LESSON 1

DEVELOPMENTS FROM SIXTH TO FOURTH CENTURIES B.C.

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JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

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

Sixth century BC also witnessed many religious movements in different parts of the world. Heraclitus in Eoinia Island, Socrates in Greece, Confucious in China, Zoroaster in Persia, Isaiah in Babylon preached new ideas. These widely separated parts of the world displayed a wave of discontentment with the traditions of Kingships, priesthood and ritualistic sacrifices. People were waking up to find answers to their questions regarding salvation and the ultimate Truth. At the same time, Hinduism by this time had made its influence so widely spread on Indian soil that people started realizing that the degeneration in Indian society was mainly because of the evils of Hinduism. Hinduism was associated with perverted values. The emphasis on sacrifices, rituals and the dominance of Brahmanas had vitiated the original doctrines of Hinduism. Society was largely guided by Brahmanism which was firmly established by now and priesthood had also become predominant. It was against this background of exploitation of the masses by the Brahmanas and discrimination among people on the basis of caste system that Mahavira and Buddha revolted. They came forward as reformers very much determined to clean Hinduism of its innumerable evil practices and evils. They did not want to start new or independent religions but drew their inspiration from the teachings as embodied in the Upanishads. They provided a rational approach to handle the problems that had crept in the Indian society as a result of the prevailing complexities. They did not approve the costly religious rituals and bloody sacrifices. There was hatred against the prevailing social order which led to pitiable conditions of the low born. The changing features of social and economic life, such as the growth of towns, expansion of the artisan class and the rapid development of trade and commerce also focused on the necessity to bring about changes in society and religion. The new ideas brought about by the reform movements challenged the established social order particularly the caste-system, the religious rituals and sacrifices, the supremacy of the Brahmanas, particularly by the Kshatriyas, and all the dead customs of the society. Outwardly, this spirit of the age was against the existing organisation of the society and inwardly against the caste system. It was based on elevation of man individually and spiritually. It emphasized personal liberty and purity and claimed that every individual had the right to attain Nirvana. These new religious ideas emerged out of the prevailing socio-economic and religious conditions of the times.
Social And Economic Life of North-West India

Post-Vedic society was clearly divided into four varnas: Brahmanas, Kshatiryas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Each varna was assigned well-defined function. Though varna was based on birth, the two higher varnas captured power, prestige and privileges at the cost of the two lower varnas. The Brahmanas who were allotted the functions of priests and teachers, claimed the highest status in society. They demanded several privileges, including those of receiving gifts and exemption from taxation and punishment. The next in hierarchy were the Kshatiryas who lived on the taxes collected from the cultivators. The third category thrived on agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade. They were the main tax payers. All these three classes were considered dvijas or twice born. The Sudras formed the lowest rung of the social order and were meant to serve the upper three castes as domestic slaves, agricultural labourers etc. in post-Vedic times. They were the down-trodden class because of the varna. This varna-divided society generated frustration among the adversely affected people. The Vaishyas and the Sudras were not satisfied with the division of society on the basis of birth but we do not have evidence of their open resistance. The reaction came in strongly from the Kshatriya class because Mahavira and Buddha, both belonged to Kshatriya clan.

However, the real cause of the rise of these new religions lay in the spread of a new agrarian economy in north-eastern India. The primary factor that revolutionized the material life of the people around 700 BC in eastern UP and Bihar was the beginning of the use of iron. Iron implements were made and used for agricultural purposes which resulted in enhancement of agriculture land and its production. Increased agriculture production led to the growth of trade and commerce. It resulted in the growth of cities where the population of traders and artisans was concentrated. It required changes in society and certain well entrenched traditions. The Vaishyas, having accumulated wealth and property, were gaining higher social status. The trading and commercial communities i.e. Vaishyas wanted their private property to be secure and social and religious sanctions for foreign trade and sea-travelling which, by then, was not sanctioned by the Vedic religion. These economic conditions necessitated changes in the society as well. The newly emerged financially strong class wanted changes in their status but the Kshatriyas took advantage of utilizing this opportunity to gain more importance and abolish the supremacy of the priestly class. That is why the preceptors of both Jainism and Buddhism, which came forward as reform movements and later became most popular religious movements, were Kshatriya princes. On the basis of the support that they acquired from Vaishyas and Sudras, the Kshatriyas opposed the supremacy of the Brahmanas, the prevalence of caste system, the complexities of rituals and sacrifices and desired change in caste according to Karma and not according to birth. Both these religious sects, therefore provided grounds to bring about changes in the social and economic set up. It was for this reason that Jainism discarded agriculture but did not protest against trade and Buddhism exhibited favourable opinion towards sea-voyages.

Prof. R.S. Sharma in his article on class formation and its material basis in the upper Gangetic Basin(1000-500 BC) says that northern India entered into a full-fledged iron age by the sixth century BC. In the second phase of iron associated with the NBP levels (500-200 BC) we encounter lot of agricultural implements. The use of iron led to the urban settlements in UP, Magadha and Bihar. Now, the village was not the neolithic village growing essentially in isolation, nor the chalcolithic village with restricted trade and inter-relationships. It was the prosperous iron using village, whose prosperity increased with easier access to both iron ore and more land for cultivation and this led to surplus production. Thus, this became the stable base for the growth of towns. This urbanization of the Gangetic valley is often referred to as the
sacred urbanization with iron technology as its crucial factor. Surplus produce and specialisation of crafts, increase in trade based on production as well as improved communication (both by land and through the use of river navigation) all combined together to make urbanisation possible. This in turn produced the characteristics associated with urban centres the building of fortified cities, the introduction of script, the use of coinage (punch marked coins), a wide range of intellectual and metaphysical speculation (from the Carvakas to the Ajivikas), some of which reflected the requirement and aspirations of the new urban groups, the artisans the merchants and the traders.

The Jaina canonical writings mention different kinds of urban centres in the age of Mahavira. Taking the country as a whole nearly sixty towns are assigned to the period 600-300 BC. The big cities like Sravasti were 20 in number and 6 of them were important enough to be associated with the passing away of Gautama Buddha. These were Champa, Rajgraha, Saketa, Kaushambi, Benaras and Kushinara. Thus, from Buddha’s time onwards, a remarkable beginning of town life in north-eastern India seems to have taken place.

Trade was both the cause and effect of increasing urbanization. The Jatakas, the Buddhist birth stories, make numerous references to caravans with 500 or 1000 carts going from one place to another. One such group of 500 carts is mentioned as passing by a street where Gautama Buddha was meditating. Iron technology by helping to clear jungles facilitated the process of moving from place to place.

Trade, on an increasing scale, led to the birth of money economy i.e. coinage. The earliest coins discovered cannot be dated beyond the time of Buddha. These coins were issued by the merchants and bore punch-marks. The use of coins in this period seems to have became fairly common and even the price of a dead mouse is stated in terms of money.

Diverse arts and crafts developed. Apart from such service occupations as those of the washerman and dyer, the painter, the barber, the tailor, weaver and the cook, several manufacturing crafts (reed-working pottery, vehicle making, needle-making, gold smithery, metal smithery, carpentry, ivory-working garland-making and silk manufacturing) are mentioned in the early Buddhist writings. The existence of so many crafts implies increasing specialisation in the field of commodity production.

Now, the artisans and craftsmen were often organised into guilds. Later, Buddhist works refer to the existence of 18 guilds in Rajgraha, though the names of only four, wood workers, smiths, leather workers and painters are specified. Each guild inhabited a particular section of the town. This led not only to the localization of crafts and industries but also to their hereditary transmission from father to son. Every guild was presided over by a head (Jeththaka). The Setthis, who also sometimes headed the guilds, handled trade and industries. They generally lived in towns but those among them who were granted revenues of villages for their maintenance (bhogagama) by the king had to keep links with the countryside. The Setthi was in some sense a financier or banker and sometimes also head of a trade guild. He was treated with respect even by absolute and despotic kings. All this implies that in towns, artisans and Setthis were emerging as important social groups.

In the countryside also, a new social group was coming up to the forefront by virtue of its wealth. The greater part of land came to be owned by gahapati (peasant-proprietors). In the
earlier period, the word gahapati (literally the lord of the house) stood for the host and principal sacrificer at any considerable sacrifice. But in the age of the Buddha, it came to mean the head of a large patriarchal household of any caste who got respect primarily because of his wealth, which in the post-vedic period was measured not so much in cattle as in land. References to several affluent gahapatis occur in the early Buddhist writings. The gahapatis Mendaka is described as paying wages to the royal army, as donor he is said to have instituted 1250 cow herds to serve the Buddha and his samgha. Anathapindika, another gahapati is said to have paid a fabulous price for Jetavana, a plot of land which he donated to the Buddha. Sometimes, the gahapatis are also represented as lending money to promising shopkeepers. The emergence of the gahapatis from the Vedic householder to a comparatively wealthy head of the household may indicate the growing disparity of wealth within the society. Common people, slaves and labourers, seem to have coveted his wealth and wished his harm, often he is depicted as keeping a bodyguard to protect himself.

Accustomed to the old ways of life some individuals found it difficult to adjust themselves to the breakup of the old tribal society caused by new material conditions which gave rise to social inequalities. Whatever may have been the ultimate objectives of Buddhism, ordinary people, whose support really mattered to the new religion, were certainly attracted towards it because of its successful response to the challenge posed by the social developments generated by the material conditions created by the use of iron, plough agriculture, coins and the rise of towns in eastern UP and Bihar.

Many aboriginal non-Aryan tribes, which remained unaffected by the knowledge of iron-technology lived at a very low level of material culture. The cultural lack of the aboriginals, living mainly as hunters and fowlers in contrast to the varna-divided society, which possessed the knowledge of implements and agriculture, perhaps led in the post-Vedic period to the growth of untouchability.

The newly developed features of the social and economic life of people did not fit in with the Vedic ritualism and animal sacrifice. The conflict between the Vedic religious practices and the aspirations of the rising social groups led to the search of new religions and philosophical ideas which would fit with the basic changes in the material life of the people. Thus, in the sixth century BC, in the Gangetic valley there emerged many new religious teachers who preached against Vedic religion. Ajita Kesha Kambalin propagated a thorough going materialistic doctrine called annihilationism (uchchaedavada). From this, the Lokayata or Charvaka school of philosophy is believed to have derived a great deal. Pakudha Katyayana, another religious leader, held that just as the earth, water, air and light are primary indestructible elements, so are sorrow, happiness and life. It has been suggested that from his ideas, the later Vaisheshika school originated. Purana Kassapa, the third contemporary preacher, which regarded the soul as distinct from the body laid the foundations of what later came to be known as the Sankhya school of philosophy. But of all the sects prevalent in northern India around the 6th century BC, only Jainism and Buddhism came to stay in India as independent religions.

Also, the urban setting in the age of the Buddha gave rise to certain features of town life which did not find favour with the Brahmanical society. The urban surroundings and breakup of the old tribal family created a class of alienated women who took to prostitution as a source of livelihood. So prostitution, characteristic of urban society, is tolerated by Buddhists but not by Brahmanas.
The use of iron weapons revolutionized military equipment and added to political importance of warriors in contrast to that of priests. They naturally claimed a position of equality in other fields. The conflict between the interests of the Brahmans and Kshatriya is evident in many texts. This partly explains the Kshatriya origin of Mahavira and Gautama and also the fact that from the beginning of Buddhism texts accord the first place to the Kshatriya and the second to the Brahmans. As the Kshatriya rulers could be maintained only by regular payment of taxes, so both Brahmanical and Buddhist texts of the age of the Buddha justify the royal share of the peasant’s produce on the ground that the King gives protection to the people (contract). In this way, with the change from nomadic pastoralism to settled agrarian villages, tribal identity was extended to territorial identity as is reflected in tribal names being given to geographical areas. This, in turn, gave rise to the concept of the state with both monarchical and non-monarchical form of government and woven into this concept were the institutions of caste and property, as already pointed out. With the rise of city life in the Ganges valley, a new pattern developed in the sub-continent, the cultural dominance of the Ganga region – the Hindustan of later centuries – exerted itself over all the regions.

Jainism

The changing scenario of the socio-economic order of the 6th century BC led to the establishment of Jainism and Buddhism as heterodox sects later to be popularly known as reform movements. Jain tradition speaks of twenty four Tirthankaras (prophets). In the Rigveda Mantras there are references to Rishaba, the first Tirthankara as claimed by Jains. However, the first twenty two Tirthankaras have no historical foundation. Only the last two, Parsva and Mahavira, are historical personages. Very little is known about the life of Parsva. It is believed that he was the son of the King of Banaras who became an ascetic at the age of thirty, got enlightenment after 84 days of penance, gave his message to the people up to the age of 100 years and died in Bihar nearly 250 years before Mahavira.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The principal sects of the Jainism are two, Svetambara and Digambara. There are differences between the two sects regarding versions of some incidents of the life of Mahavira,
the type of food taken by Jaina preacher or munis, and the question whether women could attain Nirvana or not. But the basic difference is on the use of clothes. The preachers of Svetambara wore white clothes while the preachers of Digambara sect practice complete nudity. Some scholars maintain that Prasva did not ask his followers to discard clothes but Mahavira insisted on nudity. Jain sacred texts known as 12 Angas were also non-acceptable to Digambaras as authentic. The original doctrines taught by Mahavira were contained in 14 old texts known as ‘purvas’. In the first council at Pataliputra, the Jaina canon was divided into 12 sections which the Svetambaras accepted but Digambaras refused to accept this claiming that all old scriptures were lost. At the second council held at Vallabhi new additions were made in the form of ‘Upangas’ or minor sections. Among the 12 angas the Acharayanga Sutta and the Bhagwati Sutta are the most important. While the former deals with the code of conduct which a Jaina monk is required to follow, the later expound the Jaina doctrines in a comprehensive manner.

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

Buddhism

Of all the religious preachers of the sixth century BC, Gautama Buddha is the best known. Gautama Buddha or Siddhartha was a contemporary of Mahavira born in a royal family of the Sakyas at Kapilavastu in the southern part of present Nepal in the year 566 BC. Siddhartha (original name of Gautama Buddha) renounced the world at the age of twenty nine. He moved from place to place in search of truth for seven years and then attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya under pipal tree. From this time onwards, he began to be called the Buddha or the enlightened one.

Though his life was spent in royal splendor, it failed to attract the mind of Gautama. As traditions describe, he was deeply affected by the sight of an old man, a sick person, a dead body and an ascetic. The misery of the human life left a deep impact on Gautama. To find a solution to the misery of mankind, he spent years as a wandering ascetic. From a sage called Alara Kalama he learned the technique of meditation and the teachings of the Upnishads. After attaining the supreme knowledge, he proceeded to Sarnath near Varanasi to deliver his first sermon which is known as ‘Dharma Chakra Pravartana’ (setting in motion the wheel of Dharma).
Asvajit, Upali, Magallana, Sariputra and Ananda were the first five disciples of Buddha. His message laid down the foundation of both Buddhist religion and philosophy which in course of time spread far and wide to Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, etc.

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

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

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

Buddhism laid emphasis on the law of ‘Karma’ by which the present is determined by the past actions. If an individual has committed no sins, he is not born again. This is an important part of Lord Buddha’s teachings. Buddha preached that the ultimate goal of one’s life is to attain Nirvana, the eternal state of peace and bliss, which is free from desire and sorrow, decay or disease and of course from birth and death. Therefore, annihilation of desire is the real problem. Prayers and sacrifices will not end desire nor will rituals and ceremonies as emphasized by Vedic religion but he stressed on moral life of an individual.

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

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

The teaching of Buddha put forward a serious challenge to the existing Brahmanical order. Buddha’s liberal and democratic approach quickly attracted the people of all sections. His attack on the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmanas was welcomed by the lower orders. Irrespective of caste, creed and sex, people were welcomed in the new order. Buddha rejected the authority of the Vedas and condemned animal scarifies. He detested the complex and meaningless rituals. He strongly believed that sacrifices and rituals could neither help a person to wash away his sins nor benefit any sinner by performing various ritualistic practices. Max Muller wrote “What was felt by Buddha had been felt more or less intensely by thousands and this was the secret of his success”. The practice of social equality on which Buddhism was based was the call of the day. Buddha understood and preached what masses desired at that time. Thus Buddhism represented the spirit of its age.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Comparison and Contrast Between Jainism and Buddhism**

Mahavira and Buddha were contemporaries and there was much in common between them. It is because of the similarities between the two that some scholars think that Jainism owes it origin to Buddhism or Jainism is the oldest branch of Buddhism. Berth wrote ‘Jainism is
a sect which took rise in Buddhism’. Others like Weber and Lassen believe that Jainism branched off from Buddhism. But modern scholars disagree with the above views and maintain that the two religions have a lot in common but the basic difference in the philosophies of the two makes each of them a distinct religion. Both of them were the products of intellectual, spiritual and social forces of their age which arose as a challenge to the existing Bramanical order. Both possessed Aryan cultural background and were inspired by Upanishads especially the Samkhya – Yoga, Atheism, pessimism about human life being full of misery, doctrines of transmigration of soul and theory of Karma and the belief in dualism about spirit and matter are all essence of Samkhya Yoga which Jainism and Buddhism adopted with some modifications. Both were started by Kshatriya class who appealed and gave Social status to the Vaishya and Sudra castes. They emerged in eastern India, a place which had retained some feature of pre-Aryan culture. Their common place of origin and their newly acquired support from the economically prosperous Vaishyas and socially oppressed Sudras all together helped in the publicity of their principles. Their attack on caste system, rituals and sacrifices, supremacy of the Brahmans led the people to acquire new dimension to deal with problems of life and living. Both aimed at Nirvana or salvation from the cycle of birth and death as the ultimate aim of life. Both laid stress on pure and moral life for spiritual upliftment. Both emphasized Ahimsa or non-violence. Both denied authenticity of the Vedas as an infallible authority. Both emphasized the doctrines of transmigration of soul and laid stress on the effects of Karmas on individual’s future birth. Both discontinued with Sanskrit and Jain text took to Prakrit and Buddhist to Pali, which was the language of the masses. In order to preach their religion, both established Samghas or orders for monks and nun and encouraged criticism as means to attain enlightenment.

Though Jainism and Buddhism resembled each other very much, yet there were distinctions between the two religions. Jainism is a much more ancient religion as compared to Buddhism. According to Jain tradition, it had twenty four Tirthankars of whom Mahavira was the last. In this light, Mahavira has been regarded as a reformer of an already existing religion while Buddha is the originator of a new one. Jainism believes that all elements of nature have a soul whereas Buddhism believed in life in animate things only. As far as non-violence is concerned, Jainism laid lot of emphasis on it and believed in extremities but Buddhism is liberal in approach and even permitted eating of flesh to its followers where it is a traditional diet of the people. Buddhism emphasized love to all beings which is a positive virtue and more affirmative concept of Ahimsa than the concept of non-injury to all beings as emphasized by Jainism. Jainism advised practice of strict ascetism to attain nirvana while Buddhism preached the middle path to attain salvation. While Jainism thought women and men householders could not fulfill the eligibility to attain salvation, Buddhism believed both could attain and were eligible for the nirvana. According to Jainism, salvation is possible only after death while according to Buddhism, it is possible during one’s own life if one is able to detach oneself from the worldly existence. While Jainism describes nirvana as freedom from body, Buddhism describes it as an end of the self and breaking the cycle of birth and death by detriment from the worldly attractions. Buddhism was more practical in approach towards the problems of the time. It was more flexible to adopt changes into its fold with changing circumstances but Jainism was more rigid. While Buddhism spread all over Asia accommodating the traditions of the local population, Jainism remained confined to India only. Jainism remained closer to Hinduism than Buddhism. Therefore, conflicts between Jainism and Hinduism were negligible but Buddhism proved as a major rival to Hinduism. But with the bouncing back of Hinduism as a more positive religion with broader perspective, Buddhism practically disappeared from the land of its birth as a major reform movement.
Thus, there is no doubt that Jainism and Buddhism, born at different intervals, though at about the same period of time, were marked by distinct characteristics along with possessing strong resemblances.

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Fick R. : Social Life in North East Indian in the age of Buddha
- Kosambi D.D. : Culture and Civilisation in ancient India
- Sharma R.S. : Light on early Indian Society and Economy
- Sharma R.S. : Material Milieu of Buddhism (Article)
- Thapar Romla : Ancient Indian Social History
- Wagle N.K. : Society at the time of the Buddha
The period extending from the sixth century BC to the fourth century BC is justifiably regarded as a very significant period of Indian history. It was in this period that we understand how the changes taking place in the earlier period matured to give a new dimension to the political developments which were deep rooted in the changed material life of the people. In the context of the agrarian situation, a new type of society emerged in the Ganga valley between this period. That is why historians place the beginning of the early historic period of Indian history in this phase.

In the sixth century BC, like religion, contemporary political developments were also deep rooted in the changed material life of the people. The increasing use of iron in eastern UP and western Bihar created conditions for the formation of large territorial states. The surplus produced by the use of the new agricultural tools and implements enabled the people to be self-sufficient and remain on their land. They could now expand at the cost of the neighboring areas and pass on their extra produce to the princes for military and administrative requirements. This led to the rise of large states with towns as their centre of activity. Since towns emerged as the seats of power and as the base for operations, this idea strengthened the concept of territorial affiliations. Now people owed their allegiance to the territory or Janapada to which they belonged. Thus the emergence of several territorial states in different parts of the country in the sixth century BC formed an important feature of the political life of the times.

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

The kings or groups of Kashatriyas, the chiefs of which called themselves rajas or kings ruled over Janapadas or Mahajanapadas. The appearance of urban centres meant the emergence of different social groups pursuing different occupations because the existence of cities implies the existence of different sections of populations engaged in multiple activities. Since people following different occupations came to the forefront, their living and getting familiar with one place led to the distinction between urban and rural centres. Moreover, some groups were not engaged in the production of food so they had to receive a share of the produce from other social groups who could pass on their surplus in exchange of services of the groups who did not engage in agriculture. Thus emerged the system of taxation. Since the exchange of goods had undergone major changes by this time, the complexity of the system led to the emergence of professional middlemen and merchants. They would mediate in the dealings of different individuals and regions. This is how the class of merchants or setthis came to be regarded as important in society not only as economically sound merchants but also as big landlords. This period also saw the appearance, for the first time in India, of metallic coins which were
extensively used for exchange. It also witnessed the regular trade connections between cities and towns.

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

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

With progress in agriculture and settlement by 500 BC Janapadas became a common feature. Around 450 BC, over forty Janapadas covering even Afghanistan and south-eastern Central Asia are mentioned by Panini. However, the major part of southern India was excluded. Pali texts show that these Janapadas or small principalities grew into Mahajanapadas that is large states. These texts mention sixteen of them. The literature belonging to our period of interest refer to various kinds of units of settlements as Mahajanapadas, Janapadas, Nagara, Nigama, Grama etc. Janapada, literally means the place where the people place their feet. In the early Vedic times, the members of Jana were pastural groups roaming in search of pastures. In later Vedic phase, the members of Jana took up agriculture and began to lead a settled life. These agriculture settlements came to be known as Janapadas. Initially, these settlements were named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages settled in that area. The Kuru and Panchal Janapadas located around Delhi and upper UP were named after their Kshatriya lineages. With the use of ploughshares and introduction of iron, people decided to settle down in one place and practice agriculture. The agriculturist could now clear the forest land and make it arable with the use of iron tools and implements. Middle Gangetic valley i.e. the area east of Allahabad came to be recognized as best suited for wet rice cultivation. The agricultural expansion led to the growth of population. Agricultural surplus was made available. Cattle was no more considered a major strength of wealth. Money economy had surpassed barter system. This led to the chiefs of the
lineages constantly at war with each other either to show their might or to surpass each other by financial strength. Through the process of agricultural expansion, war and conquest the Vedic tribes had come in closer contact with each other and with the non-Aryan population. This in fact led to the formation of large territorial units. For example, the Panchalas represented the amalgamation of five different tribes. By the sixth century BC, some of the Janapadas developed into Mahajanapadas. This happened as a result of the series of changes in the internal social and political organisation of the Janapadas. One such important change as mentioned earlier was the expansion of agricultural communities. Agricultural land now came to be considered as an important economic asset as against cattle. Another important change was the emergence of new categories and groups of people in the society, namely the Gahapati or the master of an individual household which owned land, and merchants or settlers or a person having the best, a term used by the Buddhist texts for people who dealt with money and had acquired considerable prestige and power. Combined with developments in the social and economic fields were changes in the nature of the polity of the Mahajanapadas. In the period prior to our period of study the word Raja was referred to as the chief of a lineage. Rama was referred to as Raghukularaja meaning one who rules over Raghu clan. Similarly, Yudhishthira is called Kuru or Raja. They ruled over their lineage and the concept of ruling over a territory had not come into existence. The taxes collected from the Kinsmen were mostly voluntary contributions. King was a father figure who ensured the safety and prosperity of the lineage. He did not function independently and taxation or maintenance of independent army was not his prerogative. The reference to kings in the sixth century BC on the other hand indicate his rule over a geographical unit belonging to him with a regular taxation system and an army. The distinction between Raja or Ruler and Praja or the ruled became more pronounced. There are references to Krsaka or peasants who paid taxes to the king. The cattle raids of the preceding period were now replaced by organised campaigns in which territory was annexed and the agriculturists and craftsmen were to pay taxes. Bhaga or share of the agricultural produce was given to the king for safeguarding their interests and welfare and for being in subordination to the king. Survey of the agricultural land was done by an officer called rajjugahaka besides bhagadugha an officer who collected bhaga. These officers are mentioned in the contemporary literature. The Jatakas also mention royal officials measuring out grain to send to royal granary. The Mahajanapadas did not bear the name of the dominant Kshatriya lineage. For example Kosala, Magadha, Avanti. Vatsa were not named after any Kshatrya lineage. Thus one notices that a new political system had emerged by the sixth century BC. The word ‘Mahajanapadas’ denoted large Janapadas like those of Magadha, Kosala etc. which were ruled by powerful kings or oligarchs. In fact, many of the Mahajanapadas of the sixth century BC came up by incorporating Janapadas which were earlier independent. For example, Kosala Mahajanapada included the janapada of the Sakyas and of Kashi. Magadha came to include the Janapada of Anga, Vajji etc. even before it grew into an empire.

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

Towns and cities dominated by the monarchs and merchants had at the same time heterogeneous population in the new kinds of settlements. The difference between the new settlements named as Pura, Nigama, Nagara is not known but the size and the varying features of these settlements must have led to their different identities. These towns and cities were definitely larger than villages. Big cities like Ayodhya and Varanasi find a mention in the contemporary literature. This historic phase is associated with settlements using a pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware. Increased trade and developing economies led to massive fortification of the cities like Kaushambi, Ujjain, Raighat(Vanaras), Rajgir etc. These cities emerged as the centres of power and control over the Mahajanapadas. In the wake of growing economy, the use of coinage made the position of the merchant class stronger. Thus, one notices that the period starting with the sixth century BC saw the emergence of cities in ancient India for the second time. This urbanisation was more significant since it endured for a longer time and saw the beginning of a literate tradition. This tradition is embodied in Buddhism, Jainism and many strands of Hinduism. It is not only big cities which emerged at this time. Along with agriculture based villages there existed market centres, small towns, big towns and other types of settlements.

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

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

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

During the sixth century BC, India came to be divided into a number of independent states and even north India had no single paramount power. Most of these states were monarchical but quite a large number of them had republican or oligarchic constitutions. The Buddhist and Jain religious texts are more informative regarding them as compared to the Hindu religious texts. The Buddhist texts mention the following republican or oligarchic states:
1) The Sakyas of Kapilvastu in the foothills of the Himalayas near the border of Nepal.
2) The Bhaggas of Sumsumara hill in eastern Uttar Pradesh.
3) The Butis of Allakappa between the districts of Sahabad and Muzafferpur in Bihar.
4) The Kalama of Kesaputta.
5) The Kaliyas of Ramagama.
6) The Mallas of Pava-modern Fazillpur in Bihar.
9) The Videhas of Mithila-modern Janakpur near the boundaries of Nepal.
10) The Licchavis of Vaisali – Basarah in the modern district of Muzafferpur in north Bihar.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1) Kashi
2) Kosala
3) Anga
4) Magadha
5) Vajji
6) Malla
7) Chedi
Another Buddhist text Mahavastu enumerates a similar list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas while omitting Gandhara and Kambhoja in the northwest. These are substituted by Sibi and Dasarna in Punjab and central India respectively. Bhagavati Sutra, a Jaina work gives a comparatively different list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas while including Vanga and Malaya. However, the number sixteen seems to have been acceptable and conventional but the list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas varied because the regions important to the Buddhist and Jains had some variation. The list include a gradual shift of focus to the middle Gangetic valley because of the location of most of these Mahajanapadas in this area.

**Kashi**

Of the sixteen Mahajanapadas Kashi seems to have been the most powerful in the beginning. Since it was at first the most powerful, it played important part in the subversion of the Videhan monarchy. Located in and around the present day Varanasi district its capital Varanasi is referred to as the foremost city of India situated on the confluence of the Ganges and the Gomati river and in the middle of the most fertile agricultural areas. The economic importance of Kashi lay in the fact that it had emerged as a leading centre of textile manufacture in the time of the Buddha. The Kashaya (orange brown) robes of the Buddhist monks are said to have been manufactured here. Kashi was not only famous for its cotton textiles but also for its market for horses. Excavations at the site of Rajghat which has been identified with ancient Benaras have not yielded any impressive evidence for urbanisation in the sixth century BC. It seemed to have emerged as a major town around 450 BC. But by the time of Buddha, it had emerged as a centre for commercial activity. Several kings of Kashi are mentioned as having conquered Kosala and many other kingdoms. Dasaratha Jataka also mentions Dasaratha and Rama as kings of Kashi and not of Ayodhya. The father of Parsva, the twenty third teacher (Tirthankara) of the Jains is said to have been the king of Benaras. The Buddha also delivered his first sermon after enlightenment in Sarnath near Benaras. All important religious traditions of ancient India are associated with Kashi. However, by the time of the Buddha the Kashi Mahajanapada had been annexed by Kosala and was a cause of war between Magadha and Kosala.

**Kosala**

The Mahajanapada of Kosala was bounded on the west by the river Gomati, on the south by the Sarpika or Syandika (Sai) which defined its southern boundary. To its east flowed the river Sadarvira(Gandak) which separated it from Videha Janapada. Towards the north, it skirted the Nepal hills. Literary references indicate how Kosala emerged out of an assimilation of many smaller principalities and lineages. For example, we know that the Sakyas of Kapilvastu were under the control of Kosala. The Buddha calls himself as Kosalan in the Majjhima Nikaya. But at the same time, the Kosala King Vidudhaba is said to have
destroyed the Sakyas. It would only indicate that the Sakya lineage was under the normal control of the Kosala. The newly emergent monarchy established a powerful centralized control and put an end to the autonomy of the Sakyas. Hiranyanabha, Mahakosala Prasenjita and Suddhodhana have been named as rulers of Kosala in the sixth century BC. These rulers are said to have ruled from Ayodhya, Saketa, Kapilvastu and Sravasti. Ayodhya or the Saryu associated with the Rama story in Ramayana, Saketa adjoining it and Sravasti (modern Sahet-Mahet) on the borders of the Gonda and Bahraich districts of Uttar Pradesh, were three important Kosala cities, though excavations indicate that none of them was settled on any considerable scale before the sixth century BC. Probably in the early years of the sixth century BC, the area of Kosala was under the control of many smaller chiefs who were ruling from small towns. Towards the close of the sixth century BC, Kings like Prasenjita and Vidudhabha succeeded in bringing all chiefs under their control. They ruled from Sravasti. Thus Kosala emerged as a prosperous and powerful kingdom having Ayodhya, Saketa, Sravasti under its control. Kosala also managed to annex Kashi in its territory. The Kings of Kosala favoured both Brahmanism and Buddhism. King Prasenjita was a contemporary and friend of the Buddha. In the years to come Kosala emerged as one of the most formidable adversaries to the emergent Magadha empire.

