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M.A. [History]

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**INDIAN CIVILIZATION AND
CULTURE UP TO 1206 A.D.**

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INTRODUCTION

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India is recognized as having a unique and intriguing history and culture. Historical records trace the beginning of Indian civilization to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. It is also called the Harappan Civilization as Harappa was the first site to be excavated. The sources of evidence about this civilization are the artifacts, pottery, tools, ornaments and ruins of towns. Man began to use metals which continued into the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic Ages. This was followed by the arrival of the Vedic Age which occupies an important place in Indian history. The religion, philosophy and social customs of the Hindus who constitute the majority of our country have their principal source in the Vedic culture. However, with the passage of time, Vedic religion had become quite ritualistic and the caste system had become predominant. This resulted in regional dissent among the masses, which led to the emergence of new classes and the rise of Jainism and Buddhism. Jainism and Buddhism represent a remarkable phase in the religious and cultural development of India. This was followed by the emergence of cities and territorial states, especially the Magadha Empire and the Nandas.

Further, the small cities and territorial states were brought under the control of Chandra Gupta Maurya who laid the foundation of the Mauryan Empire. The decline of the Mauryan Empire led to the arrival and emergence of Indo-Greeks, Shungas, Kharavelas, Kushanas and Satvahanas. India was once again politically united in the Gupta Period. The Gupta Age is marked as an era of unprecedented progress in all aspects of polity, religion, art and literature. The disintegration of the Gupta Period led to the emergence of regional kingdoms. This was followed by the arrival of Arabs and Turks in India.

In this book, *Indian Civilization and Culture Up to 1206 A.D.*, is written with the distance learning student in mind. It is presented in a user-friendly format using a clear, lucid language. Each unit contains an Introduction and a list of Objectives to prepare the student for what to expect in the text. At the end of each unit are a Summary and a list of Key Words, to aid in recollection of concepts learnt. All units contain Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises, and strategically placed Check Your Progress questions so the student can keep track of what has been discussed.

BLOCK - I
PRE-HISTORY AND PROTO-HISTORY OF INDIA

*Meaning of Civilization
and Culture*

**UNIT 1 MEANING OF
CIVILIZATION AND
CULTURE**

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Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Various Sources
- 1.3 Prehistoric Sites and Settlements
- 1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Indian civilization is among the most ancient civilizations of the world and this fact accounts for it occupying a renowned place of pride in the history of cultures.

Many of the ancient civilizations are now either extinct or have failed to preserve their past traditions. However, the Indian civilization is not only versatile and flexible but has also succeeded in preserving its traditions to the present day. Further, the contribution of Indian culture and civilization to the entire world has been significant. Its spirit of humanity, religious tolerance and spiritualism can be compared favourably with similar sentiments in any other cultural tradition, dead or alive. Its achievements in the fields of religion, philosophy, literature, art, mathematics and astronomy are admirable. Factually, Indians have been lauded for securing some great inventions. However, there can be no denying that the Indian subcontinent has been greatly influenced by geographical factors and this has played a crucial role in enriching its cultural heritage.

Historical writings on India started in the eighteenth century as a result of the establishment of the rule of the English East India Company. The Englishmen who conquered India were interested in knowing the laws, habits and history of the people of India. In 1784, the Asiatic Society was founded largely through the efforts of Sir William Jones (1746-1794). This unit will discuss the various sources that provide information on Indian history as well as pre-historic settlements in India.

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1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the archaeological sources and the foreign accounts that provide information of Indian history
- Assess the importance of the sources of information on early Indian history
- List the crucial literary sources for understanding ancient history
- Describe the position of literary sources, both religious and secular
- Discuss the prehistoric sites and settlements

1.2 VARIOUS SOURCES

Archaeology has contributed a lot to the history of ancient India and its importance cannot be over emphasized. Indian archaeology is a science of recent growth but it has made wonderful progress during this brief period. The pioneer work was done by the Europeans but the same is being carried out now by the Indians. The study of the Indian antiquities was initiated by scholars like Sir William Jones who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1774. A large number of researches were hampered by the ignorance of the script but that difficulty was solved by Jones Prinsep in 1838 by his discovery of the Brahmi script. After that discovery, the task of deciphering the inscriptions became an easy one and a lot of work was done by historians like Fergusson, Cunningham, Dr. Rajendra Lai Mitra, and Dr. Bhau Daji. The greatest contribution was made by General Cunningham who was appointed in 1862 as the Archaeological Surveyor to the Government. He devoted about half a century to the study of ancient Indian history. Through his personal investigations, he gathered a lot of information regarding the geography of ancient India. He also collected a large number of Indian coins. Digging was also started at places like Bodh-Gaya, Bharhut, Sanchi, Sarnath and Taxila.

Lord Curzon set up a separate Department of Archaeology and appointed Dr. Marshall as the Director-General of Archaeology. With him were associated scholars like Dr. Vogel, Dr. Stein, Dr. Bloch and Dr. Spooner. Under the direction and supervision of Dr. Marshall, the ancient sites of Taxila covering an area of about 25 sq. miles were excavated and a lot of useful information was collected. The ancient city of Pataliputra, too, was excavated by Dr. Spooner but much information could not be extracted on account of water-logging. Dr. Spooner also promoted the mine laying of the Buddhist sites of Nalanda University and a lot of material was secured within the next two decades. In 1922, R.D. Banerjee started the same work at Mohenjodaro in Sind and the same procedure was followed at Harappa. The information collected from Harappa and Mohenjodaro was fused together and Sir John Marshall wrote his monumental work on the Indus Valley Civilization. A lot of work was done by the Hungarian scholar Aurel Stein in

Baluchistan, Kashmir and Turkestan. N. G Majumdar and Dr. Mackay also made their contribution to the already existing works on the Indus Valley Civilization. A lot of archaeological work is being carried out at present in various parts of India.

Exploration

Since time immemorial, people have had an inquisitiveness about their surrounding and the universe. They used exploration as a means of pushing the boundaries of known lands and creating new interpretation of the workings of the cosmos. As people wandered farther from home, they found new civilizations, large rivers, wide oceans and exotic foods. As a result of growing curiosity, the desire to augment military might and demand for goods, exploration was linked to trade.

Skylax from Greece was the first ever western geographer. According to Herodotus, Skylax (naval officer in Persia), was sent by King Dario to explore the estuaries of Indus river in 510 BC. To start with, he followed the flow of river through mountains in Afghanistan until its exit into the Arabian sea. Later, he followed the coast and explored the Gulf of Oman and the south-eastern side of the Arabic Peninsula. He presented to the King the record of his travels, a chronicle with the title *Periplus*. Dario used this important information to conquer India and set up naval bases and new harbours.

Conquests of Alexander the Great in 320 BC extended the known world to the distant East. Alexander wanted to enslave Asia and annex it to Greece, which was extended in all of the Mediterranean. Twenty years after Alexander's aggression in Indian territories, Megasthenes from Ionia was sent to the Indian empire. During his stay in India, he visited almost all of Northern India and also reached the Himalayas. In his efforts to record the extent of India, Megasthenes reported that the country's width from East to West was about 16,000 stades and her length from North to South 22,300 stades (1 stade = 180 metres). He also reported big rivers of country, as Ganges, Indus, and also other fifty-eight navigable rivers in the extent of the country.

Early Chinese sailors explored many of Asia's rivers and surrounding seas. They ventured as far as India and the eastern coast of Africa. Exploration and trade aided in the creation of a powerful and far-reaching Chinese empire.

According to Alberuni, one of the greatest Persian scholars of the medieval Islamic era, 'The Hindus do not pay much attention to the historical order of things; they are very careless in relating the chronological succession of things, and when they are pressed for information and are at a loss not knowing what to say, they invariably take to tale-telling.'

Some writers have gone to the extent of maintaining that the people of ancient India had no historical sense in them. It is true that the old extreme view, which is essentially prejudiced, is being given up and it is admitted even by scholars like Dr. Keith that 'there is a certain amount of writing and a number of facts attesting a degree of sense for history.'

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When the Indians took up this challenge, the pendulum at times swung to the opposite extremes. While the British historians tried to minimize the importance of ancient India, the Indian historians tried to glorify it. However, that period seems to have passed now and having become free from political subjugation and due to the availability of new resources, we are now in a better position to explore and interpret the history of ancient India.

Efforts were made by the Europeans to explore the history of ancient India in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The efforts of a few Jesuit Fathers like Father Hanxladen in mastering Sanskrit and of Father Coeudouse to recognize the kinship of Sanskrit with the language of Europe gave no understanding of India's past. The efforts which brought about definite results in this field were made by Sir William Jones, who came to India as a judge of the Supreme Court during the days of Warren Hastings as governor-general. Jones was a linguist who had already learnt the important languages of Europe as well as Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Turkish and a little of Chinese before he came to India. Here, he learnt Sanskrit also. As we have learnt before, in 1784, with the help of Charles Wilkins, he established the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In the journal of this society, *Asiatic Researches*, the first real steps in revealing India's past were taken. Jones himself translated *Sakuntala*, *Gita-Govinda* and the law-book of Manu in English while *Bhagavad Gita* and *Hitopadesa* were translated by Wikins. Thus, Jones and Wikins were truly the fathers of the process that can be conveniently termed as Indology. They were followed by Henry Colebrooke and Horace Hayman Wilson. In 1786 a Frenchman, Anquetil-Duperron, translated the *Upanishads* from a seventeenth century Persian version. The efforts of these pioneers created interest in Sanskrit literature in Europe and chairs were instituted at London, Cambridge, Edinburgh and several other universities of Europe and America for the study of the revered language. It also resulted in the establishment of the French Asiatic Society in 1821 in Paris followed by the Royal Asiatic Society in London two years later. A German-Sanskrit dictionary prepared by two German scholars was published in parts by the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences from 1852 to 1875. Another notable contribution was made by Max Muller, a German scholar, who spent most of his working life as a professor of philology at Oxford and translating the *Rig-veda* and a series of books known as the *Sacred Books of the East* in English. In 1837, James Prinsep interpreted for the first time the earliest Brahmi script and was able to read the edicts of Emperor Ashoka.

As studied earlier, these literary efforts created a curiosity amongst the scholars and travellers to probe further into the history and culture of India. It resulted in the establishment of an Archaeological department in 1862 and Alexander Cunningham was appointed as its head. During the period of his Viceroyalty, Lord Curzon took a personal interest in supervising the working of the department. John Marshall was appointed the director-general of this department which was reformed and enlarged subsequently. With the help of one Indian officer Mr R.D. Banerji, Sir John Marshall discovered the remnants of the Indus civilization in

1922. Afterwards, useful work was done by many Indian scholars in exploring the history and culture of India. Earlier in this section, we learnt, amongst the pioneers were Dr Bhan Daji, Dr Bhagavad Lai Indrajai, Dr Rajendra Lai Mitra, Dr R.G. Bhandarkar and Dr A. Ghosh. Now, this work has been taken up mostly by the Indians and foreign scholars who are working simply as their associates. All these efforts have contributed to the exploration of the ancient history and culture of India and their various sources.

Excavations

In archaeology, excavation is the exposure, processing and recording of archaeological remains. The development of excavation techniques has moved over the years from a treasure hunting process to one which seeks to fully understand the sequence of human activity on a given site and that site's relationship with other sites and with the landscape in which it is set. Since independence, various agencies like the Archaeological Survey of India, State Departments of Archaeology, Universities and other research organizations have conducted archaeological excavations in different parts of the country.

The important excavated cities and towns of ancient India include Peshawar (ancient Purushapura), Taxila, etc., in North-western Frontier Province and the Punjab; Mathura; Varanasi, Sravasti, Kausambi, Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, etc., in UP; Rajgir (ancient Rajagriha), Nalanda, Bodh Gaya, certain parts of Pataliputra, etc., in Bihar; Vrissa, Padmavati, Ujjain, Sanchi, etc. in Madhya Pradesh; Bairat, Rairh, Sambhar, Karkotnagar, etc., in Rajasthan; Langhnaj, Anhilper, Patan, Amreli, etc., in Gujarat; Kolhapur, Kondapur, etc., in Deccan; Chandravali, Brahmagiri etc., in Mysore; Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, etc., in Andhra; Virampattanam etc., in Madras; Paharpur, Mahasthana, Pundravardhana, Kotivarsha, etc., in Bengal; and Parihaspur, Avantipur, Martand in Kashmir.

Special mention may be made here of the pre-Aryan civilization of Indus Valley, excavated partly in Mohenjodaro and Chanhu-daro in Sind, and partly in Harappa in the Punjab during the later phase of British rule in India. With extensive excavations in post-Independent period, sites have been discovered in a large area consisting North-Western India, Rajasthan and the Deccan. Mehrgarh excavations deserve a special mention since Mehrgarh, located on the bank of the Bolan river in the Kochi plain (Baluchistan), is the only known Neolithic settlement in the Indian subcontinent, attributed to approximately 7000 BC.

Since independence, with the initiative of Central and State archaeological departments and different universities, almost every year archaeological excavations are revealing new data on different aspects of pre-history and ancient history of India.

Epigraphy

In ancient times, the rulers engraved important messages for people on rocks, pillars, stone walls, clay tablets and copper plates. These writings are known as

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inscriptions. The study of inscriptions is called epigraphy. A study of these inscriptions throws light upon the language of the people, names of the rulers, the years they ruled, their military achievements, the religious and social conditions of the people and many other details. For example, the edicts of Ashoka are a collection of thirty-three inscriptions on the Pillars of the Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty (269 BC to 231 BC). An edict was a formal announcement of the ruler to inform the public. The Ashokan edicts on pillars give us information about the extent of his empire.

Under the heading of archaeology, we discuss the information derived from inscriptions, numismatics and monuments. Regarding inscriptions, they are of a very great value being engraved upon stones and metals and they cannot be tampered without detection. Consequently, we can be sure while using the material from the inscriptions that they contain what was then originally written. While in the case of books, there is the possibility of interpolations by the known and unknown authors, however, that is not the case with these inscriptions. Their genuineness cannot be doubted. The inscriptions also give us a correct idea of the method of writing followed at the time when they were actually inscribed. The character of the script inscribed also enables us to fix their approximate age. Location can also throw some valuable light. The difficulty in deciphering the inscriptions has been overcome in most of the cases although the script of the Indus Valley still remains a mystery.

If we analyse the contents of the inscriptions, they can be grouped under the following heads—commercial, magical, religious, didactic, administrative, eulogistic, votive or dedicative, donative, commemorative and literary. In the case of commercial inscriptions, their specimens are found on the seals of the Indus Valley. Some of these seals must have been used for the stamping of bales of merchandise and commodities like potteries. It is possible that the shorter inscriptions (on the seals) are simply the owner's name and longer ones include titles that the owner of the seal happens to possess. These seals may have been used by the seafaring traders engaged in foreign trade. It seems that *Nigamas* and *Srenis* (which were commercial organizations) had the power of minting their coins and they must have possessed seals to be used for such commercial purposes. Their record on the perishable materials must have disappeared. However, there are references to the use of seals for commercial purposes in other inscriptions, *e.g.*, the Mandasore stone inscription of time of Kumaragupta and Bandhuvarman (Malwa Era 529).

Some specimens of magical inscriptions are found in the Harappan seals which were used as amulets and contained a magical formulae on them. The seals have not been deciphered as yet and it is difficult to know their contents. However, they are very likely to contain the names of the deities which are represented by the animals. The animals represented on the amulets are the antelope, buffalo, Brahmi bull (a composite animal), elephant, goat, hare, human figure, monkey,

rhinoceros, short-horned bull and tiger. Some of the deities represented by them are Moon, Yama, Siva, Indra, Brahma and Durga. It is to be observed that magical formulae continued to be written on metals as well as on birch-bark (*Bhojapatra*) and other materials.

Religious and didactic inscriptions deal with religious and moral matters. Possibly, some of the seals and tablets of the Indus Valley were the objects of worship and their use as amulets was forbidden. The inscriptions of Ashoka are the best specimen of the religious and didactic types. The edicts of Ashoka are appropriately called *Dhamma-Lipi*.

Ashoka's edicts are also a specimen of the administrative inscriptions. An extract from one of his inscriptions reads thus: 'Everywhere in my dominions, the Yuktas, the *Rajukas* and the *Pradesikas* shall proceed on circuit every five years as well for this purpose (for the instruction of *Dhamma*) as for other business.' The Sohagaura copper plate inscription of the third century BC is an example of pure administrative inscription. The Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman I also contains some administrative material. A large number of copper plate inscriptions have been found both in the north and south and they contain many useful administrative details. Reference may be made in this connection to the Banskhera copper plate inscription of Harsha.

The eulogistic inscriptions (*Prasastis*) are very important from the political point of view. Generally, they contain an elaboration concerning the King, his military, political and administrative system and achievements, the existence of the contemporary states coming into conflict with him and the inter-state relations, the personal accomplishments of the Kings, his patronage and charity and mythological or Puranic allusions by way of comparison and similes. One great difficulty in these inscriptions is that there is a tendency on the part of the authors to exaggerate the achievements of their patrons.

Eulogistic inscriptions can be further subdivided into two parts viz. pure eulogy and eulogy mixed with other types. The edicts of Ashoka form a category by themselves. The Hathigumpha inscription of Kalinga belongs to the category of pure eulogy. It describes in detail the achievements of Kharavela in a chronological order. To the same category belongs the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta. The number of inscriptions which contain eulogy mixed with other matter is very large. Practically, in every document of a permanent nature, reference is made to the glories of the ruling sovereign and his ancestors. Important specimens of the mixed type are to be found in the Nasik Cave inscription of Usavadata, the Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman I, the Nasik cave inscription of Gautami Balasri, the Mehrauli iron pillar inscription of Chandra, Junagadh rock inscription of Skandagupta, the Bhitari stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta, the Mandasor Stone pillar inscription of Yasodharman, the Stone inscription of Isanvarman, the Aihole Stone Inscription of the time of Pulakesin II, the Talagunda stone pillar inscription of the time of Santivarman, the Nagarjunakonda inscriptions of Vira

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purusdatta, Mandasor stone inscription of the time of Kumaragupta II and Bandhuvarman, etc.

