the revenue from many villages donated by the kings and also by donations from merchants; according to Hsuan Tsang, it was supported from the revenues of 100 villages, but I-Tsing raises this number to 200. Nalanda thus had a huge monastic establishment during Guptas and Harsha. Nalanda was the fee-free university but the students were admitted after a tough entrance test. There had catholicity of method in education and curriculum was liberal. Wide varieties of subjects were taught. Instructions were mainly imparted in logic, grammar, astronomy, literature, along with the philosophies like Vedic, Jaina and Buddhist. The method of discussion was used in the class rooms. Scholarship was measured by the number of Sutra collections a student was able to master.

The working time was managed by the famous Nalanda water clock. Eminent grammarians such as Panini, Jivaka and Chanakya are said to have studied at Nalanda. The lawmaker Silabhadra, who was generally known as the 'Treasure of Right Law', had once been the head of this university. The university had helped to spread Indian culture in foreign countries such as Tibet, China, and Central Asia and also in South East Asian countries. Nalanda University was destroyed towards the end of the twelfth century by Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji, a general of Mohammad Ghori.

Taxila University was another famous centre of higher learning even before the Gupta age. It was probably, the earliest of the ancient seats of higher education. It was situated about 50 km west of Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Taxila was not a well-organized university to be equated with Nalanda. It is said that Kautilya, Charaka and Chandragupta Maurya were the products of Taxila. It gained importance during the reign of Kanishka. The Taxila town was already famous in about 300 BCE, when Alexander invaded India. By the closing period of the Gupta dynasty Taxila lost its former glory due to Hun invasion. Valabhi University was situated in modern Gujarat. The University specialized in many branches of learning such as Rashtra Mimamsa, Law, Medicine, etc.

The Gupta age was also significant for imparting Technical education, and it was mainly dealt by the guilds. Technical training included metallurgy, ivory and diamond cutting, woodwork. This was usually started in the family itself as professions had become hereditary. Sometimes artisans took outside students as trainees. Elementary education probably commenced at the age of five and was imparted by teachers who were called *Daraka Acharyas*. Lipisalas or primary schools did exist in many villages. Children used to write either on wooden boards in colour or by the finger on the ground covered with sand. Excellence in ancient metallurgy is proved by the Mehrauli Iron Pillar of Chandragupta II.

#### **5.1.10.2: Religious Revival:**

Gupta period was popular for the revival in Brahmanical Hinduism, called the period of Hindu Revivalism. One important development of this period was the growing importance of Bhakti cult or devotion to a personal god such as Vishnu, Siva, and Sakti in their many forms. The personal god was considered as the saviour from dangers, misfortunes and calamities.

A Bhakti devotee believed that his personal god is the only source of blessings, and majority of the Gupta and post- Gupta society predominantly kept the same religious outlook. The early idea of Bhakti cult can be located in Bhagavatism or worships of Vishnu-Narayana - Vasudeva-Krishna. Although Bhagavatism originated in post-Mauryan times, Pancharatras, also called Bhagavatas, were popular even under the Mauryas. Vishnu was a minor god during the Vedic times. He represented the sun and also the fertility aspect. By the second century BCE he was merged with a god called Narayana, and came to be known as Narayana-Vishnu. Originally Narayana was a non - Vedic tribal god called Bhagavata, and his worshippers were called Pancharatras or Bhagavatas.

This god was conceived as a divine counterpart of the tribal chief. Just as a tribal chief received presents from his kinsmen and distributed shares among them, Narayana



also was supposed to bestow shares or good *Bhaga* (fortune) on his Bhakta or worshipper. In return the Bhaktas or worshippers offered their Bhakti or loving devotion to him. The worshippers of Vishnu and those of Narayana were brought under a single umbrella by merging as Vishnu-Narayana. Besides, Vishnu came to be identified with a legendary hero of the *Vrishni* tribe living in western India who was known as Krishna-Vasudeva. The great epic Mahabharata was recast to show that Krishna and Vishnu were one. Thus, by 200 BCE the four streams of gods (Bhagavata-Vishnu- Vasudeva Krishna) and their worshippers merged into one and resulted in the creation of Bhagavatism. Bhagavatism was marked by Bhakti and Ahimsa. Bhakti meant the offer of loving devotion.

Ahimsa, or the doctrine of non-killing of animals, suited the agricultural society and was in keeping with the old cult of life giving fertility associated with Vishnu. People worshipped the image of Vishnu, and offered it rice, sesamum, etc. Out of their aversion to killing animals, some of them took to an entirely vegetarian diet. The new religion was sufficiently liberal to attract foreigners. It also appealed to artisans and merchants who became important under the Satavahanas and Kushans. Krishna taught in the Bhagavadgita that even women, Vaishyas, and Shudras who were born of sin could seek refuge in him. This religious text dealt with the Vaishnava teachings, as did the Vishnu Purana, and also to an extent the Vishnu Smriti.

The progress of Bhagavatism prevented widening influence of Buddhism and Jainism, and it largely overshadowed Mahayana Buddhism by Gupta times. Under the Gupta rulers Bhagavatism acquired considerable growth. Many temples were built and Vedic scriptures were interpreted. Bhagavatism preached the doctrine of incarnation, or *Avatara*. History was presented as a cycle of ten incarnations of Vishnu. It was believed that whenever the social order faced a crisis, Vishnu appeared in human form to save it. Each incarnation of Vishnu was considered necessary for the salvation of Dharma which coincided with the Varna divided society and the institution of the patriarchal family protected by the state. The deification of human hero Bhagavata-Narayana - Vasudeva Krishna and the concept of the Avatara of Vishnu strengthen the Bhagavata cult.