Anga

Anga on the east of Magadha was separated from it by the river Champa and comprised the modern districts of Munger and Bhagalpur in Bihar. It may have extended northwards to the river Kosi and included some parts of the district of Purnea. It was located to the west of the rajamahal hills. Champa was the capital of Anga. It was located on the confluence of the rivers Champa and the Ganga. Champa has been considered one of the six great cities in the sixth century BC. It was noted for its trade and commerce and traders sailed further east through the Ganga from here. By mid-sixth century BC, Anga was annexed by Magadha a large number of North Black Polished ware has been unearthed at Champa near Bhagalpur.

Magadha

Between Anga and Vatsa, there lay the kingdom of Magadha corresponding to modern Patna and Ganga districts. It was protected by the rivers Son and Ganga on its north and west. On the south, it was bounded by the Vindhya outcrop and it had reached up to the Chotanagpur plateau. In the east, the river Champa separated it from Anga. Its capital was called Girivraja or Rajagriha. Rajagriha was an impregnable place protected by five hills. The walls of Rajagriha show the earliest evidence of fortification in the history of India. In the fifth century BC, the capital was shifted to Pataliputra which was the seat of the early Magadhan Kings. In the Brahmanical texts, the Magadhans were considered inferior because of their mixed origin. This was probably because the people in this area did not follow the varna system and had no faith in Brahmanical traditions and rituals. On the other hand, the Buddhist tradition attaches great importance to this area. It was here that Buddha attained enlightenment. Rajagriha was a favourite place of the Buddha. The Magadhan monarchs Bimbisara and Ajatshatru were Buddha’s friends and disciples. Magadha also gained importance because the fertile agricultural tracts of this area were best suited for wet rice cultivation. Moreover, it had control over the iron ore deposits of south Bihar. Finally, the open social system of the Magadhan empire made it the most important kingdom in the years to come. Its control over the trade routes of the Ganges, Gandak and Son rivers provided it substantial revenues. The Magadhan King Bimbisara is said to have called an assembly of the Gaminis of 80,000 villages. This shows that Bimbisara’s administration was based on the
village as a unit of administration. The Gamini were not his Kinsmen but chiefs or representatives of villages. Therefore, through his conquests and diplomacy, Bimbisara made Magadha most important kingdom in the subsequent history. Magadha as a kingdom kept prospering with its extension of power over the Vajji of Vaishali under the control of Ajatshatru. This was to culminate in the Maurya empire in the fourth century BC.

**Vajji**

Centred around the Vaishali district of Bihar, the Vajjis (literate meaning pastoral nomads) were located north of the Ganga. This Mahajanapada stretched as far as the Nepal hills. Its western limit was the river Gandak which separated it from Malla and Kosala. In the east, it extended up to the forests on the banks of the river Kosi and Mahanadi. Unlike the Mahajanapadas previously discussed, the Vajjis had a different kind of political organisation. The contemporary literature refers to them as Ganasamgha, a term which was earlier used for a republic or an oligarchy. The Ganasamgha of this period represented a joint rule by a group of Kshatriya chiefs and not a rule by a single all-powerful king. This ruling class, members of which were called rajas, were now differentiated from different non-kshatriya group.

The Vajji state is said to have been a confederation of eight clans (atthakula) of whom the Videhas, Licchavis and the Jnatrikas were the most well known. The Videha had their capital at Mithila which has been identified with Janakpur in Nepal. The Ramayana associated it with the King Janaka, the Buddhist sources consider it a chiefship. Licchavis, the most well known of the ancient Indian Ganasamghas had their headquarters at Vaishali which was a large and prosperous city. The Jhatrikas were another clan which settled somewhere in the suburbs of Vaishali. To this clan belonged the Jain teacher, Mahavira. The other members of confederacy were the clans of the Bhogas, Kauravas, Ugras, Aiksavaras. Vaishali seems to have been the metropolis of the entire confederacy. Their affairs were managed by an assembly but they had no standing army or a proper system of collection of revenue from agriculture. According to a Jataka story, the Vajjis were ruled by many clan chiefs. In all likelihood the Vajji confederation took form after the decline and fall of the Videhan monarchy and was a flourishing non-monarchial state in the time of Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. The Magadhan King Ajatshatru is supposed to have destroyed this confederacy. He sowed discord among the chiefs by seeking the help of his minister Vassakara and then attacked the Licchavis.

**Mallas**

The territory of the non-monarchical Mallas supposed to have been ruled by five hundred chiefs was divided into two parts each having its own capital. It is another Kshatriya lineage referred to as Ganasamghas in ancient texts. They seem to have several branches of which two had their headquarters in the towns of Pawa possibly identical with Pawapuri in Patna district and Kushinara identified with the site of Kasia in the Gorakhpur district of UP. The Malla territories are said to have been located to the east and south-east of the territory of the Sakayas. The Mallas like the Videhas had at first a monarchical constitution, which was replaced by what has generally been described as a republican form of government. Literary writings refer to some kind of alliance between the Mallas, the Lichchavis and the clan chiefs of Kashi – Kosala. This joining of hands could be against the rising threat of the Magadhan ascendancy.
Chedi

The Chedi territory roughly corresponds to the eastern parts of the modern Bundelkhand and adjoining areas and their kings’ lists occur in the Jatakas, the Buddhist birth stories. It might have stretched up to the Malwa plateau. Sisupala, the famous enemy of Krishna was a Chedi ruler. Both figure in the well-known epic, the Mahabharata, the latter being the most prominent among its different characters. The staying of the forms became the central theme of a long poem written by a later poet, Magha. According to the Mahabharata, the Chedis seem to have been in close touch with the chiefs of Matsya beyond the Chambal, the Kasis of Benaras and the Karusas in the valley of the river Son. Its capital was Sotthivati (Suktrimati) probably located in the Banda district of Madhya Pradesh. Other important towns in this territory were Sahajati and Tripuri.

Vatsa

Vatsa was one of the most powerful principalities of the sixth century BC with its capital at Kaushambi (modern Kosam) which lay at some distance from Allahabad on the bank of the Yamuna. This means that the Vatsas were settled around modern Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. The Puranas say that the descendant of the Pandavas, Nichakshu shifted his capital to Kaushambi after Hastinapur had been washed away by floods. The dramatist Bhasa, has immortalized one of the kings of the Vatsas named Udayan in his plays. These plays are based on the story of the romantic affair between Udayana and Vasavadatta, the Princess of Avanti. These plays also indicate the conflicts among the powerful kingdoms of Magadh, Vatsa and Avanti. Probably, Vatsa lost its importance in the ensuing struggle because the later texts do not refer to them with great importance.

Kuru

The Kingdom of the Kuru was centred around the Delhi – Meerut region. The kings of the Kurus were supposed to belong to the family of Yudhisthira. The Arthashastra refers to the Kuru kings as Raja Sobadopajivinah i.e carrying the title of kings. This indicates some kind of a diffused structure of chiefship. Many political centres in this area prove that they did not have absolute monarchy. Hastinapura, Indraprastha, Isukara are mentioned separately as the capital of the Kurus with their own chiefs. We all know about the Kurus from the epic, Mahabharata. This epic relates the story of the war of succession between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Earlier phases were characterised by cattle raids for personal gains but with the emergence of the Mahajanapadas, large scale wars started. The Mahabharata narrates the war between two Kshatriya lineages. It is with the emergence of the early historic period that the social economic and political interaction increased among the Mahajanapadas.

Panchala

The Panchal Mahajanapada was located in the Rohilkhand and parts of central Doab (roughly Bulandshahr, Bareilly, Pilibhit, Aligarh, Badaun etc.) The ancient texts make reference to the existence of two lineages of the Panchala – the northern Panchalas and the southern Panchalas with the river Bhagirathi dividing the two. The northern Panchalas had their capital at Aichchatra located in the Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh. The southern Panchalas had their capital at Kampiliya. They seem to have been closely linked to the Kurus. The Kurus allied with the Panchalas and their trade centre is said to have been visited by the Buddha. Very little information is available about them but they too are called Samgha. By the sixth century BC, they seem to have become an obscure power.
Matsya
Not much information is available about Matsya who are traditionally associated with modern Jaipur – Bharatpur – Alwar region of Rajasthan. Their capital was at Viratnagara. The famous hiding place of the Pandavas. Mahabharata refers to this place as suitable for cattle rearing that is why when the Kaurawas attacked Virat they took away cattle as booty. Since it was primitive, Matsya could not compete with the powers which had settled agriculture as their base. It was therefore absorbed by the rising Magadhan empire. Some of the most famous Ashoka edicts have been found in Baurat (Jaipur district), the ancient Virat.

Surasena
The Surasena, Kingdom, with its capital at Mathura, on the bank of the river Yamuna, was inhospitable because of ‘uneven roads, excessive dust, vicious talks and demons’. The Mahabharata and the Puranas refer to the ruling family of Mathura as belonging to the Yadava clan with which is associated the epic hero Krishna. The Yadava clan was divided into smaller clans like the Andhakas, Vrishani, Mahabhogas, etc. They two had a Samgha form of government. Mathura was strategically located at the junction of the two famous ancient Indian trade routes i.e. the Uttarapatha and the Dakshinapatha. This was because Mathura represented the ancient zone between the Gangetic plains having settled agriculture and the sparsely populated pasture lands jutting into the Malwa plateau. It could emerge as a powerful kingdom because of its varied landscape and splintered political structure. The chiefs could not give it a cohesive form of control.

Assaka
The Assaka lived on the bank of the river Godavari near modern Paithan in Mahabharata. Paithan has been identified with ancient Pratishthana, the capital of the Assaka. The Kaksina Patha or the southern route is supposed to have connected Pratishthana with the cities of the north. Our information about this region is quite meager because of vague references to the kings of the Assakas. Probably, with passage of time, the territory of Assakas became commercially important.

Avanti
In the sixth century BC Avanti was one of the most powerful Mahajanapadas. The central area of this kingdom would roughly correspond to Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh, extending upto the river Narmada. Its important city Mahismati is sometimes referred to as its capital. Divided into two parts, its southern capital was Mahasmati and its northern Ujjain, which became more important of the two. The Puranas attribute the foundation of Avanti to one of the clans of the Yadavas called the Haihaya. Located in a very fertile agricultural region and controlling the trade among from the south, this clan of the Yadavas here developed into a centralized monarchy. The Avanti King Pradyota is famous in legends according to which from an enemy he became father-in-law of Udayen who ruled over Vatsa kingdom.

Gandhara
Gandhara was located between Kabul and Rawalpindi in the North Western Province. Some parts of Kashmir might have been included in this territorial limit. In the early Vedic times, it was of considerable importance but in the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of the later phases it was not given any importance. The capital Taxila was an important city
for learning and trading. In the sixth century BC, Gandhara was ruled by a king Pukkusati who was a friend of Bimbisara but by late sixth century BC, the kingdom was conquered by Persians. According to Greek historian Herodotus, Gandhara formed the twentieth province of the Archaemenid empire and was the most populous and wealthy, it supplied men and material to the persona army fighting against the Greek.

**Kambhoja**

Kambhoja was located close to Gandhara probably around Afghanistan. The Kambhojas were regarded as uncultured by the Brahmanical texts of the seventh century BC. The Arthashastra calls them Varta-Sastropajivm Samgha meaning a confederation of agriculturists, herdsmen, traders and warriors.

We have reviewed the political conditions prevailing in India of the sixth century BC. The Mahajanapadas which emerged as distinct geographical units witnessed new kinds of socio-political developments. What seems to be important is the fact that seven of them i.e. Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Kasi, Kosala and Vatsa were located in the middle Gangetic valley. These Mahajanapadas emerged as regions in different geographical zones reflecting the nature of the economy there. Since middle Gangetic valley is a rice growing area and the fact that in traditional agricultural system of India, rice output exceeded the wheat output, it was natural that the density of population would be more in these areas. Further, Mahajanapadas like Magadha had easy access to natural resources like metal ores. These factors may have contributed to the emergence of the middle Gangetic valley as the focus of politico-economic power. It also provided a convenient ground for a ruler to consolidate his power because of its flat terrain and the continuity of settlements. No wonder Magadha one of the powers in this zone, emerged as the most powerful kingdom in the subsequent period.

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

Chakrabarti D.  : Article on ‘Beginnings of iron in ancient India’
Jha D.N.   : Ancient India: An Introductory Outline
IGNOU Series : India: Earliest Times to 800 A.D.
Mehta R.N.  : Pre-Buddhist India
Ray Nihar Ranjan : Technological and Social Change in Early Indian Society
Sharma R.S. : Class formation and its material basis in the Upper Gangetic basin (C 1000-500 BC) 9HR Vol.II
LESSON 3

DEVELOPMENTS FROM SIXTH TO FOURTH CENTURIES B.C.

- Dr. Rajni Nanda

The period from 6th century B.C. to about 400 B.C., was marked by far reaching changes in almost every aspect of life in India. This period saw the spread of agriculture over large parts of the country, the rise of cities and the formation of states. The period is important not only for polunity but also for cultural unity. Two major religions – Jainism and Buddhism – which arose in the 6th century B.C. left a lasting influence on the religion beliefs and practices. The Varna system, the system, of social organization popularly known as the caste system, which had arisen in the vedic age now became well-established and gradually became the dominant form of social organization throughout the country. The rise of cities, crafts and trade also furthered the process of cultural unity. One point which you must bear in mind is that the focus of the Aryan civilization had now moved to Magadha, Vatsa, Kosala and Avanti, eastwards during this period of our study. Of all the sixteen principal states, four great kingdoms and the Vajji Republic of the Lichchhavis eclipsed the old land of the Kurus both in political and economic importance.

In Avanti, we come across an outstanding ruler named Pradyota. He was a very powerful King. Even Ajatasatru, the ruler of Magadha, was afraid of him. His daughter Vasavadatta was married to Udayana, the ruler of Vatsa. In the beginning of the 4th century B.C. Sisunaga, a ruler of Magadha, destroyed the power of the rulers of Avanti.

Udayana, was the most famous ruler of Vatsa. He married the daughters of the rulers of Magadha, Anga and Avanti, and thus increased his powers. But his career was meteoric. He left no worthy successor. In the end, ruler of Avanti annexed it to his own kingdom.

In the days of Lord Buddha, Prasenajit was the ruler of Kosala. He was a disciple of Lord Buddha as is evident from a sculpture at Bharhut. He gave his sister Kosaladevi in marriage to Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha and gave a part of Kasi to her as pin-money. When Ajatasatru, the son of Bimbisara, starved his father to death, Kosaladevi died of grief. Thereupon Prasenajit confiscated the part of Kasi which he had given to his sister. This led to a war between Kosala and Magadha which continued for a long time. In the end Prasenajit gave his daughter Vajira in marriage to Ajatasatru and with her the revenues of Kasi. Thus the conflict was patched up between two royal families. From the fleeting references in the early Buddhist works, it seems that Prasenajit was inefficient and wasted his money on holy men. He controlled the administration of his kingdom through tribal chieftains and vassal kings. When his son became king he treated his generals cruelly and this led to the decline of the kingdom.

Rise of Magadha

Ultimately it was the kingdom of Magadha which eclipsed the power of the other three kingdoms. There were a number of factors which contributed to the growth of Magadha as the most powerful monarchy from the sixth century B.C to the fourth century B.C. This kingdom occupied a strategic position between the upper and lower parts of the Gangetic plain and it was a very important centre for trade and commerce. Though half in size in comparison to Kosala it had abundant forest resources, metal and prosperous agriculture. Its people were not orthodox in the social matters. Herein, a Brahmana could live on friendly terms with the Vratyas or
degenerate Kshatriyas and the Kshatriyas could even marry Sudras girls. The ruler of Magadha built an impregnable mountain fort and organized a strong army because they had sufficient resources in men and money. They also had the wisdom of establishing an efficient system of government on the basis of regular officials and standing army devoid of tribal life. The bards of Magadha inspired the people and with their support, the rulers realized the ideal of establishing an empire under a Chakravarti ruler which had been the goal that many of the authors of the Brahmanas and the Upanisadas in prehistoric times had set for the rulers.

In the sixth century B.C (C.543 to C.491 B.C) Magadha was ruled by Bimbisara of the Haryanka-kula. He was also known as Srenika. At first his capital was Girivajra, later he transferred it to Rajagriha some sixty miles to the South-East of Patna.

Bimbisara was succeeded by his son Ajatasatru (C.491-C.459B.C) Ajatasatru had served as his father's is viceroy at Champa before he was crowned as king. It is said that Ajatasatru imprisoned his father, and starved him to death, and afterwards expressed remorse to Lord Buddha for this heinous crime.

You have already been told how Kosaladevi died of grief and this led to war between Ajatasatru and Prasenajit and how in the end, the latter gave his daughter Vajira in marriage to Ajatasatru and with it the part of the territory of Kasi which had originally been given as pin-money to Kosaladevi.

Another important event of Ajatasatru's reign was his war against the Lichchhavis. Various causes have been assigned for this war the most important one being but Ajatasatru's motive to destroy the power of the neighbouring oligarchy which was no doubt a thorn in the side of an ambitious ruler. Before undertaking this ambitious project, Ajatasatru took all the necessary precautions. He sent two of his trusted ministers Sunidha and Vassakara to sow the seeds of dissensions among the Lichchhavi chiefs. He organized his army carefully and equipped it with as many destructive weapons as he could. As a result of this war (the preparation for which had continued for sixteen years) some parts of the Lichchhavi territories were incorporated within the Magadhan empire. Both the Buddhists and the Jains claim that Ajatasatru was a follower of their faith. It is said in the Buddhist works that when Lord Buddha died in C.483 B.C., Ajatasatru claimed a share of his relics and enshrined them in a stupa.

The account of the reigns of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru show that they were the first Indian kings who sought to establish a far-flung empire in historic time.

According to Pali sources, Ajatasatru was succeeded by his son Udayibhadra in C.459 B.C. He founded the city of Patliputra on the confluence of the Sone and the Ganges. Udayibhadra's successors were Anurudha, Munda and Nagadasaka. They were weak and unpopular rulers. Hence Sisunaga the minister of the last ruler seized the throne. Sisunaga destroyed the power of the ruler of Avanti and thus became the undisputed ruler of almost the whole of Madhyadesa, Malwa and other territories in the north.

About the middle of the fourth century B.C the Sisunaga dynasty was overthrown by the first Nanda ruler Mahapadma. There are different traditions about his origin. According to the Puranas, he was born of a Sudra woman. In the Jain works, he is described as the son of a courtesan by a barber and according to a Greek writer Curtius, Mahapadma was the son of a barber who by is good looks had won the queen's heart and who subsequently assassinated the ruler of Sisunaga dynasty (probably Kalasoka Kakavarna). All these accounts show that Mahapadma was of low origin, and succeeded in capturing the Magadhan throne by political intrigue of subterfuge.
Mahapadma is said to have uprooted the Ksahtriyas by defeating the Iksvakus, Kurus, Panchalas, Kasis, Surasenas, Maithlas, Kalingas, Asmakas and Haihayas. There may be some exaggeration in this tall claim but it is certain that almost the whole of Madhyadesa and Malwa region formed parts of Sisunaga's empire.

From the "Katha-sarit-sagar" we know that Kosala formed a part of Magadhan empire and the Hathigumpha inscription refers to the excavation of a canal by a Nandaraja who has been identified with Mahapadma. In view of this the Nanda control over parts of Kalinga, the conquest of Asmaka and other regions lying further south does not seem to be altogether improbable. On the Godavari, there is a city called Nav Nand Dehra. This also suggests the inclusion of a considerable portion of the Deccan in the Nanda domains. According to Pliny, the Prasi (Easterners) surpassed in power and glory every other people all over India. This shows the high reputation which the Namdas enjoyed at that time.

The eight sons of Mahapadma are said to have ruled for twelve years in succession. The last Nanda ruler was probably Dhananada. According to Greek writer Curtius, he maintained a strong army consisting of 2,00,000 foot soldiers, 2000 horses, 20,000 chariots and 4,000 elephants and had immense riches. But he was irreligious (adharmika), and of tyrannical disposition. He was, therefore, very unpopular. After Alexander's departure Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of the situation and destroyed the power of the Nandas of Magadha (C.320-21 B.C).

Magadha had thus step by step emerged as the premier kingdom in northern India, and henceforth its history merged with the history of India itself. The glamour of the Nandas had been dimmed by the greater splendour of the Mauryas. But we should remember that it was they who for the first time united the petty states of northern India, who were generally at war with one another, into one strong military unit. In other words, it was the Nandas who established a strong and unified political authority which covered most of northern India excluding Bengal.

In the sixth century B.C., unlike in north-east India where Smatter principalities & republic merged with the Magadhan empire, there was no political unity in the North-West India. Several small principalities, such as those of the Kambojas, Gandharav and Madras fought one another. This, together with the fact that the area of north-western India was fertile and rich in natural resources, attracted the attention of its neighbours and most probably persuaded the Persian emperors to seek territorial aggrandizement in the north-western region of India.

The Iranian ruler Darwin penetrated into north-west India in 516 B.C. and anhexed the Punjab, west of Indus, and Sindh. Xerses, the son of Darwins I, and his successors seem to have maintained some control of the Indian provinces, which furnished contingent to their army. It appear that India contained to be a pact of the Iranian empire till Alexander of Spacedonia defeated Darvin III, the last Achaemenid emperor, and proceeded to conquer to whole of his empire.

**Effects of the Persian Invasion**

The Indo-Iranian contact lasted for about 200 years. The Persians brought India into contact with the Western. The Persians brought India into contact with the Western world and thus gave an impetus to her trade and commerce with the west. The cultural results were more important.

**Effects of the Persian Invasion**
The Indo-Iranian contact lasted for about 200 years. The Persians brought India into contact with the western world and thus gave an impact to her results were

1. D.B. Spooner has tried to prove that at Patliputra, the Mauryan palace was modeled after the palace of Darius. But the evidence on which has has relied is scanty and unreliable. That is why his view is not accepted by the vast majority of other scholars. H.G. Rawlison has suggested that the bell capital of Ashokan pillars shows many traces of Persian influences. This view is also untenable. As pointed out by E.B. Havell, the capital represents inverted lotus which is characteristically a significant motif in Indian art. It is however, possible that the inspiration for building pillars might have come from the Persians, but the Asokan pillars are in no way imitations of their Persian prototype. The Persian shaft is fluted, i.e. has semi-cylindrical vertical grooves or channels, while Asokan pillar is plain and circular. The Persians shaft is built or separate pieces of stone, while the Asokan shaft is monolithic (i.e. single block of stone). So even when the inspiration for erecting pillars might have been derived from Persia, indigenous and original contribution to the creation of this item of Mauryan art is undeniable.

2. The Persian scribes introduced into India a new form of writing called Kharoshthi, which was made use of by Ashoka in some of his inscriptions in North-Western India and beyond. This script is a derivative of the Aramaic alphabet which was extensively used in the Achaemenid Empire (558-338 B.C.). This script like the Arabic script is written from right to left. The popularity of the Kharoshthi did not extend beyond 3rd century A.D. Certain words and the preamble of Ashokan edicts also show some Persian influences. The word dipi is used for a script and nipishta for ‘written’ which are clearly Indianised forms and Persian words.

3. Though the idea of chakravarti ruler having an empire existed in the protohistoric times as it is definitely mentioned in the Brahmanas, yet it is possible as suggested by Prof. Basham that the expansionist policy of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru, the rulers of Magadha, “was inspired by the example of the Persians”. We learn from Megasthenes that Chandragupta Maurya imitated the Persian hair style. He celebrated the hair-washing ceremony, employed women body-guards and lived in seclusion like the Persian Emperors got their administrative edicts inscribed on rocks. It is therefore probable that Ashoka borrowed this practice from the Persian but his use was the practice with the Persian but also his exhortations for spreading his dhamma. We also know that the Persian system of government by satraps was introduced in several provinces of North-Western India.

II. ALEXANDER INVASION OF INDIA.

In 330 B.C. Alexander (356-323 B.C.) of Macedon defeated Darius III, the last Persian emperor of Achaemenid and set out to subdue the whole of the former Persian Empire. After a long campaign in Bactria, the region on the borders of the modern Soviet Union and Afghanistan watered by the river Oxus, Alexander crossed the Hindukush and occupied the district of Kabul.

At this time, the North-Western India was divided into a number of petty principalities as there existed no great power in that area which could curb their mutual strifes and jealousies. These prinapalities had little tendency to unite even against a foreign enemy. Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, was at war with the Abhisaras and Poros. Poros and the Abhisaras were also enemies of the autonomous tribes like the Ksudrakas and the Malwas. The relations between Poros and his nephew were far from friendly. Owing to these quarrels among these petty states, Alexander did
not face any united resistance. Some of these ruler like Ambhi of Taxila received him with open arms out of hatred of his neighbours. Alexander also received assistance from Sanrajya of Puskalavati, Kophaios of the Kabul region, Asrvait and Saisgupta. No doubt Poros and Abhisaras, the Malwas, the Khudrakas and the neighbouring tribes presented still resistance to the invader, Massaga, the strong-of the Assakenians was stromed with great difficulty. Poros, the Malvas, and the Khudrakas were no doubt defeated but Alexander’s army met with stubborn resistance from them. The Malavas almost succeeded in killing Alexander. But ultimately all this was of no avail. The disunited people could not long resist the united forces of the Greeks led by Alexander, one of the greatest generals of ancient Europe. Alexander had succeeded in conquering the old Persian provinces of the Gandhara and North-Western India but was unable to defeat the powerful Nanda king of Magadha, and other rulers to march further for his soldiers has heard that the Nanda king and the rulers of the Gangetic provinces were waiting for Alexander with an Army of 80,000 horses, 2,00,000 foot, 8,000 war chariots and 6,000 fighting elephants. The stout resistance put up by the Brahmns of the Punjab and the cities of Malavas was indeed the beginning of the reaction that was soon to wipe out all traces of Alexander from India. Alexander’s efforts to persuade his mercenaries to proceed further were of no avail, and his soldiers having refused to adance beyond the river Beas (hyphasis) he was left with no option but to order theretreat in September, 326 B.C. Thus he failed to achieve his strongly held aim “of planting the Hellenic standard in the eastern ends of India.” Alexander himself died in June 323 B.C. in Babylon and his dream of world empire came to an end.

The Effect of Alexander’s Invasion

The consequences of Alexander’s invasion of India have been exaggerated out of all proportion by some foreign writers. Rapson and Smith regard this invasion an important and successful landmarlk in the history of India, while according to Radhakumd Mookerji it cannot be called a singular victory for Alexander. Alexander, of course, tried his best to consolidate his conquest in India as far as possible by suitable administrative arrangements. He posted Greek governors to the west of the Indus; Peithon in Sind. Philip in the north, in the lower Kabul valley up to Bacteria, and Oxyartes in the valley of the Hindukush. To the east of the Indus, however, he did not dare to appointment Greek governors, but appointed only Indians, such as the King of Taxila, Abhisara, and Poros to rule over his conquered territories.

Nonetheless, one of its important consequences was that the political vaccum created in the North-West by Alexander’s retreat did produce “indirect effects of utmost importance” in so far as the exploits of Alexander must have provided Chandragupta Maurya with some added inspiration to undertake his extensive territorial ventures. Alexander’s invasion by destroying the power of the petty states of North-Western India gave an impetus to united India.

Thus by increasing the existing facilities for trade, Alexander’s campaign paved to way for Greek merchants and craftsmen.

Alexander established in India a number of Greek settlement, some of which may have survived till the time of Ashoka’s and even later. This promoted an exchange of ideas between Indian and Bacterian Greeks. Greek influence can be seen on Buddhist religion and also on art in course of time there grew a cosmopolitan school by the Hellenic influence. A V. Smith has put it: “whatever Hellenistic elements in Indian civilization can be detected were all indirect consequences of Alexander’s intension”
An immediate effect of Alexander’s invasion was the destruction/weakening of tribes of India which had survived from earlier times. This made it easier for Chandragupta Maurya to bring them under his survey. Thus the process of political unification of northern India under one Government was unleashed. Alexander’s historians besides having left valuable geographical accounts have also left clearly dated records of Alexander’s campaign, which enable us to build Indian chronology for subsequent events on a definite basis.
Sources of Information

With the coming of the Mauryas in the later part of the fourth century B.C., Indian history in a real sense has been reconstructed with fairly authentic evidences from many sources.

1. *Writings of classical workers—Greek and Roman.* The most valuable account has been left by Megasthenes, ambassador of Seleukas to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. His original work ‘Indica’ is unfortunately lost. But few extracts from his work have been extensively found incorporated in the writings of many subsequent Greek and Roman writers. In addition to Megasthenes, we have an account of the voyage between the Persian Gulf and the Indus by Nearchus, one of the great naval commanders of Alexander. Then there was Deimachose who was sent by the Syrian court to Amitrachates, i.e., Bindusara. Similarly, the Egyptian courts sent an envoy named Dionyius to Patalipurta. Though somewhat later, the account left by Patrocles, one of the governors of Seleukas Nikator and Antiochus I of the region lying between the Indus and the Caspian sea, and Erastosthenes, the President of Alexandrian Library (296 to 249 B.C.) provide us with geographical and political data of considerable value.

It must be kept in mind that accounts of the classical writers are not uniformly reliable because even a man like Megasthenes included in his work much that was based on secondary information of which he had no personal knowledge. Nonetheless, the observations and comments of these foreigners have served us fairly reliable information and have also provided valuable corroborative evidence to indigenous sources of India. All these accounts studied with care have yielded information which has been ably utilized by many scholars and historians.

2. *Jain and Buddhist Literature.* Traditions also throw a flood of light on the Mauryan Age. The Jains claim that Chandragupta Maurya in the later part of his career became a Jain. Ashoka, as you know, was personally a Buddhist. A work known as *Jain Kalpasutra* by a Jain writer Bhadrabahu of about 4th century B.C. imparts some useful information about the Mauryas. Sanskrit Buddhist texts like the Divyavadana, Lalitavistara and the Mahavastu also provide valuable information for the period. Likewise, the Jataka stories of previous births of Lord Buddha or Bodhisattvas – compiled in the second or third century B.C. also provide some useful data about the social economic and religious condition of India during this age. The Pali chronicles of Ceylon the *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* (the former being older of the two) most probably completed in the fifth century A.D. – throw some light on Mauryan India.

3. *Kautilya’s Arthasastra and Vishakadatta’s Mudrarakshasa.* Another valuable source of information for this age is the treatise on statecraft, the Arthasastra, generally ascribed to Kautilya (also known as Vishnugupta or Chanakya) who was a councilor of Chandragupta. This work may be “used as a general guide to Mauryan polity”. An historical play written in about 500 A.D. by Vishakadatta named Mudrarakshasa also yields useful data about the history of the Nandas and early Mauryan rule.
4. Last but not the least, we have those remarkable inscriptions of Ashoka engraved or rocks and pillars which notwithstanding the ravages of time, have supplied us with authoritative details of inestimable value.

All these sources of information have certainly increased our knowledge about almost every aspect of the life of our countrymen during the Mauryan Age and also explain why, as graphically described by one scholar “the advent of the Mauryan Dynasty marks the passage from darkness to the light for the historian” as chronology comparative to the previous ages becomes more definite.

The much coveted ideal of Ekrat Sarvabhaum since the Later Vedic period was given the political reality for the first time in the history of India by the Mauryas. The authors of this political reality, Chandragupta, his son Bindusara and his grand son Ashoka, in a real sense, for the first time brought about political and administrative unity of Indian sub-continent.

Ancestry of Chandragupta Maurya

The ancestry of Chandragupta is not known definitely. Some Hindu literary evidences relate him with the Nandas of Magadh. A Chandragupta Katha has come into existence by piling story after story round the hallowed name of Chandragupta. The fragments of the Katha and the different versions of it are preserved in lands, talks, prayer and even in the philosophical dissertations in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and Tamil. Outside India, they are preserved not only in the writings of the Greek and Latin writers but are also in Burmese legends and Ceylonese chronicles. The historical authenticity is lent to this Katha by inscriptive evidence and writings of Greek and Latin historians and Indian and Ceylonese scholars.