We have a large number of votive or dedicative inscriptions. It is possible that some of the tablets found in the Indus Valley contain votive inscriptions. The Piprahwa vase inscription records the dedication of the relic casket of Lord Buddha. The Besnagar Garuda pillar inscription of Heliodorus also belongs to this category. Many of the dedicative inscriptions deal with the installation of images and the construction of temples. Reference may be made in this connection to the Mandasor Inscription of the time of Kumaragupta Nand Bandhuvarman and the Bhitari Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta and the Aihole inscription of the time of Pulakesin II.

The number of donative inscriptions is quite large as many occasions offered themselves for this purpose to the rulers and the subjects. Some of the inscriptions refer to the donations of caves or other buildings for the residence of monks and ascetics. Some refer to the donation of money in the form of a permanent endowment. Out of these funds, the Brahmins and the needy were fed and lamps were lighted in the temples. In some inscriptions, there is a reference to the donation of lands and villages to the monasteries, educational institutions and the Brahmins.

Commemorative inscriptions record births, deaths or other important events. The Rummindei inscription of Ashoka reads 'King Priyadarsin, beloved of the gods, when he had been consecrated many years, came in person and did worship. Because here the Shakya sage, Buddha, was born, he caused a huge stone wall to be made and a stone pillar to be erected.' A large number of commemorative inscriptions refer to the Silaharas of Kohlapur, the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Rashtrakutas, the Yadavas, etc.

Some inscriptions contain poetic compositions and dramatic works and their purpose is primarily literary. From the Mahanirvana Stupa at Kusinagara in Uttar Pradesh was discovered a copper plate containing thirteen lines the *Udana-Sutra* of Buddha.

Inscriptions have been found on stone and copper plates and other materials. The details of Asoka's reign tell us that he got his edicts engraved on stone so that they may last for a long time. Writings on stone were done on rocks, pillars, slabs, pedestal or the back of images, rims and lids of vases, caskets, prisms of crystal, walls of temples, pavements of pillars of colonnades, and caves, etc.

Copper was the material which was commonly used for the writing of inscriptions. A copper-plated inscription was called Tamrapatra, Tamrasasana, Sasanapattra or Danapattra according to its contents. It is remarkable to note that the land-grants were invariably inscribed on the copper plates and were handed over to the concerned so that they may serve as title-deeds. Fa-Hien tells us that in many Buddhist monasteries he found those copper plates which referred to the grant of land. Some of them were as old as the time of Buddha. The discovery of Sohagaura copper plates of the Mauryan period confirms this statement of Fa-Hien. Hieun Tsang tells us that emperor Kanishka used to summon a Buddhist

council which prepared these commentaries. These were later engraved on copper plates and kept in stone caskets which were placed in the Stupas built over them. It is also stated that the commentaries of Sayana on the Vedas were engraved on copper. Some specimens of the books inscribed on copper plates are to be found in the British Museum. The use of copper for writing purposes was not very common up to the sixth century AD but it remained quite popular for the next six centuries. Copper plates were of different sizes and thickness. Some of them were so thin that they could be bent easily and there were others which were very thick and heavy. The size of a copper plate depended upon two factors, the contents of the document and the size of the commonly used writing material in the district where the copper plate was issued. Sometimes, a document was inscribed not on one copper plate but on many and in that case the copper plates were fastened together by means of copper rings. In this way, the copper plates looked like a book which would be opened easily. Sufficient margin was left on the copper plates.

Numismatics

A study of ancient Indian coins enlightens us a great deal regarding the history of ancient India. The Numismatic Society of India is doing a lot of useful work in this connection. We have, at present, a large number of coins excavated from various parts of India dealing with the different aspects of ancient Indian history. Coins are of various metals viz. gold, silver and copper.

Coins help to build up the history of the country in many ways. They give us the names of the kings who ruled at various times in different parts of the country. In many cases, the coins are the only sources of information we have regarding the existence of certain kings. Without these coins, the very existence of those kings would have remained unknown. Many a time, the information from the coins can be used to corroborate the evidence extracted from other sources such as the Puranas and other religious literature. The coins also help us to fix up the chronology as they mention the year in which they were issued. The existence of a large number of coins issued during the different years of the reign of a king helps us to fix the exact dates for the accession and the death of the king. Coins have helped us to fix the dates of Samudragupta. The location of coins helps us to determine the extent of the territory of a king. The discovery of a large number of Roman coins in India confirms the fact that there was brisk trade between India and the Roman Empire. That also refers to the economic prosperity of India and the coastal activities of its people. The figures of the various kings appear on the coins from where we can get an idea of the head-dresses and attire of those kings. Sometimes, the hobbies or the amusements of the rulers can also be known from studying their coins. Coins give an indication of the prosperity (or otherwise) of a country. If people have gold or silver coins, they are likely to be prosperous. The case is the opposite if they have copper coins alone or more of them than those of gold or silver. Sometimes, the depreciation of coinage gives an indication that the country was passing through difficult times. During the Huna invasion of India, the Gupta currency

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depreciated. The symbols on the Gupta coinage refer to their zeal for Hinduism. The coins give us genuine information regarding the history of ancient India as there is no possibility of their being tampered with. Coins were issued by the rulers and other authorities like *Srenis*, etc., and there is no possibility of their being issued merely to deceive people.

The earliest coins of India have only figures, devices or symbols and no legends. Sometimes, the coins were cast in a dye but very often symbols were punched metal pieces. These symbols varied from time-to-time and were punched with a view to guarantee their genuineness and value. On account of the absence of legends on them, much information is not available.

After the Greek invasion of India, the practice of writing the names of the kings on the coins was started. A large number of coins were issued by the Indo-Bactrian rulers who had under their control Punjab and the North-western Frontier. These coins possessed a high degree of artistic excellence and ultimately had a tremendous influence on Indian coinage. The design borrowed in the Indian coinage was the name and the portrait of the ruler. The Greek coins refer to about thirty Greek kings and queens who ruled in India. The classical writers refer to only four or five of them and had these coins remained undiscovered, the names of other rulers would have remained absolutely unknown. The coins of the Scythians and Pratiharas are of an inferior quality but they also give us a lot of historical information. Their coins have enabled us to have an outline of the history of their rulers and without them even the outlines would have been missing. A branch of the Scythians settled in Gujarat and Kathiawar issued coins in which the names of the ruling kings and their fathers were mentioned in the Saka era. These have helped us to reconstruct the history of the Western *Satrap*s for more than three centuries. The Kushans also issued a large number of coins. The existence of the Malawas, Yaudheyas and the Mitra rulers of Panchala is known only from the coins. The coins of the Satavahanas supplement, correct and corroborate the accounts of the Puranas. The Gupta coins also give us a lot of useful information. The Indian coins after the Gupta period do not give us much historical information.

According to historians, V.A. Smith and Rapson, the punch-marked coins represent a private coinage. The view of Smith is that they were issued by guilds and goldsmiths with the permission of the ruling power. The numerous obverse punches were made by different moneyers through whose hands those coins passed. The reverse marks were the signs of approval by the controlling authority. According to Rapson, the obverse marks were the private marks of the money-changers and the reverse marks denoted the locality in which the coins were issued. However, recent researches have proved that the punch-marked coins were issued by a regular public authority. A few of them found at Pataliputra have been ascribed by Dr. K.P. Jayaswal to the age of Chandragupta Maurya. A large number of coins are to be found in government museums and municipal museums and with private collectors. A critical study of all of them is bound to give a lot of additional evidence.

Monuments

The ancient monuments like buildings, statues of stones or metals, terracotta, ornamental and decorative fragments, pottery, etc., give us a lot of useful and reliable information. The excavations at the sites of the old towns like Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Taxila have revealed secrets hitherto unknown and, thus, changed our concept of ancient India. It was after the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization that we began to talk of a civilization in India prior to that of the Aryans. The excavation at Taxila throws welcome light on the Kushanas. A study of the sculptures found from there gives us an idea of the Gandhara School of art. The digging of the old sites of Pataliputra gives us some information regarding the old capital of the Mauryas. The Angkor-Vat in Cambodia and Borobodur in Java bear testimony to the colonial and cultural activities of the Indians in ancient times. The temples of Deogadh in Jhansi and Bhitargaon near Kanpur throw light on the artistic activities of the Guptas. The excavations add to our knowledge regarding Buddhism and Ashoka. The excavations in China, Turkestan and Baluchistan by Stein prove the intimate contacts of India with those territories. The progress of the archaeological work in India in the near future is bound to enrich our knowledge of ancient Indian history.

Literary Sources

The literary source for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history may be classified as (i) indigenous literature and (ii) accounts of the foreign travelers.

Literary sources: Indigenous, Primary and Secondary Sources

The indigenous literature may be divided into a number of varieties, e.g. religious text, secular or scientific text, biography, poetic writings and regional literature. However, when literary writings are patronized by the king's court, they are likely to be exaggerated ones. Thus, they should be used as sources of history with caution. Foreign accounts are also to be used cautiously, as the foreigners in most of cases, did not know the Indian language and the lifestyle.

• Indigenous literature

The Indigenous literature includes the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas, the Upanishads, the Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharatha), the Brahmashastras, the Puranas, and so on. The Buddhist and Jain literature gives knowledge of the traditions prevalent in those periods. The books of this period are in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit. They give us a knowledge about music, dance, painting architecture and administration of various kings. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a remarkable work on the system of administration. The Sangam literature in south is an elaborate record of life in South India. Though these literatures lack historical sense, they are the main sources to learn about the Indian history.

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- **Primary literary sources**

Primary sources are original materials. Information for which the writer has no personal knowledge is not primary, although it may be used by historians in the absence of a primary source. In the study of history as an academic discipline, a primary source (also called original source or evidence) is an artefact, a document, a recording, or other source of information that was created at the time under study. It serves as an original source of information about the topic. Similar definitions are used in library science, and other areas of scholarship, although different fields have somewhat different definitions.

- **Secondary literary sources**

Secondary sources are works of synthesis and interpretation based upon primary sources and the work of other authors. They may take a variety of forms. The authors of secondary sources develop their interpretations and narratives of events based on primary sources, that is, documents and other evidence created by participants or eyewitnesses. Frequently, they also take advantage of the work of other historians by using other secondary sources. Reference books, popular periodical literature, and general historical works and monographs are the examples of secondary sources.

Problems of Dating Inscriptions

Most of disputes in history start with dates. It is very difficult to know the exact year of existence of particular person from inscriptions. For example, inscriptions are dated in many ways: ranging from simple year date (regnal or era) to detailed year-month *tithi* (lunar day), week day and/or other calendrical or astronomical dates. Let us see the Era or dating used.

Regnal (relating to a king or his reign) Year

This is practice of dating records from regnal years of king. This method is used in most of the inscriptions. In their inscriptions, Ashoka, the Satavahana, the Ikshvakus, used regnal years in their records. This continued in medieval period with the Palas, the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Pandyas. A typical inscription with regnal year, might say: 'The great king of so-and-so with so-and-so titles with so-and-so achievements donated in the first year of his reign.' The inscription may add the *tithi* or day of the week, or month in addition to the regnal year. Unless additional reference date or another king or ruler or event is provided the dating of the inscription is not absolute. These inscriptions have to be dated by techniques similar to paleographic records or undated inscriptions. The problem with regnal years is that everything is relative and fluid, with change of date of one inscription every other inscription has to be re-dated. If Greek had not come to India, we would not have been able to date Ashoka and with Ashoka the entire Indian History.

Year of an Era

Starting from the first century BC, some inscriptions dated the years in continuous era. In this practice, a king issued the inscriptions in the regnal years of the previous kings instead of his accession. This system was seen in the dynasties. Sometimes this system was followed even when the dynasties fell and new ones took over. Let us discuss some of the eras.

- **Jain Nirvana Era**

This date starts with Nirvana or salvation of Last Jain Tirthakarna Vardhamana Mahavir. While Vicarasreni (1310 AD) in *Merutunga* (Prakrit) gives date as 470 years to Vikrama Era, Nemichandra (1084 AD) in *Mahaviracariam* (prakrit) gives the date as 605 years and 5 months before the start of Saka Era. So, the dispute will be there as the Mahavira date is not certain.

- **Buddhist nirvana Era**

Cantonese records say each year after passing of Buddha was represented by a dot and so the date of Buddha is 486 BC, the start of Buddhist nirvana Era. But there is no agreement in Buddhist world. So the dates are disputed.

- **Vikram Era**

This Era starts in 50 BC. Vikramaditya regained his ancestral kingdom in Ujjain by expelling the Sakas from there after nine years of their rule (66-57 BCE). In order to commemorate his victory over them, he introduced a new era called Vikram Samvat (or Malawa Samvat) in 57 BCE. This story is also disputed.

- **Saka Era**

The origin of Saka is very debatable. However, it is generally agreed that Kanishka was the first to use Saka Era. So, the origin is given to him. But Kushana chronology itself is debated. The Era starts in 78 AD.

- **Gupta or Vallabi Era**

Due to absence of this era in the early inscriptions of the Guptas, the date of origin of this era is questionable. Most historians attribute this era to accession of Chandragupta I. The dates are calculated by adding years 319 to 322 years to what is found in the inscriptions.

- **Kalachuri-Cedi Era**

The date of origin of this era is also doubtful. The date of 248 AD based on the accession of Abhira king Isvara Dutta is now not valid.

Oral Traditions: Myths and Legends

Oral tradition applies to a process of communication of facts from one individual to the other through oral messages which are based on previous information. It is

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as old as human beings, since before writing was invented, spoken words were the only means to pass information from generation to generation. Many people around the world continue to use oral traditions to pass along knowledge and wisdom. Interviews and recordings of community elders and witnesses to historical events provide existing stories, anecdotes and other information about the past.

Eye witness accounts are purportedly the fundamental component of oral tradition. They are without fail a direct and personal experience and involve both perceptions and emotions. Oral tradition is an aspect that shapes most parts of historical sources. In writing history, there are a variety of sources available to the historian to gain the accurate knowledge of events and actions that happened in the past and which are presently unavailable for scrutiny or direct study since the persons or events are no more. Historians rely on information on any evidence from the past, therefore anything; material or immaterial that bears witness to the past is a historical document or source.

Myths and historical documentation

Numerous historians and scholars in their related fields use the term ‘myths’ in somewhat different ways. In a very broad sense, myth is referred to any traditional history. The main characters in myths are usually gods, deities or supernatural heroes whose stories were usually sacred stories. Myths are often endorsed by rulers and priests and closely linked to religion in the society in which it is told. A myth is usually regarded as a true account of the remote and immediate past. Myths as traditions of the people are not invented, they are experienced. It is an aspect of orally transmitted tradition among various peoples of the world and form part and parcel of the history of the people..

The *Mahabharat*, which is considered as huge historical source, contains numerous aspects of myths, legend and folklores. Apparently, numerous fields of study, ranging from history, archaeology, astronomy and linguistics have used the epic and its accounts to provide insight into their respective pursuits and understanding of ancient and modern culture, mythology, anthropology and morality – to name just a few.

Scientific/Secular Literature: Poetry, Drama and Technical Literature

Scientific/Secular literature, comprising poetry, drama and technical literature like grammar, astronomy, medicine, statecraft, provide embedded information often useful to historians. Discovery of ancient texts of Indian poetry and drama has revealed the history of ancient Indian culture. Technical literature reflects the advanced knowledge attained by society in the respective fields.

As the term suggests, the writings included in this section are not restricted to a particular religious sect or social class. Rather, it focuses upon sorting out those major texts which were composed by neutral and intellectual personalities so as to compile an exact and a precisely transparent record of Indian culture and

heritage. Therefore, it includes writings by foreigners, biographical works of great historical persons, historical texts and literary compositions.

The Greek, Roman, Chinese and Muslim writers and travellers have left fairly interesting sources of information in their accounts. Amongst the Greek and Roman writers, Strabo, Skylax, Justin, Herodotus, Curtius, Diodorus, Arrian, Plutarch, Ptolemy and the anonymous author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* have left interesting accounts of India. But the most popular amongst them is *Indica* written by Megasthenes who lived for some time in the court of Chandragupta Maurya as an ambassador of Seleucus. Amongst the Muslims, Sulaiman and Al Masudi left brief records of India while Alberuni who came to India with Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni wrote the best ever foreign account of India that this age has produced. The Chinese travellers Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and I-tsing recorded their experiences in bulky volumes which provide us with useful and relevant information. Besides these important writers and travellers there are many other Greek, Muslim and Chinese authors whose works play a crucial role in educating us regarding the contemporary Indian cultural beliefs.

Accounts apart, the contemporary biographical works also prove to be a source of authentic and filtered information. The most important of these works are *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta, *Gaudavaho* and *Vikramankadeva-charita* of Vakapati and Bilhana describing the exploits of Yasovarman and Vikramaditya of the later Chalukya dynasty, *Kumarapala-charita* of Jayasimha, *Kumarapala-Charita* of Hemachandra, *Hammir-Kavya* of Nayachandra, and *Bhoj Prabandha* by Ballal, and *Prithviraja-Vijaya* by an anonymous writer. Amongst the historical writings, the most famous is the *Rajataragini*, the history of Kashmir written by Kalhana. After him, writers like Jonaraja, Srivara, Prajya Bhatta and Shuka carried on this work and scribbled down the history of Kashmir till a few years after its conquest by the Mughal emperor Akbar. The Gujarat chronicles like *Ras-Mala*, *Kirti Kaumudi* *Hammira Mada-Mardana*, *Vasanta-vilasa*, the Persian translation of Chachanama which gives a detailed account of the Arab conquest of Sind, the Vansavalis of Nepal and Tamil literature, particularly of the Sangam age, also throw valuable light on the contemporary history and culture of their respective places.

Pure literary works such as dramas and poems and prose works on polity, economy and grammar carried out by scholars in the other branches of knowledge are also of some valuable help. Among them, the most notable are *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, *Mohabhashya* of Patanjali, *Astadhyayi* of Panini, *Mudra-Rakshasa* of Vishakhadatta, and the *Katha Sarita Sagar* of Somdeva dealing with the period of the Mauryas. The *Nitisara* written by Kamandaka provides an insight into the polity of the Gupta rulers, the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali and the *Malvikaganimitram* written by Kalidas help us in finding out the material concerning the history of the Sungas and the *Mricchakatika* of Sudraka and the *Das Kumara-Charita* written by Dandin throw useful light on the contemporary socio-political and economic life.