By the sixth century CE Vishnu became a member of the trinity of gods along with Siva and Brahma, but was a dominant god in his own right. After that several texts were written to popularize the virtues of worshipping him, but the most important was the Bhagavata Purana. The story in that text was recited by priests for several days. In medieval times Bhagavatagaras or places meant for Vishnu worship and recitation of the legends associated with him began to be established in eastern India. Several religious recitations, including the *Vishnusahasranama*, were composed for the benefit of Vishnu worshippers.

Gradually Bhagavatism and Bhagavata-Narayana-Vasudeva-Krishna was sidelined by Vishnu and the pure Vaishnavism. Shaivism also became popular in the period. Some of the Gupta kings were worshippers of Siva. Siva was worshiped in different forms and names, including human form. Many Siva temples were built during the Gupta period and some of them were massive structures. Grand festivals also marked the popularity of Saivism. Although Siva, the god of destruction, came to the fore at a later stage, does not seem to have been as important as Vishnu in the early phase of the Gupta rule. Sakti cult made some progress under the Guptas. *Sakti* was worshiped under different names such as *Bhavani* and *Bhagavathi*. Similarly, goddess Ganga and goddess Sarasvati were worshiped in different regions.

The importance of Bhakti introduced temples and image worship. Idol worship in the temples became a common feature of Hinduism from the Gupta period onwards. Side by side with idolatry, Vedic rituals sermons and sacrifices were revived. Vedic rituals and sacrifices were elaborate and complicated that required the services of many priests. They were very expensive and therefore only the rich people could afford them. Many festivals also began to be celebrated. Agricultural festivals observed by different classes of people were lent a religious garb and colour, and turned into useful sources of income for the priests. A temple oriented socio-economic and cultural system began to be emerged. Temples in spite of being centers of worship, were also acting as educational units, platforms of cultural exchanges, besides the focus of wealth called Brahmasvam.

Many temples oriented social classes such as architects, sculptures, painters, dancers, musicians, etc., emerged and some among them enjoyed special status in the society. Buddhism and Jainism continued to flourish a little in this period. In fact, Hinduism and Buddhism were almost evenly balanced; however, Buddhism was not as much important in the period as it was in the days of Asoka and Kanishka. Jainism also continued to be popular in certain specific areas of Western, Central, and Southern India. Gupta rulers were, by faith and exercise, followed the Brahmanical Hinduism; though they were tolerant towards all religious groups. We find no instances of persecution of the followers of Buddhism and Jainism.

This was also due to the change in the characters of Buddhism and Jainism which had come to acquire many features of Brahmanism or Hinduism. There was an acculturation process by give and take among Buddhism and Jainism and Hinduism. Some of the practices of Brahmanical Hinduism were adopted by Sramanas and vice-versa. The Gupta rulers patronised Buddhist scholars and monks and were lavish in donation to the Viharas. Samudragupta permitted Meghavarman, the ruler of Sri Lanka to build a Buddhist monastery at Gaya. Fa-hsien reported that there were several Viharas at different places and Buddhism was in a good state. Jainism was also gained a good from the liberal royal patronisation. It was in the Gupta period that the Jain council was held at Valabhi.

#### **5.1.10.3: Gupta Architecture:**

The Gupta rulers were patrons of religious architecture and they built many Viharas, Stupas, Pillars, and temples. Buddhism gave great impetus to art and architecture in Mauryan and post-Mauryan times and led to the raising of high Stupas or relic towers, the hewing of beautiful caves, and creation of massive stone statutes and pillars. The Stupas appeared as dome-like structures on round bases, principally of stone.

The Ajanta caves represent a clear combination of Gupta architecture, sculpture, and painting. The Buddhist University at Nalanda was set up in the fifth century, and its earliest structure, made of brick, relates to this period. The Gupta period saw the

beginning of structural temples that were built in indigenous style. The Brahmanical temples of the period are usually small and simple and represent an initial stage of development. Generally, they had a Garbhagriha each to accommodate the deity. One of the four corners there were beautifully decorated pillars. The outer wall of the temples was plain. On the whole they were grand and beautiful. Brick and stone were the chief building materials, and they were constructed on a high platform.

The intense religious purpose and the wave of creative enthusiasm are reflected in the architecture of the period. It was the age of experiments in temple forms and types. The following well-defined groups may be recognized among the temples of the Gupta period. (i) The flat roofed square temple with a shallow porch in front. (ii) The flat-roofed square temple with a covered ambulatory surrounding the sanctum and preceded by a porch in front, sometimes with a second storey above the shrine chamber. (iii) The square temple with a low and squat tower or *Shikhara* above; (iv) The circular temple with shallow projections at the four cardinal faces. The well known examples for the first group may be found in temple No. XVII at Sanchi (MP), Kankali Devi temple at Tigawa in Jabalpur (MP), and Vishnu and Varaha temples at Eran in Sagar (MP). The second group is represented by the Parvathi temple Nachna-Kuthara (MP), Siva temple Bhumara (MP), and remains of Brick temple at Baigram in Dinajpur (WB). The third group of the Gupta temples is represented by the Dasavatara temple Deogarh in Lalitpur (UP), Mahadeva temple in Nachna-Kuthara (MP), a ruined temple at Bhitargaon in Kanpur (UP), and the great Mahabodhi Buddhist temple Bodhi Gaya (Bihar). The last group is represented by a single temple, namely Maniyar Math (shrine of Mani Naga) in Rajagriha (Bihar).

#### **5.1.10.4: Gupta Art:**

The Gupta art was largely inspired by religion. Survivals of non-religious art from ancient India are few and far between. Gupta sculptures, paintings, and architecture attained a high level of excellence. Gupta age witnessed an unprecedented artistic activity that won the praise and admiration of many experts. The aesthetic sense and concepts of the artist underwent great change. Indigenous techniques of art were

perfected and new aesthetic ideals of form and beauty were formulated.