1. The ancestry of Chandragupta Maurya, as stated above, is controversial and is subject to widely divergent views ranging from base origin to high Kshatriya lineage. The Puranas which are our earliest available Brahmanical sources are more concerned with the origin of Nandas than with that of Chandragupta. They simply mention that the irreligious Nanda were uprooted by the Brahmin Kautilya who appointed Chandragupta as sovereign of the realm. The formal appointment (Rajyabhisheka) of Chandragupta by Kautilya, an uncompromising champion of Dharma, indicates that Chandragupta was a Kshatriya eligible for kingship. Nowhere in the Puranas there is any mention of Mura, the supposed mother or grandmother of Chandragupta: nowhere in these works is attributed to Chandragupta a Sudra or base origin: nor do they link him with the preceding Nanda Dynasty.

2. It was Sridharswamy, the commentator, of Vishnu Purana who for the first time, mooted the theory about the base origin of Chandragupta by way of explaining his title Maurya. He sought to derive this appellation from Mura, one of the wives of a Nanda king and made her the mother of Chandragupta. But the commentator is guilty both of bad grammar and fictitious history. The derivative from Mura is Maurya and not Maurya and again the commentator makes Chandragupta the scion of Nandas. However, he does not fasten the blame of the base-origin to the name of Mura. He describes her as the lawfully wedded wife of the Nanda king, thereby implying that Chandragupta was of Sudra origin as the Nandas themselves belonged to that caste.

3. The Mudrarakshasa calls him not only Maurya putra but also Handanvaya, Kshemendra and Somadeva refer to him as Purvanandasuta, son of the genuine Nanda, as opposed to Yoga Nanda. The Commentator on the Vishnu Purana says that Chandragupta was the son of Nanda by a wife named Mura. Hence he and his descendents were called Mauryas. Dhudiraja, the commentator on the Mudrarakshasa informs us on the other hand, that
Chandragupta was the eldest son of Maurya, who was the son of the Nanda king, Sarvarthasiddhi by Mura, daughter of Vrishala (Sudra).

4. The Buddhist tradition, however, gives us an altogether different story. The Divyavadan refers to Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, as an anointed Kshatriya, thereby alluding to a Kshatriya origin of Chandragupta. The Mahavamsa, a Ceylonese chronicle, makes Chandragupta a scion of the Kshatriya clan named Moriyas (after peacock or Mora) of Pippalivana lying somewhere between Rumminderi in the Tarai and Kasia in the Gorakhpur district of eastern Uttar Pradesh of today. The existence of this clan can be traced back to the time of the Buddha and is mentioned in the Mahaparinibbansutta, one of the most authentic and ancient canonical texts of the Buddhists. According to this text, the Moriyas sent a messenger to the Mallas, claiming portion of the relics of the Buddhas, by saying: “The Blessed one belonged to the Kshatriya caste and we too are of the Kshatriya caste.”

5. The Jain tradition supports the Buddhists in indicating a connection between peacocks and the family name of Chandragupta. Whereas according to the former, Chandragupta was the son of a daughter of a village headman of peacock-tamers (mayura poshaka), according to the latter, he was the son of the Moriya clan. It appears that Jain writers were not aware of the origin of Chandragupta’s family and have given only an etymological meaning of the Pali word ‘Moriya’.

6. According to Buddhist source, there is a supposed connection between the Maurya expression Moryal Morya and Mora or Mayura (peacock). Aelian informs us that these peacocks were kept in the park of the Mayura Palace at Patliputra. Sir John Marshall points out that figures of peacocks were employed to decorate some of the projecting ends of the gateway at Sanchi. Faucher does not regard these birds as a sort of eating vadge for the dynasty of the Mauryas. He prefers to imagine in them possible allusion to the Mora Jataka.

7. Justin, the Latin classical writer, knew Chandragupta as a ‘novus homo’, a man “Born in humble life”. This does not necessarily meant that he was a man of low caste but merely a commoner with no pretension to the throne yet aspiring for royalty. According to a Greek biographer and moral philosopher Plutarach it was Chandragupta who was seeking to make capital out of the base origin of his rival instead of himself suffering from the same disability.

Taking into consideration all the available evidences we may summarise that Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya Dynasty, belonged to the Kshatriya, clan named Moriya, originally ruling over Pippalivana. The fortunes of the family declined after the death of Chandragupta’s father who was the chief of the clan, and died in a border clash. It was left to Chandragupta to redeem the prestige of his family.

Chandragupta’s Early Career

It is not known when Chandragupta was born. He was a mere stripling according to Plutarch, when he met Alexander 329-25 B.C. in the Punjab. His birth could not have taken place before the middle of the fourth century B.C.

According to Mahavamsa, the mother of Chandragupta after the death of her husband sought shelter in Pushapura (Kusumpura-Pataliputra) where she gave birth to Chandragupta. He was brought up first by a cowherd and then by a hunter in a village. The child showed promise right from his childhood. He towered over his friends when he played the role of the king with them. This attracted the notice of Chanakya, i.e., Kautilya, who happened to pass through that village. The latter took him away to his native city of Taxila. The new mentor gave him a
thorough grounding in certain aims and objectives and, *inter alia* the most important was that he must rid the country of the hated rule and tyranny of the Nanda king, who had insulted Chanakya.

The Nanda ascendancy was not only regarded as “unlawful” and “irreligious” because of their origin, but it was equally despised for the wickedness of the disposition of its rulers and the forcible exactions levied by them on their subjects. The “unlawfully” amassed wealth of the Nandas had become almost proverbial. Its notoriety had reached as far South as the Tamil Country. The Punjab and the North-Western India lay prostrate to Alexander’s invasion. These areas were being constantly squeezed and hurried by his prefects. Chandragupta had thus a doublefold task to accomplish. He must rid the country of foreign domination and liquidate the oppressive rule of the Nandas. These tasks with which Chanakya had entrusted Chandragupta were indeed very difficult yet the latter achieved both these aims with resounding success. He soon successfully mobilized the military resources of the country, rehabilitated its moral, awakened its spirit of resistance, and brought about a unique national rejuvenation. Thus well equipped, he began war of national emancipation which proved eminently successful and resulted in bringing about a national unity in the country which was envied by many successive rulers of India and which India had never witnessed before. He sought to accomplish a part of his mission by including Alexander, when he was in Punjab in 326 B.C. to attack the Nandas. But Alexander was greatly offended by the tone and boldness of Chandragupta and gave order to kill him. According to another account, he was caught spying in Alexander’s camps where he had gone to study the Greek military strategy. He, however, escaped. Encouraged by various visions, he was determined to claim the sovereignty of India. He knew it full well that he had to depend upon himself for realizing this destiny of his.

**Chandragupta’s Later Career**

Chandragupta and Chanakya both set out according to the Pali work *Mahavamsatika*, to collect a huge army from different sources. Justin describes these soldiers as mercenaries, hunters as well as robbers. According to *Arthasastra*, a treatise on policy whose authorship is attributed to Kautilya, the army is to be recruited from the *Choras*, i.e., thieves, *Mlechchhas*, *choraganas* (organised gangs of robbers), *Atavi-Kas* or foresters, and *Sasiro-pajivi…Srenis* or warrior clans. Such elements were found in great abundance in the Punjab after the defeat and disintegration of the large number of republican people like the *Mailoi*, *Oxydrakai Astakenoi*, etc. who as you have been told before, had fought Alexander heroically but had failed for want of cohesion and leadership. Chandragupta obviously weaved together these loose elements into a huge and formidable army. His personal heroism and magnetic personality provided the required leadership. He also made an alliance with the Himalayan King Parvatak (of doubtful identity according to *Mudrarakshasa*, a work of the sixth century written by Vishakhadatta, and Jain work *Parisistaparvan*). This alliance with the Himalayan king gave to Chandragupta as stated in the *Mudrarakshasa* a composite army formed with the Sakas, Yavanas, Kirathas, Kambojas, Oarsikas and Bahilikas. Shorn of dramatic allegory, it means that Chandragupta tapped all the available sources and armed with a huge composite army attempted to overthrow the existing Nanda Empire.

The details of the conquest of Magadha by Chandragupta are not preserved. But the related episodes can be gleaned from the different traditions. The *Mahavamsatika* tells us about the initial mistakes of his campaign in attacking on the centre without conquering the frontier regions. The Jain tradition similarly compares the advance of Chandragupta to a child who puts his thumb into the middle of a hot pie instead of starting from the edge which was cool. But the
Buddhist traditions mention his preliminary failure to consolidate the frontier *rashtras* and *janapadasen* route to Patliputra.

The different stories point to the fact that Chandragupta had to make repeated attempts on Patliputra before he could wrest it from the Nandas. The *Milindapanho* gives an exaggerated account of the slaughter from the destruction of the Nanda army led by Bhaddasala (Bhadrasala).

The Brahmanical tradition, however, gives credit for the overthow of the Nandas to Kautilya. The *Puranas, Arthasastra* and the *Mudrarakshasa* all of them cast the figure of Chandragupta into shade in this heroic fight and give full credit to Chanakya (alias Kautilya) for bringing about the dynastic revolution in Magadha by his diplomacy and appointing Chandragupta as king.

The different versions of this story seem to have preserved only a part of the truth and not the entire truth. The seemingly conflicting views can be easily reconciled by stating that the military skill and bravery of Chandragupta in the battlefield was ably seconded by the astute diplomacy of Chanakya. This witty Brahman who is variously known as Kautilya and Vishnugupta is supposed to be the author of the *Arthasastra* (Treatise on Polity). It has also been argued that Kautilya is not the writer of the Arthasastra. He had a serious grouse against the Nandas. Chandragupta and Chanakya made a common cause. The two together brought about the downfall of the Nandas. The extensive Nanda empire comprising the entire Gangetic Valley and Eastern India along with the considerable portion of the Deccan, passed into the hands of Chandragupta who thus, heralded the foundation of the Mauryan Empire.

According to Plutarch, this event took place ‘not long after’ Chandragupta’s meeting with Alexander in the Punjab in 326-25 B.C. The Buddhist tradition dates the accession of Chandragupta one hundred and sixty two years after the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha which according to the Cantonese tradition took place in 486 B.C. thus assigning Chandragupta a period of twenty-four years rule i.e., from 324 B.C. to 300 B.C. as the first Mauryan empire.

After accomplishing his first task, he turned his attention towards the second, viz, freeing his country from foreign domination. This became easier owing to the growing difficulty of the Greek position in the Punjab, by many uprisings of the Indians, against the Greek Satraps and the outbreak of jealousy between the Greek and Macedonean elements of the occupying forces. Above all, there came the death of Alexander himself in 323 B.C. This led to the disruption of his empire and letting loose of the centrifugal tendencies. At the first partition of Alexander’s empire at Babylon in 823 B.C., no change was affected in the term of Indian position. Both Porus and Ambhi were left free in their respective domains which were greatly increased. Greek authority was limited. Eudomus, in charge of the Greek garrisons in India and Pithon, son of Agenor, as the Greek Satrap of Sind were the two important officials left in India. But during the second partition of Alexander’s empire that took place at Triparadisus in 321 B.C., Pithon was transferred to the North West without appointing any substitute. The quiet withdrawal of the Greeks from India in 321 B.C. was most probably due to the fact that Chandragupta had already started war of the liberation in Sind by then. He carried further north where Eudemus after testing the blood of Chandragupta’s sword discreetly retired from India in 317 B.C. Pithon who was in the north was also left in 316 B.C. to participate in the Greek war of succession. The achievements of Chandragupta are thus summed up by Justin: “India after the death of Alexander had shaken off the yoke of servitude and put his governors to death. The author of this liberation was Sandrocottus.” This Sandrocottus was obviously Chandragupta. The task of liberating the
Punjab and Sind was not an easy one. It invited hard fighting which lasted for almost a decade from about 323 B.C. to 316 B.C.

While Chandragupta was engaged in emancipating his country and consolidating his conquest, the Greek King, Seleucus of Syria, who had succeeded Alexander in the eastern part of his empire was moving towards India to recover the lost provinces. The river Indus formed the boundary between his dominion and that of Chandragupta, before the two kings came to wage conflict. The former, according to another classical writer, is said to have “crossed the Indus and war with Sandroctotus, king of the Indians who dwelt on the banks of the streams”. Neither the date of the war, nor its duration is known for certain reasons. Justin however, dates Seleucus’s treaty or understanding with Chandragupta and settlement of affairs in the East prior to the former’s return home to prosecute the war with Antigonus who died in 301 B.C. The conflict between the two is generally assumed to have taken place in 305 B.C. The Greek writers who were painstakingly meticulous about Alexander’s campaigns were abnormally reticent about the details of Seleucus’s invasion of India. Reasons are quite obvious. This was indeed a very humiliating treaty for the Westerners. According to another classical writer, Strabo, Seleucus ceded to Chandragupta territories then known as Aria (i.e. Herat), Arachosia (i.e. Kandhar), Propanisade (i.e., Kabul) and part of Gondrosia (i.e. Baluchistan) in return for 500 elephants, and a matrimonial alliance, the exact nature of which is not clear. The diplomatic relations were also established between the two as Strabo refers to the sending of Megasthenes—Seleucus’s ambassador to the court of Chandragupta in Patliputra where he wrote his famous book called “Indica”. These terms of the treaty leave no doubt that Seleucus fared badly at the hands of Chandragupta who thereby secured a scientific frontier by acquiring Afghanistan and Baluchistan for his newly founded empire.

About the subsequent career of Chandragupta, we have to rely on the stray inscriptional and written notices. In a vague statement, Plutarch asserts that “with an army of 6,00,000 men Chandragupta overran and subdued all India”. Justin also refers to mastery over the entire country. The conquest and inclusion of one important province that is of Saurashtra in the empire of Chandragupta is clearly attested to by the testimony of Junagadha inscriptions of Rudradaman of 150 A.D. (72 Saka Era) where it is mentioned that Saurashtra-Kathiawar was governed by Chandragupta’s Rashtria, Vaishya Pushyagupta, who constructed the famous Sudarshan Lake there.

I. THE MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION

Undoubtedly, Indian history entered a new era with the beginning of the Mauryan Empire in around 321 B.C. as for the first time, India attained political unity and administrative uniformity. The Mauryan Empire as founded by Chandragupta stretched from the Bay of Bengal in the East to Afghanistan and Baluchistan in the West, the Himalayas in the North to the ChitalduRig district in the South.

Chandragupta was not only a great conqueror, he was also a great administrator. Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleukses in the court of Chandragupta, has left detailed accounts of his system of government. The treatise on state craft called the Arthasastra attributed to Chandragupta’s able minister Chanakya (also known as Kautilya), confirms and supplements the accounts of Megasthenes. According to the Puranas, the son and successor of Chandragupta was Bindusara who is believed to have ruled from 300 B.C. to 273 B.C. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for four years. Ultimately, Ashoka succeeded him to
the throne. Ashoka’s imperishable records inscribed on rocks and pillars testify that the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka embraced the whole of India except Assam in the extreme east and the Tamil Kingdom of the Far South.

Besides the sources mentioned above, the Buddhist and Jain traditions, the literary sources like the Divyavadara and Mudrarakshasa (though they belong to much later times) and inscriptions (eg. The Girnar inscription of Rudradaman) provide us a variety of evidence for the study of the administrative organization under the Mauryas.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION
The King

At the apex of the Mauryan administrative system stood the king: The king was primarily the wielder of the power, who was given primacy among the seven components (Saptanga) of the state. His chief function was to promulgate the social order. It was his moral duty to punish the wrongdoers and to maintain peace in the empire. Arthasastra refers to him as dharmapravartaka who had to set a high ideal in front of his subjects. The people were looked upon as children for whose happiness the head of the state was responsible and to whom he owed a debt which could only be discharged by a good government.

Kauutilya puts the following ideal before the king: “For a king his Vrata (religious vow) is a constant activity for the cause of his people (utthanam); his best religious ceremony is the work of administration, his highest charity – equality of treatment noted out to all”.

The brahmanical law books such as Manu and Baudhayan stressed that the king should be guided by the laws laid down in the Dharmasastras and by the customs prevailing in the country.

The Council of Ministers

According to Megasthenes, the King was assisted by a council of ministers, whose members were noted for their wisdom. From the councillors were chosen the high officers who were responsible for inculcating and enforcing the essentials of dharma throughout the country. For the first time the ideal of Chakravarty was given a practical shape. But the Mantri-Parshad acted as a good check on the King’s autocracy for the latter had to consult it on important matters of policy and administration. These officers are differently stated in different texts. They are referred to as councillors and assessors by Greek writers whereas Rock Edict VI of Ashoka refers to them as Mahamatras or high officials. The most important among the officers were the Mantrins or high ministers. The dharmamahamatras and mahamatra of Ashoka were concerned with the propagation of dharma. Antapala of Arthasastra was concerned with guarding the frontier and controlling the import trade. The other officers were the high priest or purohit, commander-in-chief or Senapati and crown-prince or Yuvaraja and adhyakshas or Superintendents who assisted the King in economic activities of the State. They controlled and regulated agriculture, trade and commerce, weights and measures, crafts such as weaving and spinning, mining etc.

Municipal Administration

The city administration was entrusted to a commission of thirty members divided into six boards of five members each. Each board had its own departments allotted to it. The first board supervised industries and crafts, regulated work and wages and enforced the use of correct material. The second board looked after the comfort and security of the foreigners.

Samaharta was the highest officer incharge of assessment and Sannidhata looked after the treasury.
The third board's work was registration of births and deaths. The fourth board regulated the sales of produce, supervised and tested weights and measures, stamped the articles sold, issued licenses to merchants. The fifth board inspected the manufactured goods and prevented the frauds arising from adulterations. The sixth board collected taxes on the goods sold.

The Army

A considerable part of revenue was spent on the army. The maintenance of a huge army led to the political unification of nearly the whole of India except the extreme South. According to Indian tradition, the army consisted of four departments – elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry. The Arthasastra maintains that the army was organized in squads of 10 men, companies of a hundred and battalions of a thousand each. The king was the commander-in-chief of the Army and the Senapati was directly under him. According to Megasthenes, the army was controlled by a war office consisting of 30 members distributed among 6 boards who were incharge of different departments. Behind the success of the army was the diplomacy of the Mauryas. Arthasastra refers to the employment of secret agents or spies, winning over enemies people, siege assault are the fine means to capture a fort shows the importance given to diplomacy. The Arthasastra clearly prefers diplomacy to force.

Espionage

From Indian literature, we know that at all times kings used to entertain spies (chara or gudha purusha). These agents were grade into high ones, low ones and those of middle rank. Recruits to the service of special agents or news writers were chosen for their good character. The employment of women of easy virtue as spies, is also alluded to by Kautilya’s Arthasastra.

A similar class of officers which was created by Asoka himself were the reporters or prativedaka who were posted everywhere in order to report the affairs of the people at any time.

Law and Justice

For the administration of justice, there were two sets of courts besides the village tribunals that dealt with petty cases under the guidance of the village headmen or the elders. These were styled the Dhamamasthiya and Kantakasodhana. At the head of the judiciary stood the king himself. Greek writers refer to judges who listened to cases of foreigners. Penal code was strict. We are informed by the Greek writers that “thief was a thing of very rare occurrence”. They were surprised to observe that the people “have no written laws and are ignorant of writing but conduct all matters by memory”. The crime of giving false evidence was punished by mutilation of limbs and in certain unspecified cases, offences were punished by the shaving of the offender’s hair. Torture for the purpose of extorting a confession was recognized and freely used.

Provincial Administration

The Mauryan empire was a vast one. But Chandragupta devised a plan in overcoming these difficulties and introduced a decentralized scheme of administration. The whole empire was divided into four administrative divisions: besides the center with its headquarters at Patliputra headed by the king and assisted by the ministers and the Council, the other four divisions had their capitals respectively at Taxila in the North-west, Ujjain in West, Suvaranagiri in the South and Tosali in the East, as mentioned in the edicts of Ashoka. Each administrative divisions was put in charge of Viceroy designated as Kumara or Aryaputra who was normally the prince of the royal blood or some other relative to the king or high official. The details of the provincial administration are not amply known. But even then it can be guessed
that the Viceroyal courts were the smaller replica of the imperial courts with the difference that
the council of ministers could sometime even dwarf the viceroy and oppress the people as was
the case in Taxila in the time of Bindusara. The same contingency led Ashoka to demonstrate
with his officials to be honest in the discharge of their duties.

The Viceroyalties were subdivided into provinces under the charge of the Pradeshkikas
referred to in Ashoka’s inscriptions and the Junagarh inscription of Rudradamen I of 150 A.D.
Girnar was one such province governed by Pushyagupta in the time of Chandragupta and Raja
Tushaspa in the time of Ashoka.

Local Administration

The provinces were further split up into smaller areas equivalent to the district and tehsil
comprising 100 villages under sihanika and 5 to 10 villages under Gopa respectively. Each had
its own staff of officials comprising mostly Yuktas and Rajukas. They were entrusted with the
collection of revenue and general administration of their respective areas. They were, in fact, the
link between the people and the government and were under the final authority of the Samaharta
or the chief-collector.

The smallest unit of administration which enjoyed semi-autonomous power was the
village. It regulated its own affairs with regard to defence, discipline, cultivation, payment of
revenue, land and water-rights, etc., through the gramani who was chosen from amongst the
village elders who assisted the official of the government in disposing petty disputes arising in
the village. Cultivable land was parceled out in states belonging to individuals, while pastures
and forest lands were held in common.

Municipal Administration

The cities of the empire were administered, most probably, on the lines of the municipal
administration of Patliputra which has been graphically described by Megasthenes. He
designated the town-official as Nagaradhyaksha of Kautilya. According to Megasthenes, the
officers-in-charge of the city were divided into six boards, five members in each. Each board was
assigned specific functions, e.g., the first board looked after everything relating to the industrial
arts; the second looked after foreigners; the third recorded the births and deaths within the city,
the fourth supervised trade and commerce; manufactured articles were the concern of the fifth
board, and the sixth collected the tenth of the prices of the articles sold. Thus, nothing escaped
the notice of the city officials from birth to death. In their collective capacity these officials
looked after the civic amenities like water, sanitation, cleanliness, public-buildings (temples) etc.
There were city-magistrates, each termed as the Nagarvyaharika Mahamatra as mentioned in
the Asokan Edicts, to maintain law and order and to settle disputes of the residents of the city.

Judicial Administration

King was at the head of the judicial administration. He constituted the highest appellate
court in the realm. In the villages and towns, cases were settled by the Gramvrdha and
Nagarvyavaharika Mahamatras respectively. In the countryside, there were Rajukas who were
equal to our modern district-magistrates. All disputes arising out of land and its ownership were
heard by them and Ashoka made them autonomous to expedite the settlement of the disputes and
to prevent undue delay in meeting out justice: Kautilya refers to two other kinds of courts
Dharmasthaya and Kanatakashodhana. The Dharmasthaya courts were civil courts presided over
by three Dharmastrhas learned in sacred law and three amtyas and they were located in all
important centers. They tried cases involving disputes in marriage, divorce inheritance, houses,
water-rights, trespass, debt, deposits, serfs, labour and contract, sale, violence, abuse, assault, gambling and miscellaneous. Punishments, were carefully graded and executed by royal authority; they included fines, imprisonment, whipping and death. There must have been in existence also caste panchayats and guild-courts which regulated the affairs of communities and professional and dealt with disputes among them in the first instance.

The Kantakashodhana courts were presided over by the three Pradeshrtis and three Amatyas. These were a new type of courts constituted to meet the growing needs of an increasingly complex socio-economic structure and to implement the decisions of a highly oRiganized bureaucracy on all matters that were being brought under their control and were unknown to the old legal system. These courts were special tribunals to protect the state and people against the anti-social persons—the thorns (Kantaka) of society. These were designated to safeguard both government and society from the possible evils of the new order that was being introduced, and at the same time, they served as powerful weapons to implement the mass of new regulations to regulate the new order.

The sum-total of this judicial system was that control of the bureaucracy over the people was strengthened and there was a sharp decline in crime as a result of fear and moral exhortation as mentioned by Megasthenes.

To conclude, one may say that the imperial organization under the Maurayyas as it comes down to us through the Arthasastra of Kautilya, inscriptions of Asoka and other sources, was of a very high order with the king as the head of the State, wielding all power, a huge standing well oRiganized military system and an efficient system of criminal administration, new sources of revenue and a huge bureaucracy organized in a hierarchical way, which together contributed to strengthen the royal power.

II. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PATTERN OF THE MAURYAN INDIA

Mauryan Economy

The discovery of iron and introduction of its technology in the Madhyadesa (U.P. and Bihar) by 800 B.C., at the latest, revolutionised the economic pattern of India. Barring the Indus Valley experiment in Chalcolthic agrarian economy the rest of India was passing through Neolithic pastoral-cum-agricultural village economy. The transition of India from the Neolithic to the Metal Age and its subsequent corollary of postoral to agrarian economy was accelerated by the discovery and use of iron. The revolution took place in the Madhyadesa and it dominates the political scene than culminating in the Magadhan or Mauryan Empire.

The use of iron facilitated the clearing of the jungles and furrowed the land more deeply so as to exploit fully the potential fertility of the Ganga-Yamuna valley. The spurt in agriculture resulted in the accumulation of the surplus food necessitating its exports which was facilitated by the natural water-way of the Ganga. The resulting trade and commerce led to the rise of gradual urbanization. The famous cities of Sravasti, Saketa, Varanasi, Champa, Rajagriha, Ujjain etc., grew around market places and attracted artisans from far and wide with the allurement of easy availability of raw-material and ready market for the disposal of their handiworks. With the consolidation of the markets, cities multiplied in number and became the storehouse of wealth. These famous cities were so much coveted and prized by the adventuring spirits that they became the capitals of the famous kingdoms of the sixth century B.C. mentioned in the traditional lists of Sixteen Mahajanapadas’. These centres of trade, commerce and craft were interlinked by means of trade-routes which linked Champa with Varanasi via Rajagriha, from then on to Taxila : the second linked Varanasi with Srasvasti via Saketa and Ayodhya : the third
joined Varanasi with Ujjain via Kausambhi and the fourth linked these northern centers with the Deccan via Ujjain. From Champa, the merchants were going to *Suvarnabhumi* (Arakan in Burma) *Tamraparni* (Ceylon) and the other islands to the east of India and Taxila became culture cum – commercial distributing centre of “Indian Wares” to Central and Western Asia and further to West Africa and Europe. No wonder that the background had been fully prepared by these spanning trade routes and expanding agrarian economy resulting in gradual urbanization for the rise of imperial polity manifested by the Mauryas.

The importance of irrigation to Indian agricultural conditions was fully recognized. In certain areas water for irrigation was distributed and measured. The *Arthasastra* refers to a water tax which was regularly collected wherever the state assisted in providing irrigation. One of Chandragupta’s governors was responsible for building a dam across a river near Girnar in Western India. The construction and maintenance of reservoirs, tanks, canals, and wells were regarded as part of the functions of the government.

One of the more notable results of the political unification of the sub-continent was the security provided by a stable and centralized government which patronized expansion of various, craft guilds and trade. The state directly employed some of the artisans such as armours, shipbuilders, etc., who were exempted from tax but others who worked in state workshops were liable to tax.

A tax was levied on all manufactured articles and the date was stamped on them. The merchandise goods were strictly supervised. Various factors such as current price, supply and demand, and the expenses of production were considered by the superintendent of commerce, before assessing the goods.

**Social Organisation under the Mauryas**

The social organisation continued to be as it had been transfixed in the later Vedic period with the difference that the duties of each caste had become more crystallized. Castes increased in number due to the rise of mixed castes and new economic groups as stated by Kautilya in his *Arthasastra*. He enumerates the duties of the Brahmins as *Adhyana* (study), *Adhyapana* (teaching), *Yajna* (worship) *Yajana* (officiating at worship), *Pana*, (pratigraha), or (accepting gifts).

Supreme position in society was assigned to the Brahmin. He was supposed to fill the highest offices in the state and society as teacher, priest, judge, prime minister, assessor and member of the Dharma Parishad, the standing legal commissions etc., in the administration. He was punishable in law, but not by capital punishment. A Brahmana lost his status if he violated the restrictions prescribed regarding food and gifts, and due to occupation of low profession for livelihood from which he was debarred. But in actual life, specially in times of distress, he was allowed to follow occupations not theoretically prescribed for him. This rule applied to other caste also.

The duties of the Kshatriyas comprised *adhyaya*, *yajana*, *dana*, *savtra jive* (profession of arms as source of livelihood) and bhutarakshana (protection of living being). The duties of the Vaisyas are: *Adhyayana*, *Yajana*, *Dana*, *Krishi* (agriculture) *Pasupala* (cattle rearing) and *Vaniyaa* (trade). The functions assigned to the Surdas were Dvijajatisrusha (service of the three twice-born castes), e.g. *Varta* (production of wealth), *Karukarma* (arts) and *Kusilva-karma* (crafts). The common duties of the three higher castes were study, worship and making gifts.

This Sudras were debarred from sacraments (*Samskara*) and even from hearing sacred text. He was denied the rites of marriages, cooking of daily food in the grihya fires, and funeral
ceremonies (*Shraddha*). He had few privileges and a horde of obligations. His position had degenerated to that of a slave except that he was still a freedom.

The kind of social stratification could subsist as long as society was based on rural economy. With the onset of urbanization and revolution in agro-economy there came a change. The wealth accumulated with the merchants, artisans and craftman who mostly belonged to the Vaisya and Sudra class who began to occupy a position of honour in society. They grouped themselves into guilds which regulated all their affairs and lessened their dependence on the caste panchayats. With the formation of their respective group guilds, they became free from fear of social isolation. Their increasing prosperity on the basis of their group unity increased social tensions between them and the upper two classes of the society. The guilds and corporations of people on the basis of trade, arts and crafts rose to such an extent that Megasthenes confused castes with profession or occupations. He enumerates seven class or castes into which the whole population of India was divided, *viz.*, Philosophers, Husbandmen, Herdsmen, Artisans, Military, Overseers or Spies and Councillors or Assessors. He adds that no one is allowed to marry out of his castes, or to exchange one profession or trade for another or to follow more than one business. His observations seem to have been based on what he heard about the castes and formal division into seven classes. Thus, there emerge a big gulf between theory and practice in the caste system. This confusion could possibly arise only in an urban-centre, due to emergence of some liberalizing processes. But in rural areas the caste system comparatively remained rigid and unchangeable, making invidious distinction and producing untouchables and *Nirvasita Sudras*.

Slavery, which Megasthenes never heard of in India was very much there, though the treatment to them was very different from that prevailing in the Western world. They were not outcastes and were employed in the households. Forcible production through slave was of course non-existence. There were many attenuating circumstances for them by which they could buy their freedom and thus become honourable members of he society, e.g. a slave girl bearing a son of her master automatically became free. Ashoka in his Edict, continuously exhorted the people to be humane and considerate to their slaves and servants and he specifically enjoined upon his *Dharmamahamatras* to mitigate their physical suffering, if they had any.

Ashoka, further, recommended (Alparyasta) to his people not to hoard wealth unnecessarily and not to spend it extravagantly. By this he was able to keep down the inflationary tendencies in the country which usually happened due to the production and inflow of wealth into the country. At the same time, he brought out the hidden wealth to promote trade and commerce.

**Relationship between Mauryan Polity, Economy and Society**

The pattern of Mauryan economy and society was largely influenced by its political system. No state in ancient India maintained such a vast army to defend the country and a huge bureaucracy to run the administration, as the Maura yas maintained. Secondly they also maintained enough surplus in their exchequer to meet the need in emergency.