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Judging by the same standards, the *Sangam* literature written in Tamil language becomes a sort of mirror reflecting the social and political realities of the Chera, the Chola and the Pandya dynasties of the far South up to third century AD.

However, the list is not complete. Different scholars wrote religious and secular texts in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Tamil and other languages at different points of time. Among them, many are well known and many more might have been missed. Besides, a student of history should be cautious while going through this literature, whether religious or secular, in an effort to dig out ancient Indian history, as religious history is no historical chronicle and the object of biographical works, in most cases, remains the glorification of the kings while the writings of the foreigners are mostly based upon second-hand information. Yet, though suffering from these handicaps, the literary sources certainly provide valuable help to the students of Indian history.

Literature in Regional Languages

India is very rich in languages. There are a number of languages and dialects being spoken in India. The country has a vast diversity in regional languages. A regional language is a language spoken in an area of a nation state, whether it be a small area, a federal state or province, or some wider area. Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu are the important regional languages of India.

Urdu emerged as an independent language towards the end of the 4th century AD. It, as a language, was born out of the interaction between Hindi and Persian. Urdu became more popular in the early eighteenth century. People even wrote accounts of later Mughals in Urdu. Gradually it achieved a status where literature, both poetry and prose, started being composed in it. The last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar wrote poetry in it. Urdu was given its pride of place by a large number of poets who have left inimitable poetry for posterity. The earliest Urdu poet is supposed to be Khusrau (1253-1325). He started writing as a poet in the reign of Sultan Balban and was a follower of Nizamuddin Auliya. He is said to have composed ninety-nine works on separate themes and numerous verses of poetry. Among the important works composed by him are *Laila Majnu* and *Ayina-I-Sikandari* dedicated to Alau-din-Khalji.

There was a tremendous growth of regional languages like Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Marathi and Gujarati in the medieval period. Hindi evolved during the Apabhramsa stage between the 7th and 8th centuries AD. In the South, Malayalam emerged as an independent language in the 14th century. The rise of the Bhakti movement and the use of these regional languages by the various saints helped in the growth and development of Indian literature. We have already noted the various dialects that developed in northern and western India. *Prithviraj Raso* is supposed to be the first book in the Hindi language. It is an account of exploits of Prithviraj Chauhan.

In the later period of British Colonialism, Bengali literature was gaining importance. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote in Bengali (besides English) that gave impetus to Bengali literature. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) and Akshay Kumar Dutta (1820- 86) were two other writers of this early period. In addition to these, Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1834-94), Sharat Chandra Chatterji (1876-1938), and R.C. Dutta, a noted historian and a prose writer, all contributed to the making of Bengali literature.

The earliest Assamese literature consisted of buranjis (court chronicles). Shankardev has left several devotional poems, which people song with rapturous pleasure, but it was only after 1827 that more interest was shown in producing Assamese literature. Two names, Lakshmi Nath Bezbarua and Padmanaba Gohain Barua cannot be forgotten.

From Orissa, a couple of names are worth mentioning and these are Fakirmohan Senapati and Radha Nath Ray, whose writings deserve considerable attention in the history of Oriya literature. The works of Upendra Bhanja (1670 - 1720) were important as they ushered a new period of Oriya literature. The works of Saraladasa are regarded as the first works of Oriya literature.

Punjabi is a language with several shades. Guru Nanak was the first poet in Punjabi. His poems are still being sung by local singers. There are several other poetic stories which have been composed by the locals. This folklore has been preserved. The most important of these is *Heer* of Waris Shah. It is the most popular of the early works. It is a landmark in Punjabi poetry.

Early Gujarati literature is available in the form of Bhakti songs of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Dr. K.M. Munshi was a great Gujarati novelist, an essayist and a historian, and has left a plethora of historical novels. In these books, he exhibits his ability to mix fact with fiction. *Prithvi Vallabha* is one of his finest novels.

The earliest Marathi poetry and prose is by Saint Jnaneshwar (Gyaneshwar) who lived in the thirteenth century. He wrote a long commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. He was the one who started the *kirtan* tradition in Maharashtra.

Religious Literature

Religious literature includes the religious texts of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

Hindu religious texts

The first literary source of the Hindus is the Samhita which includes four Vedas namely the Rigveda, the Samveda, the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda. Besides these, there are the Brahmanas (the Satapatha, Panchavis, Atreya, etc.), the Upanishads (the Kathaka, the Isa, the Svetasvatra etc.), the Aryanakas, the Sutras (the Manu, the Vishnu, the Narad, the Brashpati, etc.), the Puranas (the Vishnu, the Vayu, etc. 18 in all) and the Epics (the *Ramanayana* and the *Mahabharata*) which assist one in deciphering and understanding the history and culture of India from the Vedic up to the Gupta age. The Rig-Veda provides us some significant

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information about the civilization of the early Vedic Age while the rest of the three Vedas illuminate upon the specificity of the cultural aspects of the later age. The Brahmanas provide us some critical knowledge concerning the Aryans- their attitude towards east India, religious beliefs, and rituals to be conducted especially during the later Vedic age. The Upanishads, too, were concerned with the philosophical speculations and beliefs of the Aryans such as the transmigration of the soul, Brahma and salvation. The Shastras inform us about the rituals while performing different *Yajnas* and the religious, social, moral and political responsibilities of an individual. The Smritis reveal to us the social and religious conditions of the Indians between 200 BC to AD 600. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are useful for knowing the living conditions of the Aryans during the later Vedic age while the Puranas help us in finding out the history of the rulers and their kingdoms which existed in India after the war of the *Mahabharata* till the sixth century AD.

Buddhist religious texts

The original Buddhist texts are known as the *Tripitaka*. They are three in number and can be categorized as (i) The *Vinya pitaka* which describes the rules and regulations for the guidance of the Buddhist monks and the general management of the Church; (ii) the *Sutti-pitaka* is a collection of the religious discourses of Buddha; and (iii) the *Ahbidhamma-pitaka* which contains an exposition of the philosophical principles underlying religion. Afterwards, the Mahayana and the Tantrika sects of Buddhism created vast religious literature of their own and the penultimate *Jataka* stories (nearly 549 in number) of Mahayanism describing various life-stories of Mahatma Buddha were also written. All of them constitute the sources of approaching the contemporary culture and history of India. These Buddhist religious texts provide useful information to us concerning the polity, political life, different rulers, their dynasties, their rule and their kingdoms up to the sixth century BC and also the social, economic, religious and cultural life of the people in that age. The religious texts, the *Mahavansa* and the *Dipavansa*, prepared by the scholars of Sri Lanka, also provide us useful information concerning the history of ancient India.

Jain religious texts

The original Jain religious texts were called *Agams*. Afterwards, these were compiled into fourteen *Purvas* and further, the first ten *Purvas* were re-arranged in twelve *Angas* in the fifth century AD. Now, only eleven *Angas* are available. Besides, a vast literature was created by Jain scholars afterwards which also provide us useful knowledge concerning the history, culture and civilization of ancient India. The *Bhadrabahu Charita* refers to several events belonging to the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. The *Katha Kosh* and other similar Jain religious texts have churned out some useful historical material. Among the later Jain religious texts, one of the most prominent ones is the *Parisista Pan/a* which was prepared during the twelfth century.

Foreign Accounts: Greek, Chinese and Arab Writers

Foreign accounts are of immense importance in the reconstruction of ancient Indian history. According to K.A.N. Sastri, 'The accounts of any country and its people by foreign observers are of great interest to the historians of the country. For they enable him to know what impression is made upon the minds of such observers and to estimate with greater confidence the part played by it in the general history of the world.'

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- (i) **Greek writers:** Herodotus in his *Histories* gives us information about Indo-Persian relations and the political condition of north-west India in his time. Arrian, a Roman historian, wrote a detailed account of the invasion of India by Alexander. The Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, Megasthenes in his book *Indica*, gives a descriptive account of India at that time. The Greek account of the Periplus of the Erythean Sea gives us an idea of the maritime activities between India and the West by mentioning ports, harbours and merchandise. Ptolemy wrote about the geography of India during second century AD. Pliny gives an account of the Indian animals, plants and minerals in the first century AD. The accounts of Plutarch and Strabo also provide us with useful information regarding the socio-economic life of their times. But the Greek accounts are based on generalizations. Their ignorance of the Indian languages might have affected their impressions and knowledge of our country. Since the Greek ambassadors mostly stayed in state capitals; their information was based on mere hearsay which could have been represented in a distorted or exaggerated way.
- (ii) **Chinese writers:** Chinese accounts of Hiuen Tsang and Fa Hein provide us with useful information regarding the life during the reign of Harsha and Chandragupta II respectively. Tibetan historian, Taranath in his *History of Buddhism* gives us information about Buddhism and its spread.
- (iii) **Arab writers:** The Arab accounts of travellers and geographers mostly deal with India and its inhabitants and not history as such. Alberuni's *Tehquiq-I-Hind* throws light on the various aspects of socio-economic and political condition of India at the time of Mahmud of Ghazni.

Thus, in order to study Indian history in a comprehensive manner, one has to depend on literary, archaeological and foreign sources which help us to form a complete picture of the ancient times. The information provided by literary texts if corroborated by archaeological remains helps the historian to improve the scale of historical authenticity and reliability of fact.

Check Your Progress

1. Who initiated the study of Indian antiquities?
2. What do you understand by excavation?
3. What were the original Buddhist texts?

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1.3 PREHISTORIC SITES AND SETTLEMENTS

Now that we have learnt about the sources through which history is studied, let's now focus on the early sites and settlements. In this section, we will take a look at the various prehistoric sites.

1. Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic Sites and Settlements

Early man lived in agreement with the environment and his surroundings for long. He used the material that could be obtained and handled conveniently to prepare tools and weapons. He began using stone and later used metals to prepare his tools and weapons. Civilization did not develop everywhere simultaneously. The periods of its development differ from civilization to civilization. In India, it commenced long ago.

The Palaeolithic Age is divided into three phases in accordance with the type of stone tools used by the people and according to the nature of climatic change. The different phases of the Palaeolithic Age are classified as follows:

- (i) Early or lower Palaeolithic
- (ii) Middle Palaeolithic
- (iii) Upper Palaeolithic

(i) **Early or lower Palaeolithic:** The lower Palaeolithic or the early Stone Age covers the greater part of the Ice Age. The early Stone Age may have begun in Africa around two million years ago, but in India it is not older than 600,000 years. The region of Bori in Maharashtra is considered to be from this age and is said to be one of the earliest. During this age, people used hand axes, cleavers and choppers. The axes found in India are more or less similar to those of Western Asia, Europe and Africa. Stone tools were used largely for chopping, digging and skinning. When the climate became less humid, the people of the lower Stone Age principally became food gatherers. They took to small game hunting and consumed fish and birds. The early or lower Stone Age in India may be associated with the *Homo sapiens* (i.e., scientific name of man). Early Stone Age sites have been found in the valley of river Son or Sohan in Punjab, now in Pakistan. Several sites found in Kashmir, the Thar Desert and the Belan valley also show features of the lower Palaeolithic Age.

(ii) **Middle Palaeolithic:** The middle Palaeolithic industries show the basic technological features common to the Mousterian (tool culture) of Western and Central Asia. The tools are generally small, light and based upon flakes struck from cores which, in some cases, are carefully shaped. These flakes were transformed into finished tools. There was also a marked change in the choice of raw material. Silica and minerals, chiefly chert, agate, jasper and chalcedony, became the

most common media of working in most parts of the country. These enabled the middle Palaeolithic man to prepare beautiful tools with better edges. In some regions, particularly, Chennai, the Deccan and Kutch, the material employed by the lower Palaeolithic groups continued to be used during the middle Palaeolithic Age. In such cases, the material seemed to be finely grained and carefully selected.

- (iii) **Upper Palaeolithic:** The Upper Palaeolithic or the Late Stone Age is the third and last subdivision of the Palaeolithic age (40,000 to 10,000 BC). It is said to coincide with the appearance of behavioural modernity (a time when *Homo sapiens* began to rely on symbols to express cultural creativity). This period was marked by the appearance of many new flint industries and several figurines and other artefacts reflecting art and rituals. It was also marked by the appearance of a wide range of bone tools, including needles, fishing tools, harpoons and blades.

Characteristics of the Palaeolithic Age

Life of the Palaeolithic man or *Homo habilis* was hard. *Homo habilis* was a food gatherer and depended entirely on nature for food. He ate fruits, roots, nuts, flesh of animals and even insects. He did not have a fixed place to stay. He wandered like a nomad from place to place. He lived in caves and hollows of trees to protect himself from wild animals and harsh climate. He used animal skins or the bark of trees and leaves to cover his body.

Tools

The tools used by man during the Palaeolithic Age were pebble tools, which were quite crude. He made tools using flint, a kind of stone that chips easily. The tools of this age can be divided into two categories: core tools and flake implements.

Core tools were made by chipping and shaping large stones. They were usually pear shaped with sharp edges, like hand axes, which were held in the hand and used to cut trees, dig the earth and shape sticks. Some of these have been found in South India. Flake implements were tools made from smaller pieces of stone and were used as choppers and cleavers to chop meat and skin animals.

Discovery of Fire

Early man feared fire that broke out in the forests due to lightning. Later, he discovered how to produce fire himself. The discovery of fire was probably accidental. Perhaps, one day, he picked up pieces of flint to chip and shape them into tools. He was fascinated by the sparks made by striking two pieces of flint against each other. He repeated his action and perhaps some dry leaves caught fire. In this way, one of the greatest discoveries of mankind was made.

Once humans had discovered how to make fire, they began to use it for various purposes, listed as follows:

- To frighten off wild animals, they kept fire burning at the mouths of the caves at night and slept inside in comfort.

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- They used it to keep themselves warm in winter.
- They used fire to cook the flesh of animals. They found that cooked food was easy to chew and digest.
- By the light of fire, they could work inside the caves at night.

2. The Mesolithic Sites and Settlements

In 9000 BC began an intermediate stage in Stone Age culture, which is called the Mesolithic Age. The Mesolithic people survived by hunting, fishing and food gathering; however, at a later stage, they also domesticated animals. The first three occupations were a continuation of the Palaeolithic practice, whereas the domestication of animals developed later in the Neolithic culture. Thus, the Mesolithic Age marked a transitional phase in the mode of subsistence leading to animal husbandry.

Characteristics of the Mesolithic Age

Mesolithic Age is characterized by microliths or tiny tools. It is believed that the bow and arrow came into regular use with the introduction of microlithic technology based on microblades which were produced by pressure techniques. The fact that the people of the Mesolithic Age had developed an aesthetic sense is attested by the discoveries of a very large number of cave paintings across the country. These paintings are a mine of information for the reconstruction of the Mesolithic man's way of life and contemporary environment.

In the Mesolithic Age, early man tried to find ways and means to make his life more comfortable and secure and fulfil his basic requirements of food. During this period, which is called the Mesolithic Age, he learnt to make more sophisticated tools using bones and horns along with stone. Since these materials were more flexible and lighter than stone, they could also make a larger variety of things like bows and arrows and fishing hooks. Heavy tools gave way to smaller and more refined ones like arrowheads and spearheads. For most of this period, men continued to be food gatherers. It was probably towards the end of the Mesolithic Age that they learnt about cultivation. Men observed that when seeds fell on the ground and received water, they grew into plants that bore grains. Thus, another means of getting food, besides hunting and gathering, was now available to them, i.e., growing crops or agriculture.

3. The Neolithic Sites and Settlements

The period between 9000 and 3000 BC saw remarkable technological progress in Western Asia. Man developed the art of cultivation, weaving, pot making, house building, writing, stock raising and the like. The Neolithic Age in the Indian subcontinent began around the 7000 BC. Some important crops including wheat and barley came to be cultivated in the subcontinent; villages were established in this part of the world. All these were indicative of a revolutionary change in the

mode of subsistence. People no longer depended on hunting, fishing and food gathering because cultivation and cattle husbandry provided them with food. With new means of food and shelter, they were on the threshold of cultivation.

Refined Tools

The Neolithic man began to make a variety of stone tools with the help of a grindstone. They were sharper, well-polished and had handles fixed to them. In this period, man began to use tools made of basalt, which was harder and stronger, and could be shaped and polished. Bones were also used to make needles, blades and other tools. Due to this improved variety of tools, this period is called the Neolithic Age or New Stone Age.

Art

Early man also learnt to paint the walls of his cave dwellings with scenes showing dancing figures and animals. In this way, art developed. For example, the paintings in Bhimbetka Caves in Madhya Pradesh.

Pottery

When man became a food producer, he felt the need for containers to store the surplus grain. Containers were also required to store milk and water and cook food. At first, man wove baskets from wild grass and plastered it with wet clay. But these were not good enough, as liquids could not be stored in them. Later, man learnt to bake the pots over fire to make them waterproof.

Invention of the Wheel

One of the greatest inventions of Neolithic man was the invention of wheel. Early man observed the way logs rolled easily. This must have given him the idea of fitting wheels to his sledges and carts. The invention of the wheel made travelling quicker and more comfortable. Apart from this, the wheel was used for making pottery, spinning and weaving. Man began to use cotton and wool to make clothes, along with animal skin, barks and leaves.

Religious Beliefs

The Neolithic man, like the Palaeolithic man, was afraid of natural phenomena like lightning, thunder, storms and forest fires which could do him immense harm. So, he began to worship the forces of nature like the sun, rain, thunder and fire to appease them.

When he took to cultivation, he came to regard soil too as the life-giver, and thus began to worship earth. Some animals, like the cow, came to be regarded as holy. Death was considered a journey from which one never returned. Hence, the dead were buried and their belongings were placed in the grave or in large vessels called urns. They also marked the burial places with huge blocks of stones or megaliths.