Gupta art was liberated Indian art from Greek influence. Greek aspects that characterised the Gandhara School of art ultimately disappeared in the Gupta period. Gupta art forms are noted for their simplicity and originality. Spiritual, graciousness and dignity are pleasing characteristics of the Gupta art. Gupta art signifies the comparative absence of nudity and obscene representation, and its expressions represented great spiritual depiction. Gupta ideals and models continued to dominate the art forms for a long time. The path of virtue is the path of beauty; Gupta sculptures are noted for the fusion of the beauty with pious idealism. Gupta age unravels the extraordinary progress of the sculptors who created the perfect types of divinities, both Buddhist and Brahmanical. They simply transformed Stone and metal into graceful figures. Innumerable images of the Buddha were sculptured during the time. Gupta sculptors made some modifications to the Gandhara idiom; introduced the curly hair in contrast to the well shaven head of the Kushana Buddha statues; introduced ornamentation in the halo behind the statues of Buddha; spiritual calmness of the face and eyes was given importance rather than physical beauty. The famous statues of Buddha bearing the above features are the Sarnath Buddha, standing Buddha of Mathura and Sultanganj Buddha.

The Sarnath Buddha is perfect representation of body and soul, aesthetic sense and beauty. The Sultanganj Buddha is a life-size copper image, more than 6 feet high, is now displayed in Birmingham museum. Significance of the Gupta Buddha images can be interpreted by the observation of R. C. Majumdar that “they present a beautiful figure, full of charm and dignity, a graceful pose and a radiant spiritual expression. In general, a sublime idealism, combined with a highly developed sense of rhythm and beauty characterize the Gupta sculptures”.

As the Guptas supported Brahmanism, images of Vishnu, Shiva, and some other Hindu gods were fashioned for the first time during their period. A large number of Siva and Vishnu images were created in this period. Some of the images of Vishnu and Siva are rated as excellent specimens unrivalled by any other creation. At many places,

the entire pantheon is portrayed with the chief god at the centre surrounded by his retainers and subordinates. The leading god is represented as large in size, with his retainers and subordinate gods drawn on a smaller scale. The legends and myths attached to Brahmanism and the epic stories of Rama and Krishna were visualized with extraordinary perfection.

#### **5.1.10.5: Gupta Painting:**

The art of painting reached its zenith in the Gupta period. Subject matter of the Gupta paintings are religious objects like land, water, vegetation, birds, beasts, human beings, demons, etc. The best pieces of the period are found in Ajanta and Ellora in Maharashtra, Bagh caves in Madhya Pradesh, Sittanavasal in Tamil Nadu, and in the Rock-cut chambers of Sri Lanka. Ajanta caves represent a combination of painting, sculpture, and architecture. The Ajanta paintings attracted great art critics who lavished their praises on the specimens. Although Ajanta paintings covered the period from the first century BCE to the seventh century CE, most of them relate to Gupta times. However, there is nothing to show that the Gupta rulers were the patrons of Ajanta paintings. Ajanta murals depict various events in the life of Gautama Buddha and the previous Buddhas whose birth stories are related in the Jatakas. A herd of elephants engaged in bathing in Cave No. X is noted for realistic perfection. The painting of princess lying on her death bed and surrounded by her relatives looking helplessly at her is a wonderful painting.

The renunciation of Buddha is another classic work that such a classic conception could hardly occur twice. Ajanta paintings are lifelike and natural, and the brilliance of their colours has not faded even after fifteen centuries. Fine arts attained notable progress during the Gupta age. Both Samudragupta and Chandragupta II were patrons of fine arts and other arts. The music and musicians played a great role in the Gupta society.

Most of the Gupta rulers patronised musicians in their courts. Samudragupta himself is represented on his coins playing the lute (Vina). We get a glimpse of singing and dancing in the sculptures of the period. Chandragupta II is credited with

maintaining nine luminaries in his court. The Gupta period is called the Golden Age of ancient India. Although this may be true in certain perspectives of cultural context such as Art, Architecture, Painting, and Literature, Gupta society was socially discriminated and economically disparate.

#### **5.1.10.6: Literature during the Gupta Era:**

The Gupta period is remarkable for the production of secular literature, which consisted of a fair degree of ornate court poetry. Bhasa was an important poet in the early phase of the Gupta period and wrote thirteen plays. He wrote in Sanskrit, but his dramas also contain a substantial amount of Prakrit. He was the author of a drama called *Dradiracharudatta*, which was later refashioned as *Mrichchhakatika* or the 'Little Clay Cart' by Sudraka. The play deals with the love affair of a poor Brahmana trader with a beautiful Courtesan, and is considered one of the best works of ancient drama. In his plays Bhasa uses the term Yavanika for the curtain, which suggests Greek contact. However, what has made the Gupta period particularly famous is the work of Kalidasa who lived in the second half of the fourth and the first half of the fifth century CE. He was the greatest poet of classical Sanskrit literature and wrote *Abhijnanashakuntalam* which is very highly regarded in world literature. It relates the love story of King Dushyanta and Sakuntala, whose son Bharata appears as a famous ruler. *Sakuntalam* was one of the earliest Indian works to be translated into European languages, the other work being the *Bhagavadgita*. The plays produced in India during the Gupta period have two common features. First, they are all comedies; no tragedies are found. Secondly, characters of the higher and lower classes do not speak the same language; women and Shudras featuring in these plays use Prakrit whereas the higher classes use Sanskrit. This period also shows an increase in the production of religious literature. Most works of the period had a strong religious bias.