Such a huge expenditure could not be maintained by the normal taxation. So, to find out a profitable source of income, it was essential for the Mauryan state to undertake and to regulate numerous economic activities. As a natural corollary to that the Mauryans adopted the policy of state control of the entire economic activities consisting of agriculture, industry, trade and transport, and the imposition of all possible varieties of taxes on the people.
Socio-Agricultural Policy of the Mauryas

The Mauryas rendered enormous contributions to the further growth of rural economy. In that respect they adopted the dual policy of establishing new agricultural settlements and developing the decaying one by transferring its surplus settlers to the new one. To increase agricultural productivity, the Sudras who hitherto formed the collective property of the upper three classes and worked as their slaves and hired labourers, were now allowed to settle down as cultivators in those new rural settlements. In order to convert virgin soil into cultivable one, they were granted state assistance in the form of remission of taxes, supply of cattle; seeds and money with deferred re-payment upto their attaining self sufficiency. Secondly, lands were granted in new settlements to retired village officials and priests, without any proprietary rights. Thirdly, the failure of a farmer to cultivate his plot led to its transfer from him to others for proper utilization. Ordinary peasants were not allowed to transfer their plots to non-taxpaying peasants. Lastly, the state farms formed an important source of income to the state. These were managed by the superintendent of agriculture and tilled by slaves and hired labourers.

The state regulated water supply and provided irrigation facilities, to the agriculturists. Thus, with the help of Sudra labour and proper irrigation facilities, a substantial portion of Ganga-basin was brought under cultivation.

Trade and Industry

The Mauryan empire regulated trade and industry with the help of a number of superintendents. The superintendent of commerce was in charge of the market, the superintendent of weights and measures used to enforce correct weights and measures, the superintendent of ships looked after water communications and collected ferry dues, the superintendent of tolls collected customs on commodities for internal and external commerce, the superintendent of weaving looked after weaving industry mainly run by women labourers, and the superintendent of liquor managed the state wine shops. State had the complete monopoly over the trade of salt and liquor.

Mining and metallurgy formed the base of political as well as economic power of the Mauryas. It was looked after by the superintendent of mines who was to be an expert on mining and metallurgy. He was to develop the old mines and discover the new ones. The ores of gold, silver, copper, lead, tin, iron and Bitumen were worked upon. Literary evidence suggests that working of iron was much more expensive than any other metal. Lohadhyaaksha was the officer-in-charge of iron working. The production of minerals and mining trade was the monopoly of the state. Thus, metals and mining were the most important factors in the Mauryan state policy. Kautilya points out that the origin of treasury is mining, and of force in treasury, and earth is acquired by means of treasury and force.

System of Taxation

Apart from the incomes of the economic undertaking, the state also imposed a large number of customary and new taxes. The main tax was the 1/6 of the production of the peasants as the royal share. The state also received 1/4 and sometimes 1/2 from the share croppers who received land and other agricultural inputs from it. The peasants also paid another tax known as the pindakara, imposed on the groups of villages. The old Vedic Tax bali, perhaps is now regarded as the religious tax. Kara was a tax received from flower and fruit gardens. Senabhakta was a tax received from the villagers in the form of supply of provisions to the army when it passed the villages concerned. Hiranya was known as payment in cash. The peasants had also to pay irrigation cases.
There were also customs and ferry dues. Taxes were also imposed on the guilds of urban artisans. Even those numerous taxes could not meet the mounting expenditure of the state. So, Arthasastra provides for large real emergency taxes. One such measure was the imposition of pramaya or the gifts of affection which was to be levied only once on peasants and which amounted to 1/3rd or 1/4th of their produce. Arthasastra also provided for compulsory raising of a second crop by the cultivators, a share of which went to the state. According to Patanjali and Kautilya, the Mauryan emperors also collected money by setting up images of Gods for worship. Jaina tradition also suggests that Kautilya issued 800 million karsapanas i.e. Kautilya debased silver coins to fill up the treasury. All such emergence measures enormously increased the income of the Mauryan State.

Normally half of the income of the Mauryan state was deposited in treasury to meet the emergency.

Thus the whole Mauryan economy was geared up to meet the financial requirements of the state. Most of these taxes were collected in kind. From the nature of the duties of the superintendent of mints, it appears that money economy under the Mauryas, made considerable progress. But the growth of money economy, at the same time, was retarded due to Mauryan policy of depositing half the amount in treasury, and not investing them for productive purposes. Moreover, taxes levied on all varieties of commodities also retarded the progress of money economy.

In spite of such limitations, the Mauryan age, witnessed significant economic progress with giant strides in the expansion of agriculture and mining industry. Development of transport and communications helped in expansion of inland trade and commerce.

III. CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

India came to enjoy a proud position and became the nucleus of diffusion of its civilization in the world under the Mauryas. However, the anti-climax came immediately after Ashoka and the Mauryan Empire disintegrated within fifty years of his death. It collapsed as suddenly as it had risen; but the suddenness of its collapse is not as startling as its longevity. In those early times with the primitive mode of transport and communication, to hold together different and diverse social, political, and cultural groups in a country as vast as India for even a century and a half was virtually a task of political geniuses and not dreamers as the Mauryan kings have sometimes been accused.

Ashoka has been sometimes held responsible for the downfall of the empire. The end of the dynasty at the coup of Pushyamitra Shunga was considered Brahmanical revolt against the pro-Buddhist policy of Ashoka. But there is no support for this contention. Ashoka never allowed his personal religion to come into conflict with his state religion (Dharma). A king who never felt tired of teaching his subjects the virtues of religious toleration, and who encouraged the different religious demonstrations all over his empire could not be blamed of religious intolerance. As aptly observed by one critic “his general policy was neither specifically pro-Buddhist nor anti-Brahman. It was open to acceptance or rejection by all or any.” Moreover, the Brahmanical dynasty founded by Pushyamitra Shunga, the annihilator of the Mauryans, was itself overthrown by another Brahmanical dynasty of the Kanvas. Thus political and not religious causes were at the root of this change in dynasty accentuated no doubt by the vastness of the country.

History of India is a continuous interplay of centrifugal (i.e., breaking away from the centre) and centripetal (i.e., on a centre) tendencies, when the former are on the ascendance.
regionalism and disintegration assert themselves as was the case after Ashoka, and when the latter manifest themselves, the political unification becomes a natural sequence. The nature and scope of the unification depends on the personality of the unifier. The Mauryan Empire was not an exception to his historical phenomenon.

Ashoka’s eschewing of war and its substitution by dharmavijaya (conquest by religion of course did not lead to the disbanding of the army; nor was the advocate of it for his non-violence was not of such an unrealistic nature. It had likely dimmed the moral and spirit of the army and farsightedness of his successors. It is because of this that the rise of powers and new political combination of the Bactrians and Parthians across the Hindukush were overlooked, and frontiers were left inadequately guarded. This very dynastic empire had its inherent weakness of too much dependence on the personality of the king and when the supply of equally capable monarchs were exhausted. All the evils of centrifugal tendencies like rise of factions in the court, assertion of independence by the provincial governors and viceroy in the distant regions, and the resulting foreign invasions manifested, themselves. The Mauryans, in spite of creating a permanent cadre of administrative service under the name Mahamatras could not check these tendencies, mostly because of the weak successors of Ashoka.

Notwithstanding any high sounding theoretical basis claimed of monarchy in ancient India, Mauryan kings in practice were more or less despots. And as you know quite well no despot however, efficient, benevolent or conscientious and who knows his obligation to his subject, can despite his best efforts assure that his successors would follow his footsteps. There is no certain method by which he can pass on his virtues and qualifications to his successors. Thus most frequently—and the history of India is replete with innumerable such instances—a good and benevolent king is succeeded by a worthless, profligate and inefficient successor. This is the chief bane of almost every personal rule. The same thing happened when Ashoka died. His successors, by and large, were weak and irresponsible despots who wasted much of their time, energy and expense in dissipation at the cost of the subjects’ welfare and “thus the dominion of Dharma (Dharma-Chakra), the kingdom of Righteousness which Ashoka sought to establish, could not survive after him because it was not broadbased upon the people’s will through a democracy which is independence of the personal factor in a monarchy.” (R.K. Mukherjee).

We should never ignore the economic cause which precipitated the downfall and disintegration of the Mauryan empire. The cumbersome and expensive Mauryan bureaucracy despite its excellent record of efficiency under Chandragupta and Ashoka, tended to be lax, indifferent and parasitic. The cost of administration increased phenomenally. But the resources remained almost static. The debasement of currency resorted to in the latter part of the Mauryan rule was indicative of the new trend towards economic stagnation. Growing weakness of the economy had its inevitable impact on administrative efficiency and his coupled with the weakness of the rulers who succeeded Ashoka unavoidably led to the early dissolution of the once powerful Mauryan Empire.

One should also not overlook another factor. Ashoka by preaching his Dharma had unwittingly deprived monarchy of its traditional strength based on the claims of divinity. This irresistibly led to one inevitable outcome. “Gradually Dharma replaced the idea of a state. Even a divine was no longer infallible, because an unrighteous king could be removed.” (Romila Thapar)
Dim though the picture be in many ways of its details, the figure of Ashoka takes an honourable place in the galaxy of monarchs ever known to Indian history. He is a great ideal today because he is a great harbinger of peace. He is the only monarch in the history of the world who is the preacher of universal morality to the people.

The ideal of kingship of Ashoka was to promote the material as well as spiritual welfare of his subjects; to make the mankind happy in this world and also in the other world. Ashoka’s efforts after Dhamma date from his conquest of Kalinga. The reason of his moral propagandism is suggested to be that he feels bound to promote the real welfare of his subject, as ‘a father does of his children’. The reason is further indicated in the following statement: “And whatever efforts I am making is made that I may discharge the debt which I owe to living beings, that I may make them happy in this world and that they may attain heaven in the other world” (R.E. VI). Thus Ashoka takes to moral propagandism as an absolute duty of the ruler towards his subjects, one of the obligations of kingship. Such a duty must need be wide and Catholic in its outlook and scope, such as the promotion of happiness of all sections of people both in this world and the next.

We are told in Rock Edict XIII that a turn in his ideal of kingship or in his religious thought came after his conquest and annexation of Kalinga in his 9th regnal year. There arose in his mind a heavy remorse by thinking of horrors of Kalinga war. These slaughter, death and captivity seemed exceedingly serious to the monarch. His actions as a monarch were changed and since then the sound of ‘Bheri’ had become the sound of ‘Dharma’.

After the war the chiefest conquest, in his opinion, was not the victory in a military war, but the victory of law of Piety (dharma vijaya) and in a way he advised his sons and grandsons not to think of conquering a new conquest by war, and that they should consider that to be the real conquest which is through the law of piety, as it avails both for good in this world and the next.

It appears that after Kalinga war he altogether stopped slaughter and killing of animals. It can not be ignored that Ashoka was up in arms against sacrificial slaughter that was prevalent in this country under the brahmanic system of Vedic sacrifices. He found offence in even convivial gatherings where meat doles must have been distributed to merry makers. Due to his compassion for animal life the king brought out a code of regulations (in R.E.V.) restricting slaughter and mutilation of various kinds of animals, birds and aquatic lives, prevention of caponing of cocks, of burning of chaff along with living creatures within, of forest conflagration, feeding of the living with the living, and of destruction of elephant preserves or of fish ponds and these were prominent features in the king’s restrictive regulations.

D.R. Bhandarkar opines that ‘his ideal was to promote material and spiritual welfare of the whole world consisting not only of men but also of beasts and other creatures, not only again in his own kingdom but also over the world known or accessible to him.

The source of his ideal was his dhamma. Ashoka’s dhamma is a code of certain ethical principles and humanitarian ideals with its universal dimension. And it is this which Ashoka tries to propagate as far as possible. His Dhamma of edicts is not any particular religious system but the moral law independent of any caste or creed, the sara or essence of all religions. One can see
in it the efforts on the part of the king to unite the various sects and sections of the society and to promote the ideas of peaceful co-existence and universal brotherhood.

Scholars dispute whether Ashoka’s concept of dhamma was based on Buddhism or not. Negatively, we may say that it was not to be identified with any of the then prevailing faiths of the country. It was certainly not Buddhism, his own religious system. “We hear from him nothing concerning the deeper ideas or fundamental tenants of that faith; there is no mention of the Four Grand Truths, the Eight fold Path, the Chain of Causation, the supernatural quality of Buddha;’ the word and the idea of Nirvana fail to occur; and the innumerable points of difference which occupied the several sects are likewise ignored”. (Cambridge History p. 505) It can be argued that his idea of Dhamma absorbed common ethical principles or essence of all religious sects in which Buddhist principles also form a part.

It has two aspects; Negative and Positive.

**Positive aspect of Dhamma:** In its positive aspect, we find the mention of certain virtues in the edicts, viz,

(i) Sadhuta, saintliness, (ii) apasinavam, freedom from sin (iii) Daya, kindness (iv) Danam, liberality (v) Satyam, truthfulness (vi) Saucham, purity (vii) Mardavam, gentleness (viii) Samyama, self control (ix) Dharmarati, attachment to morality.

In P.E.I love to Dharma, self-examination, obedience, fear of sin and enthusiasm are mentioned as requisites for the attachment of happiness in this world and the next. In its practical aspect, it prescribes a comprehensive code of conduct embracing various relations of life. It is described as comprising:

(i) Prananam anarambha, abstention from slaughter of living beings.
(ii) Avihisa bhutanam, non-violence towards life.
(iii) Susrusa, obedience to father, mother and teachers
(iv) Apachiti, respect of pupils towards the gurus
(v) Sampratipatti, proper treatment towards brahmanas, sramanas, relations and acquaintances.
(vi) Danam, liberality towards brahmanas, sramanas, friends and the aged.
(vii) Apa-vyayata, less expenditure
(viii) Apa-bhandata, moderation in saving

By the inclusion of those common duties, the emperor no doubt aimed at this purity of domestic life so essential to the well being of the society. The circle of human relations embraced even the brahmanas and sramanas, thereby making it necessary to the householders to support the acetics. In R.E. III and IV the king gave the direction and even enforced it that the lower animals must be met kind treatment by their human masters.

In R.E. XIII, the Dhamma is described in a nutshell as the right attitude towards all manifesting itself in non-injury, restraint, equal treatment and mildness in respect of all creatures, human beings as well as beasts and birds.

**Negative aspect of Dhamma:** In its negative aspect Ashoka has pointed out certain vices which should be avoided and not be practiced by human beings viz krodhah, anger; manam, pride; irsa, envy; nisthuryam, cruelty; chandyam, rage or fury. In R.E. X the dhamma is also negatively defined as aparisravam, i.e. freedom from evil.

We have already seen how much Ashoka cherished all his domestic relations brothers and sisters, sons and grandsons and other female relations of his, in whose affairs, moral welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, he was keenly interested. Those outside his own
family the people at large, he regarded as his own children for whose welfare he was constantly working. In P.E. II, Ashoka himself refers to his many and various kindnesses and good deeds in respect of both man and beasts, birds and aquatic creatures. Ashoka also insists on dharmanusasanam, preaching morality as the supreme duty of the king, and accordingly he himself undertook a part of this public instruction in morality by moving among his subjects in different parts of the country, instructing them in morality and questioning them also about morality as stated in R.E. VIII. In R.E., VI, he asserts the promotion of good of all as the most important duty of the king, which could only be discharged by exertion and dispatch of business.

Ashoka has drawn certain comparisons between the practices of ordinary life and those of Dhamma so that the people may understand his idea of Dhamma. Dharmadana is better than the ordinary gift. While alms-giving was commended, the higher doctrine was taught that there is no such charity as the charitable gift of the law of piety; no such distribution as the distribution of piety R.E. XI.

Secondly Ashoka cared very little for ordinary mangalas or rituals performed by the people specially by the women kind and was inclined to look with some scorn upon ordinary ceremonies, which, as he observes, bear little fruit. True ceremonial consists in the fulfilment of that law which bears great fruit; and includes kind treatment of slaves and servants, honour to teachers, respect for life and liberality towards sramanas and brahmanas.

Thirdly, Ashoka insists on Dharmavijaya, which, he considers is only the true conquest rather than an ordinary conquest. Glory of a king does not depend upon the physical extent of his dominion but upon the victory of hearts and wills of the people by the force of moral pursuasion.

Some important features of Ashoka’s Dhamma: It is distinguished by several doctrines and philosophical positions bringing out Ashoka’s ideas of moral reform Ashoka insists on the quality of self-examination. This must mean examination of one’s bad deeds with his good ones (P.E. III). In P.E.I, he emphasises intense self-examination (pariksha) and intense effort (utsaha) as among the aids to moral life.

Next is emphasised the need of self-exertion as a means of moral progress. The need, he frankly admits, is all the greater for a man of ‘high degree’ (R.E. X). He further points out: ‘Difficult, verily, it is to attain such freedom (from sin), whether by people of low or high degree, save by the utmost exertion (parakrama), giving up all other aims’. The Minor Rock Edict-I publishes the declaration: ‘Let small and great exert themselves’. He wanted to see such a purpose to increase from more to more. He did not forget to say that even people living outside the Indian borders should strive for the same end.

Ashoka also emphasised on the quality of tolerance. It appears that many religious sects and faiths flourished during his reign in India and hence, toleration was insisted as an absolute duty. The root of toleration is restraint of speech, ‘refraining from speaking well of one’s own sect and ill of others.’ On that basis toleration among the followers of different faiths will grow, and it should be further promoted by making them know of one another’s doctrines, so that the follower of one sect may be able to appreciate the doctrine of other sects. Out of this width of knowledge will spring a wider outlook, charity and toleration, and purity of doctrines, the essence of all religions (R.E. XII).

Another important feature of his dhamma is emphasis on the essence of religion. Every religion has two aspects; ethical and doctrinal. Ethics is the inner and doctrine is the outer manifestation of the religion. All religions agree on the ethical aspect but they differ with respect to outer manifestation. The ethics is the Sara or essence of all religions. In the words of D.R.
Bhandarkar, “What constitutes Ashoka’s originality of mind, as of all saints, is his concentration on the essence of religion, which all sects possess in common specially at a time when they have lost sight of it.”

Lastly for kings and administrators, the ideal of Dharmavijaya has been prescribed. The real fame for a king does not depend upon the territorial expansion of his dominion, but upon the moral progress he can help his people to achieve. It is evident that by these and other similar prescriptions. Ashoka tries to instal morality as the governing principle and force in every walk of life and to spiritualise politics and, in deed, all life’s activities. His new ideals and doctrines express themselves in a new language, a variety of terms invented by Ashoka himself. In Pillar Edict-I he sums his intention by saying that he wants the maintenance, governance happiness and protection of the people to be regulated by dharma, and the people to grow day by day in their dependence upon Dharma and devotion to Dharma.

We may note that Ashoka had faith in the other world repeated in several of his edicts and also in the attainment of svarga or happiness in the that world as a result of pursuit of dharma in this world. He also believed in the eternity of heaven and, consequently, in the immortality of soul. He considered the other world, as the ultimate objective of life. In R.E.X, he makes it clear that all his endeavour is for the sake of other world. As a believer in the svarga, Ashoka also says in his R.E. IV how he tried to stimulate his people to virtue by presenting before them pictures of such blisses awaiting them after death.

The dhamma that is thus presented in these Edicts is another name for the moral and virtuous life and takes its stand upon the common ground of all religions. It is not sectarian in any sense, but is completely cosmopolitan, capable of universal application and acceptance as the Sara, essence of all religions and is thus worthy of a sovereign of a vast empire comprising peoples following different religions. Thus in the moral interests of the diverse peoples committed to his care, Ashoka was at pains to think out a system which might be imposed upon his subjects irrespective of their personal faiths and beliefs. Thus he laid the basis of a universal religion and was, perhaps, first to do so in history.

**Propagation of Dhamma in external relations**

Ashoka organised an efficient system of foreign missions with a desire to diffuse the blessings of his ethical system in all the independent kingdoms with which he was in touch. His conception of the idea of foreign missions was absolutely original, and produced the well considered results. Royal missionaries were dispatched to all the dependent states and tribes on the borders of the empire, and in the wilder regions within its border to independent kingdoms of Southern India, and to the five Hellenistic countries of Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, Mcedonia and Epirus. Ashoka for the same purpose sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghmitra to Ceylon in the reign of Tissa.

The Border states and tribes brought in this way within the circle of his ethical system included the Kambojas; the Gandhars and Yavanas of the Kabul valley regions; the bhojas, Pulindas and Pitenikas dwelling among the Vindhya range and Western Ghats, and the Andhra Kingdom. Four independent Southern Kingdoms; the Chola, Pandya, Keralputra and Satiyaputra were on such good terms with Ashoka that he was at liberty to send his missionaries to preach the people of these lands.

In organizing such missions to foreign countries at the expense of India, Ashoka perhaps felt that India also would be benefited along with them. These were the countries with which India had active intercourse in those days, and it was desirable that they should conform to
common codes and ideals of conduct and thought. The influx of foreigners to India in those days is quite apparent from the statement of Megasthenes that there was a separate department of administration to deal with their special interests. The history of the Western Greek countries does not preserve any record showing how Ashoka’s missionaries fared there, but we need not assume on a priori grounds that those countries did not welcome the Indians who too brought them only a message of peace and good will. It is difficult to dispute that Buddhist thought has left its marks upon some phases of Western thought, notably “the heretical Gnostic sects and some of the more orthodox forms of Christian teaching”. (V.A. Smith’s Early History of India IVth ed. P.197).

It is almost certain that Ashoka, by his comprehensive and well-planned measures, succeeded in transforming the doctrine of a local Indian sect into one of the great religions of the world. He did not attempt to destroy either Brahmanical Hinduism or Jainism; but his prohibition of bloody sacrifinces, the preference which he openly avowed for Buddhism and his active propaganda, undoubtedly brought his favourite doctrine to the front and established it as a dominant faith in India as well as Cylon.

**Ashoka’s Concept of Peaceful Co-existence**

The discussion on Ashoka’s Dhamma would remain incomplete unless it is analysed in the light of his idea of peaceful co-existence Religious toleration in India is traditional co-existence of all religious sects and creeds prevails even now. But the root of such toleration may be traced to Ashoka’s religious activities. His idea of peaceful co-existence suggests that there should not be shown dishonour and condemnation to another sect; all other sects should be honoured by all men and in all ways. Thus acting they would be able to promote their own sect and benefit the other sect. Acting otherwise they would hurt their own sect and harm other sect.

Ashoka’s principle of co-existence strove to bring together people following different faiths and to bind them in a harmonious union. As has been stated above the king did not attempt to destroy brahmanical religion, Jainism or any other faith but tried to provide a common ground for all sects by means of certain ethical principles and practices acceptable to all. And, therefore, Ashoka preached his concept of Dharma Vjaya. It differs from the concept of Digvijaya of later Hindu monarchs who believed in the territorial expansion of their dominions. Ashoka ardently desired to conquer human hearts not by sword but by the superior ideals of humanity i.e., love, goodwill sympathy and assurance of non-aggression and advancement of the cause of humanity through piety and works of public utility.

The principles of non-violence and peaceful co-existence reflected in Ashoka’s Dhamma are the instruments of global force of “peace, progress and prosperity” that plays by the rules without hegemonic designs based on military might. Hence, it was an empire of righteousness, an empire resting on right and not on might. He also gave to his people belonging to different communities and sects, certain common ideas of thought and conduct which entitle him to be the humanity’s first ruler with universal love and morality. He lives with us even today in our national emblem. Such is the influence of Ashoka’s dhamma on history. The significant role played by him in the history of the world has aptly been described by Toynbee in the following words. “Ashoka will continue to be remembered because he put conscience into practice in the exercise of his political power. This is all the more notable considering that unlike ourselves Ashoka lived in the pre-atomic age, and therefore he did not have the obvious urgent utilitarian incentive, that our generation of mankind has to renounce the use of war as an instrument of national policy. Waging war with even with the deadliest of weapons then at Man’s disposal,
Ashoka would have run no risk of getting his own subjects exterminated not to speak of bringing annihilation upon the human race as a whole.”

**Mauryan Art**

The history of art in ancient India virtually begins from the reign of Ashoka. Whatever we find in Indus valley is isolated, its continuity is broken. We find for the first time, buildings and structures of permanent materials like stone, rock and brick during the Mauryan period. During the Vedic and later Vedic period buildings were made of impermanent materials. It was Ashoka who substituted stone for wood the common material for the construction of the buildings. This change from impermanent to permanent material was due to the desire of the emperor under whose patronage the Indian art flourished considerably. From Circa 2500 B.C. to 250 B.C. is a long period of which we have hardly any record in the matter of artistic expression. The architecture of this period was mostly of wood and has perished without leaving a trace behind.

**Architecture**

Ashoka was a great builder. The legend which ascribes to Ashoka the erection of eighty-four thousand stupas within the space of three years, proves the depth of impression made upon the popular imagination by the number, magnitude and magnificence of the great Maurya’s architectural achievements.

**Mauryan architecture** can be divided into three categories for the sake of convenience.

(i) Remains of the places

(ii) Remains of the stupas

(iii) Rock-cut caves.

**(i) Remains of Palaces**

Megasthenes gave a detailed description of the Mauryan palace where the king resided. It was magnificent and famous for its artistic excellence. According to Megasthenes, the entire palace was made of wood and in splendour and magnificence it was better than the palaces of Susa and Elbatana. So imposing was the structure that it was universally believed to have been erected by supernatural agency.

Fa-Hien who visited India during the Gupta period, was so much impressed and surprised to see this palace, its skill and work magic that he thought that it was not the work of men, but of spirits. The Royal palace and halls in the midst of the city (Pataliputra), which exist now as of old, were all made by spirits which he employed, and which piled up the stones, reared the walls and gates, and executed the elegant carving and inlaid sculpture work in a way which no human hands of this world could accomplish.

Similar residences must have been built for the establishment of Kaushambi and other places and also for the kumaras serving as viceroys. The excavations of Bulandi bagh and Kumrahar near Patna have been carried out and remains of this palace have been actually discovered. Remains of some pillars of very huge size have been found, particularly a hall built of high pillars. Thus the accounts of Megasthenes and Fa-Hien are very well supplemented by the archaeological evidence.
(ii) Remains of Stupas

A stupa was usually destined either to enstrine a casket containing the relics of Buddha or other saint or simply to mark permanently the reputed scene of some incident famous in the history of Buddhist church. Generally a stupa was erected in honour of a Buddha. Origins of the stupas are to be found in the Vedic and later Vedic ‘chitas’. The stupas, are in purpose, similar to the Egyptian Pyramids. It is possible that architecture and designing of Pyramids must have influenced these stupas. It is significant point to note that stupas of huge bricks were made in India only after Ashoka when Sindh and Western Punjab had been in possession of Persia for hundred years and when Egypt was also a province of Persia. Hence, it is possible that the architecture of the stupas might have been influenced by the Persian art like other artistic monuments of the Ashoka.

A stupa was a nearly hemispherical mass of solid masonry either brick or stone, resting upon a plinth which formed a perambulation path for worshippers, and flattened at the top to carry a square alter shaped structure which was surmounted by a series of stone umbrellas one above the other. The base was frequently surrounded by stone railing. Sometimes the entrances through the railings were equipped with elaborate gateways (toranas).

As stated in Divyavadana Ashoka got built eighty four thousand stupas all over his empire. Yuan-Chwang who travelled in different parts of India visited these stupas in Afghanistan, Sarnath, Sanchi and Taxila in Northern India; Tampralipti and Pundravardhan in Eastern India and Kanchi in South India. Now we shall discuss the art of stupas erected during the Mauryan period.

Stupa of Bharhut: The stupa is situated at Bharhut a village in Nagod state of Baghelkhand, about ninety five miles south west from Allahabad. It is a stupa made of bricks having a moderate size nearly 68 feet in diameter, surrounded by an elaborately carved railing bearing many dedicatory inscriptions. The stupa has wholly disappeared and its richly sculptures were principally devoted to the illustration of Buddhist Jatakas or Birth stories. As at Sanchi the buildings were of different stages the stupa itself probably dating from the time of Ashoka while one of the gateways is known to have been erected in the Shunga period.

The more or less similar railing, fragments of which exist at Bodhgaya has been generally designated as the ‘Ashoka Railing’ but in fact belongs to Shunga times like the Bharhut gateway.

Stupa of Sarnath: The Dharmarajika stupa of Sarnath was possibly erected during the Ashokan period. Here we only find the ground plan. Mauryan polish is still visible on its railing. The stupa was erected at a place where Buddha gave his first sermon to his five Brahman companions.

Stupa of Sanchi: The principal stupa at Sanchi which stands on the top of a hill at a distance of 25 miles from Bhopal is built of red sandstone. Its diameter is 121 feet and its total height is 77 feet. It is enclosed by a massive plain stone railing having four gates in four different directions, 34 feet in height, covered with a profusion of relief sculptures. The railing too is covered with sculptures depicting either scenes from the life of Buddha or incidents from his legendary past lives. The art is essentially of folk art with an intense feeling of nature. The method is that of continuation narration suggesting everything. The stupa is one of the important monuments of Ashokan period. Other stupas in the neighbourhood are more or less alike in form.
(iii) **Rock-cut Caves**

The Ashokan age is also noteworthy in the history of Indian art from the point of view of cave architecture. There are seven rock-cut caves of the Mauryan age. Four caves are to be found on a hill named Barabar in Gaya district. All these caves were excavated for the residence of the monks of Ajivaka sect and these were places of shelter during the rainy season. The cost of such work must have been enormous and the expenditure of so much treasure on the Ajivakas is an evidence of their influential position and the catholic spirit of Ashoka for the Ajivakas were extreme fatalists having nothing in common with the Buddhists. Three other caves are to be found on Nagarjunini hill. These caves too were dedicated by the grandson of Ashoka – Davanamapriya Dasaratha to the monks of Ajivaka sect.

These rock cut caves are important because of two reasons; firstly, they are the first examples of buildings in rock-cut architecture, and secondly these are the exact imitation of former wooden buildings. The cost, labour and skill in turning these huge rocks into residential places is remarkable in reality. The interiors of these caves are highly polished. Thus the cave architecture in the age of Ashoka seems to have attained a high standard of workmanship and excellence.

**Sculpture:** The figure sculpture of the Mauryan period is important not only in the history of India but also in the world sculpture due to its workmanship, beauty and artistic magnificence. In this class of art, we shall first discuss the pillars of Ashoka. Because these are standing independently and upon them we find animal sculpture, these can be placed among the sculptural work.

**Pillars:** Ashoka took special delight in erecting monolithic pillars, inscribed and uninscribed, in great numbers and designed on a magnificent scale. No less than thirty pillars set up by Ashoka have been found so far. Hiuen Tsang mentions specifically sixteen of such pillars, four or five of which can be identified with existing monuments more or less convincingly; and, on the other hand most of the extant pillars are not referred by the Chinese pilgrim. These pillars have been found in Bakhira, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Rampurva, Sanchi, Sarnath, Kaushambi and Allahabad. It is important to note that these pillars are distributed over a large area stretching from the northern bank of the Ganges to the Nepal border and were erected at the places connected with Buddhism. A Mauryan pillar consists of a shaft, surmounted by the capital. The shaft, plain and circular has a slight taper upwards is made out of a single block of stone (monolithic). Over the shaft is the capital being another piece of stone and fixed to the top of the shaft by means of a copper-dowel. The capital consists of an inverted lotus design, abacus (platform) and carved animal sculpture in the round. The surface of both the shaft and the capital has the Mauryan polish.

The perfect uninscribed pillar at Bakhira near Basar, the ancient Vaishali in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, is a monolith of fine sand stone highly polished for its whole length of 32 feet above the water level. A square pedestal with three steps is said to exist under water. The shaft taper uniformly from a diameter of 49 inches at the water level to 38 at the top. The total height above the level of the water is 44 feet. Including the submerged portion the length of the monument can not be less than 50 feet and its weight is about 50 tons.