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4. Chalcolithic Sites and Settlements

This age has been regarded to fall during the years between 3000 BC and nearly 1000 BC. Scholars believe that in south India this age did not exist at all. Rather, with the entry of the Aryans in south India, it entered the Iron Age after the Neolithic Age. Certain scholars believe that India did not at all enter the Bronze Age. From the Neolithic Age, it entered the Copper Age and then the Iron Age. During the Copper Age, apart from the copper implements and weapons, men also used stone implements for a long time. Therefore, this age has been regarded as the Chalcolithic Age as well. The Indus Valley Civilization in India has been accepted as belonging to this age. By this time, men had progressed in every field. They cultivated land, lived in villages and cities, domesticated animals, used both cotton and woollen clothes, developed means of transport and communication, language and script, faith in religion and worship of gods and goddesses, rather, every means of livelihood which makes a group of people cultured and civilized.

Check Your Progress

4. What are the different phases of the Palaeolithic Age?
5. What is the Mesolithic Age characterized by?

1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The study of the Indian antiquities was initiated by scholars like Sir William Jones who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1774.
2. In archaeology, excavation is the exposure, processing and recording of archaeological remains.
3. The original Buddhist texts are known as the Tripitaka. They are three in number and can be categorized as (i) The Vinya pitaka which describes the rules and regulations for the guidance of the Buddhist monks and the general management of the Church; (ii) the Sutti-pitaka is a collection of the religious discourses of Buddha; and (iii) the Ahbidhamma-pitaka which contains an exposition of the philosophical principles underlying religion.
4. The different phases of the Palaeolithic Age are classified as follows:
 - (i) Early or lower Palaeolithic
 - (ii) Middle Palaeolithic
 - (iii) Upper Palaeolithic
5. Mesolithic Age is characterized by microliths or tiny tools. It is believed that the bow and arrow came into regular use with the introduction of microlithic technology based on microblades which were produced by pressure techniques.

1.5 SUMMARY

- Efforts were made by the Europeans to explore the history of ancient India in the latter half of the eighteenth century.
- Amongst the literary sources we include all written records whether in the form of texts, essays or descriptions.
- The first literary source of the Hindus is the Samhita which includes four Vedas namely the Rigveda, the Samveda, the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda.
- The original Buddhist texts are known as the *Tripitaka*.
- The original Jain religious texts were called *Agams*.
- The Greek, Roman, Chinese and Muslim writers and travellers have left fairly interesting sources of information in their accounts.
- Archaeology has contributed a lot to the history of ancient India and its importance cannot be over emphasized.
- Under the heading of archaeology, we discuss the information derived from inscriptions, numismatics and monuments.
- Foreign accounts are of immense importance in the reconstruction of ancient Indian history.
- The prehistoric sites and settlements take into account (a) Palaeolithic; (b) Mesolithic; (c) Neolithic and (d) Chalcolithic Age.

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1.6 KEY WORDS

- **Asiatic Society:** It refers to the union of scholars and authors formed by Sir William Jones in 1774.
- **Samhita:** It is a collection of Hindu scriptures namely the Vedas.
- **Moneyers:** They refer to people who physically create money by striking and casting bronze, silver and copper coins.
- **Agams:** It is the name given to the sacred texts of Jainism.
- **Numismatics:** It is study of coins and other ancient material discovered through the excavation of archaeological sites.
- **Archaeology:** It is the study of human society, primarily through the recovery and analysis of the material culture and environmental data which they have left behind.
- **Inscription:** It means a marking, such as the wording on a coin, medal, monument, or seal, that is inscribed.

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the sources of early Indian history.
2. What is secular literature? Prepare a list of the books that are covered under this literature.
3. What kind of information on Indian history has been revealed from numismatics and monuments?
4. Write short notes on: (a) Palaeolithic (b) Mesolithic Age (c) Neolithic Age; (d) Chalcolithic Sites.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the various religious texts which give ample information about Indian history.
2. Elaborate upon the initiatives taken by the British officials in exploring Indian literature and history. Name a few prominent officials and their literary contributions.
3. What kind of information about Indian history has been deciphered from the inscriptions?
4. Describe the foreign accounts that have revealed substantial information about ancient Indian history.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 INDUS VALLEY AND TAMIL CIVILIZATION

NOTES

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Socio-Economic Culture of Indus Valley Civilization
 - 2.2.1 Geographical Expansion
 - 2.2.2 Life and Culture
 - 2.2.3 Art Practised in Indus Valley Civilization
 - 2.2.4 Urban Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization
- 2.3 Socio-Economic Condition of Ancient Tamil Civilization
- 2.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.8 Further Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit discuss the Indus valley civilization as well as the early Tamil civilization.

The earliest evidence of the use of metals is found at the sites of Indus Valley Civilization. It is also called the Harappan Civilization, as Harappa was the first site to be excavated. The sources of evidence about this civilization are the artifacts, pottery, tools, ornaments and ruins of towns. This unit will introduce you to the various facets of this civilization.

Early Tamil civilization can be studied the heading of the Sangams. The Sangams were the gatherings of intellectuals and scholars held under the rule of the Pandyas in the far South. The Sangam literature provides us useful information concerning the ancient history and the culture of the far South. We learn a great deal from it concerning the religious, social, political and economic conditions of the far South during the period of rule of the ancient dynasties viz. the Chera, the Cholas and the Pandyas, trade relations of the far South with foreign countries and synthesis between the cultures of the South and North India. It is believed by modern scholars that though much of the Sangam literature is based on imagination and exaggeration, when we take support of other sources, texts and inscriptions, we are able to get useful information concerning the contemporary political, social religious and economic conditions from it. Primarily, the Sangam literature provides us useful information concerning the political history of the Chera, the Chola and the Pandya dynasties of the far South. Besides, it also sheds some light on the history of seven more small states from among those which existed there at that time.

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2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the geographical extent of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Identify the various features of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Explain the urban decline of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Describe the main kingdoms of the South and their importance
- Discuss the main characteristics of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas
- Explain the social, religious and academic traits during the Sangam age

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CULTURE OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

Let us begin by discussing the geographical expansion of the Indus valley.

2.2.1 Geographical Expansion

Up to 1920, nothing was known about the Indus Valley Civilization. Construction workers at a railway track near Harappa were using the bricks from a nearby ruin, when it was realized that the bricks probably belonged to a very old civilization. The railway authorities informed the Archaeological Survey of India. In 1921, two archaeologists, Dayaram Sahani and Rakhal Das Bannerjee carried out excavations at Mohenjodaro in Sind and at Harappa, which revealed that a very advanced civilization far older and superior to the Europeans had flourished in India. This generated great enthusiasm, not only in India but in other countries as well. Further excavations at Lothal, Ropar and Kalibangan revealed that the Indus Valley Civilization flourished beyond the River Indus. The area that it covered at that time was approximately 1.3 million square kilometres.

Figure 2.1 shows us some of the important sites of the Indus Valley Civilization. It is estimated that the Indus Valley Civilization existed between 2500 and 1500 BC almost at the same time as the Egyptian, Sumerian and Chinese civilizations.

It is true that all the civilizations of the world have originated and developed in the valleys of rivers. A common feature of all civilizations is the river, which provided fertile soil for the civilizations to develop in its valley. When rivers flooded the banks, the water left deposits of fine silt, which made it possible for farmers to produce abundant crops. Floodwater was used to irrigate fields in the dry season. Rivers provided humans with additional source of food in the form of fish. Rivers also served as waterways for the transport of people and goods from one place to another. The Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations developed on the

banks of Dajla-Farat, the Egyptian civilization on the banks of the river Nile and the Harappan civilization on the banks of the Indus.



Fig. 2.1 *Important Sites of the Indus Valley Civilization*

The Indus Valley Civilization was an ancient civilization that had disappeared hundreds of years ago leaving its ruins. Maximum remains of the Indus Valley Civilization have been found in the valley of river Indus, from where the civilization derives its name. The city of Mohenjodaro was 640 km away from Harappa. The term ‘Mohenjodaro’ means ‘the mound of the dead, which was a local name of a high mountain located on the fields of Larkana. In the context of the Indus Valley Civilization, author and historian Ramashankar Tripathi states, ‘Till so far our way has been full of obstacles but now we can see the horizons of the Indian Civilization.’ It has been established by the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization that hundreds of years before the Aryans there was a pre-established civilization in India.

The cities belonging to Indus Valley Civilization were divided into lower town area and citadel. Historians believe that there was some kind of difference between people who lived in the lower town area and those who lived near the citadel. Occupational groups lived in the lower town area and the nobility comprising the king and his nobles lived in the citadel. Nevertheless, there must have been some controlling authority, otherwise the uniformity of the town plan, standardization of weights and measures, collection of taxes and grains would have been impossible. You would probably get a better idea about the social and political life of the Indus Valley Civilization once the script is deciphered.

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Geographical Expansion of the Indus Valley Civilization

According to the Australian archaeologist and biologist Vere Gordon Childe, 'The geographical area of the Indus civilization was much more than the ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Persian civilizations.'

The remains of the expansion of this civilization have been found in North India from Ropar of Ambala district to Rangpur district in Kathiawad; from Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra (in South India) to Ghazipur, Varanasi, Buxar and Patna in the east. This proves that the Harappan Civilization was spread across Punjab and Sindh, in the valleys of north-western frontiers mainly Kathiawad, Rajasthan and Doab. Following are the chief towns of the Indus Valley Civilization:

1. **Baluchistan:** This region was important from the perspective of trade and commerce. The main places that were extremely important include Sukagendor (at the origin of river Dashak), Sotakakoh (at the beginning of Shadi Kaur) and Balakot (in the east of Son Miyani at the origin of river Vindar).
2. **North-Western Border:** Significant artefacts have been discovered from this area in the Gomal valley.
3. **Sindhu:** Several remains have been found in the Sindhu region but many sites have been destroyed on the banks of this river. Several remains have been found at the sites of Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro, Judeirjodaro and Amri.
4. **Western Punjab:** This area has the most important Harappan site which is located on river Ravi.
5. **Eastern Punjab:** An important site of this area is Ropar. In recent excavations remains have been found in Sanghol.
6. **Haryana:** In Hisar and Banvali important remains of the Indus Civilization have been found.
7. **Doab of Ganga and Yamuna:** The remains of Indus Valley Civilization are spread from Meerut to Aalamgir. Recently remains have also been found at Hulas in Saharanpur.
8. **Gujarat:** There are several Indus Valley Civilization sites at the peninsula of Kutch and Kathiawad and the mainlands of Gujarat. Important sites at these peninsula are Sutkotada and Lothal, respectively.
9. **Other sites:** Important remains have also been found at the sites of Bahawalpur, Jammu and Northern Afghanistan.

2.2.2 Life and Culture

The spindles found in the excavations reveal that the Indus Valley people knew the art of spinning and weaving. They were perhaps the first people to cultivate cotton to make clothes. Besides cotton, they wore woollen clothes. Men wore a piece of cloth round their waists and a shawl over their shoulders, while women wore a

skirt and do not seem to have worn blouses. Archaeologists have unearthed an idol of a man covered with a shawl (see Figure 2.2). The shawl was tied under the right arm and went across the left shoulder, which left the right hand free. A cloth similar to the dhoti worn in rural India was worn at the bottom.

The discovery of needles at the excavation site points towards the fact that the people of this civilization were familiar with sewing. Both men and women wore ornaments. These were made of metal, bone, shell and beads. The Indus people loved ornaments. The chief ornaments worn by women included necklaces, armlets, bangles, earrings, nose-rings, rings and wristlets.



Fig. 2.2 *Man Covered with a Shawl*

The ornaments of rich people were made of gold, silver and precious stones whereas the ornaments of poor people were made of bones, copper and baked clay. Sir John Hubert Marshall who was the Director General of Archaeology in India in 1902 stated, 'seeing the shine and design of gold ornaments it seems that they are brought from an ornament shop of Bond Street (London) and not from a pre-historical house of five thousand years ago.' Figure 2.3 illustrates a bronze idol of a dancing girl.



Fig. 2.3 *Bronze Idol of Dancing Girl*

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Farming and Cattle Rearing

Agriculture was the chief occupation of the people. The climate and seasons were conducive for farming and annual flooding of the rivers made the land fertile. This facilitated the growth of crops. The chief crops were wheat, barley, cotton, maize and millet. They also grew fruits and vegetables. Different methods of irrigation were in use. Channels and embankments were also built to control the flow of water into the fields. Ploughs and sickles were commonly used agricultural tools.

Animal husbandry was also practised, and oxen, buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys and camels were reared. The horse, however, was unknown.

The chief occupation of the Indus people was agriculture. Crops such as wheat, barley, corn and cotton, were cultivated here. According to Dr Basham, the people did not know how to cultivate rice but the remains of rice at Lothal and Rangpur have proved this conception wrong. Similarly, Dr. Lal has said that the cultivation of cotton was the specialty of Indus people. Grinding machines of wheat, barley and crushing machines and storehouses reflect their proficiency in agriculture. Adequate irrigation facilities were developed for agriculture.

Domestication of animals

Agriculture being the chief occupation the Indus people used to domesticate buffaloes, cows, sheep, pigs, dogs, oxen, etc. The people also earned their living by domestication of animals, which were also helpful in agriculture.

Pottery and Trade

Next to agriculture, pottery seems to have been the most popular industry of the people. They were skilled in the use of the potter's wheel. Reddish-brown clay was baked, glazed and decorated with various designs in black. Some broken bits of pottery found in the excavation sites have geometric designs and animal motifs. They speak of the excellent craftsmanship and artistic skills of the Harappan people.

Trade, both by land and by sea, thrived in the Harappan society. A number of seals of Indus origin have been found at various sites in Mesopotamia (Sumer). This indicates that trade flourished between the two civilizations. In order to measure articles, they used a stick with markings on it. They also used various kinds of weights and measures.

More than 2000 seals have been found at various sites. The seals were made of terracotta and steatite, a soft stone. Most of the seals are rectangular but some are circular in shape. Some of them have a knob at the back, which contains a hole. It is believed that different guilds or individual merchants and traders used these seals for stamping their consignments. They have a carved picture with some inscription on the other side. These seals throw light on the religion, customs and economic activities of the society. The animal shown in the seal may be a sacred bull. Small-scale industries were also chief sources of living.

Carpenters, potters, weavers, goldsmiths, connoisseurs, sculptors, etc., constitute the different professions of the time. Potters made a good living by making earthen toys. The Indus Valley Civilization's economy appears to have depended significantly on trade, which was facilitated by major advances in transport by bullock-driven carts as well as boats. Most of these boats were probably small and had flat-bottoms, perhaps driven by sail, similar to those one can see on the Indus River today. Archaeologists have discovered a big canal and docking facility at the coastal city of Lothal. The artefacts of this civilization found at the sites of other ancient civilizations suggest trade links with portions of Afghanistan, the coastal regions of Persia, Northern and Central India and Mesopotamia.

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- (i) **Partial meditation:** As per this technique, the dead bodies were left in open so that they became food for birds and animals. The leftovers were then buried.
- (ii) **Cremation:** In this technique, the dead bodies were burnt and the ashes were collected in pots and buried.

Settlement Patterns and Town Planning in the Indus Valley Civilization

One of the most remarkable features of the Indus Valley Civilization was meticulous town planning. This is especially evident in the city of Mohenjodaro.

Architecture

Evidence of town management of this time is found from the remains of Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Kalibanga, Lothal, etc. Towns were so well managed and organized that it is still a matter of wonder. The roads were very broad. The drainage system was very fine. Figure 2.4 illustrates the citadel, the Great Bath and the city of Mohenjodaro. The remains of Mohenjodaro are proof of the unparalleled art of the ancient cities, their cleanliness and construction. It is quite clear from studies that cleanliness was given a lot of importance.



Fig. 2.4 Mohenjodaro

The shape of the city was rectangular. The roads cut each other at right angles and divided the city into large blocks. Within each block, there was a network of narrow lanes. The drainage system was magnificent and lights were arranged on roads. It seems that the town planning was the work of efficient engineers.

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Art of Making Buildings

The houses, built of burnt bricks, were constructed on both sides of the roads. There were covered drains along the roads, in which sewage from the houses flowed. Some houses had only one or two rooms while others had several, indicating different living quarters for the rich and the poor. The Indus people were excellent constructors. There are other things related to architecture and idol making, which are living examples of their efficiency. The interiors of these buildings prove that the Indus people were definitely aesthetically inclined. Of all the remains of the Indus Civilization, the best is the Great Bath. Its walls are cemented. There are stairs on the corners. In order to keep the water safe and the foundations strong, the masons worked cleverly. The system of filling and emptying the water tank was no doubt extraordinary. There was also a system for hot water, which was probably used by the priests. The biggest proof of the durability of the bath is that it was constructed in 5000 BC and is till today totally intact.

Town Planning

Excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro reveal that all these cities were similarly planned. They were divided into two parts—a raised area with large buildings called the citadel at the western end and a lower town. The roads ran at right angles, bringing out the grid pattern of the township. The citadel was built on a raised platform, constructed with bricks and stones, about 12 metre high and rectangular in shape, and surrounded by a huge brick wall with watchtowers. This protected the buildings and the people from the recurrent flooding of the river Indus. The citadel was probably the seat of the government and overlooked the lower town. The ruler or the administrator lived here along with the nobles. It also had public buildings such as the granaries, the assembly or town hall and important workshops. At Mohenjodaro, which means ‘mound of the dead’ in Sindhi, the most remarkable feature was the Great Bath. It was situated within the citadel. It resembled a large swimming pool measuring 55 by 33 metres. A flight of steps led down to the pool at two ends. Broad corridors on four sides with a number of rooms surrounded the pool. It is the finest specimen of the engineering skill of the Harappan people.

In Harappa, archaeologists found the Great Granary located in the citadel. It measured 61.5 by 15.5 metres and consisted of two similar blocks with a wide passageway between them. Each block had six halls further divided into smaller rooms and compartments with openings for ventilation. The largest granary was found in Mohenjodaro. Close to the granaries at Harappa, circular brick platforms have been found. According to archaeologists, these were used for threshing grain. Grain was brought by boats along the rivers. The grain collected as tax was safely stored to be used in times of crises like floods or famine. The granaries prove that the land was fertile.