The two great epics, namely the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, were almost completed by the fourth century CE. Although the epics and Puranas seem to have been compiled by the Brahmanas, they represent the Kshatriya tradition. They may reflect social developments but are not dependable for political history. The Ramayana relates

the story of Rama, has two important traditional moral strands. First, it idealizes the institution of family in which a son must obey his father, the younger brother must obey his elder brother, and the wife must be faithful to her husband under all circumstances. Second, Ravana symbolizes the force of evil, and Rama the force of righteousness. In the end, righteousness triumphs over the forces of evil, and a good order over a bad order. The story of Rama had a much wider social and religious appeal than the main narrative of the Mahabharata. There are many versions of the Ramayana in all the important Indian languages and also in those of Southeast Asia.

The Mahabharata too symbolizes the victory of righteousness over the forces of evil. The Bhagavadgita forms an important part of the Mahabharata. It teaches that a person must carry out the duties assigned to him by his caste and rank under all circumstances without any desire for reward. The Puranas follow the lines of the epics, and the earlier ones were finally compiled in Gupta times. They are full of myths, legends, sermons, etc., which were meant for the education and edification of the common people.

The period also saw the compilation of various Smritis or the law books in which social and religious norms were written in verse. The phase of writing commentaries on the Smritis begins after the Gupta period. The Gupta period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on the work of Panini and Patanjali. This period is particularly memorable for the compilation of *Amarakosha* by Amarasimha, who was a luminary in the court of Chandragupta II. This lexicon is learnt by rote by students learning Sanskrit in the traditional way. Overall, the Gupta period was a bright phase in the history of classical literature and one that developed an ornate style that was different from the old simple Sanskrit. From this period onwards we find a greater emphasis on verse than on prose, and also a few commentaries. Sanskrit was undoubtedly the court language of the Guptas, and although the period produced much brahmanical religious literature, it also gave birth to some of the earliest pieces of secular literature.



#### 5.1.10.7: Science under the Guptas:

In mathematics, the great mathematician Aryabhata contributed a lot to the world. He was lived in between the fifth and sixth centuries CE. He was a native of Kerala, completed his education from the ancient university of Nalanda and later settled at Pataliputra. Aryabhata authored his magnum opus *Aryabhatiyam*, which displays his awareness of both the zero system and the decimal system.

It appears that he was well versed in various kinds of calculations as well. A Gupta inscription of 448 CE from Allahabad district suggests that the decimal system was known in India at the beginning of the fifth century CE; can be corroborated with the Zero knowledge of Aryabhata. Aryabhata was an extraordinary teacher and scholar who had immense knowledge about not only mathematics but astronomy as well. He popularised the theory of heliocentricity as sun has to be located in the centre of the solar system where all the planets revolve around. Aryabhata's identification in fact revealed solar truth before Copernicus. He further identified the round in shape of the earth's rotation on its axis which leading to the day after night. Many superstitious beliefs he challenged by scientific reasons. He said the moon shining on account of Sun, and the eclipse is the shadow cast of earth and moon.

Aryabhata used epicycles in a same way of Ptolemy; both illustrate the inconsistent movement of some planets. It is said that Aryabhata's academic excellence was honoured through the position of Vice Chancellorship of Nalanda University by the Gupta emperor Buddha Gupta. *Romaka Siddhanta*, another understating in the field of astronomy, was compiled during the Gupta age. *Romaka Siddhanta* literally says it is the 'Doctrine of the Romans'. This is one of the five theories or Siddhantas elaborated by the *Panchasidhantika* of Varaha Mihira. *Romaka Siddhanta* is based on the Greco-Roman astronomical understanding on the universe.

#### 5.1.10.8: Technology under the Guptas:

The Gupta craftsmen distinguished themselves by their work in iron and bronze. Bronze images of the Buddha began to be produced on a considerable scale because of

the knowledge the smiths had of advanced metal technology. With regard to iron objects, the best example is the iron pillar found at Mehrauli in Delhi. Manufactured in the fourth century CE, the pillar has not gathered any rust over the subsequent sixteen centuries which is a great tribute to the technological skill of the craftsmen, although the arid conditions in Delhi may also have contributed to its preservation. It is unfortunate that the later Indian craftsmen could not develop this knowledge further.

#### **5.1.11: Decline of the Gupta Empire:**

The successors of Chandragupta II had to face an invasion by the Hunas from Central Asia in the second half of fifth century CE. Although initially the Gupta king Skandagupta took effective measures to stem the march of the Hunas into India, his successors proved to be weak and were unable to cope with the Huna invaders who excelled in horsemanship and possibly used stirrups made of metal. They could move quickly, and being excellent archers they seem to have achieved considerable success not only in Persia but also in India. By 485 CE, the Hunas occupied eastern Malwa and a substantial portion of central India where their inscriptions have been found. The intermediate regions, such as Punjab and Rajasthan, also passed into their hands. This must have drastically reduced the extent of the Gupta Empire at the beginning of the sixth century. Although the Huna power was soon overthrown by Yashodharman of Malwa who belonged to the Aulikara feudatory family, the Malwa prince also successfully challenged the authority of the Guptas and set up in 532 CE a pillar of victory commemorating his conquest of almost the whole of northern India. Yashodharman's rule was short-lived, but it 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 tended to declare themselves independent. The later Guptas of Magadha established their power in Bihar. Alongside them, the Maukharis rose to power in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and had their capital at Kannauj. It seems that by 550 CE, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had passed out of Gupta hands.

By the beginning of the sixth century we find independent princes issuing land

grants in their own right in northern Madhya Pradesh, though they used the Gupta Era in dating their charters. The rulers of Valabhi established their authority in Gujarat and western Malwa. After the reign of Skandagupta, that is, 467 CE, hardly any Gupta coin or inscription has been found in western Malwa and Saurashtra.