The inscribed Lauriya Nandangarh pillar in the Champaran district of Bihar resembles that at Bhakhira in design but is lighter and less massive and therefore appears graceful. The polished shaft diminishes from a base diameter of 35 inches to a diameter of only 22 inches at the top. The entire monument is nearly 40 feet high.
Two mutilated pillars exist at Rampurva in the Champaran district of Bihar. One Pillar was surmounted by a finely designed lion and the other uninscribed pillar had a bull capital.

The Ashokan pillar found at Sarnath is the most famous among all Ashokan pillars. The abacus has an originality in having four animals – elephant, horse, bull and lion – separated from one another by figure of wheels. These wheels and animals have been carved out in moving position. The pillar represents the high watermark of the evolution of the capital. The whole pillar is gracefully united and indeed it ranks among the best sculptures of which our country is proud.

Sixteen centuries later in A.D. 1356, the two Ashokan pillars which now stand near Delhi on Firoz Shah Kotla and the Ridge near Bara Hindu Rao Hospital were transported by Sultan Firoz Shah the one from Topra in the Ambala district and the other from Meerut. Their transportation and errection bear eloquent testimony to the skill and resource of the stone cutters and engineers of the Mauryan age. No pillar has yet been discovered in the distant provinces, where the Rock Edicts were incised.

**Figure Sculpture:** A few huge figure sculptures are ascribed to the Mauryan period on the basis of two facts; first they have the Mauryan polish and second they are made of sand stone of chunar. These figure sculptures are mostly the portraits of Yakshas and Yakshinis. Two such Yakshas have been found at Patna having Mauryan polish. However the ascription of these figures to the Mauryan period is by no means all certain.

A fragmentary relief on a piece of stone belonging to Mauryan period is remarkable. It is intensely lyrical and subtle figure of a young surrowing woman.

**Terracotta Heads:** Terracotta is a material combined of sand and mud. A few male heads from Sarnath and Rajghat are also ascribed to the Mauryan period because they are carved out of the chunar sand stone and have the Mauryan polish. It is very likely that they are parts of portrait figure. Their special feature is their headdress.

**Rock-cut elephant at Dhaul i (Orissa):** This rock-cut elephant at Dhauli coming out with fore parts of the body from the natural rock is artistically far superior to many Mauryan Sculptures.

**Monolithic railing at Sarnath:** This railing was found at Sarnath. It is made of sand stone of chunar having Mauryan polish. It is artistically excellent and smooth.

**Foreign influence on Mauryan art**

European scholars trace the foreign influence on Mauryan Sculpture. Sir John Marshall is of the opinion that the Ashokan pillars were adopted and copied from the Persian pillars. Monolithic pillars prove the reality of Persian influence and it appears that early Indian art was largely indebted to Persia for its inspiration, But a minute observation would reveal many differences between the two. Ashoka may have borrowed the idea to raise pillars from Persian art, but it is not reasonable to say that the whole pillar is the imitation of the Persian Pillar. The Sarnath pillar is far less conventional than its prototypes and much superior in both design and execution to anything in Persia.

Scholars like V. Smith find Greek influence on the animal sculpture of the Mauryan period. The treatment of the body and its different parts are said to have been derived from the Greek originals. But the Indian scholars point that we have our own traditions of carving animals for we find much resemblance between the Mauryan bull and that of Indus Valley. Therefore, it
may be concluded that though there may be some Hellenistic influence on Mauryan art, yet the theme, spirit and details are purely Indian.

It seems clear that Indian art in the Mauryan period, what ever may have been the nationality of the artists employed, attained a high standard of excellence and merit when compared to anything and that it deserves an honourable place in the artistic achievements of the world.
LESSON 6
POST-MAURYAN PATTERNS (POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL)

- Shonaleeka Kaul

‘Post-Mauryan’ is the name given to the period extending from approximately 200 BC to 300 AD, that is, from the fall of the Mauryan dynasty to the rise of Gupta power. Though several important new developments are seen in this phase, it is best viewed in terms of the continuity and intensification of political, economic and social processes that started in the post-Vedic (6th century BC) and matured in the Mauryan, culminating in the post-Mauryan.

In this lesson and the next, we survey the chief features of this period. Our sources include literature (brahmanical, Buddhist as well as foreign accounts), archaeological excavations (late NBPW and post – NBPW), coins (of a large variety and number), inscriptions (in Prakrit and, for the first time, Sanskrit) and architectural and art remains from these five hundred years.

Political History

Subsequent to the collapse and break-up of the vast Mauryan empire, we see the rise of a number of smaller territorial powers in its place in different regions of the subcontinent. In the Ganga valley, for instance, the Mauryas were immediately succeeded by the Shungas under Pushyamitra, the general of the Mauryan army who is believed to have assassinated the last Mauryan king in Circa 180 BC. The Shungas, who ruled for about a 100 years (and were then replaced by the Kanvas who quickly made way for the Mitras), included in their kingdom Patliputra (Magadha), Ayodhya (central Uttar Pradesh) and Vidisha (eastern Malwa), and possibly reached up to Shakala (Punjab). Pushyamitra is associated with the performance of the Vedic Ashvamedha sacrifice and with an antagonistic attitude to the Buddhist faith.

In Kalinga (south Orissa), Mahameghavahana Chedis set up a kingdom towards the end of the first century BC. We know this from the Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharavela who belonged to this dynasty. The rise of a regular monarchy in Orissa represents the spread of state polity and society to new areas in this period. This is illustrated also by the Satavahana kingdom that, with its capital at Pratishthana (modern Paithan on the Godavari river), covered Maharashtra and Andhra and, at times, parts of north Karnataka, south and east Madhya Pradesh and Saurashtra.

The Satavahana territories were divided into a number of administrative divisions known as aharas and we hear of different sorts of officials such as amatyas, mahamatras, mahasenapatis, and of scribes and record keepers. However, the basic organization of the
empire was feudatory which means that there existed a number of local rulers of subordinate chiefs in the realm, known as the maharathis and mahabhojas whom the Satavahanas exercised political paramountcy over but did not eliminate.

Some of the major Satavahana kings were Gautamiputra Satakarni (c.106-130 AD) during whose reign the empire seems to have territorially reached its peak, his son Vashisthiputra Pulumavi (130-154 AD), and Yajnashri Satakarni (165-194 AD). The use of metronym (name deriving from the mother’s name) by Satavahana kings and the fact that their queens issued inscriptions are interesting features. Another remarkable aspect about this dynasty is that they issued coins made of lead and its alloy, potin.

Finally, in the post-Mauryan period the north-west and west-central parts of the subcontinent witnessed the rule of not one but several dynasties of external origin, often simultaneously, as a result of tribal incursions from central Asia. The first to come where the Indo-Greeks or Indo-Bactrians who were from the area north-west of the Hindukush mountains, corresponding to north Afghanistan. They expanded into the Indus valley and the Punjab and founded an empire there, occasionally making inroads as far as the Ganga-Yamuna doab, between the second century BC and the first century AD. They are known for and by their coins which not only included the earliest gold coins recovered archaeologically in India but bore legends and portraits of individual kings, thus facilitating their identification. Indo-Greek rule in the region is also responsible for the growth of Hellenistic cultural influences seen in the town planning, on the one hand, and sculpture, on the other. The most famous king is Menander (165-145 BC) who seems to have embraced Buddhism after an extension dialogue with a monk named Nagasena. The dialogue is captured in the Pali text Milindapanho, The Questions of Milinda (Menander’ Indianised name).

The next to invade were the central Asian tribe called the scythians or Shakas (as they came to be known here). Different branches of the Shakas took over different parts of north and central India, establishing their rule at Taxila, for instance, and at Mathura. Shaka chiefs were known as Kshatrapas. The strongest and longest lasting Shaka presence was in Malwa where it continued till the fourth century AD. The best remembered kshatrapa of this line is Rudradamana I (c.130-150 AD) of the Kardamaka family who extended his hold over Saurashtra, Kathiawar, Konkan and Sindh, apart from Malwa. This brought him into prolonged, fluctuating conflict with the Satavahanas. This is something that both the Satavahana Nasik inscription of Rudrahamana’s Junagadh inscription tell us about. Significantly, Rudradamana’s inscription is the first long epigraph in chaste Sanskrit that we get from early India.

Close on the heels of the Shakas were the Parthians or Pehlavas, originally from Iran. They occupied a relatively minor principality in the north-west, their best known king being Gondophernes.

The last major central Asian force to enter the subcontinent in post-Mauryan times were the Kushanas. The Kushanas were a branch of a tribe bordering China known as the Yueh chi which, as a result of pressure from other tribes in their homeland, moved out to new regions. A section known as the Little Yueh chi settled in north Tibet while the Great Yueh chi occupied five principalities in the valley of the Oxus river. Then around the beginning of the first century AD, a chief by the name of Kujula Kadphises and his son Vima brought together the five areas and laid the foundations of a unified Kushana empire that extended from the Oxus river in the north to the Indus valley in the south, and from Khorasan in the west to Punjab in the east.

Kushana power entered the subcontinent proper, and reached its height, under a king named kanishka. During his reign, which started circa 78 AD (the date from which a new era,
later called Shakasamvat, was inaugurated), the Kushana empire extended further eastwards into the Ganga valley reaching right up to Varanasi, and southwards into the Malwa region. A vast expanse spanning diverse cultures—Indic, Greek, West and Central Asian—was thus brought under one umbrella, leading to the commingling of peoples and practices.

Kanishka and his successors, like Huvishka, Kanishka II and Vasudeva I, ruled till circa 230 AD. Their Indian territories had twin capitals, at Purushapura (Peshwar) and at Mathura. Though they adopted titles like devaputra (son of god), Kaiser (emperor) and Shahanushahi (king of kings), the Kushana kings did not exercise direct and absolute control over the whole empire. Large parts were under subordinated rulers (like the Shakas) with the title of kshatrapa and mahakshatrapa.

The Kushanas both introduced new features such as an improved cavalry with the use of reins and saddle or the trouser-tunic-and-coat style of dressing, and vigorously embraced elements of indigenous cultures as reflected in their patronage of Buddhism and Shaivism and of Sanskrit literature.

As the power of the Kushanas declined, various local dynasties subdued by them resurfaced all over north and central India. These included the Shakas of Malwa and a number of Naga, Mitra and Datta kings, as well as non-monarchical ganas like the Arjunayanas, Malavas and Yaudheyas, who are known from their coins, seals and inscriptions. These were the conditions in which a new phase started with the rise to power of the Guptas in the early fourth century AD.

**Economic History**

Literature and archaeology amply indicate that the period between 200 BC and 300 AD was one of urban prosperity all over the subcontinent. Indeed it can be said to represent the apogee of early historic organism. Not only did cities that arose in the sixth century BC, primarily in the Ganges valley and the Malwa region, flourish but new towns came into being and city life spread to new regions as well, such as Kashmir, Sind, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, Andhra, Karnataka and the deep south. This went hand in hand with the expansion of agriculture, crafts production and trade, on the one hand, and the establishment of new ruling dynasties and power centers, on the other.

Cities in this period not only show extensive construction activity, complex burnt brick buildings, well laid out streets and drains, and fortification walls but the adoption of new techniques like the use of tiles in flooring and roofing. There is also abundant evidence from the urban centers of the presence of coinage, a range of sophisticated artifacts like fine pottery, beads and terracottas, and of a population that engaged in a variety of urban occupations. A list of the thriving cities of this period includes Rajagriha, Pataliputra, Varanasi, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Mathura, Hastinapura, Ayodhya, Ujjayini, Pratishthana, and new towns like Sirkap, Sirsukh and Shaikhan (north-west) Hushkapura and Kanishkapura (Kashmir), Purushapura (Pakistan), Jaugada and Shishupalagarh (Orissa), Bairat and Nagari (Rajasthan), Kaundinyanagara and Bhogavardhana (Maharashtra), Nagarajunakonda and Amaravati (Andra).

At the root of this urban efflorescence was undoubtedly a firm agrarian base. While we no longer hear of state farms like under the Mauryas, texts like the Jatakas, Milindapanho and Manusmriti convey a picture of thriving cultivation on privately or individually owned plots of land in this period. Some inscriptions from the western Deccan indicate that the fields ranged in size from 2,3 or 4 nivartanas (one nivartana—one and a half acres) to 100 nivartanas or more. Nonetheless, the king exercised a general territorial sovereignty thanks to which he could grant (the revenue from) entire villages as dana to brahmans and bhikkhu sanghas. In fact the earliest inscriptional evidence of royal land grants comes from the Satavahana kingdom (Maharashtra) from the first century BC and then again from the second century AD. Royal land grants carried certain privileges for the donee like exemption from tax freedom from entry
of royal troops. They began to be endowed in perpetuity, known as the akshaya nivi land tenure, under the Kushanas. The practice of making land grants was to become common from the Gupta period onwards, with important consequences for the agrarian structure.

A striking feature of the post-Mauryan economic scene was the remarkable growth in crafts production. Both texts and donatives inscriptions from stupa sites like Sanchi, Bharut and Mathura indicate proliferation and a high degree of specialization of craft-based occupations. The Mahavastu lists 36 kinds in Rajagriha alone and the Milindapanho enumerates as many as 75. Some of the artisan groups mentioned are blacksmiths (lohakara), goldsmiths (suvarnakara), jewellers (manikara), stone masons (selavaddhaki), carpenters (vaddhaki), lead workers (carmakara), oil-pressers (tailaka), perfumers (gandhika), garland makers (malakara), and also weavers, potters, ivory carvers, sugar manufacturers, corn dealers, fruit sellers and wine makers.

Significantly, craftsperson’s and traders were organized into guilds (shreni, nigama) and the post-Mauryan period saw a considerable increase in their number and the scale of their activities. The Jatakas refer to 18 guilds. Inscriptions from the western Deccan record gifts made by various shrenis which reflects their prosperity and social standing.

Guilds were headed by a chief called the jetthaka or pramukha who could be close to the king. Guilds could issue their own coins and seals as have been founded at Taxila, Kaushambi, Varanasi and Ahicchatra. They also functioned as bankers when people wishing to make a donation to the sangha deposited a sum of money with a guild. From the interest that accrued on that sum, the guild supplied at regular intervals provisions like grain or cloth, in accordance with the donor’s wish, to the sangha.

A natural concomitant of all these developments was a monetary economy. A large number and variety of coins were in circulation in this period. As we have seen, these included coins issued by royal dynasties, ganas, shrenis and city administrations. They were made of gold (dina), silver (purana), copper (karshapana) (the Kushanas issued a large number of coppers), lead, potin, nickel, etc. The range of metallic denominations shows that transactions at different levels-high value of small scale-were now being carried out in cash.

And, finally, trade: If the sixth century BC was the ‘take-off’ stage, the post-Mauryan period saw trade activity, both internal and external, overland and maritime, acquire full-blown proportions, literary sources mention various items involved in trade within the subcontinent-cotton textiles from the east, west and far south, steel weapons from the west, horses and camels from the north-west, elephants from the east and south, and so on. Cities were renowned for particular merchandise, like the silk, muslin and sandalwood of Varanasi, and cotton textiles of Kashi, Madurai and Kanchi.

Goods traveled up and down long distances connecting market towns by an intricate web of land and riverine routes that crisscrossed the subcontinent. For instance, the Uttarapatha was the major transregional route of north India, joining Taxila in the north-west with tamralipti on the east coast via Mathura, Vaishali, Shravasti and Pataliputra. The Dakshinapatha started from Pataliputra and went up to Pratishthana and from there to ports on the west coast. Another route ran from Mathura to Ujjayini and on to Mahishmati, on the one hand, and Bhrigukaccha and Sopara, on the other. Many routes then went further south.

The subcontinent’s internal trade networks were integrally linked up with its transcontinental commercial interactions-with central and west Asia, south-east Asia, China and the Mediterranean. India’s external trade consisted of two kinds: Terminal trade and Transit trade. Terminal trade was in merchandise manufactured in India and exported to other shores, or imported for sale in India’s internal markets: either way, India was a terminus. Transit trade
involved such commodities that originated in and were destined for other lands and only passed through the subcontinent; India functioned as an entrepot.

The chief stimulus for India’s transit trade was the demand for Chinese silk in the western world. The famous overland Great Silk Route from China to the Mediterranean passed through the northern frontiers of the Kushana empire-Kashmir and north Afghanistan, touching the cities of Purushapura, Pushkalavati and Taxila. Later, due to instability in the central Asian region, a part of this trade was diverted south further into India, and then from the Indian ports on the west coast, like Bhrigukaccha, Kalyana and Sopara, traveled on to the Roman empire via the Persian Gulf. This maritime route was facilitated by the south-west monsoonal winds. (India also had independent trade with China, exporting pearls, glass and perfumes and importing silk.)

Indo-Roman trade, however, went beyond Chinese silk. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and Sangam texts tell us that there was brisk commerce between first century BC and second century AD in spices, muslin and pearls that the Romans imported from India. In return the Romans, described as yavanas, exported to India wine and certain kinds of jars known as amphorae and a ceramic type named Arretine ware.

Most of all, it was Roman gold and silver that poured into the subcontinent as a result of the balance of trade being favourable to India. Pliny, the first century Roman historian, complains of the drain of gold to India. Hoards of Roman coins, especially of the emperors Augustus and Tiberius, have been found at numerous sites in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Earlier it was believed that yavana traders founded trading colonies or ‘emporia’ here at sites like Arikamedu but historians now feel that this was not necessary since groups apart from Indians and Romans, like Arabs of the Persian Gulf and Greeks of Egypt, may have played the role of middlemen in carrying out Indo-Roman trade.

The subcontinent also had commercial links with south-east Asia that expanded perceptibly in the post-Mauryan period. The Jatakas and the Milindapanho refer to traders undertaking difficult sea voyages to Survarnadvipa (Malaysia and Indonesia) and Survarnabhumi (Myanmar). Archaeological discoveries in this region corroborate interaction. Imports from south-east Asia to India included gold, tin, spices like cinnamon and cloves, sandalwood and camphor. Exports from India were cotton textiles, sugar, valuable beads and pottery.

It is important and interesting to note that social and cultural exchange went hand in hand with India’s commercial contracts with the world. As we have seen, the north-west of the subcontinent was a cultural crossroads that witnessed the commingling of Greek, Persian and Mongol populations and traditions with the India. In the case of China, interaction took the form mainly of the spread of Buddhism-doctrines, scriptures, relics, and monks and pilgrims traveled over many centuries between the two regions; it is from China that the religion went further east to Japan and Korea and underwent significant transformations. And early south-east Asia was long believed to have been actually ‘colonized’ by people from India since the names, practices, religious affiliations and rituals of the earliest kingdoms that arose there (seen in their inscriptions) are Sanskritic and brahmanical while both Hindu and Buddhist sculpture and architecture prevail. However, it is now clear that all this may be evidence only of cultural borrowing rather than of a direct Indian presence and role.

**Social History**

It will be obvious that the intensified political and economic developments discussed above had important social implications. This took the form chiefly of the widening and deepening of the stratification along caste, class and gender lines that had started in the sixth century BC.
The four varnas and the four ashramas (chaturvarnashramadharma) emerge as the pillars of brahmanical ideology in the Dhramashastra texts of this period. Important features of caste were the preference for endogamy and hereditary occupation. There are indications of localization of caste and occupation with people of the same profession living in their own separate settlements or in distinct parts within settlements.

Principles of purity-pollution and hierarchy governed restrictions on the giving and receiving of food, particularly vis a vis brahmanas on the one hand and chandalas, the outcastes, on the other. The ‘untouchable’ (asprishya) occurs in the Vishnu Dhrmasutra of this period. It signified complete segregation of the social group called chandalas, which include corpse-removers, cremators, executioners, sweepers, hunters, etc. According to the Manu Smriti, they had to live outside the village or town and could not eat out of other people’s dishes.

There were a number of other groups too that were categorized as lowly (antyaja). At the same time, outsiders such as the yavanas and Shakas, were sought to be assimilated within the traditional social structure by describing them as sankrita varnas, born out of the mixture of castes, or as vratya kshatriyas, degraded kshatriyas. All this shows that the forces of the ideologies of social exclusion and incorporation were simultaneously at work.

Linked to the need for the maintenance and perpetuation of the caste and class structure was the strengthening of patriarchy in this period. It took the form of subordinating women and controlling their reproductive potential. The preference for sons over daughters continued. Women’s access to knowledge, secular and scriptural, was diminished. Women of affluent classes were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, making them economically dependent on their male kinsmen. Great emphasis was put on the chastity of women which was sought to be preserved by early (Prepuberty) marriages, on the one hand, and severe strictures on widows, on the other.

The texts also suggest that women were treated as property and akin to shudras. At the same time they were denied rights to inherit property which was patrilinearly passed on (passed on from father to son). The lawgivers of this period, however, do allow a married woman some control over the gifts made to her as a bride which was known as stridhana. It should be noted that the occurrence of number of women as donors of Buddhist sites indicates that certain women had some degree of access to economic resources of their households.

The post-Mauryan period also saw the growing role of rituals in the life of the individual and household, and society at large. Known as sanskaras, these were rites performed to mark various life stages such as pre-natal (garbhadana), initiation by sacred thread (upanayana), marriage (vivaha) and death (antyesthi). And then there were panchamahayajnas that were actually simple ceremonies obligatory for upper caste householders, including making offering to ancestors (pitrivajna), to the sacrificial fire (daivyayajna) and to all being (bhutayajna). These can be understood as ways to regulate the individual’s life as well as to string society together through common beliefs and practices.
While in terms of economic, social and political history, the post-Mauryan period was one of the culmination, in various spheres of culture it saw the inaugurating and founding of fundamental trends. Below we outline the chief new cultural developments and specimens of the time.

Religion

The post-Mauryan period witnessed the emergence of those principles of religious belief and practice that we popularly recognize as Hinduism today. These can be summarized as bhakti and puja.

Bhakti refers to devotion centred on a distinct personal or favourite god (ishtadeva) (rather than on the yajna or a nameless Brahman). It manifested itself in three main theistic cults based on the worship of Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti. While these deities were not new, the pre-eminence they shot into now, and the elaborate ritual attention paid to them, and complex mythologies built around them, were certainly new and spectacular. The co-existence of the worship of the three gods and goddess, who were the focus of independent sects but were part of a common pantheon, can be described as monolatry – the belief in a supreme god while acknowledging the existence of other gods. In fact the three deities, as well as Brahma, were seen as closely related and performing complementary functions. This is an important feature of this religion. For example, the concept of trideva is that Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. Shakti in her various forms (Durga, Kali, Bhadrakali, Lakshmi etc.) also performs these roles, and figures as the consort to these gods as well.

Another important feature is that these cults developed in a syncretistic fashion, bringing under their folds and assimilating a number of other subsidiary cults. For example, the Dashavatara concept associates the worship of Vishnu with that of ten other cults, including some that appear to be of non-Vedic and totemic origin, such as the varah (boar) and matsya (fish). The most popular of the avatara who enjoyed a wide following already by this period is Vasudeva-Krishna. He emerges as the supreme god and author of the Bhagavad Gita, the most important Hindu scripture the composition of which belongs to our period.

The most important mode of worship that characterizes religion from this period onwards is puja. Puja refers to ceremonial worship with the making of offerings such as flowers, fruits and camphor for the deity. The two natural accompaniments of this new form of ritual were image worship and worship in shrines/temples evidence for both which can be traced to our period. They indicate growing institutionalization and permanence of cults. Shiva was most commonly worshipped in his linga (phallic) form. Earliest linga and man like representations of Shiva are from second century BC Mathura. Idols of Vishnu and Vasudeva-Krishna and his brother Balarama and sister Ekanamsha increase in number and variety from the early centuries AD in central India, but their earliest images occur on coins from Ai-Kghanoum (Afghanistan) from second century BC. Earliest remains of stone temples are from those dedicated to Vishnu at Besnagar (Madhya Pradesh) and Nagari (Rajasthan) again from the second century B.C. The most striking image of Shakti in this period is that Durga-Mahishasuramardini (The Slayer of the demon Mahishasa) on stone plaques from the Mathura area (first century BC-AD).
Interestingly, Buddhism underwent transformation in this period along similar lines. In other words, the element of devotionalism came to dominate this creed which, in this form, is known as Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle) as opposed to Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle), the older, orthodox and austere form. A central difference was that in Mahayana the highest goal was not that of attaining nirvana for oneself and disappearing from the cycle of life and death, but to be a Bodhisattva or the one who, although he had attained perfection himself, renounces nirvana so as to continue in the world for ages and work for the spiritual welfare of others. Great compassion (mahakaruna) and universal altruism are the key elements of the Bodhisattva ideal. This had a special messianic appeal that inspired bhakti and self-surrender to the lofty-minded and merciful bodhisattva.

The direct result of these ideas was the defication of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas and their worship in the form of images in shrines. This was a significant change from the earlier faith where the Buddha was worshipped only through symbols like the Bodhi tree. Mahayanism, which was vigorously patronized by Kanishka who organized a great council in Kashmir, thus popularized the practice or worhipping at stupas and chaityas which proliferated in the post-Mauryan period.

It also marked a greater use of Sanskrit in Buddhist scriptures and the growth of a Buddhist pantheon and mythology consisting of five dhyani buddhas, bodhisattvas like Maitreya, Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri, as well as female consorts known Tara. Among the famous philosophers who espoused Mahayana ideas was Nagarajuna (second century AD) and Vasubandhu (fourth century AD).

Jainism also witnessed a schism or split in its ranks into the Digambara and the Shvetambara sects. The difference between the two related chiefly to rules of monastic discipline. Digambara monks, believing in absolute renunciation, did not wear clothes and walked nude, while the Shvetambaras wore white garments. The former received alms in their cupped hands and did not carry alms bowls whereas the latter carried the vessel and ate out of it. They also accepted that women had the potential to attain salvation whereas the Digambaras denied this. Eventually the Shvetambaras came to predominate in western India and the Digambaras in the south. They received the patronage of wealthy political and social elites.

At the level of Jaina lay practice, the post-Mauryan period saw the development of a temple cult and related rituals which, interestingly, did not involve any intermediary monastic or priestly class. A number of images of Jinas and tirthankaras have been found from sites like Kankali Tila (Mathura) from 200 BC onwards while Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves in Orissa were centres of Jaina monasticism.

**Literature**

200 BC-300 AD is a fairly prolific period in terms of production of literature, particularly a larger range of texts-religious and secular, technical and creative. These five hundred year occupy an important place in the evolution of the epics : Mahabharata 400 BC – 400 AD and Ramayana 500 BC-300 AD. They also saw the compiling of law books known as the dharma smritis which, together with the earlier dharma sutras (500-200 BC), comprise the bulk of the dharma shastra or socio-legal corpus. The *Manusmriti*, *Naradasmriti* and *Yajnavalkyasmriti* enshrine the fundamanetal principles of varnashramadharma and patriarchy that constituted the base of brahmanical society for centuries.

The post-Mauryan period is significant for the composition of a number of philosophical treatises of the classical schools of early Indian orthodox philosophy. Jaimini’s *Mimamsasutra* of
the second century BC emphasized Vedic ritual as the embodiment of dharma and the means to salvation. Badarayana wrote the Brahmasutra at about the same time. It is a key text of the early school of Vedanta which aimed at enquiring into the nature of Brahman (the universal spirit) and atman (the individual soul). Kanada’s Vaisheshikasutra, written between second century BC and first century AD, is an exposition on pluralistic realism which means that it aimed at classifying and explaining the special (vishesha) features of the multiple things that exist in the world. (They enunciated a theory of atoms.) Gotama’s Nyayasutra of the first century AD laid down the parameters of formal, step-by-step method of logic and reasoning. The Samkhya karika of Ishvarakrishna belongs to the fourth-fifth century AD: the philosophy is much older, though, and revolves around the concepts of purusha (soul) and prakriti (matter) out of which the universe comes into being and through the rupture between which liberation of the soul can be attained. Finally, the Yogasutras, ascribed to Patanjali, are a manual of Yogic thought and practice. They prescribe a series of exercises, physical and mental, to achieve cessation of the activities of the mind (cittavrittinirodha) whereby tranquility and liberation can be achieved.

All the works discussed so far were in Sanskrit. Works in Pali and Prakrit espousing Buddhist thought or chronicling the life of the Buddha also date to our period. For example, the Jatakas (300 BC – 100 BC), the Nidanakatha and Milindapanho (100 BC – 100 AD). However, the Mahavastu, a Hinayana text, is in mixed Prakrit-Sanskrit as in the Mahayanist Lalitavistara (100 – 200 AD) while the Avadanashataka (200 AD) on the life of Ashoka, is in Sanskrit only.

An interesting aspect is represented by the technical treatises on a variety of ‘secular’ themes that are associated with our period. These include Patanjalis’s Mahabhashya, a commentary on Panini’s grammar, and Pingala’s Chhandasutra, a work on metrics. Parts of the Mauryan work on statecraft, the Arthashastra, were also composed in the post-Mauryan. Vatsyayana’s Kamasutra, an exposition on pleasure especially of the sexual kind, belongs to the end of our period. And so do the twin medical treatises, Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, though they were added to subsequently. They lay down with an astonishing degree of expertise and accuracy a comprehensive approach to human and even animal physiology, diagnosis of disease and treatment.

Finally, to the post-Mauryan period can also be traced our earliest surviving kavyas or highly aesthetic, creative literature which includes poetry, drama, novel and biography. Ashvaghosha’s Buddhacharitam and Saundaranandam in Sanskrit were composed in the first century AD (he was patronized by Kanishka) while Bhasa’s 13 plays, such as Avimarakha, Svapnavasavadatta and Karnabharam, also belong to the first three centuries AD. An erotic poem, Gathasattasai, in Prakrit is attributed to a Satavahana king, Hala. The classical phase of Kavya writing followed in the Gupta period.

Art and Architecture

Post-Mauryan art has the following broad characteristics: (1) It is structural art, meaning that it was originally part of architectural structures like the gateways, railings and facades of stupas, chaityas, viharas and temples. (2) It is by and large narrative, describing scenes from myths and legends to do with divine and semi-divine beings, and also depicting signs and symbols. (3) It is regarded as popular art, representing the folk spirit of commoners, unlike Mauryan art which was royal and stately. (4) It is overwhelmingly religious in nature and predominantly Buddhist.
It should be noted, however, that the earliest brahmanical stone temples and sculpture are also from this period. A Vishnu temple stood at Vidisha (Besnagar) from the third century BC onwards in the vicinity of the famous Heliodorus pillar which was a Garuda column dedicated to Vishnu by a Greek ambassador called Heliodorus. Remains of a Vishnu shrine are also found at Nagari (third century BC), of a Lakshmi temple (200-50 BC) at Atranjikhera, a Durga temple at Sonkh (100-200 AD) and one Vishnu and five shiva temples at Nagarajunakonda (400 AD). A number of stone statues and reliefs depicting four armed Vishnu, Krishna-Balarama-Ekanamsha triads, Govardhana-Krishna, Shiva lingas, and Mahishasuramardini have been found from various sites, as already mentioned.

The post-Mauryan period is the take-off stage for Buddhist architecture. It was the establishment of a large number of stupas (done-shaped funerary mounds preserving relics of the Buddha or special monks), chaityas (shrines) and viharas (monasteries) of varying size in every part of the subcontinent.

In the north-west a large monastic complex was revealed at Takht-i-Bhai while Taxila yielded a number of stupas and chaityas including the huge Dharmarajika stupa. The stupas at Sanchi and Bharhut in central India are the best known. These were equipped with a stone circumambulatory path (pradakshina patha), two flights of stairs (sopana) at the base, stone balustrades (vedika) at the ground and a stone umbrella (chhattra) on the summit. Four gateways (torana) and a stone railing enclosed the stupa compound. Sculptural decoration was confirmed to these parts and was not done on the stupa itself. It consisted of narrative scenes from the Jatakas and also symbols like the triratna, and figures like yaksha and nagas.