Town hall

A huge structure almost 70 metres long and over 23 metres wide with walls about 1.5 metres thick has been excavated in Mohenjodaro. It has twenty pillars made of burnt bricks, arranged in four rows of five each. Archaeologists believe that this great hall may have been used as an assembly hall, a prayer hall or as a hall for cultural shows.

Residential area and houses

Below the citadel was the residential area of the town where the merchants, artisans and craftsmen lived. The whole area was divided into blocks by wide roads, which formed a grid. Sun-dried and baked bricks were used for construction of houses. They were single or double storeyed. All houses had a courtyard around which there were rooms. Every house had a well and a hearth for cooking. The main entrances opened onto the lanes or side alleys instead of the main street in order to keep out dust and to ensure privacy. Within the houses, the rooms were built around a central courtyard. Some houses also had wells to supply water. Several *pukka-kutch*a and big-small buildings have been found during the excavations of the remains. Houses were well ventilated. The roofs of the houses were flat and made of wood. Each house had its own bathroom with drains, which were connected to the drains in the street.

Streets

The streets and lanes ran straight from north to south and east to west, cutting each other at right angles. They were 4 to 10 metres wide. Roads were paved and suitable for movement of bullock carts. Ruins of lamp posts suggest that there were street lights. Dustbins were provided at regular intervals to keep the roads clean.

Drainage system

Another striking feature of the Indus towns was their drainage system. It was the best drainage system known to the world in ancient times. Drains were constructed on either side of the roads connected to a drain from each house. They were lined with bricks and were covered with slabs of stone, which could be removed in order to clean them. This shows that the dwellers had great concern for health and sanitation.

Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Indus Valley Civilization

No temples or shrines of the Harappan Civilization have been found. Our knowledge of the religious beliefs of the Harappans is based on the information derived from the seals and the terracotta and bronze figures. Seals engraved with the figures of animals like the humped bull, elephant and rhinoceros suggest that these animals were probably considered sacred. The image of a three-headed

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male God sitting cross-legged and surrounded by animals, like the lion, the rhinoceros, the buffalo and the elephant with two deer under his seat is found on many seals. There is evidence that the peepal tree and the serpent were also worshipped. The terracotta figure of a female deity has been identified as that of the Mother Goddess who represented fertility and prosperity. Some statues also bear soot marks at the base, indicating that incense was burnt as a part of the ritual. These evidences show that Harappan people worshipped images.

Like their contemporaries—the Mesopotamian and Egyptian people—the people of the Indus Valley used a script, which consisted of picture-like signs called pictographs. Each sign stood for a specific sound or idea. Examples of this script are found on the seals, most of which bear an inscription.

Although the Indus Valley Civilization has declined and disappeared, its influence on the Indian culture remains. The worship of the Mother Goddess in image form as the symbol of female power or *shakti* was introduced in the Later Vedic Age. The bullock carts still seen in Indian villages today are similar to the carts of the Harappan cities. The realistic carving of animals on the seals can also be seen on Ashoka's Lion Capital at Sarnath.

The religious knowledge of the people of the Indus is based on the findings of seals, inscriptions on copper plate, idols, etc. We do not have any knowledge of their philosophy due to lack of clear and readable written material. According to most historians, the Mother Goddess and Lord *Shiva* were the most important deities. The primary features of their religion are as follows:

1. **The worship of Mother Goddess:** Mother Goddess or Nature Goddess was the main religious deity of the time. In one of the idols, a plant is seen coming from a woman's abdomen and, in another, a woman is sitting with legs crossed. Sacrifices were also in vogue to please the Mother Goddess.
2. **The worship of Lord Shiva:** The tradition of praying to Lord Shiva was also much prevalent. In one of the seals, a yogi is surrounded by animals and has three faces with a crown of two horns. This image is considered to be that of Lord Shiva. Historians accept Shaivism as the oldest religion after finding its origin in the Indus Valley Civilization.
3. **The worship of the womb:** Along with the worship of Shiva, the worship of the *lingas* or the womb was also in practice. Several rings have been found during excavations, which were made of shell, stone, clay, etc. Structures in the shape of female organs of reproduction have been found from the Indus area as well as Baluchistan.
4. **The worship of trees or nature:** Coins reveal that worship of trees was also in practice. It had two forms—(i) worshipping trees in their natural form (ii) worshipping trees in the symbolic form, i.e., worshipping trees while considering them to be a place of residence of God. The

Banyan tree was considered to be a sacred tree by the people of the Indus Valley Civilization.

5. **The worship of animals:** Animal worship was a popular practice of the Indus people. They considered the ox, bull, snake, sheep, buffalo and lion as holy animals.
6. **Other traditions:** There are evidences, which prove the worship of rivers and the sun. Idol worship was practised but historians have differences with regard to the existence of temples. Most probably prayers were offered at sites consisting of pillars and the sign of the swastik. From the discovery of an idol depicting a naked woman, it is assumed that the devadasi system was in practice.

The religious beliefs of the Indus Valley civilization had a lot in common with modern Hinduism. This proves that the Hindu religion is very ancient and is till today practised with little change. The Indus Valley Civilization is one of the oldest civilizations of the world. Its affinity to peace is till today the central character of our culture. The practice of idol worship is the gift of this civilization only. It is believed that people of this civilization were happier than those of other civilizations. The tradition of Indian culture which was started by the Indus Valley civilization is constantly flowing till today. Indian culture is indebted to the Indus Civilization especially in the field of religion and art.

2.2.3 Art Practised in Indus Valley Civilization

The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were art lovers and capable of making beautiful and attractive idols. Certain aspects of the art forms during the Indus Valley Civilization are as follows:

1. **Proficiency in constructing buildings:** The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were proficient in constructing buildings. Big buildings and good bathrooms prove their mastery in this art.
2. **Proficiency in idol making:** The idols of this time are of very good quality. These idols are very imaginative and artistic. The artists paid great attention to detailing to achieve the right facial expressions on their idols. The idol of the *Tribhangi* dancer is an excellent example. The metal idols were made by melting and moulding metals.
3. **Proficiency in seal making:** Seals were prepared from different kinds of stones, metals, clay and ivory. The seals were mainly square, rectangular or circular in shape. To increase the beauty of the coins, shapes of animals were made on them. People had acquired great proficiency in this field.
4. **Art of writing:** The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were familiar with the art of writing. Their script was symbolic in character. They wrote from right to left. Though the language is not decipherable, the seals tell us that the text used was brief and short.

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5. **Dance and music:** It is known from seals and other things that the Indus Valley people were familiar with dance and music. A copper idol has been found in which a lady in a dancing pose is standing on her right leg.

6. **Other art forms:** The Indus Valley people were familiar with the art of metallurgy, drawing, pot making and manufacturing statues.

Textile workers were also considered as craftsmen. The Indus Valley Civilization was one of the first in the world to cultivate cotton and weave it into cloth. The textile workers of Harappa were believed to have woven cloth by hand interlacing two or more sets of strands. They did not use looms. Instead spindles made of terracotta were used. Remnants of dye vats have been found at some Indus sites, and it is believed that these were used to dye cotton cloth. Cotton cloth was also an important trade item.

Not only metallurgists but even stoneworkers made sharp-edged tools. A parallel-sided chert flake was supposed to have been used as a blade. Stone was used to make statues. The sculpture of a bearded man that was found at one of the sites is proof of the existence of skilled sculptors.

2.2.4 Urban Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization

Like other unanswered questions about the Indus Valley Civilization, the question of its devastation, of how, when, and why it disappeared, is unanswered. Many historians have given their own opinion. Seven layers have been found during excavations at different sites, which inform us that the Indus Valley Civilization would have been established and devastated a number of times. The chief reason being the floods in the Indus river. The Indus time and again changed its normal course, which was a frequent cause of devastation.

Another opinion regarding the decline of the Indus Valley civilization is geographical in nature including scarcity of rainfall, change in the course of the river, drought and earthquake, which may have devastated this developed civilization. In the opinion of a few scholars, this civilization was devastated due to the attack of the Aryans. Religious books clarify that there is mention of forts and towns of non-Aryans in the Rigveda which were probably ravaged in these attacks. The use of horses and chariots made these attacks successful. However, it has not been completely clarified as to how this civilization met its end.

The Indus Valley Civilization flourished for about 1000 years with very few changes in lifestyle, customs and habits. Though this civilization began to decline by 1500 BC, the exact causes of the decline are not known. However, historians have made various suggestions based on evidence, and they can be summed up as follows:

- The most commonly accepted theory is that natural calamities like earthquakes and floods or change in the course of the river Indus may have destroyed the cities or led to mass migration.

- Some historians are of the opinion that epidemics or fire destroyed the cities.
- Others believe that foreign invasions (probably of the Aryans) led to its decline.
- Yet another theory is that ecological changes due to deforestation led to the land becoming dry and uninhabitable.

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Check Your Progress

1. Name the archaeologists who discovered the Indus Valley Civilization in 1921 through excavations.
2. What was the chief occupation of the Indus Valley people?
3. List one striking feature of the Indus Valley towns.

2.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF ANCIENT TAMIL CIVILIZATION

It is difficult to determine the chronology of the works of the Sangam age. Modern writers have dismissed the first two Sangams as pure myths. The inclusion of the supernatural agencies into the Sangams, incredibly long reigns ascribed to the Pandyan kings and the astoundingly long periods of duration assigned to the Sangams positively weaken the historicity of the Sangam tradition. The generally accepted period of the Sangam, especially the last one, is somewhere in between 500 BC and AD 300. However, L. D. Swamikkannu Pillai assigns the Sangam age to the seventh and eighth century AD.

Dr. N. P. Chakravarthy pushes it back to the sixth century AD. While S. K. Iyengar, S. Pillai and K. K. Pillai place these works in the first and second century, Raghava Iyer, Sesa Iyer, Ganapati Rao and others place them in the third and fourth centuries AD as based on astronomical calculations.

The Academy at Madurai produced a large mass of literature dealing with a large variety of subjects ranging from grammar to pure romance. Social customs, religious practices, popular deities, art of war, folk tales, foreign trade and philosophical problems were also dealt by the Sangam poets. The Sangam seems to have done very useful work in the literary field. It collected the scattered literary pieces, edited them properly and tried to preserve them. It was a sort of parliament of letters, a censor board and an editorial committee. That we do not have examples of such academies elsewhere in India can be no reason why we should wholly reject the local tradition about them.

Kingdoms in Sangam Age

There are references to three powerful kingdoms in the Sangam works, viz. the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas. Their innumerable vassals added to their power

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and glory. The achievements of the kings were praised by the poets and many kinds of myths and legends were associated with one another to praise their patrons who actually did not have the position of the provincial governors of the Mauryas or the Guptas. It is difficult to say which out of the three kingdoms mentioned above was the earliest. It may be presumed that their origin was not later than the third century BC.

The Cheras

The earliest Chera king about whom we have any information was Udayan Cheralathan. It is said that he fed sumptuously both the intending parties at Kurukshetra and won the nickname of 'Udayan of the Big Feed'. The view of P. T. Srinivasa-Iyengar is that this refers to the celebration for Sraddha for the dead heroes in the Mahabharata war. Udayan ruled from the capital city of Vanchi, which has been variously identified. He was a great warrior and is said to have defeated Satakarni II, the Satvahana king.

Nedum Cheralathan was the successor of Udayan. He won a naval victory against a local chieftain on the Malabar Coast. He possessed a large army. He defeated the Yavanas and imprisoned many of them. Later on, they were released for a large ransom. Nedum is said to have 'quelled the valour of Northern kings up to the Himalayan region'. The view of P. T. S. Iyengar is that Nedum might have marched a few miles north of the Chera kingdom, possibly up to the Konun. However, his court poets praised him to the sky by saying that he conquered Northern India. Nedum built many temples and performed many sacrifices. This shows that Brahmanism had a considerable influence in the Chera kingdom. Nedum assumed many high-sounding titles like *Imayavaramban* (He whose fame is as high as the sky). These high-sounding titles are really misleading because the territory of this king was a small one. Nedum was killed in a duel with the Chola king Virarkilli.

Nedum Cheralathan had many sons from many wives. His two sons from his Chola wife were Senguttuvan and Ilango Adigal. Ilango Adigal became an ascetic and immortalized his brother Senguttuvan through the epic poem *Silapadikaram*.

Cheran Senguttuvan alias Kadalpirakottiya Chenkuttuvan was probably the greatest Chera king of the Sangam age. His achievements have been described by his court poet Parinar. He might have emulated Parasurama tradition of throwing a weapon into the sea. Chenkuttuvan made a journey to the Himalayas to bring a stone for making the idol of Kannaki. However, this does not mean that he led an expedition to the North as a conqueror to prove his martial valour and prowess. Chenkuttuvan reached the Northern hills, cut a piece of rock and left a mark on a stone. He consecrated a temple for Kannaki and on that occasion Gajabahu, King of Ceylon, and a prince of Malwa were present among the high dignitaries.

The history of the Cheras after the death of Cheran Chenkuttuvan is not eventful. Various petty kings ruled the country one after the other. Slowly and steadily, the Chera kingdom disappeared from the scene of history.

The Cholas

The origin of the Cholas is not certain. Tradition connects them with the Manu of the Puranas. The first Chola king was one Uruvappahrer Ilam Setsenni, who ruled from Uraiyur (Urandai). He possessed 'many beautiful chariots' and had fabulous wealth.

The greatest Chola king of the Sangam age was Karikala Chola. He was the posthumous son of Uruvappahrer Ilanjetchenni. The early life of this ruler was not happy. An attempt was made by the relatives of his father to snatch the throne. He was imprisoned but he came out of it by sheer good luck. The author of *Vattinapalai* describes how Karikala re-established himself on the throne. Karikala was the victor of many battles. In the first Battle of Venni near Tanjor, Karikala defeated the kings of Pandyas and Cheras and their innumerable vassals. A potter woman of Venni sang songs about the victory of Karikala. The second Battle of Venni made Karikala the master of an extensive dominion including Tondaimandalam. A confederation of nine kings and their vassals was routed in the battlefield of Vahaiparanpalai. The Pallavas of Kanchi and the Kurumbas were compelled to accept suzerainty. He prevented the migration of his subjects to other countries. During his rule, forests were cleared and inducements were offered to agriculture and trade.

Karikala shifted his capital from Uraiyur to Kaveripattanam (Puhar). He did so because he wanted to control his possessions by means of naval power, and because he could better encourage foreign trade from that place. A beautiful picture of the new capital of Karikala is given by the author of *Pattinapalai*. It is said that the city was with strong walls in which was placed the Goddess of victory. It was furnished with a door on which a tiger-crest was carved. Brahmanical sacrifices were encouraged during his reign. He was also a patron of literature.

It is said that as Karikala had no enemies, he left his capital with a sword and an umbrella and proceeded to the North up to the foothills of the Himalayas. The view of Seshadri Sastri is that Karikala ruled during the early second century. The suggestion of P. T. S. Iyengar is that the most probable period when Karikala flourished was the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, the central year of his reign being AD 400.

There is not much to write about the later history of the Cholas. The Chola kingdom was plunged into chaos and confusion. Karikala had two sons. Nalankilli ruled from Uraiyur and Mavalattan ruled from Kaveripattanam. In due course, the successors of Nalankilli and Mavalattan became deadly enemies. They fought to the finish in the Battle of Kariyaara. However, the Chola family survived for over a century with various ups and downs.

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The Pandyas

The Pandyas of Madurai had an ancient past. Many Pandya rulers seem to be mythical heroes. Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi was the earliest known Pandya king who ruled from Madurai. He was a follower of the Vedic religion. He constructed many sacrificial altars. It appears that he was a heroic soldier whose fame spread to the North. He might have defeated some petty rival tribes but his achievements were glorified by the court poets. It is said that he yoked his enemies to a plough and ploughed the streets.

Aryappadaikadanda was the fourth king after Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi. His name is mentioned in the *Silapadikaram*. He is said to have defeated the Aryan kings of the North. That is why he was given the title of Aryappadaikadanda, which means 'he who conquered the Aryan soldiers.' His achievements are recorded in the *Maduraikkanji*. It is said that he died broken-hearted when he learnt that he had unknowingly ordered the execution of an innocent person. He was succeeded by his brother.

The greatest Pandya king of the Sangam age was Nedunjeliyan of Talaiyalanganam. He was the hero or the Madurai Kanchi, the longest of the Ten Idylls. At the time of his accession, he was a young man and the neighbouring Chera and Chola kings declared war on him. However, he met the combined armies of the Cheras and Cholas in the historic field of Talaiyalanganam and defeated them. The Chera king was captured and thrown into a dungeon. Mangudi Marudan, a poet patronised by him, wrote the *Maduraikkanji* in which he described the city of Madurai and gave advice to the king to give up martial activity and become peace-loving. Nedunjeliyan was a great patron of art and literature. The city of Madurai was beautified so that it could compete with the important capitals of the North. Foreign trade was encouraged and agriculture was improved. He became the hero of many legends.

The last great Pandyan king of the Sangam age was Kadalul Maintha Ukkirap Peruvaludi. He was a poet and a patron. He defeated Vengai Marban, the ruler of Kataiyar Kovil, a forest fortress. He was a contemporary of the great Chola Perunarkilli, who performed the imperial sacrifice.

Among the feudatories of the Pandyas, the greatest was Pari who ruled over the Parambu and is reckoned by tradition as the greatest among the patrons of those times. His patronage of Kapilar, the great poet, is proverbial. The three crowned monarchs became jealous of Pari and invaded his Parambu. When they could not take it by storm, they called him to a conference and treacherously killed him.

There were a number of local chieftains who played a vital role in the history of the Sangam Tamils. The tripartite struggle among the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas dug their grave. By about the fifth century AD, the Sangam glory disappeared.