The loss of western India, which seems to have been complete by the end of the fifth century CE, must have deprived the Guptas of the rich revenues from trade and commerce and crippled them economically. In north India, the princes of Thanesar established their power in Haryana and then gradually moved on to Kannauj. The Gupta state may have found it difficult to maintain a large professional army because of the growing practice of giving land grants for religious and other purposes, which was bound to reduce revenues. Their income may have been also lost by the decline of foreign trade. The migration of a guild of silk-weavers from Gujarat to Malwa in 473 CE and their adoption of non-productive professions show that there was no great demand for the 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, but this proved to be of no avail. Although the rule of the court Guptas lingered till the sixth century, the imperial glory had vanished a century earlier.

#### **5.1.12: The Hunas:**

The authentic history of the Hunas or white Huns in Europe practically begins about the year 372 CE, when under a leader named Balamir (Balamber) they began a westward movement from their settlements in the steppes lying to the north of the Caspian. Some say that the Hun history may be started even Before the Common Era. They had powerful monarchies and extensive empires, and were illustrious conquerors and rulers. They had a glorious as well as an inglorious past of 1000 years. The great imperial polity of the Huns was almost ignored, which established at different times, as powerful monarchies in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

We can find mention of the India being invaded by the Hunas in the Vishnu Purana. The Hunas are also referred to in the Raghuvamsha Kalidasa. It seems that the Huns had some relations with India from early times, just as the Persians had. There was a great inroad of the Huns into India in the last part of the fifth century CE. Chinese traveller Sung-Yun (Sing-Yun) who came to India in 520 CE attests the fact. He speaks that the Ye-thas, who were a tribe of the Huns, destroyed India and set up their king Laelih, since which two generations have passed. Cunningham views that Laelih was the father of another prominent Hun king Toramana. The Huns first occupied Gandhara and advanced further into the interior of India about 460 CE, and finally confronted with the Gupta emperor Skandagupta. Skandagupta saved India for a time by defeating the Huns, and to commemorate the event he erected a pillar of victory at Bhitari. Owing to the repeated attacks of the Huns, whose hordes seem to have followed one after another, Skandagupta was in the end defeated. The Hunnic war brought great financial distress to Skandagupta; coinage degraded both in the purity of its gold and in the design and execution of the dies. Corresponding to the Hun wake, Skandagupta, the last most powerful Gupta ruler was died about 480 CE.

The Hunas were the worshipers of demons and severely hostile towards the believers of Buddha. They severely treated the old and the oppressed. Since 500 CE, the Huns brought stronger attacks on India. Toramana, one among the most powerful Huns, consolidated power in Punjab region. Toramana further forwarded by conquering Kausambi, and from there moved to settled in Malwa of Central India. Toramana assumed the Indian title of *Maharajadhiraja*, denotes the 'King of the Kings'. He authorised power by struck coins in his name and engraved inscriptions. The 11 feet high Eran inscription of Toramana inscribed on the chest of a colossal red sand-stone statue of a Boar, representing God Vishnu's incarnation, records the construction of a Vishnu temple. The establishment of Buddhist Monastery at Kura in the salt range province of Panjab (Pakistan) is recorded by another inscription of Toramana.

#### **5.1.12.1: Mihirakula:**

Toramana was succeeded by Mihirakula (Mihiragula) in 510 CE. Sakala

(Sialkot) in Punjab was his capital. Cosmas Indicopleustes, the monk-writer, refers to a king of the Huns, named Gollas, as ruling oppressively in India and drawing large tributes have been identified as Mihirakula. He nicknamed Mihirakula as the 'Attila of India'. Mihirakula had struck coins in his own name. The reign of Mihirakula witnessed the peak of Hun ascendancy in India.

It had spread far and wide beyond India. Bamiyan near Herat and Balkh the principal centres of Mihirakula. He levied tribute from forty countries, between the frontiers of Persia in the West, to Khotan on the frontiers of China in the east. Chinese pilgrim-envoy, Sung-Yun, from the king of China, visited his Court in about 519-520 CE. Mihirakula is referred to in the Rajatarangini by Kalhana, as a wicked king who was opposed to the local Brahmins and established new Brahmin settlements by importing Gandhara Brahmins into Kashmir and other parts of India. It is said that Mihirakula and the migrant Brahmins were followed some form of Zoroastrian belief system. But it is generally believed that Mihirakula was a staunch Saivite but notorious to Buddhists.

Contemporary Gupta ruler was Baladityaraja II, was a devout Buddhist and a patron of Nalanda monastic university. Baladityaraja II could not fight with Mihirakula because of his affiliation with the peace loving religion of Buddha. Instead of the emperor, struggle against the Huns was carried on by some powerful Gupta feudatories. One of them was a Maukhari chief, probably Ishvaravarman. Another chief who came to rescue of Baladityaraja II was probably Yashodharman of Malwa. Mihirakula was captured by the forces of Yashodharman in the meantime.

He was taken as prisoner, and then was sent away with all honour to his capital at Sakala. But taking advantage of the defeat of Mihirakula in the south, his brother had usurped the throne. Mihirakula therefore, sought and obtained an asylum in Kashmir. Later revolted and treacherously killed his sheltered king and occupied the throne of Kashmir. He next killed the king Gandhara and renewed his project of exterminating Buddhism. Mihirakula died in or about 548 CE.

### **5.1.13: Summary:**

The third century CE signalled the death knell of a great power, the Kushanas in the northern part of India and in the north western borderland of the subcontinent. “With the decline of the Kushanas, the political scenario was dominated by numerous independent indigenous powers like the Malavas, the Yaudheyas, the Arjunayanas and the Madrakas in eastern Punjab and Rajasthan, the Nagas in the Western Uttar Pradesh, the Maghas at Kausambi and a number of small tribal states and forest kingdoms in the south of Uttar Pradesh. These powers, however, could not prevent the rise of the Guptas in the middle Ganga valley.