And then there are the rock-cut caves in the Western Ghats at sites like Bhaja, Pitalkhora, Nasik, Karle, Kanheri and Bedsa. These included chaityas, initially cut parallel to the rock-face and later perpendicular to the entrance facing directly the object of worship within, and viharas, some of these two-storied with cells arranged around a central hall and consisting of rockcut bed and pillow for the monks. A number of important Buddhistic establishments were also located in Andhra, for example at Amaravati (with its mahachaitya, now lost), Jaggayyapeta and Nagarajunakonda.

The profuse inscriptions found at most Buddhist sites of the period show that they enjoyed the support of not only royalty but, more so, commoners like artisans, merchants, guilds, yavanas, monks and nuns who appear as donors.

Mention may also be made of the Jain caves at Udayagiri and Khandagiri in Orissa. These consisted of only tiny, stark and plain monastic cells cut into the sandstone caves. The outer façade sometimes bore ornamentation. They were patronized by the Chedis of Kalinga.

As regarding stone sculpture, two important schools developed in the post-Mauryan period. The Gandhara school flourished in the north-west from the first to the fifth century AD. It used blue schist stone and later lime plaster. Its themes were Indic, chiefly Buddhist, but its style showed a distinct Graeco-Roman influence. For instance both standing and seated images of the Buddha show naturalism in body forms, muscular physique, heavy, three dimensional folds of garments, sharp facial features and wavy or curly hair. Scenes from the Jataka tales were also depicted by this school including the famous Fasting Siddhartha statue from Sikri, Pakistan, that shows the prince in a striking state of emaciation.

The Mathura school flourished under Kushana rule. Its distinguishing feature was the use of local red, mottled sandstone. Images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are in a clearly indigenous style, showing a heavy, fleshy body, thin, clinging garments, stiff smile, and shaved
head. Numerous other relief subjects in this school include Jataka tales, Hindu and Jaina images, amorous couples, yaksha-yakshis, etc.

The burst of cultural effort in the post-Mauryan period sampled above should be understood against the larger background of proliferation of centres of political power, a burgeoning economy, prospering, upwardly mobile social groups, institutionalization of religious cults, and interaction with foreign traditions.
Historians and Indologists regard the Sangam period as the ‘classical age’ of the Tamils analogous to the age of the classics in Greece and Rome and to that of the Renaissance of later period in Europe. Some even consider the Sangam age as the ‘Golden age’ of the Tamils, which marked a unique epoch in the history of the Tamilakam. The archaeological sources found from different explored or excavated sites throw light on the various aspects of the political, social, economic, religious and cultural life of the Sangam age people. However, the precious literary finds of this period discovered from various places in South India provide us with the significant information in this regard. In other words, the Sangam literature is the major source for the study of the Sangam age.

The term ‘Sangam’

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

Chronology

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

The Tradition of the three Sangams

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

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

The Corpus of Sangam Literature

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

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

While the individual poems included in the above mentioned three groups may be taken to have been produced within the first three centuries of the Christian era, they were very probably collected and arranged in the order in which they are now found, at a much later date. Length of the poem was one of the very important basis for the classification into three broad divisions. The poems in the ‘Eight collections’ run from three to thirty one lines, whereas in the ‘Ten Songs’, the shortest poem runs to 103 lines and the longest has 782 lines. The ‘Eighteen Minor Works’ include the ethical and didactic literature. The didactic literature, which includes the world famous Tirukkural is mostly in stanzaic form, the stanza having from two to five lines.
The Sangam collections at present consist of 2279 poems of varying lengths from 3 lines to about 800 lines. Some of these works are attributed to a single author, while others like the Naladiyar, contain the contributions of many poets. This Sangam poetry available to us runs to more than 30,000 lines. These were composed by 473 poets including women besides 102 being anonymous. Among the poets nearly 50 were women poets.

These works reflect fairly advanced material culture. They also show that by the Sangam age, Tamil as a language had attained maturity and had become a powerful and elegant medium of literary expression. The language is inevitably archaic, though not perhaps more difficult to understand for the modern Tamil.

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

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

Polity

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

Kingship

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

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

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

Chieftains

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

Administration

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

It is important to note that in spite of all the glory attached to the ancient king, the ethos of Indian administration has been in the direction of limited or popular monarchy. This can be observed in South India from very early times even more than in the north and each followed its own model of administration. Every local unit, however small and in whatever corner it was
situated, was administered by a local assembly. The *avai* and the *manram* are the terms used for this unit in Sangam works. Such assembly is commonly referred to as *arankuravaiyam*, which were known for its just decision. These can be taken to be the forerunner of our modern panchayat.

**Defence**

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

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

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

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

**Economy Agriculture**

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

Agriculture was the main source of revenue for the state. The importance attached to cultivation is also seen in the interest people showed in cattle rearing. The Sangam poems frequently refer to milk and milk-products such as curd, butter, ghee and butter milk. The importance of cattle is also attested by the cattle raids on enemy country mentioned in the literary works. One of the primary duties of the king was to protect the cattle of his kingdom. The cattle wealth in turn enhanced the wealth of the farmer. *Silappaddikaram* also relates the happiness and prosperity of the people to the agriculture.
The paddy and sugarcane were the two important crops cultivated in a large quantity. Besides these chief crops, other varieties of crops and fruits included gram, beans, roots like Valli (a kind of sweet potato), jack-fruit, mango, plantain, coconut, arecanut, saffron, pepper, turmeric, etc.

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

Industry

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

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

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

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

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

Trade

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social Composition

Anthropological studies have shown that the earliest social element consisted of Negroid and Australoid groups with mixture of another racial stock which migrated from the earliest Mediterranean region. In its early phase these societies had small population and social classes were unknown. As a result there existed great unity among the people of each region, who moved freely among themselves and their ruler. The only classification Tamil society knew at this time was that of the *arivar, ulavar*, etc. based on their occupation such as the soldiers, hunters, shepherds, ploughmen, fishermen, etc.

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

Women

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

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

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

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

Dwellings

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

Food and Drinks

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

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

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

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

Religion: Beliefs and Rituals

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

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

The four important deities as mentioned by Tolkappiyam were—Murugan, Tirumal, Vendan (Indra) and Varunan. Indra was worshipped as the rain god and a festival in his honour was celebrated every year. In Pattinappalai worship of Muruga is mentioned. Muruga is the son of Siva. Besides these deities, Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity), Mayon (later Vishnu) as guardian of the forest region, Baladeva, Kaman (the god of love), the moon-god, sea-god and other divinities were also worshipped.

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

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

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

The Sangam age people also believed in dreams and influence of planets on human life. Certain ominous signs were popularly observed. For example, the cawing of the crow was considered as an omen of the coming guest, who was eagerly waited. Kuruntogai mentions that the crow was considered a good harbinger and was fed with rice and ghee. Sneezing was held inauspicious.

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

The Tamils of Sangam age believed in the ritual uncleanness on occasions of birth and death. Dead were disposed either by cremation, burial or by being left in open to vultures or jackals. Burning grounds are mentioned in Manimekalai where dwelled different kinds of spirits.

Conclusion

Thus, the picture that emerges from the study of Sangam literature reflects that the period witnessed the conception of state for the first time in South India. However, it was still in the process of crystallisation. Sangam polity was characterised by the patriarchal and patrimonial systems in which the administrative staff system and various offices were directly controlled by the rulers. We also notice social inequalities with the dominance of the Brahmanas. But the acute class distinction, which appeared in later times, were lacking in Sangam age. Agriculture was the backbone of Sangam economy. The trading activities, especially trade relations with the Mediterranean World enriched their economy. The foreign elements also influenced the socio-economic and cultural life of people. The beliefs and customs practised by Sangam people suggest the complex nature of their religion. Both, animism and idol worship, were followed during the Sangam age. Many of the traditions of the age continued and survived in the later periods and some exist even till today.
LESSON 9

GUPTAS AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES: STATES AND ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS

-Nandini Sinha

Introduction and Historiography

The period from the fourth to the seventh centuries is important in ancient India history, as it was a transitional period in terms of political, social, economic, religious and cultural historians. The period has been debated and a rich historiography is available for the study of this period. A brief outline on the major schools of historical writings would familiarize us with the shifts in the study of India of the Guptas and Harsha.

The colonial or imperial historians like Vincent Smith of British India dubbed ancient India as a ‘dark age’, which enabled the Britishers to divide and rule India. The nationalists in their reactions against an unfair portrayal of ancient India borrowed the periodization of Indian history (Ancient India is equivalent to Hindu India, Medieval India is equivalent to Muslim India and British India is equivalent to British India and advent of Christianity). Nationalist historians like R.C. Mazumdar, K.K. Datta, H.C. Raychaudhuri exaggerated the achievements of ancient India and coined the term ‘golden age’ for the Gupta period.

To the nationalists, the Gupta period surpassed all other periods in ancient Indian history in its achievements in political unity, economic prosperity, art, architecture and literature. In the post-independence era, the Marxist historians in a critique of the nationalist historiography postulated the theory of ‘Indian Feudalism’ from the Gupta period onwards. The Marxist historians R.S. Gupta, B.N.S. Yadava, D.N. Jha etc. propounded that the Guptas began with the regular practice of landgrants to brahmanas with fiscal privileges and the post-Gupta rulers gave away administrative and judicial rights along with fiscal rights initially to brahmanas temples and on to officials and even to merchants. Hence, the Guptas and their successors including Harsha perpetuated a feudal political structure in which landed intermediaries ruled rural society and politically fragmented and decentralized India. Landgrants brought feudal, practices in economy as trade and urbanization declined in the post-Gupta period and exploited peasantry with increasing burden of taxes. Obnoxious practices like Tantricism marked the cultural and religious aspects of Indian feudalism. As a critique of ‘Indian Feudalism’, B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Hermann Kulke forwarded the processualist model/integrative model of state formation for the study of the post-Gupta India or early medieval India. Chattopadhyaya and Kulke argued that landgrants to brahmanas and temples, instead of decentralization of the political authority of bigger and smaller states, legitimized the exercise of royal authority in the countryside and hence, integrated the territorial units and chiefs into the emerging local, sub-regional and regional states.

Bhairabi Prasad Sahu in his presidential address to the ancient Indian section of the Indian History Congress refers to the integrative/processual model of studying states in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. Nandini Sinha Kapur has demonstrated the integrative forces in the formation of two near contemporary states to the Guptas, the Vakataka state in Vidarbha and the Maitraka in Gujarat. Instead of disintegration, the integrative model highlights integrative forces in ancient Indian history.
In the days when historians of ‘Golden Ages’, the Gupta period was described as such, civilizations were said to have a Golden Age when virtually every manifestation of life reached a peak of excellence. The Gupta period was selected largely because of impressive literary works in Sanskrit and the high quality of art, which coincided with what was viewed as a brahmanical ‘renaissance’. Since India civilization had early been characterized as Hindu and Sanskritic, the initial spread of brahmanical culture as ‘high’ culture on an unprecedented scale was described as golden period.

The distant past had an advantage, for it allowed greater recourse to imagination in recreating that past. Now that historians are commenting on all aspects of society, the notion of a uniformly Golden Age that encompasses an entire society has been questioned. The description of a Golden Age reflected the life of the wealthy and their activities along characterized such an age. There are at least three epochs when artistic and literary expression achieved impressive standards – the post-Mauryan and Gupta period; the Cholas; and the Mughals. The precursor to the culture of the Gupta period was not restricted to northern India, since the Deccan shows a striking evolution of cultures.

The classicism of the Gupta period is not an innovation emanating from Gupta rule but the culmination of a process that began earlier. New artistic forms were initiated during the pre-Gupta in north India, such as those associated with Buddhism and which also found parallels in other religious sects, with the writing of texts on technical subjects and creative literature of various kinds. Much of the articulation is in Sanskrit, but it is of Sanskritic culture assumes certain kinds of social and cultural exclusively and demarcates social groups it attempts a transition towards a uniform, elite culture, but in the process becomes a catalyst for many others. The description of the Gupta period as one of classicism is relatively correct regarding the upper classes, who lived well according to descriptions in their literature and representations in their art. The more accurate, literal evidence that comes from archaeology suggests a less glowing life-style for the majority. Materially, excavated sites suggest that the average standard of living may have been higher in the preceding period.

Evidence on the origin and antecedents of the Gupta family is limited, as it seems to have emerged from obscure beginnings. It was thought that the family ruled a small principality in Magadha, but recent opinion supports the western Ganges Plain as a base. The name could indicate that they were of the vaishya caste, but some historians accord them Brahman status. The eulogy on a later king of the dynasty envisages many small states subsequent to the decline of the Kushanas, and theirs may have been one such. The dynasty came into its own with the accession of Chandra Gupta I, who made his kingdom more than a mere principality. Chandra Gupta married into the Lichchhavi family, once and old, established gana-sangha of north Bihar, now associated with kingdom in Nepal. The marriage set a stamp of acceptability on the family and was politically advantageous for them, since Chandra Gupta I made much of it in his coins. His rule extended over the Ganges heartland (Magadha, Saketa and Prayaga) and he took the title of maharajadhiraja (great king of kings), although this ceased to have much significance since it was now used by many rulers, major and minor. The Gupta era of AD 319-20 is thought to commemorate his accession.

Samudra Gupta claimed that he was appointed by his father to succeed him about AD 335, a lengthy eulogy on him was inscribed on an Ashokan pillar, now at Allahabad, which provides the basic information on his reign. The eulogy, if it is to be taken literally, provides an impressive list of kings and regions that succumbed to Samudra Gupta’s triumphal march across various parts of the subcontinent. In the subsequent period such lists of conquests were
often part of the courtly rhetoric, but in his case the exaggeration of a court poet may have been more limited. The emphasis seems to be on the paying of tribute rather than the annexing of territory. Four northern kings were conquered, mainly in the era around Delhi and the western Ganges Plain. Kings of the south and the east were forced to pay homage were captured and released. From the places mentioned, it appears Samudra Gupta campaigned down the east coast as far as Kanchipuram (near modern Chennai). Nine kings of Aryavarta, in northern India, were violently uprooted; the rajas of the forest-peoples of central India and the Deccan were forced into servitude. In a sixth-century inscription eighteen forest kingdoms of central India are said to have been inherited by a local ruler, which suggests that the conquest of these areas began earlier. Kings in eastern India, as well as small kingdoms in Nepal and the Punjab are said to have paid tribute. Nine of what were earlier gana-sanghas in Rajasthan, including the age-old Malavas and Yaudheyas, were forced to accept Gupta suzerainty. In addition, more distant rulers such as the Daivaputra Shahanushahi (‘The Son of Heaven, King of Kings’, clearly a Kushana title), the Shakas, and the King of Sinhala (Sri Lanka) also paid tribute, as did the inhabitants of all the islands.

An interesting feature of the conquests is their variety and number, from chiefdoms to kingdoms. Samudra Gupta broke the power of the chiefdoms in the watershed and northern Rajasthan, which led to an unfortunate consequence for the later Guptas when the Huns invaded north-western India. Apart from this the termination of these chiefdom was the death-knell of the gana-sangha polity, which had held its own for a millennium as an alternative to monarchy. Regarding Sri Lanka, a later Chinese source provides evidence that Sinhala king sent presents and requested the Gupta king’s permission to build a Buddhist monastery at Gaya. Such a request can hardly be termed tribute and it is probable that his relationship with other distant kings was similar. Who the ‘inhabitants of the islands’ were remains unclear and possibly refers to parts of south-east Asia hosting Indian settlements, with which contacts had increased.

Samudra Gupta had more cause that other kings to perform the horse sacrifice when proclaiming his conquests.

Of all the Gupta kings, Chandra Gupta II, the son of Samudra Gupta, is reputed to have shown exceptional chivalrous and heroic qualities. His long reign of about forty year from c. AD 375 to 415 had a rather mysterious beginning. A play written some two centuries later, Devi-chandra-gupta, supposedly dealing with events on the death of Samudra Gupta, introduced Rama Gupta as the son who succeeded Samudra Gupta. The story goes that Rama Gupta defeated in battle by the Shakas, to whom he then agreed to surrender his wife, Dhruvadevi. His younger brother Chandra was incensed by this, disguised himself as the Queen and, getting access to the Shaka King’s apartments, he killed him. This action gained him the affection of the people but created enmity between him and his brother Rama. Chandra finally killed Rama and married Dhruvadevi. The discovery of the coins of Rama Gupta, and of inscriptions mentioning Dhruvadevi as Chandra Gupta’s wife, lend some authenticity to the story. Furthermore, Chandra Gupta’s major campaign was fought against the Shakas. The campaign led to the annexation of western India, commemorated by the issuing of special silver coins. Its significance lay not only in the western border of India being secure, but also in its giving access to the western trade since the ports were now in Gupta hands. The western Deccan, earlier held by the Satavahanas, was ruled by the Vakataka dynasty which emerged as a dominant power in the Deccan.
The Gupta kings took exalted imperial titles, such as maharaja-adhiraja, ‘the great king of kings’, prameshvara, ‘the supreme lord’, yet in the case of later rulers these titles were exaggerated since their claimants possessed limited political power when compared with the ‘great kings’ of earlier centuries. Such grand titles echo those of the rulers of the north-west and beyond and like them carry the flavour of divinity.

In the Ganges Plain, under the direct control of the Guptas, the king was the focus of administration assisted by the princes, ministers and advisers. Princes also held positions rather like viceroys of provinces. The province (desha, rashtra or bhukti) was divided into a number of districts (pradesha or vishaya), each district having its own administrative offices. But for all practical purposes local administration was distant from the center. Decisions, whether of policy or in the relation to individual situations, were generally taken locally, unless they had a specific bearing on the policy or orders of central authority.

This was significantly different from the Mauryan administration. Whereas Ashoka insisted that he be kept informed of what happening, the Guptas seemed satisfied with leaving it to the kumaramatyas and ayuktakas. Admittedly, a taut administration is described in the Arthashastra, but this was a normative text and the evidence from inscriptions and seals suggests that the Gupta administration was more decentralized, with officials holding more than one of office. Harsha’s tours were similar to those of a royal inspector since he looked into the general working of administration and tax collection, listened to complaints and made charitable donations.

Villages were of various categories: grama, palli, hamlet; gulma, a military settlement in origin; khetaka, also a hamlet; and so on. They came under the control of rural bodies consisting of the headman and the village elders, some of whom held the office of the grama-adhyaksha or the kutumbi. In urban administration each city had a council consisting of the nagarashreshthin, the person who presided over the city corporation, the sarthavaha, the chief representative of the guild of merchants, the prathama-kulika, a representative of the artisans, and the prathama-kayastha, the chief scribe. A difference between this council and the committee described by Megasthenes and Kautilya is that the earlier government appointed the committees, whereas in the Gupta system the council consisted of local representatives, among whom commercial interests often predominated.

If the Mauryan state was primarily concerned with collecting revenue from an existing economy, or expanding peasant agriculture through the intervention of the state, the Gupta state and its contemporaries made initial attempts at restructuring the agrarian economy. The system developed from the notion that granting land as a support to the kingship could be more efficacious that the performance of a sacrifice, and that land was appropriate as a mahadana or ‘great gift’. This investment by the king was also intended to improve the cultivation of fertile, irrigated lands and to encourage the settlement of wasteland. Peripheral areas could therefore be brought into the larger agrarian economy, and the initial grants tended not to be in the Ganges heartland but in the areas beyond. There was gradually less emphasis on the state in establishing agricultural settlements, with recipients of land grants being expected to take the initiative.

Grants of land were made to religious and ritual specialist or to officers. This did not produce revenue for the state, but it allowed some shuffling of revenue demands at the local level and created small centers of prosperity in rural areas that, if imitated, could lead to wider improvement. If the land granted to brahmans (whether as ritual specialists or as administrators) was wasteland or forest, the grantee took on the role of a pioneer in introducing agriculture. Brahmans became proficient in supervising agrarian activities, helped by manuals on agriculture,
such as the Krishiparashra, which may date to this or the subsequent period. Some normative texts forbid agriculture to the brahmans, except in dire need, but this did not prevent brahmanical expertise in agricultural activity.

Commercial enterprise was encouraged through donations to guilds, even if the interest was to go to a religious institution, and by placing commercial entrepreneurs in city councils and in positions with a potential for investment and profit. The range of taxes coming to the state from commerce was expanded, which in turn required an expansion in the hierarchy of officials. Although the granting of land was at first marginal, by about the eighth century AD it had expanded, gradually resulting in a political economy that was recognizably different from pre-Gupta times.

Kings who conquered neighbouring kingdoms sometimes converted the defeated kings into tributary or subordinate rulers, often referred to in modern writing as feudatories. Agreements were also negotiated with such rulers. The term samanta, originally meaning neighbour, gradually changed its meaning to a tributary ruler. This implied more defined relationships between the king and local rulers, relationships that became crucial in later times with a tussle between royal demands and the aspirations of the samantas. Where the latter were strong the king’s power weakened. But he needed the acquiescence of the samantas – the samanta-chakra or circle of samantas – to keep his prestige. Samantas were in the ambiguous position of being potential allies or enemies.

In addition to the tributary rulers, grants of land had created other categories of intermediaries. Grants to religious beneficiaries included some to temples, monasteries and brahmans. Such grants to temples empowered to sects that managed the temples. Villages could also be given as a grant to a temple for its maintenance. This added local administration to the role of the temple, in addition to being an area of sacred space. At a time when land grants were tokens of special favour the grant to the Brahman must have underlined his privileged position. The agrahara grant of rent-free land or a village that could be made to a collectivity of brahmans, the brahmadeya grant to brahmans, and grants to temples and monasteries, were exempt from tax. The brahmans were often those proficient in the Vedas, or with specialized knowledge, particularly of astrology. Gifts to brahmans were expected to ward off the evils of the present Kali Age, and recourse to astrology appears to have been more common.

Grants of land began to supersede monetary donations to religious institutions. Land was more permanent, was heritable and the capital less liable to be tempered with. Such grants were more conducive to landlordism among brahmans grantees, although the monasteries did not lag too far behind. Another significant feature of this period was that officers were occasionally rewarded by revenue from grants of land, which were an alternative to cash salaries for military or administrative service. This is mentioned in some land-grant inscriptions from this period onwards, and also in the account of Hsuen Tsang. Such grants were fewer in number. Not all grants to brahmans were intended for religious purposes since there were many literate brahmans performing official functions. Vassalage, involving a warrior class with ties of obedience and protection, is not commonly met with.

Such grants distanced the owners from the control of the central authority, thus predisposing administration to be more decentralized. Those with substantial grants of land providing revenue could together accumulate sufficient power and resources to challenge the ruling dynasty. If in addition they could mobilize support from peer groups and others such as
the forest chiefs, or coerce the peasants into fighting for them, they could overthrow the existing authority and establish themselves as kings, at least on the fringes of the kingdom.

Brahmans as religious beneficiaries were granted land, ostensibly in return for legitimizing and validating the dynasty, or averting a misfortune through the correct performance of rituals or the king earning merit. Lineage links with heroes of earlier times were sought to enhance status through a presumed descent. If the grant was substantial enough the grantee could become the progenitor of a dynasty through appropriation of power and resources. The grants were also part of a process of proselytizing where the grantee sought to propagate his religion. Many grants were made to brahmans proficient in the Vedas, but when they settled near forested areas, or in villages already observing their own beliefs and rituals, the very different observances of the brahmans may have created tensions requiring a negotiated adjustment on both sides. In this situation the Puranic sects were useful mediators between Vedic Brahmanism and the religions of the local people. Even if the Brahman took over the ritual of the priest, he would have needed to incorporate local mythology and iconography into the flexible and ever-expanding Puranic sects.

Social-Economic Changes

The conventional historiography projected continuation of the four-fold division of the Varna-System (Chatuh-Varna) in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. However, R.C. Hazra mentions that early Puranas offer descriptions of Kaliyuga in terms of foreign invasions, instability, social tension, struggle, teaching of hedonistic sects. But modern historians like Ram Sharan Sharma ascribes the origin of Kaliyuga to mixing of castes (Varna Shankara) and the rise of Shudras on the beginning of the fourth century. Hence it was a period of social crises. It was an age of enmity between brahmans and shudras, vaishyas refusing to perform yojnas on tax burdened subject population law and order problem, thefts, unsecured family and property, increasing materialism and decreasing religions rituals, sovereignty of mlechhas (low-caste) kings. The inscriptions of the Vakatakas of Viderha and Pallavas of Kanchipuram are quoted to show that they acted together against Kaliyuga. Brahmanization of villages under the Vakatakas and Pallavas are supposed to indicate social disorder. It is assumed that the rulers set to order Kaliyuga from the fourth century onwards. The rise of the Vakatakas, Pallavas, Gangas and Kadambas are supposed to indicate brahmanical reactions against the shudras as these dynasties originated from brahmana families. From the later half of the Gupta period and particularly the Vakatakas and Pallavas enforced strict rules according to Varna-order to deal with Kaliyuga. One of the chief mechanisms of continuing Kaliyuga was landgrants. We have already mentioned that the Guptas and their contemporaries began to grant land to religious denees, brahmans and temple-priests, and later to secular denees, ministers, civil and army officers and even merchants. Thus began the age of landed-intermediaries intervening between states and peasants. Landgrants gang rise to a graded rural society and ranking status and ranks which did not fit into Varna-order: Mahamandalika, Mandalika, Mandaleshwara, Mahasamanta etc as mentioned in Aparajita-prachha (a book of architecture) but a receipt (critique of the above thesis by Herman Kilke, B.D. Sharma and B.P. Sahu clearly indicate that the concept of Kaliyuga was popularized by brahmans has to be viewed in the context of state formation process. Rural society had to be initiated in the norms of state society in regions where local state formation was taking place for the first time. Taxes and resources had to be mobilized for the first time from a rural population which was getting families with state and its administration and military institutions. The fear of Kaliyuga forced communities to conform to social and political order in regions, which were going through processes of state formation for the first time. Secondly a detailed study of epigraphical records reveals that landgrants did not introduced a graded society.
for the first time. B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Nandini Sinha Kapur in their case studies have demonstrated a hierarchical rural society in Bengal, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat in which brahmana and non-brahmana landlords, peasants, artisans and landless labourers constituted rural society before the beginnings of the practice of landgrants. One of the most important social developments in this period was proliferation of castes or jatis. A large number of castes originated with incorporation of economic specialists, tribes and immigrants from central Asia into the Brahmanical Varna Society.

Categories of slaves were drawn more commonly from the lower castes and untouchables. The Sharmashastras of this time mentions details of slaves and indicate a greater use of slave labour. But hired labour seems to have been used on larger scale that before. Prisoners of war, debt bondsmen and slaves born to slave women formed the usual sources of slaves. The largest number of slaves seems to have been employed in domestic work. Bonded labour, hired labour and those required to perform stipulated jobs as a form of Vishti, forced labour or labour tax constituted important part of agricultural labour. Caste regulations prevented the untouchables to be hired as domestic labour and untouchables constituted a permanent landless labour.

Fa Hsien, a Chinese Buddhist monk who was on pilgrimage to India in the years AD 405 to 411, collecting Buddhist manuscripts, describes general happiness of ordinary people. But Fa Hsien also mentions practices like untouchables sounding a clapper in the street of the town to warn people of their presence as an upper-caste person had to perform a ritual ablution. Hsuen Tsang states that butchers, fishermen, theatrical performers, executioners and scavengers were forced to live outside the city and their houses were marked so that they could be avoided. However, Chinese Buddhist marks offer an overall pleasant picture of the Indian society.

Another important indicator of social structure is the social construction of gender relations. Idealized form of women in literature and art tend to give the impression that women generally enjoyed a higher social status. But historians like Romila Thapar point out that such idealized women conformed to the male ideals of the perfect women and such ideals placed women in the subordinate position. Limited education was permitted to upper-caste women but certainly not to provide professional expertise. Women’s access to property or inheritance was limited and varied according to caste, custom and region. Although matrilineal systems might have existed among some social groups in the earlier times but normative texts supported patriarchy. Hence, groups wanting upward social mobility adopted patriarchy. Characteristic of the status of upper-caste women in later centuries was that early marriages were advocated. A widow was expected to live in austerity while a widow of the Kshatriya caste was expected to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband especially if he had died a hero’s death this would make her a sati. The earliest historical evidence for this practice dates from AD 510, when it was commemorated in an inscription at Iran. Subsequently, incidents of Sati increased. Small number of women chase to opt out of the ‘normal’ householding activities required of woman, and became nuns, or trained to be courtesans or joined troupes of performers.

Economic Changes: AD 4th-7th Centuries

The changes in the agrarian economy introduced in the Gupta period have been already noted in the section on administration. The most important innovation in the agricultural sector was the introduction of land grant economy. Initially, religious denees were exempted from payment of revenue (land-tax) and later received administrative judiciary rights over the villages. However, economic advantages of land-grant donated to religious specialists like Brahmanas were more important than the royal act of giving away since land to brahmanas and later
officials. The astronomical knowledge of brahmanas in agricultural seasons, calendar, agricultural manners brought considerable amount of land under cultivation. Thus, historians like R.S. Sharma have accepted the phenomenon of agrarian expansion for early medieval India. Important like Krishiparaghara (agricultural manual) mentions vivid descriptions of fields, and agricultural operations of this period.

Although revenue-free landgrants to religious and secular denes did not bring immediate revenue to state these grants initiated rural prosperity and bound villages in a wider economic network. If the land donated to brahmanas was wasteland or forest, the grantee took the initiatives of introducing agriculture. This was especially true of forest and tribal areas. Brahmanas possessed technical and astronomical knowledge of agricultural operations. Brahmanas became proficient in supervising agrarian activities assisted manual on agriculture, such as the Krishiparashaha, which may be dated in the Gupta period or the subsequent period.

One of the most important socio-economic changes was ‘peasantization’ of tribes in central Indian belt Orissa, Assam, part of western and southern India. As the brahmanas denees arrived in the forests and hills of tribal India, they began to initiate a section of the tribal society into agricultural activities. The process brought two economic advantages to state and society. More cultivable land was brought under agriculture generating more revenues for the expanding rural society and meeting increasing revenue demands. The part of the tribal society offered its labour for agriculture, forest and rural law and order, mining operations of public work in villages etc.

State revenue was derived from a variety of taxes from the land and from trade. The debasement of the later Gupta coinage has been interpreted as recording a fiscal crisis. Harsha divided the income of the state into four as mention by Hiuen T. Sang – quarter for government expenses another quarter for the salaries of public servants, a third quarter for the reward of intellectual attainments, and the last quarter for gifts.

It has been argued that there was decay in urban centers at this time, pointing to the Gupta period economy having feudal characteristics. Town not only declined, but many suffered a visible termination of commerce. Excavation levels of the Kushana period show a prosperous condition. The insufficiency of agricultural produce to maintain towns has been attributed to climatic change, with increasing desiccation and aridity of the environment. A decrease in rainfall and the ill effects of deforestation would also have affected agricultural production. A combination of these changes would have contributed to urban decline. However, the crucial question remains if this urban decline was subcontinental or restricted to certain regions. It is important to note that some town certainly declined, but it was not a sub continental phenomenon and the reasons for decline varied. Apart from other environmental changes there may have been other economic changes. The rise of new centers of exchange may have re-routed trade routes. New towns sprang up in the eastern Gangetic plain while Kanyakabaja (Kanauj) continue to flourish as town with a prosperous agrarian hinterland. Paunar in the Deccan flourished during the Vakataka period. Valabhi grew in commercial importance through the trade of the Arabian Sea in which affluent Arab traders were involved. The Indian merchants had become more assertive in central Asia and south-east Asia. In some parts of the sub continent the Gupta age was the concluding phase of the economic momentum that began in the proceeding period. In other parts, the sixth century witnessed emergence of new groups of merchants on the west coast.