Social and Religious Conditions during the Sangam Age

Indus Valley and Tamil
Civilization

The Sangam literature provides sufficient proof that cultures of the South and the North were fairly integrated in the far South. The caste system was not fully accepted and social divisions were primarily based on the basis of different professions of the individuals. Yet, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the castes who had adopted fighting as their profession enjoyed a better status in society. The ruling class had virtually acquired the status of the Kshatriyas and adopted the practice of donating lands and other presents to the Brahmins to keep them appeased. Eight types of marriages were also accepted in the Tamil Pradesh and marriage was regarded as a religious institution. The position of women was better as compared to the North and they were employed even as bodyguards by the kings, nobles and other rich people. However, there are certain references to the practice of Sati, which means that because of the influence of the Vedic culture, deterioration in the status of women had started and the family was gradually becoming patriarchal. There were no untouchables in the society, but the status of the poor people had worsened.

The people in the far South accepted the Vedic religion of the Aryans. According to a widely accepted legend, Sage Augustya initially propagated the Vedic religion in the South. Many stories refer to his exploits of forcing the Vindiyas to submit, killing the demons, Ilbala and Vatapi, drinking the entire water in the sea and killing all demons who had found shelter beneath the sea. It is also believed that sage Augustya was responsible for the birth of Tamil literature and grammar. The name of another sage, Kaudinya, is also popular in this regard. He was also largely responsible for the propagation of the Vedic religion and Brahmanism in the far South. Many stone and copper inscriptions have referred to the grant of land and other articles to the Brahmins of Kaudinya's gotra by several rulers. The people in the far South accepted the rituals and the Yajnas of the Vedic religion as a part of their religious ceremonies. But the Brahmanism here accepted many religious traditions of the people of the South as well within its fold. The worship of God Murugana or Murukana is very popular in the South from very ancient times. He was, later on, accepted as the representative of God Kartikeya. Besides this, the worship of Siva, Krishna, Balrama, Vishnu and Indra also started in the South. The practice of sacrifices in Yajnas was also accepted in the South though it blended the Vedic rituals with the traditions of the South.

Jainism and Buddhism were also accepted by the people in the far South. Buddhism, probably, became popular in the South during the reign of Emperor Asoka. Several stupas are *Dharamchakra* of Buddhism have been found at different places in the South. Later on, *Nagarjunakonda* and *Kanchipuram* became the centres of learning of Buddhism. Jainism also reached far South during the period of the Mauryas. Probably, it was first propagated by Bhadrabahu, who migrated to the South with the disciples when a widespread famine occurred in Magadha two hundred years after the death of Mahavira.

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Thus, the *Sangam* literature provides us useful knowledge concerning the history of the far South till the third century AD. Though, of course, we have to take help from other sources as well. The glory of the South declined by the end of the third century AD. It revived itself in the sixth century AD when several ruling dynasties succeeded in establishing powerful states of their own in the South.

Sangam Age: Literature and Other Fields

The view of Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri is that the Sangam literature, which combines idealism with realism and classic grace with indigenous industry and strength, is rightly regarded as constituting the Augustan age of Tamil literature. This literature is different from the Tamil literature of later periods. It alone can be called 'the unadulterated literature of the Tamils'. It is an isolated piece holding noticeably the different ideas, forms and ideals from later ones. It gives a clear picture of the Tamil society at a stage when Sanskritic ideas and forms were attempting to dominate the picture but had not met with much success. It reveals to us secular-minded people engaged in the battle of life in all its aspects and refusing to yield to religious fanaticism. It deals with secular matters relating to public and social activities like government, war, charity, renunciation, warship, trade and agriculture. It also deals with physical manifestations of nature such as mountains and rivers and private thoughts and activity such as conjugal thoughts and domestic life of the inner circle of the members of the family. They are called Puram and Aham. Puram literature deals with the matters capable of externalization or objectification. Aham literature deals with the matters strictly limited to one aspect of subjective experience.

The Tamils were not strangers to another form of classifying literary themes viz. Aram, Pand, Inbam and Vidu. These are the four goals of life and the literature, which deals with them, falls under the corresponding sections. This classification is not much different from the Aham, Puram classification because Aram, Porul and Vidu come under Puram and Inbam

The poets played an important role in the social life of the people. They were a source of education and performed the functions of laudatory and instructive nature. They showed the spirit of universal kindness and benevolence. Among the poets and thinkers of the Sangam age Talkapprar, Valluvar, Inlango Adigal, Sittalai Sattanar, Nakkiranar, Kapilar, Paranar, Auvaiyar, Mangudi Mnudanar and a few others are outstanding.

The great grammatical work *Tolkappiam*, the ten poems (*Pattuppattu*) the eight anthologies (*Ettuttagai*) and the eighteen Killkanakku works and two epics (*Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*) all belong to the Sangam age. There are other works, which have completely or mostly perished and have left behind either only their names or just a few stray stanzas quoted by the commentators. The exact literature consists of 7334 poems and we come across 490 mentioned poets besides about 102 anonymous pieces. Of these 7334 poems, 1612 are the *Tolkappiam* Sutras and 1330 Kural aphorisms.

Tolkappiyam is the oldest Tamil grammar written by Tolkappiyar. It is divided into three major parts. The *Pattuppattu* is a collection of ten long poems. Of these Mulaippattu, Kurinjipattu and Pattinappalai belong to Aham and the rest are Puram. The eight anthologies are *Narrinai*, *Kuruntogai*, *Aigurunuru*, *Patiruppattu*, *Paripadal*, *Kalittogai*, *Ahananuru* and *Purananuru*. Some of them belong to Aham group and the others to Ponam group. The same is the case with the eighteen Killkkanakku works. The two epics, *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, are a grand epic treatment of an indigenous story, the first part of which is dealt with in *Silappadikaram* by Ilango Adigal and the second part in *Manimekalai* by Sittalai Sattanar. The *Kural* was composed by Valluvar. It is divided into three divisions—Aram, Porul and Inbam. It consists of 1330 stanzas. It pays considerable attention to matters pertaining to government and hence the Sangam polity has often been called the Kural polity. While the author of the *Kural* mentions the king and his associates, their qualifications and some of their functions, he does not mention the contemporary condition in a factual record. He speaks of an ideal king. He does not exhaustively deal with all the contemporary institutions. He only chooses the prominent and major political institutions and draws an ideal code of behaviour for them. Dr. S. Krishnaswami Iyengar and V. R. Ramchandra Dikshitar have compared the *Kural* with the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. It is true that there are certain similarities between the two works, but that does not mean that the author of the *Kural* was indebted to Kautilya for his views. The view of Dr. N. Subrahmanian is that most probably both Valluvar and Kautilya borrowed from a common source.

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Education during Sangam Age

The Tamil society of the Sangam age was an advanced and civilized society. Education was not merely known and encouraged but was a widespread social activity. The pattern of education was not merely reading and understanding of books, but also listening to the learned persons. It was believed that the advice given by wise and experienced persons was like a support on a slippery ground. Those who listened to the learned were the very abode of humility. Education of a secular nature was not the peculiar preserve of any particular community or caste, sex or station in life. The Sangam scholars belonged to all the classes. It was believed that education gave self-confidence and dignity to men and hence was sought after.

The Brahmins must have pursued the traditional Vedic studies and the kings must have pursued horse-riding, target-practice, wrestling, etc. The merchants and loyal servants were probably more interested in arithmetic for professional reasons. The Brahmins were interested in astronomy. Fine arts were cultivated by special artisans and hetaerae. J.A. Kanakkayar was a teacher who collected a group of students and taught them literature and grammar.

Teachers who collected a large number of students and organized education on a large scale were called Kulapatis. The teacher was paid either in cash or in

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kind by the students. The ideal student was a dependable assistant or help to the teacher in time of emergency or danger. He gave much wealth to the teacher. Corporal punishment inflicted by the teacher on the student was not objected to. Some students stayed in public rest houses and led a mendicant's life.

The number of the Sangam poets might be nearly 500. They lived within a period of three or four centuries and many of them belonged to the same generation. Their number included kings and women.

Works on grammar like the *Tolkappiyar*, on poetics and mathematics were subjects studied by any student. Astronomy was allied to mathematics. The fine arts like music, dance, drama, painting, building architecture, sculpture etc. were specialized in by the hereditary artists. Much of the teaching was oral. The students wrote but sparingly and got practically everything by heart.

Fine Arts During the Sangam Age

Among the fine arts, painting was greatly developed. The walls of the houses of the rich people and courtesans were painted with appropriate colours. In the theatre, screens were painted with suitable scenes. There was a treatise on painting, which elaborately dealt with the different systems of painting of moving objects and static objects. On the ceilings of houses and palaces, many objects and scenes were painted.

Sculpture was a familiar plastic art to the Tamils. The material used by the sculptors was of a perishable nature and hence there is no concrete evidence about the Sangam sculptures.

Dance, drama and music were allied fine arts and they received princely encouragement. They were developed to a rare degree. The art of dance had in a sense reached perfection in those days. Dance was performed by both men and women. Tamil art influenced the foreigners also.

Check Your Progress

4. Who was the earliest Chera king about whom we have information?
5. Who is considered the greatest Pandya king of the Sangam age?

2.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In 1921, two archaeologists, Dayaram Sahani and Rakhaldas Bannerjee carried out excavations at Mohenjodaro in Sind and at Harappa, which revealed that a very advanced civilization far older and superior to the Europeans had flourished in India.

2. Agriculture was the chief occupation of the people of the Indus Valley Civilization. The climate and seasons were conducive for farming and annual flooding of the rivers made the land fertile.
3. One striking feature of the Indus towns was their drainage system. It was the best drainage system known to the world in ancient times.
4. The earliest Chera king about whom we have any information was Udayan Cheralathan.
5. The greatest Pandya king of the Sangam age was Nedunjeliyan of Talaiyalanganam. He was the hero or the Madurai Kanchi, the longest of the Ten Idylls.

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2.5 SUMMARY

- The earliest evidence of the use of metals is found at the sites of Indus Valley Civilization. It is also called the Harappa Civilization, as Harappa was the first site to be excavated.
- Construction workers at a railway track near Harappa were using the bricks from a nearby ruin, when it was realized that the bricks probably belonged to a very old civilization.
- The cities belonging to Indus Valley Civilization were divided into lower town area and citadel. Historians believe that there was some kind of difference between people who lived in the lower town area and those who lived near the citadel.
- One of the most remarkable features of the Indus Valley Civilization was meticulous town planning. This is especially evident in the city of Mohenjodaro.
- Our knowledge of the religious beliefs of the Harappans is based on the information derived from the seals and the terracotta and bronze figures.
- The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were art lovers and capable of making beautiful and attractive idols.
- Like other unanswered questions about the Indus Valley Civilization, the question of its devastation, of how, when, and why it disappeared, is unanswered.
- The Sangams were the gathering of intellectuals and scholars held under the rule of the Pandyas in the far South. Their earliest reference can be located in the preface of *Bhasya* written by Irraynara Agapporul in the 8th century AD.
- According to Irraynara Agapporul, 8,598 poets participated in these Sangams and these were provided protection by 197 Pandya rulers.

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- The Sangam literature is mostly in the form of poetry accompanied by their commentaries as well. The entire literature is in Tamil language which proves that Tamil had grown to occupy a primary position in the field of literature. Sangam literature developed between AD 100 to 250.
- The Sangam literature provides us useful information concerning the ancient history and the culture of the far South. We learn a great deal from it concerning the religious, social, political and economic conditions of the far South during the period of rule of the ancient dynasties viz. the Chera, the Cholas and the Pandyas.
- Often it is asserted that much of the Sangam literature is based on imagination and exaggeration, yet after taking support of other sources, texts and inscriptions, one is able to get useful information concerning the contemporary political, social religious and economic conditions from it.
- Literature has always been a crucial source of information regarding a contemporary societies, its customs and manners. Similarly, the Sangam authors provide a highly descriptive and precise account of the kingdoms and rulers of their time.

2.6 KEY WORDS

- **Citadel:** It means a raised part of a city surrounded by walls for protection.
- **Granary:** It is an area for storage of grains.
- **Seal:** It is an engraved piece of metal used as a stamp for identification.
- **Pictograph:** It is a picture representing a word or phrase.
- **Murugana:** It refers to a popular deity of the South.
- **Tolkappiyam:** It is the oldest treatise on Tamil grammar written by Tolkappiyar.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What kinds of trade practices were prevalent during the Indus Valley Civilization?
2. What were the causes for the decline of the Indus Valley civilization?
3. Describe the dress and ornaments used by the people of the Indus Valley Civilization.

4. Write a note on the settlement patterns and town planning of the Indus Valley people.
5. What was the Sangam Age?
6. Name the main far South kingdoms which form the basis of Sangam literature.

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the extent of the Indus Valley Civilization.
2. Discuss the religious beliefs and practices prevalent during the Indus Valley Civilization.
3. Describe the characteristic features of the Indus Valley Civilization.
4. Briefly describe the various forms of art practised in the Indus Valley Civilization.
5. Who were the important southern rulers who are said to have left an indelible mark on the regional history of that time?
6. What were the religious conditions during the Sangam age? Was the atmosphere tolerant?
7. Write an essay on Sangam literature covering every aspect of this literary phase.
8. Discuss the development of education and fine arts during the Sangam age.

2.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 EARLY AND LATER VEDIC PERIOD

NOTES

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Early Vedic Period and Beginning of the Caste System
- 3.3 Later Vedic System: Caste System
- 3.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Vedic culture occupies the most prominent place in the Indian history. Its impact on modern India is widely prevalent. The religion, philosophy and social customs of the Hindus who constitute a majority of India have their principal source in Vedic culture. The contribution of Vedic culture to human progress has far exceeded that of the Indus Valley culture and this factor alone is sufficient to justify its superiority. The authors of this culture were the Indo-Aryans, an anglicized version of the original word Aryan.

The Aryans settled down in tribes, led a semi-nomadic life and fought among themselves and with other non-Aryan tribes for cows, sheep and green pastures. By the Later Vedic Age, the Aryans had moved further into the Ganga Valley, a process facilitated by the use of iron implements, which helped them to clear the thick forests with greater ease. Gradually, many of the Aryan groups further evolved into larger political entities by capturing more and more land. These came to be known as *Mahajanapadas*. This unit will discuss the early and late Vedic period in India.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the Early Vedic polity
- Describe the division of society during Vedic times
- Analyse the technological and economic development prevalent during the Early Vedic times

3.2 EARLY VEDIC PERIOD AND BEGINNING OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The Aryans first settled in the area around the seven rivers, the Indus and her tributaries known as the *Sapta Sindhu* (seven rivers), between 1500BC and 1000BC.

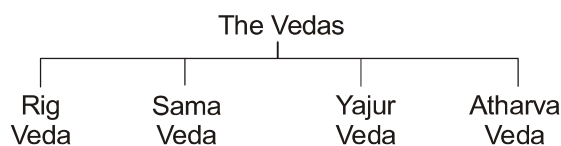


Fig. 3.1 *The Four Vedas*

They named this place as *Brahmavarta* or ‘Land of the Vedic Period Gods’. As their number increased, they began to move eastward and settled in the Ganga-Yamuna plains which now came to be called *Aryavarta* or ‘Land of the Aryans’. Gradually, they occupied the whole of northern and western India up to the Vindhya Mountains. Our information about the early Aryans is based on the excavations at Bhagwanpura in Haryana and three other sites in Punjab, which have revealed many pottery pieces dating from 1500BC to 1000BC. However, our chief source of information is the Rig Veda, which was composed in 1500BC. The Vedas are the earliest literary records of the Aryans. Since, our main source of information about the Aryans is Vedic literature, this period is also called the Vedic Age. The Early Vedic period extends from 1500BC to 1000BC. There are four Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda (Figure 3.1). The word ‘veda’ means knowledge. The Rig Veda is the oldest of the Vedic literature. It was composed in about 1500BC. It consists of 1,028 slokas, which are divided into ten books. At first it was transferred orally from one generation to the other along with the other Vedas and is therefore called *Sruti* or ‘that which is heard’. Many centuries later, it was written down. The Rig Veda gives us an insight into the political, social, economic and religious life of the Early Vedic period. The Early Vedic polity was structured as follows:

- **The King:** The highest officer of the nation was the king. The morality of the king was very high. Kingship was hereditary. The chief work of the king was to safeguard his nation and citizens. He had to be proficient in the management of soldiers and very just. There were many officers for assisting the king in his administrative work. He had many functionaries, including the *purohita* and *Senani*. The main job of *purohita* was to give advice to the king and practice spells and charms for success in war whereas *senanis* fought for him in the war.
- **The ministers of the king:** The king appointed various ministers for running the administration efficiently. The foremost among them was the *Senani*, the supreme commander of the armed forces.

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- **Warriors:** The chief warrior in the army was the second highest officer. He was appointed by the king himself. His work was to take care of the warriors' organization and to lead the army in the absence of the king. Apart from the warriors, the *Gramani* was also an important officer. He used to be the chief of villages. Apart from these office bearers, the diplomats and secret agents also played very important roles in the Early Vedic polity.
- **Organizations and committees:** Organizations and committees were very important in that age. They were created to check the despotism of the king and to discuss the problems of the nation. There were two bodies the 'sabha' and the 'samiti'. The Atharv Veda refers to them as the two daughters of *Prajapati* or Brahma. Earlier the *sabha* was responsible for performing only judicial functions. However, historians came to believe that it served as a centre for social gathering. Some considered it to be the village assembly while some considered this as a committee of selected seniors or elders. The *samiti* on the other hand was probably the bigger or central assembly.
- **Judiciary:** Only assumptions can be made regarding the judicial system due to non-availability of proof. The chief justice was the king himself.

The administrative system of the Vedic period continued with little changes. In the later Vedic period several strong monarchies evolved, which developed a feeling of imperialism. Slowly, the powers of the king increased and his post became hereditary. He even increased his officials and ministers.

The Aryans first settled in the region of Punjab. This is proved by the fact that the rivers Kuruman, Kabul and other western tributaries of the Indus are mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Indo-Aryans settled in the region of the waning Indus Valley Civilization, i.e., across the river Indus. Gradually they moved eastwards along the river Ganga. The Aryans brought with them horses and chariots. They subjugated the original inhabitants of the Ganga-Yamuna doab, and reduced them to the status of slaves or *dasyus* who performed all the menial jobs.