The period from fourth century CE to sixth century CE is marked by the domination of the imperial Guptas for nearly two hundred and fifty years over north India. The Guptas were the first indigenous ruling family after the Mauryas to emerge as a powerful dynasty with a large territorial base in India. They were also the first major dynasty to have made inroads into south India raiding the eastern regions of the peninsula right down to the southern extremity of Andhra, encountering rulers like Salankayana of Vengi and Pallavas of Kanchi probably establishing a line of control meant to be a show of their prowess and dominance in a changing socio-political scene.

With the Guptas also emerged the first state with a dominant Brahmanical-Puranic ideology and social institutions establishing the Varna hierarchy. A rich literary tradition in classical Sanskrit developed and norms were evolved to create a new order in socio-political organisation based on texts like the Dharmasastras, which sought to establish the Brahmana-Kshatriya dominance. A distinct feature of the monarchical system under the Guptas was the greater use of the concept of the divinity of the ruler. The Guptas adopted the policy of administrative decentralisation.” Several powers conquered by the Guptas were allowed to function independently. They were subjugated but were not incorporated into the empire. These feudatories paid tribute to the Guptas but at times some of them did not mention Guptas as their suzerain in their official records. The practice of land grants and also grants of villages started under the Satavahanas and continued under the Guptas.

These grants carried with them administrative rights which led to the

decentralisation of administrative authority. Rights of subinfeudation were given to the donee. Vishti or forced labour was applied over the common subjects.

The Gupta Empire divided into provinces and feudatory domains, was internally weakened by quarrels in the royal household. Hereditary succession in the high official posts as well as in the families of the feudatory rulers resulted in the tendency to concentrate power in the hands of certain groups which naturally threatened the stability of the empire. Ultimately the empire, smarting under the effect of the Huna invasions, could not effectively check the growth of the power of the feudatory families. Vishnu Gupta was the last of the imperial Gupta monarchs. The empire virtually ceased to exist by the middle of the sixth century CE. At the close of the sixth century north India experienced the emergence of a number of ruling houses who were originally vassals of the Guptas in different areas.

Though the strength and power of all these ruling houses varied, some of them made their presence felt and at the turn of the seventh century north India saw the rise of most important power under Harshavardhana, the Pushyabhutisor Vardhana dynasty.

#### **5.1.14: Keywords:**

Madhyadesa - Anuganga - Prayag - Saketa - Murundas - Harisena - Prayaga Prasasti - Atavika Rajya - Chinese source - Meghavarman - Gaya Stupa - Prabhavati - Vakataka - Pillar Inscription of King Chandra - Vikramaditya - Sakari - Bhukti - Uparika - Vishaya - Vishayapati - Vithi - Grama - Gramapati - Gupta Feudal Development - Brahman Supremacy - Narada Smriti - Caste Proliferation - Chandalas - Subordination of Women - Stridhana - Women Property Right - Katyayana - Niyoga - Widow Remarriage - Decline in Long Distance Trade - Chines Silk - Classical Age of Indian Literature - Vedic Learning - Ghatika - Acharya - Upadhyaya - Theistic, Monistic, Atheistic, and Dualistic Streams – Nalanda University - Kumara Gupta I - Sakraditya - I-Tsing - Taxila University - Daraka Acharya - Bhakti Cult - Bhagavatism - Pancharatnas - Bhagavatas - Krishna Vasudeva - Vishnu Purana - Vishnu Smriti - Valabhi Council - Beginning of Structural Temples - liberation of Indian Art - Standing Buddha of Mathura - Sultanganj Buddha - Ajanta and Ellora Paintings - Jataka Paintings - Bhasa - Sudraka - Kalidasa -

Ramayana and Mahabharata - Amarasingha - Aryabhata - Arabic Numerals - Romaka Siddhanta - Hunas - Vishnu Purana - Yezha - Laeliah - Toramana - Buddhist Monastery at Kura - Mihirakula - Sung Yun - Baladityaraja II - Ishvaravarman.

### 5.1.15: Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Write short notes on:
  - a) Pillar Inscription of King Chandra
  - b) Gaya Stupa
  - c) Liberation of Indian Art
  - d) Bhagavatism e. Mihirakula
2. What were the material advantages of early Guptas that helped them to consolidate their political power in north India?
3. Enumerate the conquests of Samudragupta indicate by Prayag Prasasti.
4. Do you agree with the statement that 'the region of Chandragupta II was a high watermark in the Gupta history?'
5. Substantiate your view. Discuss the causes for the decline of Gupta Empire.
6. Describe the political condition of India immediately the after Guptas.
7. Sketch the rise and growth of Guptas as a major political power in India.
8. 'One of the important achievements of Gupta rulers is that they organized a fairly good system of administration in an age of intermittent war and insecurity'. Give your view on this statement.
9. 'The University of Nalanda was not only an educational centre of international fame but was renowned for its cosmopolitan and catholic character'. Do you agree with the view? Substantiate.
10. 'Gupta Age was the Golden Age of ancient India'. Do you agree with the statement? Substantiate your view.



## **Lesson 5.2: Harshavardhana**

### **Structure**

- 5.2.1: Objectives
- 5.2.2: Introduction
- 5.2.3: Harshavardhana (606 CE-647 CE)
- 5.2.4: Harsha's Administration
- 5.2.5: Religion under Harsha
- 5.2.6: Literature under Harsha
- 5.2.7: Hsuan Tsang
- 5.2.8: Summary
- 5.2.9: Keywords
- 5.2.10: Self-Assessment Questions.

### **5.2.1: Objectives**

- To discern the transition from ancient to medieval times in North India.
- To identify the political atmosphere of seventh century CE North India.
- To discern the continuity and changes in the administrative system in North India during Harshavardhana.
- To understand the cultural development of seventh century CE North India.
- To know the religious changes underwent in India during Harsha's age.
- To identify the literary development during Harshavardhana.