Sources of commercial wealth consisted of the produce from mines, plants and animals converted to items through craftsmanship. Gold was mined in Karnataka but panned in the
mountain streams of the far north. The high quality craftsmanship in gold is evident in the superbly designed and meticulously minted Gupta coins. They tend to be found in hoards and some are in mint conditions. High-value silk, and a farmillier weight standards facilitated commerce. The mining of copper and iron continued, being used for household items, utensils, implements and weapons. Among the most impressive metal objects of this period is the pillars of iron, now located at Mehrauli in Delhi, reacting a height of just over 23 feet and mode of a remarkably fine metal which has scarcely rusted. It carries an inscription referring to a kind called Chandra, identified by some as Chandra Gupta II. Equally impressive is the lie-size, copper statue of the Buddha. Ivory works, pearl fisheries of western India, cutting and polishing of a variety of precions stones-jasper, agate, carnelian, quartz, lapis-lazuli and bead-malling of Ujjain and Bhokardan continued to flourish. The manufacture of various textiles had a vast domestic market dominating north-south trade within India, and there was also considerable demand for Indian textiles in Asian markets. Silk, muslin, Calico linen, wool and cotton were produced in quantity, and western India was one of the centres of silk weaving. However in the latter half of the Gupta period the production of silk may have declined, since many members of an important guild of ill-weavers in western India migrated inland to follow other occupations. Guilds continued to be vital in manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise and had their own laws regarding their internal organization. The guilds provided socio-economic support in some ways parallel to that of jati. The excessively high rates demanded in earlier times on loans for overseas trade were reduced to a reasonable twenty percent, indicating a confidence in overseas trade. The lowering of the rate of interest also indicates the greater availability of goods and a possible decrease in rate of profit.

The campaigns of Samudra Gupta to the east and the south, and the repeated tours of Harsha, world have required efficient communication and movement of goods. Ox-drawn carts were common on the roads and pack animals were used on rough terrain and elephants in heavily forested areas. The lower reaches of large rivers such, as Ganges, Narmada, Godawari, Krishna and Kaveri were the main waterways. The ports of the eastern coast, such as Tamralipti and Ghanta Shala, handled the northern Indian trade, with the eastern coast and south-east Asia and those of the west coast traded with the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. The ports and production centres of peninsular India that were involved at this maritime trade appear not to have declined at this time, but these were outside Gupta control. Neither the overland trade with central and west Asia had declined between the fourth and the seventh centuries. There appears to have been appreciable rise in the import of horses, coming from Iran and Bactria centres in north-west India, or from Arabia by sea to the western coast.

Religious Life

The Gupta period has been traditionally known as a period of brahmanical renaissance. A range of brahmanical religion was flourishing in this period. Buddhism was still prevalent in some parts of the sub-continent and its rivalry with shaivism had become well known. But Buddhism was being influenced by ritual of worship of other religions. Buddhism had a following beyond the frontiers of India in central Asia, China and south-east Asia. Religious practices current in these regions were accommodated in the practices of the newly established Buddhism. Jainism received support from the merchant communities of western India and royal patronage from Karnataka and the south. In the early part of the sixth century the second Jaina council was held at Valabhi, and the Jaina canon was defined subsequently as it exists today. The use of Sanskrit was on the increase as it had become the prestigious language of the elite in many areas. But it isolated the religious teachers from a wide following. The Jains had evolved a series of icons such as straight standing figures or the cross-legged seated figures of Mahavira and
other tirthankaras. This long drawn process of societal interactions with tribal societies in parts of the sub-continent brought important changes, among the tribal chiefs. The process of ‘peasantization’ invariably introduced forces of acculturation by the brahmanas and a large number of tribal chiefs hired turned to agricultural entrepreneurship hired tribal labour, and adopted some form of caste ranking and rituals from the brahmanical society.

Shaivism, Vishnuism, Shaktism and worship of Ganesha and Surya had became established in the form of Puranic religion by the Gupta period. In the post-Gupta period, the worship of the cult of Surya seems to have been confined to Gujarat and gradually disappeared. But the most important religions development in this period was the worship of Devi, all encompassing female deity. Devi subsumed many substratum female deities associated with notions of fertility. Female deities became the nucleus of a number of rites, imbued with magical properties which in a later form were foundational to Tantrism. Devi was supposed to be the initiator of action, and of the power and energy-Shakti-of Shiva (it was held that the male God could only be activated through union with the female). That these ideas were influential can be seen from the temples dedicated to the Yoginis, females endowed with magical power and sometimes linked to goddesses. These temples of Yoginis have mostly survived in central India. Some of the mythology linked to the worship of the goddess was brought together in the text famously known as the Devi-mahatmya. It is important that assimilation of the cult of goddesses popular among the tribal population also enriched Tantric religion.

The Shakti-Shakta cult became not only the fundamental belief in many religious sects, but gradually attained a dominant status. The consorts of male deities were worshiped in their own right, such as Lakshmi the consort of Vishnu, or Parvati Kali and Durga who were various consorts of Shiva. Buddhism was also influenced by Tantric beliefs and rites. Tantric influence on Buddhism can be seen in the emergence Vajrayana sect of Buddhism (the Thunderbolt Vehicle) with its centre in eastern India. Vajrayan Buddhism gave female counterparts, the cult of Taras, to the existing male figures of the Buddhist pantheon. However, Hieun Tsang noticed a decline in Buddhism at Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and some other places and mentioned the hostility of some rulers, such as Shashanka of Bengal towards Buddhism. Hence, Buddhism registered a decline on a sub continental scale by the seventh century. Three important aspects of Vaishnavism and Shaivism that took place in this period were important religions developments in Brahmanical religion. The image emerged as the focus of worship and this form of worship, central on puja superceded the Vedic sacrifice. An animal to the image-often food or in some cases an animal-remained a requirement of the ritual. The reduction of the emphasis on the priest compared to his role in the sacrificial ritual of Vedic Brahmanism gradually led to devotional worship-bhakti-becoming the most widespread form of the Puranic religion. Unlike the Vedic religion, the Puranic religion had a far wider appeal. The popular participation in religion including individual performance of rituals, traveling collectively to places of pilgrimage and promoting local mythologies. A few of the Puranas were written at this time, although it is difficult to date these precisely. Some of the Puranas are sectarian literature informing worshipper about the mythology, rituals of worship and observances associated with the particular deity to whom the Purana was dedicated. Some of the early Puranas like Vishnu Purana has a section on genealogies and dynasties of the past. It was an attempt at creating a historical tradition.

The interaction of northern culture with that of the south, with the circuits of traders and regular routes of armies as well as Brahman settlers, resulted in the assimilation of some of the patterns, ideas and institutions of the north, while others were rejected or modified. The brahmanas settled in Tamilaham saw themselves as keepers of what they now regarded as
sacrosanct Vedic tradition. As keepers of the Vedic traditions, brahmanas were venerated and gradually found patrons among kings of the peninsula. The performance of rituals by the king was an avenue to high status. Although orthodox brahmanas initially dismissed the devotional movement, the latter eventually proved more popular than other religions trends in the south and this was recognized even by royal patrons. The Tamil devotional movement was deeply affected by Vaishnavism and Shaivism in the choice of deity. These sects were among the early expressions of what has been called the Bhakti movement. Tamil devotional achieved a great wave of popularity in the hymns and poems of the Alvars and the Nayanars, the Vaishnava and Shaiva poets. The hymns dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu have been preserved Nalayira divya-prabandha. Appar was one of the most popular Shaiva poets while Nammalvar and Tirumankai Alvar and the much revered woman poet, Andal were important Vaishnava poets. Some philosophers revitalized Vedic philosophy and established mathas and ghatikas (monasteries and centres for vedic learning). The most effective way to make the Vedic philosophy acceptable and comprehensible to the educated was to reduce its obscurities. This was attempted by Shankaracharya, the proponent of new Vedanta philosophy, who accepted the challenges to Brahmanism from the Buddhists and the Jains and the popular devotional sects. He was born in Kerala and wrote and taught in the eighth-ninth centuries, although he could be of a later period. 

Temples evolved as the centre of socio-religious life in peninsular India in our period of study. From the Pallava period onwards the more prosperous temples maintained trained dancers, singers and musicians. This gave rise to the system of employing devadasis—the woman who served the deity—in many large temples, virtually all over India. Some among them became composers of devotional poems. Rock-cut temples were introduced in the Pallava period, the famous being monolithic temples at Mahabalipuram. Stone structural temples were built at Aihole in the sixth century (under the challenges of Vatapi), at Mahabalipuram—the famous shore temple—in seventh century, and at Kanchipuram.

Art and Patronage

Very few examples of temple architecture have survived from the Gupta period. Architecture of the Gupta period temples was still in its formative period. Rock-cut Buddhist caves at Ajanta and Ellora are the best examples of architecture. These were inspiration for the later Vaishnava and Shaiva, rock-cut temples at Ellora, Elephanta and Aurangabad. Buddhist stupas at Lalitagiri Ratnagiri and Udayagiri in Orissa continued to be build with patronage from rulers and merchants. The caves at Ajanta were decorated with sculpture, mural paintings depicted the life of Buddha and the Jataka stories literary references to painting are frequent.

The earliest temples were single cell housing the image, as at Sanchi, Aihole, Tigowa, Bhumara, Nachua Kothara, Lodh Khan and Deogarh among others worship is such temples was generally of Puranic deities-Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati, Durga and Varaha. The Dashvalara temple at Deogarh is, as the name implies, among the earliest dedicated to the incarnations of Vishnu. The architecture of the Shaiva and Vaishnava temples was constructed around the sanctum cella, the garbha-griha (literally the womb-house) the room in which the image of the deity was placed. The Buddhists in the Deccan continued to excavate rock-cut chaityas and the Vaishnavas, Shivas, and Jains imitated these in later centuries, often excavating temples adjacentable to the Buddhist caves. Temples that were free-standing and not rock-cut were generally built in stone became the medium for the increasingly monumental style (although there is an early brick temple at Bhitargaon).

Classical sculpture reflecting a high aesthetic sensibility is visible, particularly in the Buddha images from Sarnath, Mathura, Kushinagara and Bodh Gaya. These sculptures inspired
the portrayal of the more important Vaishnava and Shaiva deities as impressive coins. Vaishnava representations were either of the deity or of an incarnation, which allowed a wider range of images Shiva was most often represented as a lingam. Terracotta images continued to be popular and more accessible to masses. Stone sculptures were patronized by the rich only. A rare example Bronze sculpture of this period is the statue of Buddha found at Sultanganj.

**Literature**

We have already mentioned about the compositions of early, Puranas such as Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana, Bhagvata Purana, Brahmanda Purana and Harivamsha Purana in this period in the section under religion. It has been noted that the Puranas are important sources not only for the study of brahmanical religious but also for royalo genealogy and historical traditions. We have also mentioned the Bhaktihymns composed by the Vaishnava Alvar and Shaiva Nyamar Saints of south India for the study of religious developments in this period. It is also important to note that the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata were codified first epics are important sources for socio-religious-political history. In this section, we shall highlight creative literature which became the source of studies of dramaturgy, poetry and literary theory the subsequent period. The famous Natya-Shastra of Bharata—a foundational treatise on dance, drama and poetry can be possibly be dated to these times. Literary, criticism and theory of Rasa emerged an important feature of creative literature. The ruling elite, the court and the aristocracy, the urban rich patronized poetry and prose in Sanskrit. Kalidasa, the poet in the court of Gupta emperor, Chandragupta IIInd, was an extraordinary poet and dramatist whose work enhanced the prestige of the language and inspired later poetic forms. His play Abhijnana-Shakuntala and his long lyrical poem Meghaduta (cloud messenger) are considered examples in Sanskrit drama and poetics respectively. Following Kalidasa’s works, Bharavi’s Kiratarjuriy, Magha’s Shishupalakadha and the Bhatti-Kavya, and somewhat later Bhavabhuti’s Malati-Madhava are important examples of classical work in Sanskrit. The Mrichchha-Katika (the little day cast) by Shudraka provides glimpses of urban life. Vishakhadatta chose to dramatize past political events in his Mudrarakshasha, a play on the overthrow of the Nanda king, and in Devi-Chandra-Gupta, on the bid for power by Chandra Gupta II.

The fables of the Panchatantra and Subandhu’s Vasavadatta are acclaimed for social message and literary quality respectively. Band’s Harshacharita is an excellent example of both biography and Sanskrit phrase and so his narrative Kadamabari.

Classical was the language of the court and its pronouncements through inscriptions. The dominance of Sanskrit dates to the Gupta period and continued until about the early second millennium AD, after which the regional languages were widely used. In the times of Delhi Sultanate and Mughals, court language was Persian. But the local language and cultures were not abandoned. They can be glimpsed in the use of Prakrit in various contexts such as in some inscription and in the languages of religions sects. The Natya-shastra lists a number of languages and dialects, including those spoken by the lower castes and Chandalas. In addition to Sanskrit, literature in Prakrit also had its patronage among the Jaina merchants. The Paumacariyam of Vimalasuri, a Jain version of the Rama story is a good example of Prakrit and popular literature. We must note that high-status characters spoke Sanskrit whereas those of low social status and all the women spoke Prakrit in Sanskrit dramas.

We shall now turn towards two near-contemporary statuses. The Vakatakas of Vidharbha were an important political power in central India and northern Deccan. We can envisage three tentative phases in the emergence of the state in Vidarbha under the Eastern Vakatakas (the Vakatakas of Nandivardhan while another branch, the Vakatakas of Vatsagulma rules in western
Vidarbha). The first phase coincides with the early Vakataka rulers in the pre-Prabhavati Gupta regency period (Vindhyaashakti to Rudrasena II) Who ruled mostly in the fourth century the second phase is that of Prabhavatigupta’s regency initiating a rupture in the Vakataka dominance over Vidarbha and increasing Gupta influence in the Vakataka court and the third phase ran parallel to Pravarsena II’s reign marking intensive territorial and political integrative process in the Vakataka state formation and legitimation of the Vakataka power. A study of Pravarsan II’s twenty four landgrant charters clearly reveal step wise territorial integration of Vidarbha and political incorporation of local chiefs into the Vakataka state. The Vakataka age was also remarkable for the evolution of a distinct regional style of architecture and iconography in central India.

A probe into the landgrant charters of the first seventy years of Maitraka male reveals that Saurashtra witnessed the formation of a regional state for the first time in the sixth century. The inscriptions of this period suggest the difficulties of territorial and political integration and the mechanisms devised by the Maitrakas in their attempts to achieve the political unification of Saurashtra. A probe into the territorial distribution of the landgrants of the first seventy years clearly indicates the gradual integration of the areas that constitute the districts of Bhavnagar, Amreli and Kheda. The epigraphic evidence also suggests the integration of important non-Maitraka chiefs into the Mairaka state. Landgrants to brahmanas, Buddhist viharas and occasionally to temples, legitimized the authority of the Matrakas in Bhavnagar, Amreli and Kheda, and facilitated the mobilization of resources from the countryside.

The landgrant charters carry the images and demonstrate the prerogatives of kingship and governmental power of the Maitrakas who were emerging as the first regional dynasty of Gujarat. Charters, when repeatedly read out in the countryside, would have not only introduced the Maitrakas as the new ‘sovereigns’ of the region with royal titles and an impressive genealogy, but would also have implied their territorial claims. The political motifs in the charters helped sanction royal status to the Maitrakas in their transition from ‘chiefship’ to ‘kingship’. When the Maitrakas made grants of land for the first time in Saurashtra, they began the process of extending Maitraka sovereignty into the countryside of the region. As grants were made only in the districts of Bhavnagar, Amreli and Kheda in the first seventy years, their location indicates a neat pattern of step-wise territorial integration. The titles of the Maitraka kings suggest the process of the political incorporation of local chiefs, which ran parallel to territorial integration. Lists of officials and taxes that form a part of these charters need not be understood as instruments for the exploitation of rural society; they could be interpreted as a means of familiarizing people with royal norms and the administrative apparatus of the newly emerging government of the Maitraka dynasty. Finally, the grants of Maitrakas were not responsible for the emergence of brahmana landlord; pre-Maitraka Saurashtra had a highly stratified rural society that already included brahmana and non-brahmana landlords.

With the passing of the Guptas and their immediate successors in Northern India, historical interest shifts southwards to the Deccan and to the areas referred to as Tamilaham. The political history of the Deccan and further south focused on the long years of conflict between two geographical regions, the western Deccan and Tamilaham - the vast plateau areas enclosed by mountains along the coasts on the one hand, and the fertile plain south of Chennai on the other.

The Vakatakas in the western Deccan gave way to Chalukya power with a base in Vatapi/Badami. A series of kingdoms, south from the eastern Deccan included those ruled by the Shalankayanas and later the eastern Chalukyas; the Ikshavakus in the Krishna-Guntur region,
with Nagarjunakonda and Dharanikota as important centres, and with the Vishnukundins ruling close by. Control over Karnataka was divided between the kadambas, Nolambas Gangas. Hence the claim that some were of the brahma-kshatra catse – brahmans performing kshatriya functions or who could claim mixed Brahman and kshatriya ancestry.

For 300 years after the mid-sixth century three major kingdoms were in conflict. These were the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchipuram and the Pandyas of Madurai, all seeking to control the fertile tracts, the Chalukyas first came into prominence as subordinate rulers of the Kadambas, from whom they broke away. The Chalukya base was in northern Karnataka at Vatapi/Badami and adjacent Aihole, from where they moved northwards to annex the former kingdom of the Vakatas, centered in Upper Godavari. They also annexed some western coastal areas, presumably because these now hosted the traders from across the Arabian sea. The power from north was contained through the defeat of Harsha at the Narmada, by the Chalukya King Pulakeshin II, an event repeatedly referred to with pride in later Chalukya inceptions. The eastern part of the Satavahana kingdom, the deltas of the Krishna and the Godavari, had been conquered by Ikshvaku dynasty in the third century A.D. Ikshvaku rule ended with the conquest of this region by the Pallavas. The latter were also responsible for the overthrow of the Kadamba rulers and the annexation of their kingdom, which lay to the south of Chalukya kingdom.
TOWARDS THE EARLY MEDIEVAL (I): CHANGES IN POLITY AND ECONOMY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PALLAVAS, CHALUKYAS, AND VARDHANAS

-Vishwa Mohan Jha

History, as you know, is as much a story of continuity as of change. Taking a long-term view of the past and with the wisdom of hindsight, historians discover certain broad continuities for a long stretch of time that distinguish it from the preceding and succeeding stretches when there is a break in these continuities, i.e. when change occurs. These continuities become the characteristic feature of the particular stretch that is then called a period of history. In Indian history, three such major periods are known as ancient, medieval, and modern periods. The transition from the ancient to the medieval period in Indian history, the first subdivision of which is called ‘early medieval’, was a long-drawn-out affair. This transition encompassed a series of significant changes over a wide spectrum of human activity and thought. In this lesson we shall study the political and economic developments that mark this transition, with special reference to the Pallavas, Chalukyas, and Vardhanas. The next lesson will focus on the changes in society and culture that accompanied and were not infrequently related in various ways to the political and economic developments.

The Pallavas were a dynasty of South India. They ruled for a very long time, for as many as six centuries from third century AD onwards. Initially they were a small power in what is now northern Tamil Nadu, with their capital at Kanchipuram. From the sixth century they figure as a major regional power, dominating a large territory that included the domains of several small rulers, and defending it in an almost continuous series of wars against the Pandyas of Madurai (southern Tamil Nadu) and the Chalukyas. Their power began to wane from about mid-eighth century.

The Chalukyas emerge as rulers of northern Karnataka and adjoining areas of Maharashtra in the western Deccan in the beginning of the sixth century AD. They rapidly made themselves overlords of an extensive empire, ruling from their capital Vatapi (modern Badami). The Chalukyas of Badami were dislodged about mid-eighth century by the Rashtrakutas, their erstwhile subordinates. A junior branch of theirs, called Eastern Chalukyas, ruled in the Andhra delta region from AD 631 for about five centuries. There were other branches of the Chalukyas also in Indian history, but we shall here not be concerned with the Chalukya dynasties that ruled after the mid-eighth century.

In North India as the Gupta rule began to decline from the turn of the sixth century – to disappear eventually by the middle of it – a number of small kingdoms arose. Two of these were ruled by the Maukharis of Kanauj and the Pushyabhutis of Sthanvisvrara (modern Thanesar in Haryana) respectively. The Pushyabhuti kings had the suffix vardhana at the end of their name, such as Prabhakaravardhana, Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana. That is why they are also known as Vardhanas. Princess Rajyashri from the Vardhana family was married to the Maukhari king. When he died, her brother, King Harshavardhana of Thanesar (Harsha in short), became the effective ruler of both the kingdoms, probably by virtue of her widow sister’s claim to the throne; she, according to the Chinese sources, ‘regularly took a seat of honour beside her brother Harsha, and shared in state deliberations’. Through a number of wars lasting over a number of
years, Harsha formed a very large, but extremely short-lived, empire in North India; it fell to pieces immediately after his death in AD 647.

You will see that while the three empires well represent the three major divisions of India – North India (Vardhanas), the Deccan (Chalukyas), and South India (Pallavas)– they do not span the same range of time in Indian history. The Vardhanas ruled for the shortest period, the Chalukyas ruled both before and after them, and the chronologies of both formed a subset of the Pallava period, which was the longest of all. Since our chief interest lies in the changes that historians have identified in the transition to the early medieval period in Indian history, we shall focus on the two centuries from c. AD 550 to c. AD 750. The transitional aspects of the periods outside this time-bracket are usually discussed in the chapters on the preceding and succeeding periods of early Indian history, with special reference to the Guptas and the Palas-Pratiharas-Rashtrakutas-Cholas respectively. The focus on the transition also requires that we take into proper account other realms than those of the Vardhanas, Chalukyas and Pallavas.

Historians realised very early that the medieval period in Indian history began well before the Muslim rulers of the Delhi Sultanate. The great scholar Vincent Smith dated the beginning of this medieval period from the death of Harshavardhana, and termed its first phase as ‘early medieval India’; this nomenclature was widely accepted and was sometimes called ‘medieval Hindu India’ or ‘Rajput period’.

Over the last fifty years or so, the issue of the transition from ancient to early medieval period has been paid greater attention by historians, who now generally date it from the beginning of the Gupta period. However, they do not always agree with each other and have debated a number of issues. These may be called the debates over Indian feudalism, as they invariably began with questioning the view that the transition to the early medieval marked a transition to feudalism in Indian history. The controversies continue, but they have clarified a number of points (while obfuscating others), and it is clear that it is agreement over several basic facts of the transition that makes possible debate over the rest. In this Unit, we shall not go into these disputes, which deserve to be studied separately, except when a reference to them becomes unavoidable.

### POLITY

The distinctiveness of the early medieval polities of our period, in opposition to that of the early historical ones, has been noted in several respects. In these discussions of the transition from the ancient to the early medieval, Mauryan state and administration provide a point of comparison of the ancient Indian states with the early medieval ones, beginning with the Gupta Empire. Unlike the ancient Indian polities as exemplified by the Mauryan state, the early medieval ones were decentralised structures. The contrast has recently been modified somewhat, but it remains nonetheless. In earlier discussions, it used to be viewed in terms of a highly centralised Mauryan state versus the decentralised, ‘feudal’ set-up of the early medieval polities. Now that the terms of discussion are the degree of decentralisation rather than of centralisation, with a revised judgment of the overall character of the Mauryan state (which is now seen as far less centralised than earlier), the distinctive character of the early medieval states is now expressed differently. They are stated to have been ‘more decentralised’ than the Mauryan state.

A major indicator of the early medieval political transformation is seen in the nature of royal titles. In contrast with the practice in ancient India, when kings (including the mighty Mauryan monarchs) usually made do with the simple title of raja or ‘the king’, there was a tendency for the royal titles to become increasingly more magnificent and high-sounding in early
medieval times, when even petty rulers were known as *maharaja*, ‘the great king’, and *maharajadhiraja*, ‘the supreme king of great kings’. The trend began early with the Gupta emperors. Although they were usually called *maharajadhiraja* in most of the inscriptions, from the time of Chandragupta II some of them were sometimes also called *paramabhattaraka maharajadhiraja*, ‘the most excellent great lord, the supreme king of great kings’, and *bhattaraka maharaja rajadhiraja* ‘the great lord, the great king, the supreme king of kings’.

In continuation of this practice, Harshavardhana, along with his father and grandfather assumed the title of *paramabhattaraka maharajadhiraja*. About the same time, the Maitraka ruler Dharsena IV (AD 641-650), a powerful regional king of Saurashtra though a lesser potentate than Harsha, added two more, and equally pompous, titles – *parameshvara*, ‘the supreme lord’, and *chakravatin*, ‘the universal emperor’ – to these two. The Chalukyas of Badami called themselves variously *maharaja, parameshvara, rajadhiraja parameshvara*, or, most elaborately, *maharajadhiraja parameshvara paramabhattaraka*. Apart from these titles that are indicative of political status, these kings often had those of other types as well, more often indicating their religious affiliations (e.g. *paramamaheshvara* and *paramabhagavata*) but also referring to their other qualities. The seventh-century Pallava ruler Narasimhavarman II is known to have assumed more than two hundred fifty titles! Among other things he was called *rajasimha* (‘lion among kings’), *sankarabhakta* (‘devotee of Shiva’), and *agamapriya* (‘lover of Shaivite scriptures called *agama*’). Both the high political status and religious commitment of the Pallava rulers was captured by their title *dharmamaharaja* or *dharmamaharajadhiraja*; the prefix *dharma* seems to be emblematic of their known proclivity for Brahmanism and hostility to the non-Brahmanical religions.

These high-sounding political titles are interpreted as reflecting a qualitative shift in the nature of political organisation, apart of course from the growing ornateness of Sanskrit language. Unlike the ancient kings of India, the paramount, imperial sovereigns of our period like the Chalukyas and the Vardhanas did not directly administer their entire dominions with the help of officials, but only the central part of it. For the rest they ruled through their overlordship over a host of lesser kings. There was, in other words, a hierarchy of kings in a large political formation, and this hierarchy corresponded to a hierarchy of titles. There were many types of these subordinate kings, from big kings of large areas to petty chieftains, including tribal leaders. This structure did not prevail only in the biggest states of the times, namely those of the Vardhanas, Chalukyas or Pallavas, but could exist in smaller states as well. The regional kingdom of Kashmir in the seventh century, for instance, had a number of dependent states, including the kingdoms of Taxila, the Salt Range, and the lower hills.

These subordinate kings of the paramount sovereign, the *paramabhattaraka maharajadhiraja*, were often known collectively by the term *samanta*.

*Samanta* was an old word, but earlier it meant a neighbour, including a neighbouring king. Now it acquired a new meaning of ‘subordinate king’. In the Madhuban Copperplate Inscription of Harsha, for instance, it is in this sense that a person named Ishvaragupta is called a *samanta maharaja*. In contemporary literature also we get numerous references to the political importance of these *samantas*. Samantas, it needs to be underlined, were no simple political allies of the paramount sovereign and thus outsiders, but were important functionaries within his realm. They rendered valuable military service to him and were considered integral parts of his defence system. They accompanied their overlords in their expeditions, shared with them in the glories and spoils of victory, and paid for their defeats. Thus the Chalukya king Pulakeshin II, in his campaigns against the Pallavas, had first to overcome the opposition of the Banas, who were the subordinates of the Pallavas. On being defeated, the Banas seem to have been transferred
their loyalty to the Chalukyas as their principality, which figures as an administrative unit (Banaraja-vishaya, 'the vishaya of the Bana king') in a Chalukya record. The samantas attended the overlord’s court regularly, and even performed valuable administrative duties directly under him. Ishvaragupta, for instance, was a keeper of records of Harsha.

Samantas have been identified as a major source of the political instability and turbulence that mark the early medieval period. Always a potential source of trouble, they were the first to take advantage of the problems and weakness of the centre and declare themselves independent and, if possible, even seize power from their overlords. Thus the Chalukyas were overthrown by the Rashtrakutas, who had been their subordinates, and the empire of Harshavardhana did not outlast him, and was followed by a long period marked by a multiplicity of independent small kingdoms.

How did the paramount sovereign and his subordinate rulers govern the areas under their direct control? In this respect also a number of differences with the earlier systems of administration have been pointed out. In general, royal control of affairs slackened. The early medieval kings, as typified by the Guptas, are supposed to have taken a less active part in government than the ancient rulers, as typified by the Mauryas: ‘Whereas Ashoka insisted that he be kept informed of what was happening, the Guptas seemed satisfied with leaving it to the kumaramatyas and the ayuktakas [their officials].’

A number of official designations are seen for the first time in early medieval records. Some of these, such as sandhivigrahika and dandanayaka, appear early and soon became very important offices in most polities all over India. There was also a strong tendency to elevating these offices by adding the prefix mahat to them and making them mahasandhivigrahika, mahadandanayaka, and so forth. In a great majority of cases our records do not provide the details of these numerous designations, so that their exact nature is often no more than a matter of reasoned guesswork. However, the plethora of these new names indicates a certain reorganization of the administration, some of which was clearly necessitated by the growing importance of the new concerns of the state. For instance, the practice of creating agraharas through land grants called into existence the office of agraharika; in early medieval Assam the task seems to have been divided between two officers, the lekhayitri, who was in charge of getting the grants recorded, and shasayitri, whose duty was to get them executed.

However, it is not easy to say if the large numbers of designations that are seen in the early medieval records represent an increase in the total number of state functionaries. For one, these designations pertain to the records of different kingdoms so that not all of the known functionaries worked as part of the same state apparatus. For another, in a number of cases we see the same person holding a number of high offices.

In fact, on two sets of grounds it is thought that there was a shrinkage of officialdom during the early medieval period as the state began to withdraw from a large number of activities. One is the practice of land grants, the other being local autonomy in administration.

By the time of Xuan Zang, officials had begun to be paid commonly through grants of land (or a share in local taxes) instead of salaries. This saved the government the heavy duty of organizing the collection of resources for conversion in cash for the disbursement of salaries. During this time, the state also began to grant in perpetuity fiscal, juridical and administrative rights on a considerable scale to religious functionaries and institutions. The fiscal, juridical, and administrative administration of the villages over which such authority was granted consequently no longer remained the headache of the government. In a further contrast with the Mauryan state,
in early medieval polities the government now stopped taking an active role in the development of agrarian economy, and instead began granting land to ‘individuals, who were expected to act as a catalyst in rural areas’.

The grantees became an additional source of the decentralisation of the polity. In fact, they are supposed to have added to the ranks of the samantas. Examples such as of samanta maharaja Ishvaragupta, who was a keeper of seals in the court of Harsha can be, and have in fact been, interpreted in a different way than we have done above: it was not necessarily a case of a samanta maharaja who served as a keeper of seals, but could as well have been one of a keeper of the seals who had risen to the rank of samanta by means of land grant. Such has been some historians’ belief in the samanta-making power of land grants that whenever they see a brahmin king in early medieval India they conclude they must have been descendants of some donee brahmin, that his ancestors must have been given the first access to political power by means of land grants

A further curtailment of state activities resulted from local autonomy in administration, both at village and town levels. This has been identified as a major development in early medieval India, although it did not develop in the same way everywhere. In ancient India the committees or persons supervising local government were appointed by the state, as in the Mauryan set-up; later local representatives came to be entrusted with these tasks. Where the villagers were allowed to manage their own affairs, as in the Shangam period, they did so only in a limited and ad hoc sort of way; it is only in later times that a developed and well-organized system of local autonomous bodies, entrusted with a large number of tasks, emerged gradually.

In the deep south, local assemblies and/or councils must have in existence during the post-Shangam period, but their activities in the Tamil country remain obscure to us for a long time. However, from the late eighth and early ninth centuries when inscriptions begin to refer to three types of them – ur (non-brahmin assembly), sabha (assembly of brahmans), and nagaram (generally mercantile corporation) – they already appear with all or most of their known features. It follows that, if their growth was not sudden but gradual (as was probably the case), it must have occurred during our period.