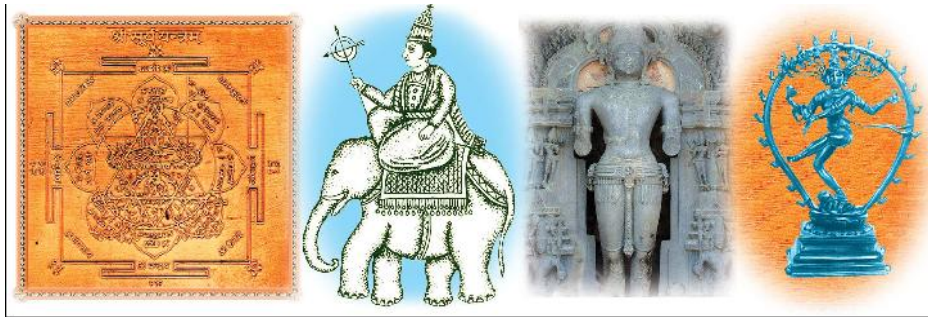
Technological and Economic Development

Agriculture and cattle rearing were the main occupations of the early Aryans. They grew barley, wheat, rice, fruits and vegetables. Agriculture was the basis of the economy in the Vedic age. The land where two crops could grow in a year was considered fertile and was coveted for.

Agriculture had developed greatly in the later Vedic period. By then, the Aryans had started using new tools, manure and seeds. Irrigation was done with the help of canals and the plough was also in use. They ploughed their fields with the help of wooden ploughs drawn by oxen. Agriculture being the chief occupation, rearing of animals was necessary. Oxen, horses, dogs, goats and sheep were mainly domesticated. The cow was considered to be pious and important. It was a source of valuation and exchange and it was regarded as a sign of prosperity.

The Aryans introduced the horse in India from Central Asia. They were used to draw chariots and to ride during battles as well as during peacetime by the *rajan* and the nobles and therefore, greatly valued. Hunting, pottery, spinning, weaving, carpentry, metallurgy (copper and bronze) and leatherwork were other important occupations. Shipping was limited to the navigation of rivers for the inland trade. Gold and oxen were used as money during trading. Figure 3.2 illustrates various artefacts of the Early Vedic period.

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A yantra of the Sun God Aryan - God Indra - Sun Temple statue - Hindu deity Shiva

Fig. 3.2 Artefacts of the Early Vedic Period

The most important thing of Vedic period was that no profession was considered to be small except fishing and hair cutting, which were looked down upon.

In the later Vedic period carpentry, metallurgy, tanning, weaning, etc., started developing. They proficiently started using gold, iron, silver etc., after the spread of knowledge of metals, which made life more prosperous.

Both imports as well as exports were carried on during the Vedic period. The traders are known as '*Pani*'. Clothes, bed sheets, leather, etc., were mainly traded. Trading was done on bullock carts.

Political Relations

The Aryans gave up their nomadic life and settled down in the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent in the form of different tribal settlements known as *janas* and the land where they settled was called *janapada*. These tribes were constantly involved in battle with one another, either to protect their cattle or their land. A village or *grama* was the smallest unit of the *jana*. A *grama* would comprise a number of families. Each tribe had a chieftain called *rajan*, who was chosen for his wisdom and courage and he ruled each tribe. His chief function was to protect the tribe from the external attacks and maintain law and order. For his service, the people made voluntary contributions of gifts. A *rajan* could be removed from power if he was inefficient or cruel. He was helped by a number of officials in the work of administration. There is also a reference to two tribal assemblies – namely the *Sabha* and the *Samiti* (as mentioned in the previous section) which checked the power of the king and also advised him on all-important matters. The *senani* or commander-in-chief assisted him in warfare.

A *raj purohit* or high priest performed religious ceremonies and also acted as an adviser. The *gramani* or the village headman looked after the village. Figure 3.3 illustrates the political structure of the Early Vedic period.

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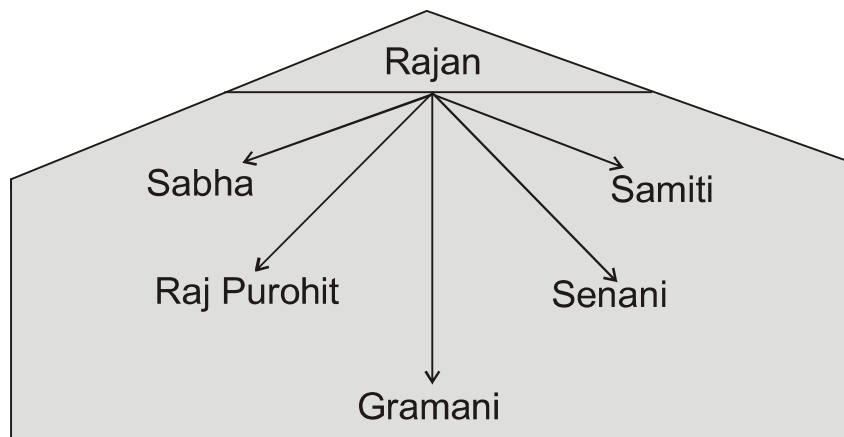


Fig. 3.3 Political Structure of the Early Vedic Period

The political life of the Vedic age was classified as follows:

- **Family:** The smallest unit of the administration was the family, which was headed by the oldest person in the home. The tradition was to have a joint family.
- **Village:** Several families made a village. The head of the village was called the '*Gramani*'. The root of the village administrative system was the *Gramani* but the Rig Veda is silent on the matter of its election system.
- **Vish:** Several villages made a *Vish*. The highest officer of the *Vish* was called *Vishpati*.
- **Jan:** Several *Vishs* made a *Jan*. The highest officer of the Jan was called *Gop*. Usually, the king himself would be a *Gop*.
- **Nation:** The highest political unit was the nation. A country was called nation or *rashtra* (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Political Life of the Vedic Age

Unit	Head
Rashtra	Rajan/Gopa/Samrat
Janas/janapada	Jyeshta
Vish	Vishpati
Gram	Gramani

Varnashrama Dharma

Varnashrama Dharma was a Sanskrit name given to the divisional structure of the Indian society during Vedic times. The early Vedic society consisted of four *varnas*—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. There was no complication in the *varna* system. The basis of *varna* was perhaps work rather than birth. It is mentioned in the Rig Veda that, 'I am a sculptor, my father is a doctor and my mother grinds cereals in the house.' The early Aryans differentiated between themselves according to the occupations each followed. The word 'varna' was later used to refer to the social division, dividing society into the following four occupational groups:

- The Brahmins or the priests performed religious ceremonies and prayers and imparted education.
- The Kshatriyas or warrior class (to which the king also belonged) fought wars and protected the tribe from danger.
- The Vaishyas carried on agriculture, industry and trade, producing goods for the society.
- The Shudras, comprising the *dasas*, were the labourers and did menial jobs. They were dark-skinned.

This system was flexible and there were no restrictions with regard to the occupation, intermarriage and inter-dining between these classes.

Thus, the work of a Brahmin was to give education. The work of a Kshatriya was to save and defend. The work of a Vaishyas was to trade and the work of a Shudra was to serve. But, till the later Vedic period, the *varna* system had become complex. By now, the basis of *varna* changed to birth from work or profession.

The Ashrama system was established keeping in mind the age of man to be 100 years. It was said that 100 years were required for all round development and to achieve the goal of religion, material pleasure and salvation in life. During the first twenty-five years, a student acquired knowledge with much hardship in the ashram of his guru. This was known as the *Brahmacharya* Ashram. From the age of twenty-five to fifty years (in adulthood) *Brahmacharya* he observed family life, which was called *Grihastha* Ashram. From fifty to seventy-five years of age, he observed Vanprastha Ashram while denouncing family life. From seventy-five to hundred years, he left all worldly pleasures and attained salvation in the devotion of god, which was called Sanyas.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the main occupation of the early Aryans?
2. Define Janapada.
3. What was the chief function of a rajan in Vedic society?

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3.3 LATER VEDIC SYSTEM: CASTE SYSTEM

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The history of the later Vedic period is based mainly on the Vedic texts, which were compiled after the age of the Rig Veda. The collections of Vedic hymns or mantras are known as the Samhitas. The Rig Veda were set to tune, and this modified collection was known as the Samaveda. In the post Rig Vedic times, two other collections, the Yajurveda Samhita and the *Atharvaveda* Samhita were composed. We have to depend upon the Samhitas of the Yajurveda, Samaveda, *Atharvaveda*, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads, all religious works for the later Vedic period which, roughly speaking, comes down to about 600BC. Figure 3.4 illustrates the later Vedic Civilization.

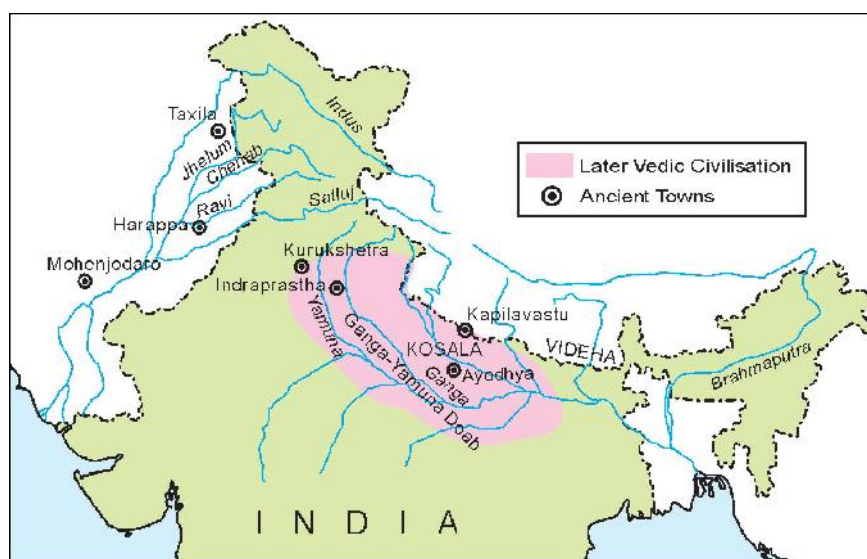


Fig. 3.4 *Later Vedic Civilizations*

During the later Vedic period, the Aryan civilization gradually extended towards the east and the south. The centre of culture shifted to Kurukshetra, and Madhyadesa. The land of the Yamuna and the Ganga came into prominence. Kosala, Kasi, Videha and Ayodhya rose as great urban centres in the east. Literature also mention the Andhras for the first time and other outcaste tribes like the Pundras of Bengal, the Sabaras of Orissa and the Pulindas of south western India. Thus, nearly the whole of northern India from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas and perhaps even beyond had come within the rule of the Aryans.

Settlement Patterns

As mentioned earlier, between 1000BC and 600BC, the Aryans had moved eastward from the land of the seven rivers into the Gangetic plain. Some crossed the Vindhya Mountains into the southern region of India. The Aryans moved eastward probably because of an increase in population. As we learnt have before, some of the chieftains carved out kingdoms for themselves and their tribes were

called the *janapadas*. The Kurus occupied the region around Delhi and called it Kurukshetra. Hastinapur was their capital. The Kurus combined with the Panchalas (ruled over the region of Bareilly, Badaun and Farukhabad) to establish their authority over Delhi and the Doab region. The Kauravas and the Pandavas belonged to the Kuru tribe. The battle of Kurukshetra is believed to have been fought in about 950BC. Towards the end of 600 BC, the Aryans had spread further eastward. A number of *janapadas* combined to form large independent kingdoms called *mahajanapadas*. By the sixth century BC, sixteen *mahajanapadas* were established. These sixteen kingdoms were engaged in the war to capture each other's territory. Kosala, Vatsa, Avanti and Magadha were the four most important ones, which eventually remained and reigned. Finally, Magadha established its stronghold over the whole of the Gangetic plain from 500–300BC.

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Technological and Economic Development

The Vedic Aryans were well known for their technology related to the tanning of leather, fermentation of grains and fruits, and dyed scale production of copper, iron and steel, brass, silver and gold and their alloys. Indian steel was believed to be of very high quality in the ancient world and it was exported in large quantities. Tin and mercury were imported from the 7th century. Alchemy was also referred to in literature. They made a special kind of polished grey pottery (known as P.G. ware). Radio-carbon dating dates it back to 1000–800BC. Other varieties of pottery, for example, red or *black-polished* pottery were also made by them.

Farming remained the most important occupation. Taxes were collected by the king, which earned him revenue. Wheat, rice, vegetables, cotton and oil seeds were grown. Besides agriculture, many crafts like weaving, leatherwork, pottery, jewellery designing and carpentry developed. Apart from gold, silver, copper, lead and tin, they had discovered the use of iron. Many agricultural implements and weapons of war were made of iron. Artisans and craftsmen produced goods of fine quality. They were organized into guilds which regulated the prices. These professions became hereditary with time and constituted subcastes or *jatis*. Many more towns started emerging during these times. Trade also flourished. Goods were sent as far as Taxila, Central Asia and European countries. The barter system was discontinued and money in the form of gold and silver was used. In other words, the economic activities became more complex. The earliest coins of India are commonly known as punch-marked coins. As the name suggests, these coins bear symbols of various types punched on pieces of silver of specific weight. The earliest Indian coins have no defined shapes and were mostly uniface. Secondly, these coins lack any inscriptions. Two well-known numismatists, D.B. Spooner and D.R. Bhandarkar, independently concluded that the punching of various symbols representing animals, hills, trees and human figures followed a definite pattern and these coins were issued by the royal authority.

Both literary and archaeological evidences confirm that the Indians invented coinage somewhere between the 5th and the 6th centuries BC. A hoard of coins

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discovered at Chaman Huzuri in 1933 contained forty-three silver punch-marked coins (the earliest coins of India) with Athenian (coins minted by Athens, a city of Greece) and Achaemenian (Persian) coins. The Bhir (Taxila) hoard discovered in 1924 contained 1055 punch-marked coins in a very worn out condition and two minted coins of Alexander. This archaeological evidence clearly indicates that the coins were minted in India long before the fourth century BC, i.e., before the Greeks advanced towards India (Alexander's invasion of Persia and India). There is also a strong belief that silver as a metal, which was not available in Vedic India, became abundantly available by 500–600 BC. Most of the silver came from Afghanistan and Persia as a result of international trade.

Social Stratification

During the Later Vedic period, the earlier distinctions in society based on varna or occupation became rigid and hereditary. A person's birth became more important than his skill or merit. Each caste had its own code of laws and marriage outside the caste was forbidden. Brahmins occupied a very high position in society as they were learned. They alone could perform the rituals and sacrifices. Only the select few amongst them could advise the king. The common people held them in high esteem.

The position of women also began to deteriorate and they were thought to be inferior to men. They were not allowed to read Vedic literature. Their main duty was to look after the house.

The family shows the increasing power of the father who could even disinherit his son. Women were generally given a lower position. Although some women theologians took part in philosophical discussions and a few queens participated in rituals, women were considered to be inferior and subordinate to men.

There is a mention of the *Ashramas* or the four stages of life—that of *brahmacharya* or bachelor student, *grihastha* or householder, *vanaprastha* or hermit and *sanyasi* or ascetic who completely renounces worldly life. Only the first three were clearly defined in the later Vedic texts; the last or the fourth stage was not well-established, though, ascetic life was not unknown.

Check Your Progress

4. What is the history of the later Vedic period based upon?
5. What changes were seen in the position of women in the later Vedic period?

3.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Agriculture and cattle rearing were the main occupations of the early Aryans.

2. The Aryans gave up their nomadic life and settled down in the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent in the form of different tribal settlements known as janas and the land where they settled was called Janapada.
3. A village or grama was the smallest unit of the jana. A grama would comprise a number of families. Each tribe had a chieftain called a rajan, whose chief function was to protect the tribe from external attacks and maintain law and order.
4. The history of the later Vedic period is based mainly on the Vedic texts, which were compiled after the age of the Rig Veda.
5. The position of women began to deteriorate in the later Vedic period and they were thought to be inferior to men. They were not allowed to read Vedic literature. Their main duty was to look after the house. Women were generally given a lower position. Although some women theologians took part in philosophical discussions and a few queens participated in rituals, women were considered to be inferior and subordinate to men.

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3.5 SUMMARY

- Vedic culture occupies the most prominent place in the Indian history. The religion, philosophy and social customs of the Hindus who constitute a majority of India have their principal source in Vedic culture.
- The Aryans first settled in the area around the seven rivers, the Indus and her tributaries known as the *Sapta Sindhu* (seven rivers), between 1500BC and 1000BC.
- The Vedas are the earliest literary records of the Aryans. Since, our main source of information about the Aryans is Vedic literature, this period is also called the Vedic Age.
- The early Vedic society consisted of four varnas—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. There was no complication in the varna system. The basis of varna was occupation rather than birth in the beginning.
- The earliest evidence of iron covering a time span of 1300–1000BC is from southern Rajasthan, marking the advent of iron. This age was associated with specific culture traits, particularly painted grey ware, black and red ware and megalithic graves.
- During the Later Vedic period, the Aryan civilization gradually extended towards the east and the south. The centre of culture shifted to Kurukshetra, and Madhyadesa. The land of the Yamuna and the Ganga came into prominence.
- The Vedic Aryans were well known for their technology related to tanning of leather, fermentation of grains and fruits, and dyed scale production of copper, iron and steel, brass, silver and gold and their alloys.

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- During the Later Vedic period most of the agricultural implements and weapons of war were made of iron. Artisans and craftsmen produced goods of fine quality. They were organized into guilds. The guilds regulated the prices. These professions became hereditary with time and constituted subcastes or *jatis*.

3.6 KEY WORDS

- **Vedas:** They refer to any of the four collections forming the earliest body of Indian scripture, consisting of the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda, which codified the ideas and practices of Vedic religion and laid down the basis of classical Hinduism.
- **Varna system:** It refers to the system of division of Indian society on the basis of occupation.
- **Janas:** They refer to different tribal settlements of the Indian subcontinent in the Vedic age.
- **Gramas:** It is a village or the smallest unit of the *jana* comprising a number of families.

3.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How was the Vedic polity structured?
2. What is the earliest source of information about the Aryans?