### **5.2.2: Introduction:**

The Guptas, with their seat of power in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, ruled over north and western India for about 160 years until the mid-sixth century CE. Then north India again split up into several kingdoms. The white Hunas established their supremacy over Kashmir, Punjab, and Western India from about 460 CE onwards. North and Western India passed under the control of about half a dozen feudatories who parcelled out the Gupta Empire among themselves. Gradually one of these dynasties ruling at Thanesar in Haryana extended its authority over all the other feudatories. The ruler who brought

this about was Harshavardhana.

### 5.2.3: Harshavardhana (606 CE-647 CE):

Harsha made Kannauj his seat of power, and from there he extended his authority in all directions. By the seventh century Pataliputra fell on bad days and Kannauj came to the foreline.

Earlier Pataliputra had her power due to the importance of trade and commerce, along with the widespread use of money. Tolls were collected from the traders who came to the city from the east, west, north, and south across four rivers. However, once trade declined, money became scarce, and officers and soldiers were paid through land grants, the city lost its importance. Power shifted to the military camps called *Skandhavaras*. The places of strategic importance were beginning to be dominated by long stretches of feudal manors. The newly emerged military land owning class was mainly from Kanauj. Situated in Farukabad district of Uttar Pradesh, Kanauj shot into political prominence from the second half of the sixth century onwards. Fortification of places in the plains of Pataliputra was more difficult, but Kannauj was situated on an elevated area which was easily fortifiable. Located right at the centre of the doab, Kannauj was well fortified in the seventh century. Therefore, to exercise control over the eastern and western wings of the doab, soldiers could be moved by both land and water routes. Emergence of Kanauj as a centre of political power from the reign of Harsha onwards typifies the coming of the full swing feudal age in north India just as Pataliputra largely represents the transitional feudal order.

The early history of Harsha's reign is reconstructed from a study by Banabhatta, who was his court poet and who wrote a book called *Harshacharita*. This can be supplemented by the account of the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang, who visited India in the seventh century CE and stayed in the country for about fifteen years. Harsha's inscriptions speak of various types of taxes and officials. Harsha is called the last great Hindu emperor of India, but he was neither a staunch Hindu nor the ruler of the whole country. His authority was limited to north India excluding Kashmir. Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Orissa were under his direct control, but his sphere of

influence spread over a much wider area. It appears that the peripheral states acknowledged his sovereignty. In eastern India he faced opposition from the Saivite king Shashanka of Gauda, who felled the Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gaya.

However, Shashanka's death in 619 CE put an end to this hostility. Harsha's southward march was stopped at the Narmada River by the Chalukya king Pulakesin (Pulakesi), who ruled over a great part of modern Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala with his capital at Badami in the modern Bijapur district of Karnataka. Apart from this, Harsha did not face any serious opposition and succeeded in giving a measure of political unity to a large part of the country.

#### **5.2.4: Harsha's Administration:**

The reign of Harshavardhana is an example of transition from ancient to medieval times in India. Harsha governed his empire on the same lines as did the Guptas, but his administration had become feudal and decentralized. It is stated that Harsha had 100,000 horses and 60,000 elephants.

This appears astonishing because the Mauryas, who ruled over virtually the entire country except the interior South, maintained only 30,000 cavalries and 9000 elephants. Harsha could have had a larger army only if he was in a position to mobilize the support of all his feudatories in the time of war. Evidently every feudatory contributed his quota of footmen and horses, and thus made the imperial army vast in numbers. Land grants continued to be made to priests for special services rendered to the state. More importantly, Harsha is credited with the grant of land to the officers by issuing charters.

These grants allowed the same concessions as priests were allowed by the earlier grants. The Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang informs us that Harsha's revenues were divided into four parts. One part was earmarked for the expenditure of the king, a second for scholars, a third for the endowment of officials and public servants, and a fourth for religious purposes. He also tells us that ministers and high officers of the state were endowed with land. The feudal practice of rewarding and paying officers with

grants of land seems to have begun under Harsha. This explains why we do not have very many coins issued by this king. Hsuan Tsang reports that according to the Harsha's laws, severe punishments were inflicted for crime.

Robbery was considered to be a second treason for which the right hand of the robber was amputated. Interestingly, the same Hsuan Tsang further reports that, about whose welfare, special care may have been taken by the government, was robbed of his belongings. It shows that the law and order of the state was not well maintained. It is stated that, under the influence of Buddhism, the severity of punishment was mitigated and criminals were imprisoned for life.

#### **5.2.5: Religion under Harsha:**

The Buddhists were divided into eighteen sects when the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang was in India. The old centres of Buddhism had fallen on bad days. The most famous centre was Nalanda, which maintained a great university meant for the students all over the world. It is said to have had as many as 10,000 students.

The Nalanda monastic University was well supported like the early rulers by Harsha where he endowed a number of villages for its maintenance. Nalanda thus had a huge monastic establishment during the reign of Harshavardhana. Harsha followed a tolerant religious policy. A Saiva in his early years, he gradually became a great patron of Buddhism. As a devout Buddhist he convened a grand assembly at Kannauj to widely publicize the doctrines of Mahayanism. The assembly was attended not only by Hsuan Tsang and the Kamarupa ruler Bhaskaravarman, but also by the kings of twenty states and by several thousand priests belonging to different sects. Two thatched halls were built to accommodate 1000 persons each. However, the most important construction was a huge tower in the middle of which a golden statue of the Buddha, as tall as the king himself, was placed. Harsha worshipped the image and gave a public dinner.

The discussion in the conference was initiated by Hsuan Tsang who dilated on the virtues of Mahayana Buddhism and challenged the audience to refute his arguments.