As to the rest of India, a fourth century record from Andhra Pradesh refers to village officials, and village headmen such as gramabhojakas and gramakutas figure in a number of records, but in general local notables seem to have played an important role in rural administration on a regular basis, in conjunction with the state functionaries. At the time of issuing a charter in an area, it was usual for the king to inform these notables of it and their consent was deemed important for carrying out land transactions. In the western Deccan they were known as gamundas and mahajanas; elsewhere mahattara was the most common term for them during our period.

A typical feature of political life at the level of locality was the grant of varying degrees of autonomy to urban corporate groups by the king. This is seen for the first time in our period in a number of charters over a wide area from modern Gujarat to Maharashtra and Karnataka, from the end of the sixth till the first quarter of the 8th century.

Not everything was transformed, however, and we must be careful, when tracing the transition from the ancient to early medieval times, to note that administration continued to bear many similarities to earlier practices. Like Ashoka, Harsha is said to have built rest houses for travellers in his kingdom. Just as Ashoka undertook a regular tour of his realm, and Manu prescribed such tours of inspection as an important part of the king’s duty, the early medieval
kings, Harshavardhana for instance, are often seen be moving about in their domains. As Xuan Zang says of Harsha: ‘The king made visits of inspection throughout his dominions, not residing long at any place, but having temporary buildings erected for his residence at each place of sojourn; but he did not go abroad during the three months of rain-season retreat.’ However, historians who do not remember, or accept as valid, this parallel with the earlier times, interpret this evidence very differently. They think that if the king had to do all this himself, he was behaving more like a ‘royal inspector’ than a king and he was not having a proper administrative machinery: ‘Harsha relied more on personal supervision than on the assistance of an organized bureaucracy for the efficient rule of his vast empire.’ In a contradictory move, when the king’s officials are seen to be doing the state’s work, historians —sometimes the same historian— reproach the Gupta kings for leaving it to them rather than doing it themselves!

It should also be clear from the examples already referred to that things did not change in the same way everywhere. In fact, from royal titles to local administration, regional variations in the polities could be very marked. For instance, a general feature of early medieval kingdoms was the king’s right to choose his successor and appoint him as heir apparent (yuvaraja or yuvamaharaja); the importance of these heirs apparent, however, seems to have varied significantly from one polity to another. Further, the line of royal succession was through males generally, but in the Kara kingdom of Orissa women rulers were quite as normal (and not something exceptional). And while a number of designations for the state functionaries, such as mahadandanayaka and senapati were common everywhere, a greater number of them (at any rate in configuration) were specific to different regions. For instance, a revenue official called dhruva is not found outside Saurashtra, and lekhayitri and shasayitri were peculiar to the Assam region.

**ECONOMY**

The economic aspects of the transition have been reconstructed mainly on the basis of the evidence of land-grant inscriptions, coins, and settlement archaeology, with some help from literary sources such as the account of the Chinese traveller Xuan Zang. These may be studied under the following themes: continuous and unprecedented agrarian expansion; growth of a new class of landlords in the countryside along with corresponding changes in the status of peasantry; and decline in craft production, trade, and urbanisation. It is absolutely impossible to describe some of these changes without discussing the controversies they involve, although we need not go here, as elsewhere in this lesson, into whether these changes entitle us to speak of a feudal or some other type of formation in early medieval India.

Agrarian regions had emerged all over the subcontinent by the first half of the seventh century AD at the time of Xuan Zang’s visit. However, the economies of not all areas were equally or uniformly developed. People who practised pastoralism ‘exclusively’, for instance, inhabited a long stretch along the lower Indus. Many other regions remained heavily forested, and in yet other areas, there had been a setback to past prosperity and land was lying desolate. These details, together with many others from other sources, show that there remained considerable potential for further agricultural development.

It is commonly argued that a major, probably the most important, way in which the early medieval states sought to tap this potential was by granting land to brahmins and temples. The increasing number of land grants in early medieval times are taken as spearheading the process of agrarian expansion. However, a recent reappraisal of the evidence cautions against this as a facile generalisation, and takes the position that only a handful of the grants were really about agrarian expansion, most being grants of revenue of already settled areas, that typically a land
grant was the end product rather than a starting point of agrarian expansion. However, growing numbers of peasants continued to bring more and more land under the plough, and they got all possible encouragement from the state; for instance, in eighth century King Lalitaditya distributed water wheels for facilitating cultivation in Kashmir.

Extension of agriculture was a widespread phenomenon by all accounts, making possible the rise of kingdoms in new areas and integration of new communities during and after our period. The details for all areas for all periods are not equally available, but research has been adding to our knowledge. For instance, we are exceptionally well informed about the construction and upkeep of irrigation system in the Pallava kingdom. The Pallavas have long been reputed for building a number of tanks around Kanchipuram in the Palar valley through such a shrewd, close observation of the terrain as draws the admiration of the experts even today. The evidence for irrigation in southern Tamil Nadu in the Pandya kingdom – small epigraphs on granite sluices – remained neglected for some time. Their investigation has revealed several impressive irrigation projects that were successfully completed in the Pandya kingdom during the seventh-eighth centuries.

A major new feature of the agrarian economy was the creation of a class of landlords by means of land grants to religious men and institutions. The first instances of these grants date back to the early medieval period, but they are few, and it is only from the Gupta period that they began to be issued on a steadily larger scale. The grantees were given away for all time the revenues of a village (sometimes a part of it, sometimes more than one village), the people of which were asked to be obedient to them and regularly pay them their dues. They were also authorised to collect judicial fines from them for many types of crimes (aparadha). In other words, the grantees came to represent the state in the granted area, and state officials were normally prevented from interfering with their authority.

There is a controversy over the implications of these grants for the peasantry. According to one view, by subjecting them to the authority of these landlords, the land grants led to an all-round depression of the status of peasants, who suffered from several constraints and were reduced to a state of servility. In the other opinion, this is exaggeration as the peasants now simply began to pay the grantees just what they had been paying so far to the state officials, and so they remained as ‘free’ as ever.

Paradoxically, this progress of the rural economy was not matched, according to some historians, by a similar progress of the non-rural one, i.e. of non-rural craft production and of trade and urbanisation. Villages came to be ‘closed’ or ‘self-sufficient’ economies, meeting most of their needs through mutual, non-market agreements on exchanges in kind; e.g. the potter would provide pots to peasants in return of which he would be given a piece of land and/or a share in their harvest. As villages multiplied, this kind of arrangement led to a progressive reduction of trade and commerce, and with it to the decline of urban economy. It thus strengthened a trend that began with the decline of India’s external trade, which was occasioned by the downfall of the western Roman empire and came to a near halt by the close of the sixth century when people in the eastern Roman empire stopped importing silk from China through Indian traders. The trade with China and Southeast Asia was clearly inadequate to check this economic regression, as seen in the urban and currency scenario in early medieval India till about the end of the tenth century AD. Trade is reduced to a minimum, a much lesser number of coins is seen in circulation, prosperous cities of yore continue to decline with some being eventually deserted as urban professionals including priests and craftpersons move out in the countryside in search of livelihood.
The criticisms of this picture of urban decline have been numerous and varied. One is the outright rejection of the decline thesis in toto; according to these critics foreign trade during the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods was in fact ‘in an exceptionally flourishing state’. In another line of critique, a phase of urban and currency decline in general is conceded, but it is argued (by implication) that the decline occurred for a more limited period and on a lesser scale, and that it could not have due to the decline of long-distance trade; no attempt is however made to explain what else was or could have been responsible for the decline. The third viewpoint seeks to delimit further both the spatial and the temporal extent of the decline of urbanism; it is believed, wrongly, that the case for urban decline has been made only for the Ganges valley (in fact, there is a book that argues in detail for urban decay for the whole of the subcontinent). Further, some scholars point out the problems with the concept of closed or self-sufficient economy, and while some others do not think there was a reduction in the number of coins in circulation in early medieval India, there are yet others who concede the paucity of coins but do not think that this necessarily amounts to a shrinkage of trade.

To top it all, inner contradictions in the decline theses have also been brought out. We need only to add to it the variations and contradictions in the critics’ standpoints (not to mention the responses to them by the protagonists of the decline thesis) to see how bad the overall situation is for arriving at a general, controversy-free understanding of the non-agrarian history of the period. Yet it seems safe enough to conclude from all this – although it is not much of a conclusion – that the transition to the early medieval period in the non-agrarian sector was anything but static, and that the confusing mass of evidence underlines a dynamism the precise nature of which awaits further research with far more rigour (and regard for each other’s work) than is seen at the moment.
In this lesson, we shall survey the socio-cultural changes that marked the transition to early medieval India. Our sources for locating these changes remain to some extent the same as those for discovering political and economic ones, but for the better part they are different. Even when they remain the same, they have to be analysed differently. At times the links between the two sets of changes are not difficult to discern, as for example between changes in economic/political and social statuses, although the paucity or problems of historical data may make it difficult to establish the relationship. However, the connection is as often not so easily apparent or seems tenuous at best. In fact, it is not possible in this brief sketch to provide answers to these and other questions, a good deal of which are either under investigation or under debate (in fact, some questions that you might ask may not have occurred to the specialists at all!). The purpose here is to introduce you to the subject matter in simplest terms, and induce you to think critically as you peruse the other readings in the subject.

**SOCIETY**

A number of important social changes have been identified in the transition to early medieval period. These changes are best approached through the composition, character and scope of the caste system, and the status of women within it. As you know, Jati is the basic unit in the caste system. People are grouped in endogamous Jatis, i.e. members of a Jati marry within and not outside their Jati. Often a number of Jatis in an area that are similar to each other in status and occupation make up a Jati cluster; and these Jatis and Jati clusters form part of one of the four Varnas – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. At the bottom of this caste hierarchy, i.e. Jati-based Varna hierarchy, are the Untouchables, who are placed outside and in an inferior relation to the fourfold Varna order, although they are also termed as ‘impure Shudras’.

Identifying the nature of caste society and the direction of social changes during our period demands a careful analysis of the sources. The terms *jati* and *varna* are not always used there in our sense of these categories, and their exact import has to be ascertained each time. A text by itself may give the impression of a static society, and it is only through a critical collation of all pieces of relevant information that one is able to see the processes of change.

A comparison of the evidence across our period shows that state society – the society of kingdoms and empires, which was by and large caste society, as distinct from the non-state, casteless societies of hunter-gatherers and tribes – was expanding significantly during our period. First, a considerable number of immigrants from outside the subcontinent, such as the Hunas, the Gurjaras, etc. were settling down. The Gurjaras, the ancestors of the present Gujar community, seem to have been particularly widespread in western and northwestern India. In some regions a gradual transformation of the original structure of Gurjara society was well under way during our period as at the end of it we see not only the emergence of a small section of them as rulers (the Gurjara-Pratiharas) but also the rest as humble peasantry. The recognition of the Hunas as one of the traditional thirty-six Kshatriya clans took a longer time. There were probably other peoples too. For instance, the Kalachuris who figure as an important political entity and had even
founded an era called Kalachuri-Chedi Era are supposed to have been such immigrants, and the term ‘Kalachuri’ is interpreted as a derivative of the Turkish title ‘kulchur’.

Large parts of India continued to remain covered with forests, in which small, scattered groups of hunter-gatherers and tribal people practising pastoralism and/or primitive agriculture lived. For instance, in calling southern Andhra Pradesh a sparsely populated jungle territory infested by highwaymen, Xuan Zang referred to one such area dominated by aboriginal population, who did not lead a settled life and for whom plunder was a legitimate source of livelihood. Similarly, for an extensive country in the northwest, he reports the presence of people who are stated to live solely by pastoralism, be very warlike, and ‘have no masters, and, whether men or women, have neither rich nor poor’. Quite a few of the aboriginal groups were in regular touch with the members of caste society, and vivid descriptions of their lives are recorded, though not without bias, in contemporary works of literature, such as the Dashakumaracharita of Dandin and the Kadambari of Banabhatta.

A number of the aboriginal peoples were also being assimilated in the caste society, some wholly, some in part. For instance, while the name ‘Shabara’ continued to stand for a tribe or a number of tribes till well after our period, the reference to a Shabara king with a Sanskritic name, Udayana, in our sources suggests the integration of a section of Shabara people into caste society. In general, the majority of the members of a tribe were converted into a Jati belonging to the Shudra Varna (some into an Untouchable caste), while a tribal chief, if he was sufficiently resourceful, could claim a Kshatriya status for himself and his close kinsmen.

The caste society was also being transformed from within in response to political, economic, and cultural-ideological changes. An interesting example is the crystallisation of the professionals called kayastha as a Jati. Kayasthas come into view as important officials from the Gupta period onwards, and just after our period are seen as a caste. Our sources suggest that they came from a number of communities, including tribes (especially Karanas) as well as brahmins. The names of a considerable number of brahmins in Bengal in the Gupta and post-Gupta inscriptions end with suffixes such as Vasu, Ghosha, Datta, Dama, etc., which are today the surnames not of Bengali brahmins but of Bengali Kayasthas. The absence of these surnames among the brahmins of the region suggests that it was the case not of people of lower Varnas adopting the surnames of their superiors in a bid for upward mobility, but one of the formation of a caste through fission of brahm and non-brahmin kayastha families from their parent bodies and fusion into a caste of Kayastha. In other words, the Kayastha caste began to form as the families belonging to this profession started marrying among themselves and stopped marrying within their own original Jatis or tribes.

As you know, each Varna was associated with some specific functions; for instance, priestly functions were considered the preserve of brahmins. Historians have noted a remarkable change in this matter during the transition, which is registered both in the brahmanical treatises as well as attested by foreign observers. Agriculture, which was considered earlier generally the work of the Vaishyas, now comes increasingly to be seen as the occupation of the Shudras. However, the meaning of this is not easy to understand, or rather is capable of being understood in at least three different ways. First, this has been interpreted as amounting to a marked improvement in the status of the Shudras. From being slaves, servants, and agricultural labourers they now become landholding peasants like the Vaishyas. Second, this may represent the decline in the status of peasantry as a result of extensive land grants. There was, it is said, such a downgrading of the Vaishya peasants that they were considered no different from the Shudras. Third, this could refer to the phenomenon of the absorption of tribal people in caste society as
Shudra peasantry. It is of course hypothetically possible that the different statements in our sources may collectively represent *in some, hitherto unexplained, way* the sum total of all these inferences. However, the point is that the problem of the exact correlation of this shift in Varna theory with the historical reality, especially the mutually contradictory nature of the first two inferences, has so far not been realized by historians, and needs to be sorted out.

From about the third to the post-Gupta centuries, a number of developments take place in the history of untouchability. Although the practice had been known earlier, the term ‘untouchable (*asprishya*)’ for them is used for the first time now. The number of untouchable castes increases through the period, largely through the absorption of aboriginal groups in the caste society. However, the Chandalas and the Shvapachas (literally, ‘dog-cookers’) remained the most conspicuous of them. The miserable life of these people seldom failed to attract the attention of shocked foreign observers. Early in the Gupta period, Fa Xian noticed it, and in the seventh century Xuan Zang observed: ‘Butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioners, and scavengers have their habitation marked by a distinguishing sign. They are forced to live outside the city and sneak along on the left when going about in the hamlets.’

The practice of slavery seems to have continued without much remarkable change. This may be inferred from the treatment of the subject in the legal digests called *shastras*: the topic is treated in more or less the same manner in a Gupta-period work as in a twelfth-century one, the *Mitakshara*, which is otherwise very particular about recording change. Slaves seem to have mainly been used as domestic labour.

As with the other social groups, the status of women did not remain unchanged during the transition to the early medieval period. The changes that are noticed mainly pertain to the womenfolk of the upper classes of society; of course these changes did not occur uniformly everywhere. The brahmanical attitudes betray certain unmistakable tendencies of further depreciation of women’s status, one of the most intolerable things being a woman’s attempt to have independence (*svatantrya*). There was an increasing tendency to club them together with either property or Shudras, just the Chandalas were coming to be bracketed with dogs and donkeys. Post-puberty marriages were deprecated, with one authority prescribing the age of the bride as one-third of the bridegroom’s. Wives would considerably outlive husbands in such cases, and detailed provisions were accordingly made for regulating the lives of widows. An extreme provision was that she should become a sati, i.e. commit suicide with her husband’ dead body on the funeral pyre (or without it if it had already perished, as Harsha’s sister Rajyashri tried to do). Although not unknown in the earlier periods, the practice of sati gained ground steadily in early medieval times as instances of it begin to multiply. However, this did not win universal approval even in Brahmanism. Baanbhttaa and Shudraka, the leading literary figures of the times, criticised it strongly, and the strongest protest was beginning to develop in tantrism, which was to declare it a most sinful act.

A general indication of the depreciation in the social standing of upper caste women is the deliberate erasure of their pre-marital identity after marriage. Till the Gupta period there is evidence that a woman did not need to lose her *gotra* identity and affiliation after marriage; thereafter, however, such marriages seem to have gone ‘gradually gone out of use, at least among the ordinary people’.

Sometimes a certain ‘improvement’ in the status of women in early medieval times is perceived in the fact that they were allowed, like the Shudras, to listen to certain religious texts and worship deities. However, this seems to have served, by making them religious-minded, mainly to strengthen the brahmanical religions and enhance the income of the officiating priests.
rather than to improve the quality of women’s lives. Much cannot also be made of the increase in the scope of stridhana, i.e. the wealth that a woman could receive as a gift, for this did little to empower them in relation to men; their dependence and helplessness remained unaffected. While some authorities tried to get inheritance rights for the widow or daughter of a man dying sonless, actual historical instances make it clear that their prescriptions were routinely disregarded in favour of the contrary opinion by the early medieval kings, who would confiscate the property of such persons except for some privileged few; this provision, however, like those against widow remarriage and advocating sati, did not apply to the women of Shudra Varna. In fact, as in the previous and following periods, women of the labouring masses, simply for the reason that they had to work in the fields, pastures, etc. along with men in order to keep body and soul together, could not be subjected to the same kind of subordination and helplessness as was the fate of women of the privileged classes.

CULTURE

It is for the multi-faceted cultural activities that the documentation in our period – literary and monumental – is the richest, liveliest, and most vivid. It is best appreciated firsthand, visually via the sites of monuments or by reading up the literature – through a colourfully illustrated narrative at a pinch – rather than through an investigation into the transitional aspects of it. However, such investigation helps us place the creative-aesthetic-scientific achievements of the age in their proper historical contexts, enriching our sensibilities thereby, and therefore comes in very useful whenever we decide to descend on the monuments or dive in the literature. There exists a highly technical and voluminous scholarly output on the different aspects of these activities, and, in the limited space at our disposal, we can do no more than describe some broad trends.

There were a number of significant linguistic developments. First, there was the onset and growth of the third stage of Middle Indo-Aryan languages, i.e. the Prakrits [Old Indo-Aryan languages include Classical and Vedic Sanskrit], from about AD 600. This third stage of the Middle Indo-Aryan is termed Apabhramsha by the linguists, out of which the New or Modern Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi and Marathi began to evolve from the tenth century. Second, the predominance of Sanskrit continued to grow as the official language of the states and one used for trans-provincial communication throughout the culture region of South and South-east Asia, apart from as a language of literature and religion; towards the end of our period even the Jainas were beginning to give up their Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit in its favour. In the history of Sanskrit legal literature, our period marks a watershed, during which the last of the Smritis, the Katyayana Smriti, was composed, and towards the end of which the great tradition of Sanskrit commentaries on these Smritis made its first beginning with the commentary of Asahaya on the Narada Smriti.

Third, there was the continuing ascent of Tamil along with the foundations of Kannada and Telugu as a literary language. The growth of Tamil received a great fillip from the Bhakti movement. Although no extant works can be ascribed to our period, epigraphic references as well as the later literary ones show nevertheless that Kannada was flourishing as a literary language, aided by state patronage and royal participation. For instance, Durvinita, who is mentioned as a celebrated literary figure of the language, was probably the sixth-century Ganga king Durvinita of southern Karnataka. As for Telugu, the discovery of fragments of an early text on prosody, called Janashraychhandas, points to a strong likelihood that its rise as a literary language may have commenced as early as the first references to Telugu words in stone inscriptions of the fifth and sixth century AD.
In the field of religion, the Puranic temple-based Brahmanical sects, about the nature and rise of which you have already read in the previous lessons, continued to be in the ascendant. Of these the Vaishnava and Shaiva sects were the most important. Taking the evidence of royal patronage as an indicator, the various Shaiva sects appear to have been moving ahead of the Vaishnava ones during our period.

A major new development of great importance was Bhakti movement in the Tamil south. The idea of bhakti or devotion to a deity was basic to most sects of the period, but it was in the south during our period that it was invested with an unprecedented emotional intensity and became the focus of a powerful religious movement. It was espoused by both Shaiva saints called Nayanars and Vaishnava ones called Alvars. They journeyed extensively in propagation of their faith; debated with rivals; sang, danced and composed beautiful lyrics in praise of their deities; and converted kings and commoners alike to their faith, exhorting them to bring disgrace to the other faiths. Besides fulfilling the religious cravings of the people, the idea of bhakti served to tone down the severity of the iniquitous caste system as well as helped, as the central doctrine of temple-based religiosity and in calling forth the unquestioning loyalty of the subjects, the monarchs to shore up their rule.

There is a perceptible decline in some areas of Buddhism, which had gradually been falling out of royal favour since the Gupta period. In many others, however, it continued to retain a substantial presence. There was a century of lavish royal patronage by the Maitraka state of Saurashtra in the west, and in the east the importance of Nalanda reached its peak during this time as the most outstanding of all the centres of Buddhist learning, to which some more like Vikramashila, Oddantapuri, and Somapura were added. In Gujarat and Rajasthan regions, Jainism too seems to have done reasonably well among the people despite the dwindling royal support.

It is in the South that the two religions lost out to Brahmanism in a major way, although the Kannada territory remained a Jaina stronghold. There was never any love lost between them and the Brahmanical religions, and religious rivalry and persecution have long been identified as distinct features of our age, despite a certain general reluctance to accept it and a rather desperate bid by some scholars to see nothing but religious tolerance and harmony. There were no doubt kings during these centuries who were evenhanded in their attitudes to the various religions, but so were those with partisan views bordering on bigotry. For instance, the following quote from one of the earliest studies on South Indian Jainism represents a standard view of the downfall of the faith in the region, about which students of history tend to be unfamiliar these days:

The vast remains in South India of mutilated statues, deserted caves, and ruined temples at once recall to our mind the greatness of the religion in days gone by and the theological rancour of the Brahmans who wiped it out of all active existence. The Jains have been forgotten, their traditions have been ignored; but, the memory of that bitter struggle between Jainism and Hinduism, characterised by bloody episodes in the South, is constantly kept alive in the series of frescoes on the wall of the mantapam of the Golden Lily Tank of the famous Minakshi Temple of Madura. … As though this were not sufficient … the whole tragedy is gone through at five of the twelve annual festivals at the Madura temple.

Tantrism was well on way to becoming a salient feature of religious life all over the subcontinent. In Tantrism the cult of female divinities, who were in general known as Tara in Buddhism and Shakti or Devi in Brahmanism, was combined with a set of esoteric beliefs and magical practices. A graphic portrayal of Tantric religion is seen in the Harshacharita, where a Sascetic from the South performs what may clearly be identified as a Tantric rite for Harsha’s ancestor Pushpabhuti. The ascetic lived near an old temple of the Mothers (matri), and
performed a fire-rite in the mouth of a corpse in an empty building near ‘a great cremation
ground’ on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight.

Among the other features of religious life in this period of transition, one was the coming
of Islam on the west coast and in Sindh, and the other was the expansion of Christian
communities from Malabar and some other places on the west coast in early sixth century to the
east coast of the peninsula by the eighth.

Philosophy continued to be enlivened and enriched by debates and discussions. Apart
from the six major schools of philosophy in Brahmanism, there were, as you already know, three
‘heterodox’, i.e. non-Brahmanical ones: Buddhist, Jaina, and Charvaka. No works of the
Charvakas have come down to us and their views are known only through refutation by others. A
major representative of this school was Purandara, who probably lived in the seventh century and
is known to have composed texts on his school of philosophy. In the same century flourished
Dharmakirti, the outstanding Buddhist philosopher. In Vedanta philosophy we have Gaudapada,
who is reputed to have been Shankaracharya’s paramaguru, the teacher of his teacher. Some greatest
names in Mimamsa philosophy also belong to our period: Shabara, Prabhakara, and Kumarila.

In stone architecture, there were two major forms: rock-cut and structural. Rock
architecture, as you probably already know, refers to the creation of architectural forms in living
rock. These rock-cut temples and monasteries usually look like artificial caves in hills and cliffs.
These were distinct from ‘structural’ architecture, which refers to building freestanding
structures with dressed-stone (or brick) masonry. Occasionally these two forms could be
combined, but normally they remained separate, and have different chronological spans. Rock
architecture, which over its long career was a virtually pan-South Asian phenomenon, goes back
to the Mauryan period, but it is from about mid-fifth century (beginning at Ajanta and Ellora)
that it entered its most active phase. By the end of our period the great age of rock architecture in
Indian art history was by and large drawing to a close, even though its greatest achievement – the
Kailasanatha temple at Ellora – comes just after it. It was during these centuries that construction
of structural buildings in stone and brick got under way in an important way, but the really
magnificent and classic phase of structural temples begins after the age of rock architecture was
over. Generally speaking, there was an overlap between the two types of construction during our
centuries, except in the south under the Pallavas, where the structural phase begins in the eighth
century only after the rock-cut phase comes to an end in the seventh.

As the fine examples from Ajanta and Ellora testify, major advances were made as the
artists stopped imitating wooden prototypes and achieved increasing perfection of design and
execution; in some instances, it has been observed, ‘lines are straighter, angles more correct, and
surfaces more true than in any other examples’. Further, two monasteries at Ellora are the only
examples we have of three storeys in rock-cut art. Till about the end of the sixth century
Buddhism largely dominated the rock-cut mode of architecture, and then gradually Brahmanism
became more important, followed by Jainism. Despite the different religious affiliations, the
architectural style remained common, expect for some adaptation for ritualistic purposes.

Examples of freestanding structures, built of stone or brick, are known from an earlier
period. A most remarkable development of our period was the evolution of the typical
brahmanical temple of the medieval era. The medieval temple was a very elaborate structure
with several typical features. The process began, about the turn of the sixth century, with the
addition of a tower called shikhara to the flat roofs of the shrine-rooms of the Gupta period. The
earliest examples of such an addition come from Bhitargaon near Kanpur (brick) and Deogarh
near Jhansi and Aihole near Badami (stone). The remaining features were gradually added till
about AD 740, when at the Vaikunthanath Perumal shrine at Kanchipuram we see a combination of all the standard attributes of the medieval temple. The evolution occurred at different pace in various regions. For instance, an important stage in the evolution was the connection of the pillared assembly hall called *mandapa* with the sanctum by means of a vestibule called *antarala*. As late as AD 700 this had not become a general practice as it is absent in both the Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha at Kanchipuram (this Kailasanatha temple was used as an inspiration for the one at Ellora).

In sculpture, the classical tradition with its emphasis on fully rounded volume by and large continued. The medieval style, in which rounded volume and smooth convex lines give way to flat surfaces and sharp curves, is seen occasionally in isolated examples, such as in a sixth-century frieze at the Dhamek stupa at Sarnath, but it did not come into its own till a later period, and even then remained confined to certain regions only.

The same is true of painting. It was quite a developed art by the onset of our period, and the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, a contemporary text from Kashmir, provides a detailed account of its various aspects. Literary references show that there were both murals (paintings on walls and ceiling) of different types in private homes, royal palaces, and religious places as well popular portable galleries of pictures drawn on textiles. However, although several examples of paintings from our period have survived, they all are all murals in religious establishments. The best-preserved specimens come from the sixth-century Buddhist caves (rock-cut halls) at Bagh in Madhya Pradesh, Ajanta, and Badami, the seventh-century rock-cut Jaina temple at Sittanavasal in Tamil Nadu (a good part of the extant paintings, it has now been found out, belong to the ninth century), and the seventh-century Shaiva Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. Outside India, Sigiri in Sri Lanka furnishes beautiful instances. The tradition of classical painting continued in all these and many other cases through the seventh century and beyond. In the classical mode, there was an attempt at three-dimensional representation by employing several techniques, such as chiaroscuro (use of light and shade by means of colour shades and tones). Through these centuries, however, the medieval style, which was to find a foothold in many regions, was also developing; it appears in an eighth-century Ellora painting with a completeness that suggests a long period of prior evolution. As in sculpture, the classical and the medieval were to coexist in South Asia after our period.

In the scientific field, Brahmagupta is the most outstanding figure in our period. He made a number of seminal contributions in mathematics. He was the first mathematician in the world to recognize negative numbers, which he presented as ‘debts’ in contrast to positive numbers, which he called ‘fortunes’. In many other ways he was ahead of the mathematicians of the time. For instance, one of his methods for proving Pythagoras’ theorem remained unknown to the western world till the seventeenth century. Astronomy was closely linked to mathematics, the word for the mathematician – *ganaka* – being also the term for the astronomer. Like his equally eminent predecessor Aryabhata, Brahmagupta was thus an astronomer also. He headed a major observatory, and grappled with such questions as lunar and solar eclipses, conjunctions of the moving planets with each other as well as with fixed stars, etc.

However, although he was characteristically dazzling in applying mathematical techniques to astronomy, Brahmagupta failed to achieve the same success in astronomy. He in fact strongly argued for the wrong conclusion that the earth does not rotate on its axis. The reason for this was his inability to go beyond and question the religion-sanctioned knowledge. It has been shown how Brahmagupta was prevented from achieving the same success in astronomy by the stranglehold of scriptural authority. Thus while he attempted a careful calculation of the
diameter of the shadow of earth in order to see how the moon is eclipsed by it, he also condemned the ‘heretics’ who mock and reject the view that the demon Rahu swallows celestial bodies! Evidently the same need to uphold religious authority led him to revile and reject Aryabhata’s findings.

The *Surya Siddhanta*, which provided the basis of medieval astronomy in India from the fifth century onwards by replacing the Vedanga astronomy, continued to undergo gradual changes; it was its later version, one that evolved between AD 628 and 960, that was to gain immense popularity. In Tamil region, an old system of astronomical calculations by means of certain numerical schemes continued as a parallel tradition, as distinct from the trigonometrical tradition of the *Surya Siddhanta*. Apart from Brahmagupta, Bhaskara I, who was a contemporary of Brahmagupta and a disciple of the great Aryabhata, and Lalla (AD 748) were the leading astronomers of our times.

In medicine, Vagbhata claimed, or was claimed, to have become the leading authority for his age, rendering superfluous the previous masters. There are two Vagbhatas, the first of whom wrote a treatise called the *Ashtanga-sangraha*, and who flourished in the seventh century just before the visit of the Chinese pilgrim Yijing. Scholars place the other Vagbhata, the author of *Ashtanga-hrdaya-samhita*, about a century later. Both were Buddhists, and thus bear witness to the close links of Buddhism with the medical tradition; medicine was avidly studied in the monasteries of Nalanda and Vikramashila.

**Conclusion**

In this and the previous lesson, you have studied how the lives of people in early India were being transformed in several significant ways over the two hundred odd years. Our concern was with identifying the dynamics of change rather than providing a detailed description of economy, polity, society, and culture. For instance, no attempt has been made to give an account of the numerous works of literature that were produced during these centuries. The purpose has been to discuss change, not narrate details.

You must not imagine, however, that the changes occurred in a uniform fashion all over the subcontinent. The transition to the medieval era occurred at different points of time in different spheres and regions, and the pace at which change occurred also varied. Moreover, historical change seldom occurs in a sweeping, wholesale fashion. Remnants of the past, including the remotest past, somehow manage to cling to us; the scientist D. D. Kosambi in fact would always urge historians to detect clues to the past in the present. All the same, the patterns of change that we have outlined above made early Indian society recognizably different about mid-eighth century from what it was about mid-sixth. As you read on, you shall see how the processes of transformation continued to operate in the times ahead.
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