However, nobody came forward for five days, and then his theological rivals conspired to take the pilgrim's life. Hearing of this plot, Harsha threatened to behead anybody causing Hsuan Tsang the slightest harm. Suddenly the great tower caught fire and there was an attempt to assassinate Harsha. Harsha then arrested 500 Brahmanas. He banished most of them, and also executed a few. After Kanauj, he held at Prayag a great assembly which was attended by all the tributary princes, ministers, nobles, etc. On this occasion, an image of the Buddha was worshipped, and discourses were given by Hsuan Tsang. At the end of it, Harsha made huge donations, and according to a tradition, he gave away everything except his personal clothing. Hsuan Tsang speaks of Harsha in glowing terms. The king was kind, courteous, and helpful to him, and the pilgrim was able to visit the various parts of the empire.

#### **5.2.6: Literature under Harsha:**

Banabhatta gives us a flattering account of the early years of his patron in his book *Harshacharita* in an ornate style which became a model for later writers.

Harsha is remembered not only for his patronage and learning but also for the authorship of three plays: *Priyadarshika*, *Ratnavali*, and *Nagananda*. Bana attributes great poetical skill to him, and some later authors consider him to have been a Literary Monarch. However, Harsha's authorship of the three dramas is doubted by several medieval scholars. It is held that they were composed by a person called Dhavaka in the name of Harsha for some consideration. In both ancient and medieval India, various achievements, including high literary attainments, were ascribed to a king in order to boost his image.

The practice of praising the patron initiated by Harisena in the time of Samudragupta became common and well established under Harsha. Evidently, the object in such cases was not only to win the favour of the king but also to validate and exalt his position in the eyes of his rivals and subjects.

### **5.2.7: Hsuan Tsang:**

The reign of Harsha is historically important because of the visit of the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang, left China in 629 CE and travelled all the way to India. After a long stay in India, he returned to China in 645 CE. He had come to study at Nalanda, besides to know more about Buddha and his scriptures. The pilgrim spent many years in Harsha's court and travelled widely in India. Under his influence Harsha became a great supporter of Buddhism and made generous endowments to it.

The pilgrim vividly describes Harsha's court and life in those days, and this account is richer and more reliable than that of Fa-hsien, shedding light on the social and economic life as well as the religious sects of the period. Hsuan Tsang's account shows that Pataliputra was in a state of decline, as was Vaishali. On the other hand, Prayag and Kanauj had become important. The Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are reported to have led a simple life, but the nobles and priests led a luxurious life. This indicates differentiation in the ranks of each of the two higher varnas. The majority in each of them may have taken to agriculture. Hsuan Tsang calls the Shudras agriculturists, which is significant. The earlier texts represent them as serving the three higher varnas. The Chinese pilgrim notes the living conditions of the untouchables such as scavengers, and executioners. The untouchables lived outside the villages, and ate garlic and onion, and when they entered the town, they announced their entry by shouting loudly so that people might keep away from them.

### **5.2.8: Summary:**

The post-Gupta period, also called the early medieval phase, in Indian history was marked by the presence of many political powers. There was no single political master over the whole of North India. While this phase witnessed endemic clashes among many powers, these political powers were mostly local or regional powers. The Vardhana Empire under Harshavardhana was the most expanded and powerful among them. Harsha governed his empire on the same lines as did the Guptas, but his administration had become more decentralized. There is little trace of monarchical elements in the Harsha polity.

The spread and proliferation of monarchical system have significantly contributed to the nature of Harsha's state. The dissection of the sovereignty of the apex political authority resulted in the emergence of many political pockets which came to be controlled by local and regional rulers who rose to prominence at the cost of a central and /or an apex political authority. The polity is characterised as 'feudal', as opposed to the centralised system. Harsha is called the last great Hindu emperor of India; but he was neither a staunch Hindu nor the ruler of the whole country. His authority was limited to North India excluding Kashmir. Harsha's southward expansion was shuttered by Chalukyan Pulakeshin.

Religious development of Harsha and his period was significant. Harsha was tolerant in religion. A Saiva in his early years gradually became a great patron of Buddhism. Buddhism was divided into eighteen sects during his time. As a devotee he convened the grand Buddhist assembly of Kannauj to publicize the doctrines of his new faith. Harsha is remembered not only for patronage and learning but also for his mastery in literary authorship by three plays. Harsha's rule historically attested the visit of Hsuan Tsang. The Chinese pilgrim vividly shed light on the socio, economic and cultural ambiance of the period. The reign of Harshavardhana is a period of transition from ancient to medieval times in India which contributed significant chapters in the history of India.

#### **5.2.9: Keywords:**

Kannauj - Skandhavaras - Feudal Age - Shashanka Gauda - Bodhi Tree - Pulakeshin - Buddhism - Nalanda - Assembly of Kannauj - Mahayana Buddhism - Banabhatta - Harshacharita - Hsuan Tsang - Priyadarshika - Ratnavali - Nagananda - Dhavaka - 'Royal Authors Are Only Half Authors' - Hsuan Tsang's Account.

#### **5.2.10: Self-Assessment Questions:**

1. Write short notes on;
  - a) Assembly of Kannauj
  - b. Banabhatta

c. Hsuan Tsang

d. 'Royal Authors Are Only Half Authors'.

2. Analyse the achievements of Harshavardhana as a monarch. Do you consider him as the last empire builder of ancient India? Give reasons.
3. What light does the account of Hsuan Tsang throw on Indian life?
4. 'Harsha's administration was feudal and decentralized'. Examine.
5. Describe the religion in the time of Harsha.
6. It is argued that 'Harsha was neither the last great Hindu emperor of India or the ruler of the whole country'. What is your opinion? Substantiate your arguments.

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