Long-Answer Questions

1. What were the major occupations of Aryans in the Early Vedic period?
2. Explain the political structure of the Early Vedic age.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 RISE OF NEW RELIGIONS

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Jainism
 - 4.2.1 Mahavira and his Teachings
 - 4.2.2 Contributions to Indian Culture
- 4.3 Reasons for the Rise of New Religions
- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Readings

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

The sixth century BC witnessed many religious movements in different parts of the world. Heraclitus in Eoinia Island, Zoroaster in Persia and Confucius in China preached new doctrines. In India, too, we find an upheaval of new ideas leading to the rise of new philosophical tenets and religious sects. The old Vedic religion had ceased to be a living force and there was a widespread discontent against costly religious rituals and bloody sacrifices. Hatred against the social order was prevalent, practices particularly against which led to pitiable conditions of the Shudras. The changing features of the 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 challenged the established social order, particularly the caste-system, the religious rituals and sacrifices and the supremacy of the Brahmins. New ideas were based on pure individualism and spiritualism. They emphasized on personal liberty and purity and claimed that every individual had a right to attain *Nirvana*.

There were different sects which preached perfect materialism, complete spiritualism and a life of renunciation. One among these organized sects was that of the Ajivikas which believed that every thought and deed of an individual was predetermined and no change could be possible in the scheme of things. Each member of this sect led the life of a *Sanyasin* and believed that it too was predetermined. Another sect was that of the *Charvakas* which believed in complete materialism. It believed that an individual's body is formed of matter and, finally, would end in matter. Therefore, the aim of human life is to enjoy all the material pleasures of life. These sects, however, were against the prevalent Vedic religion which mostly believed in leading a family life and performance of one's duties

according to one's *Varna*. In this unit, we will discuss one of these new ideas that began to flourish in India, that is, Jainism.

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4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life of Mahavira
- Identify the philosophical declines of Jainism
- Classify the primary reasons responsible for the rise of independent religious sects in India

4.2 JAINISM

Jain tradition speaks of twenty-four *Tirthankaras* (prophets). In the Rig Veda *mantras*, there are references to Rishabha and the first Tirthankaras as claimed by Jains. However, the first twenty-two *Tirthankaras* have no historical foundation. Only the last two, Parshva and Mahavira, are historical personages. Very little is known of Parshva's life. It is believed that he was the son of Ashvasena, king of Banaras. He 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 on Mount Sammeta in Bihar, nearly 250 years before Mahavira.

4.2.1 Mahavira and his Teachings

In fact, the real founder of Jainism was its 24th *Tirthankara*, Mahavira. His childhood name was Vardhamana. He was born in a suburb of Vaisali, called Kundagrama, in nearabout 540 BC. His father was King Siddhartha and his mother, Trishala, was the sister of Chetaka, an eminent Lichhavi prince of Vaisali. He was married to Yasoda and had a daughter called Priyadarsana. He left his family and became a monk after the death of his parents at the age of thirty. He abandoned his clothing after thirteen months and became a naked monk. After twelve years, he got enlightenment under a *sala* tree near the village Jrimbhikagrama on the bank of the river Rijupalika. Henceforth, he came to be called as Mahavira. He also became known as *Jina* (conqueror of passions) or *Nirgrantha* (free from worldly fetters). The remaining thirty years of Mahavira's life were spent in preaching his doctrines. The main areas of his activities were confined to the boundaries of Magadha, Anga, Mithila and Kosala. His followers were called *Nirgranthas* or *Jains*. He died at Pawa (Pawapuri in Nalanda district Bihar) at the age of seventy-two somewhere around 468 BC.

Main Jain Sects

Jainism has two main sects: (a) Svetambaras and (b) Digambaras. There are differences between the two sects regarding some incidents of the life of Mahavira;

the type of food taken by Jain preachers (*munis*); and the question whether women can attain *Nirvana* or not. However, the basic difference is on the use of clothes. Jainism does not concern the followers or ordinary householders but the preachers. The preachers of *Svetambara* sect wore white clothes, while those of *Digambara* sect practised complete nudity.

It is not certain as to when and why schism developed in Jainism. Certain scholars maintain that Parshva did not ask his followers to discard clothes but after him, Mahavira insisted on nudity. Therefore, the differences were there from the beginning on the teachings of Mahavira. But a majority of scholars maintain that the split took place 200 years after Mahavira's death. It is said that during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, a terrible famine broke out in Magadha which continued for twelve years. At that time, the chief of the Jain community, Bhadrabahu migrated to South India along with his many followers including Chandragupta and left Sthulabhadra as the Chief of the Jains that remained in Magadha. Sthulabhadra convened a council of Tainas at Patliputra when he felt that the sacred -scriptures of the Jains were in danger of being lost. The council arranged the first ten *Purvas* (Jains's sacred texts) in twelve *Angas* and allowed Jain preachers to wear white robes. When the followers of Bhadrabahu came back from the South, they found the Jains of Magadha wearing white robes. They protested against it. But when there was no compromise, the Jains got divided into two aforesaid sects. Afterwards, the *Digambaras* even refused to accept the twelve *Angas* (out of them, one is lost now) as authentic.

Growth of Jainism

At first, Jainism was more popular than Buddhism. During his own life time, Mahavira had made it popular in Kosala, Magadha, Anga and Mithila. Many Kshatriya kings and a few republican states supported its cause and thereby helped in its popularity. Afterwards, those Jains who settled down in different parts of India participated in its progress. By the time of the Gupta Empire, Jain religion had become popular in Orissa in the east to Gujarat in the West and also in the South as far as Kalinga and Mysore. However, in later times it maintained its strongholds in the provinces of Gujarat, Kathiawar and part of Rajasthan in the north (where *Svetambara* sect dominated) and Mysore and Hyderabad in the south (where *Digambara* sect predominated). Among the ruling dynasties which supported Jainism were mainly the Ganga and Kadamba dynasties of the south and among the important rulers who supported it were Chandragupta Maurya (who probably accepted Jainism in his later life), Kharavela of Kahnga and Kumarapala and Siddharaja of Gujarat.

Jain Doctrines and Philosophy

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

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observe four principles: (i) *Satya* (truth), (ii) *Ahimsa* (non-violence), (iii) *Aprigraha* (no possession of property), and (iv) *Asteya* (not to receive any thing which is not freely given). To these Mahavira added one more, that is the fifth principle called *Brahamacharya* (celibacy).

As regarding the philosophy, Jain philosophy shows a close affinity to Hindu *Samkhya* philosophy. It also ignores the idea of God, accepts that the world is full of sorrows and believes in the theory of *karma* faction (or deed) and the transmigration of souls.

Jain 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 Jaina philosophy can be summed up as follows: the living (soul) and the non-living (matter), by coming into contact with each other, forge certain energies which bring about birth, death and various experiences of life; this process could be stopped, and the energies already forged could be destroyed by a course of discipline leading to *nirvana* (salvation). This means the following seven things:

- (i) There is something called 'the living'
- (ii) There is something called 'the non-living'
- (iii) The two come in contact with each other
- (iv) The contact leads to the production of some energy
- (v) The process of contact could be stopped
- (vi) The existing energies could be exhausted
- (vii) Salvation could be achieved

These seven propositions are called the seven *tattvas* (truths or realities) by Jains. On the basis of these propositions, Jain philosophy states that if one desires to attain *Nirvana*, it is necessary for him to destroy *karma*. One can do so gradually if one first avoids evil *karmas*. To equip himself for such a task, the person should observe the five principles of the religion namely, *satya*, *ahimsa*, *aprigraha*, *asteya* and *brahamacharya*. There are also certain other vows of morality. Example: A householder should feed out what is cooked for himself each day if holy persons turn up at his house at the proper time. A monk has to observe certain other strict rules as well. He has to abandon all worldly possessions, has to cease living under a roof which may be called his own and has to root out every hair of his head by his own hands. He should walk only during the day taking care that he kills no being. In his talk, he must not indulge in censure of others or self-praise or talk about women. He should so train himself as not to be affected or moved by the objects of the senses. He should withdraw his senses from all objects and with meditation, concentration and reading of the life of *arhats* (monks who have succeeded in attaining salvation) prepare himself for salvation. Thus, according to Jains, *nirvana* or salvation depends on: (i) Right belief, (ii) Right knowledge

and (iii) Right action. These are called *Ratnatreya* or the three jewels of Jain religion.

Mahavira did not believe in a supreme creator or God. The highest state of a soul was regarded as God by him. According to Jainism, therefore, 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. The same way, it believes that the world has not been created, maintained or destroyed by a personal deity, but functions only according to a universal law of decay and development. The universe is eternal but is subjected to an infinite number of cycles of development and decline.

According to Jainism, full salvation is not possible for a householder. A monastic life is essential for it. Further, no lay Jain could take up the profession of agriculture since this involved not only the destruction of plant life but also of many living things under the soil. That is why the strict limitation on private property enforced by Jainism was interpreted to mean only the landed property. There remained no bar in amassing wealth by means of trade and e-commerce. The reason of it becoming popular amongst the trading community was the same. Besides, Jainism has suffered from one or more serious weaknesses. Its practice of non-violence is mostly negative. It has very little of positive virtue, that is, love. Therefore, it lays a greater emphasis on vegetarianism and precautions against the killing of insects and animals.

Causes of its Rise

Though, unlike Buddhism, Jainism never spread all over India, yet it was a popular religion at one time and still exists in India with quite a large following. Jainism was and still is a distinct religion. It has proved closer to the more popular religion in India, viz. Hinduism. It has no special social doctrines of its own. At one time, like Buddhism, it maintained a cult of stupas but this did not survive. Gradually, the Jain *Tirthankaras* were adored in temples in the form of icons, and by the Middle Ages, their worshipping practices were similar to those of the Hindus with offerings of flowers, incense, lamps, and so on. Jainism also accepted popular gods of Hinduism among the galaxy of their defined men, viz. men who had been spiritually great. It did not seriously oppose the Hindu theory of caste also. Rather, it compromised with it afterwards. Thus, Jainism proved most accommodating to Hinduism and, therefore, did not enter into a serious hostility with it. Besides, it did not prove dogmatic. According to its logic, no absolute affirmation or denial was possible. It contends that all knowledge is probable and relative. Knowledge possesses a tolerant spirit of accommodation with the other religions. These factors not only helped in its progress but are also mainly responsible for its existence in the present-day India. The other factors responsible for its rise were the personality of Mahavira, support of certain powerful rulers, closeness to the spirit of its age, simplicity, acceptance of the language of the people for its propagation, and so on.

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Causes of its Decline

Various factors contributed to the declining popularity of Jainism in India. It had to compete hard with both Hinduism and Buddhism. 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 Gupta, Chola, Chalukya and Rajput kings contributed to its decline, though it still survives in India.

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4.2.2 Contributions to Indian Culture

Jainism has helped in enriching Indian culture, particularly in the fields of literature, architecture and sculpture. Though the language of its religious texts had been *Prakrit*, it helped in giving a literary shape to some spoken languages of India. Its contribution to art reached its zenith in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Jain temples and idols still exist in various cities such as Mathura, Gwalior, Junagarh, Chittor, Abu and other places in Rajasthan, Madhya-Bharat, Bundelkhand, Mysore and Orissa. They have been accepted as some of the best specimens of Indian architecture and sculpture, particularly the temples of Abu, the Jain-tower at Chittorgarh, the elephant caves of Orissa and the 70-foot-high idol of Gomateshwara or Bahubali in Mysore.

Religious Texts of Jains

The original texts of Jains were called *Purvas* and were fourteen in number. At the beginning of the third century BC, a Jain council held at Pataliputra arranged them in twelve parts called *Angas*. In course of time, the twelfth *Anga* was lost. The remaining eleven *Angas* were rearranged by a Jain council held at Valabhi in the fifth century AD. All these were written in the Prakrit language. The validity of these *Angas* was not recognized by the Digambaras. Therefore, they constituted their own texts. Afterwards, however, the basis of all Jain religious texts remained the same old texts.

The 6th century BC was a remarkable age in the world history for the developments in the spheres of religion and philosophy. This century saw new religious teachers like Confucius in China and Zoroaster in Persia. As far as India is concerned, various religious sects arose in the middle Gangetic basin in the sixth century BC. We hear of as many as sixty-two religious sects in this period. Many of these sects were based on regional customs and rituals practised by different people living in the North-East India. Of these sects, Jainism and Buddhism were the most important, and they emerged as the most potent religious reform movements.

Check Your Progress

1. List the four principles that Parsva advised his followers to observe.
2. Mention the seven tattvas of the Jains.
3. What does Jainism have to say regarding a supreme creator or god?

4.3 REASONS FOR THE RISE OF NEW RELIGIONS

Some of the reasons for the rise of new religions in India were as follows:

Freedom of Religious Thinking

From the very beginning, there has been a freedom of religious thinking in India. This led the people to remove the evils that had crept in the prevailing religion. The sixth century BC was a period of religious unrest. During this century, the people of India were disgusted with old philosophical dogmas and were striving for simple methods of worship and easier means of escape from the ills of this mundane existence. Before this, the Upanishads had already raised their voice against complicated rites, rituals and sacrifices. In the due course, this opposition grew stronger and took the shape of a religious revolution.

Defective Caste System

The first social factor responsible for the rise of Buddhism and Jainism was the defective caste system of the times. To begin with, the caste system was not rigid. Inter-caste marriage could take place. One could change one's caste according to one's ability. But gradually this system became rigid as Brahmins proclaimed themselves to be the highest caste in the society. They considered it their right to get gifts. They were free from all kinds of taxes. Kshatriyas had the right to perform administrative duties and join the army. They earned their livelihood by receiving gifts from the people of Vaishya caste. Even the Vaishyas were accepted as upper caste in the Hindu society and were respected as such but the Shudras who served the other castes of Hindu society did not even have the right to recite Vedas. They could not enter the temples. They were considered as untouchables. Such defective system gave rise to discontent and annoyance. The people who believed in a logical argument declared this system to be defective and wanted to change it even though they themselves belonged to a high caste in Hindu society. They wanted a religion without any formal caste divisions.

Difficult Language

Most of the Hindu scriptures like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were written in Sanskrit which was beyond the comprehension of the common man. People were forced to follow Sanskrit texts while performing religious functions. They wanted their own language to be the vehicle for performing the religious rites. Hence, a revolt was simmering against the use of Sanskrit as well. People wanted a simple language to replace Sanskrit.

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Social Tension or the Reaction of Kshatriyas against the Ritualistic Domination of the Brahmins

Naturally, the varna-divided society seems to have generated tensions. We have no means to find out the reactions of the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The Kshatriyas, who acted as rulers, however, reacted strongly against the ritualistic domination of the Brahmins. They led a kind of protest movement against the importance attached to birth in the Varna system. The Kshatriya reaction against the domination of the priestly class called Brahmins, who claimed various privileges, was one of the causes of the origin of new religions. Vardhamana Mahavira, who founded Jainism, and Gautama Buddha, who founded Buddhism, belonged to the Kshatriya clan and both disputed the authority of the Brahmins.

Introduction of New Agricultural Economy

The real cause of the rise of these new religions lay in the introduction of a new agricultural economy in North-Eastern India. North-East India including the regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern and southern Bihar, has about 100 cm of annual average rainfall. Before these areas came to be colonized on a large scale, they were thickly forested. The thick jungles could not be cleared without the aid of iron axes. Although some people lived in this area before 600 BC, they used implements of stone and copper and led a precarious life on river banks and confluences, where land was opened to settlement through the process of erosion and flooding. In the middle Gangetic basin, large scale habitations began from about 600 BC when iron came to be used in this area. On account of the moist nature of the soil in this area, too many iron tools of earliest times have not survived, but quite a few axes have been recovered from the layers belonging to circa 600–500 BC. The use of iron tools made agriculture and large settlements possible. The agricultural economy based on the iron ploughshare required the use of bullocks, and it could not flourish without animal husbandry. But the Vedic practice of killing cattle indiscriminately in sacrifices stood in the way of the progress of new agriculture. The cattle wealth slowly decimated because the cows and bullocks were killed in numerous Vedic sacrifices. The tribal people living on the southern and eastern fringes of Magadha also killed cattle for food. But if the new agrarian economy had to be stable, this killing was to be stopped.

Prosperity of Vaishyas

During the later Vedic period, new and big towns were founded. Artisans and traders settled in towns like Koshambi, Kushinagar, Varanasi, Vaishali, Rajgir, etc. Use of coins in cities also encouraged the growth of trade. Thus, the economic condition of Vaishyas improved greatly and they wanted to change the position of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas in the society. In the Aryan caste hierarchy, the Vaishyas occupied the third position. To raise their position, they began to take the help of other sects. They gave liberal donations to Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, and Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.

Opposition to Private Property

Initially, in the Aryan society, wealth belonged to entire tribe but later on people came to possess various kinds of private property. This led to economic inequality in the society which led to public discontentment. Many people were against the use of gold and silver coins and their hoardings, as also the big cities and their pomp and show. They wanted simplicity. The principles of Buddhism and Jainism suited their disposition.

Degradation of Vedic Religion

The religion of the early Vedic people was quite simple. They were nature worshippers and as such their religion was free from unnecessary rites, rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices. But in the later Vedic period, this simple religion lost its originality. Truth and high ideals gave way to a stray and stilted religion. It failed to satisfy the needs of the masses. The people were, therefore, looking for a new but simple religion.

Burden of Ritualism

By the sixth century BC, the Vedic religious rites and ceremonies were made so elaborate and expensive that they were no longer within the reach of the average man. People, therefore, groaned under the heavy burden of ceremonial rituals. Consequently, they began to condemn rituals from a rational point of view and preferred ethical life to the performance of various rites.

Ethical Degradation of Brahmins

Degradation of Brahmins was one of the main causes of religious revolution. Leaving the virtues of learning, good conduct and a life of high character, they lost themselves in the marshes of the worldly and earthly objects. This is why they have been called strays in the Jain and Buddhist books. Brahmins started leading a life of comfort and luxury.

Efforts of the Intellectuals

Any sensible man was bound to revolt against the narrow class distinctions, class hatredness, ritualism and expensive sacrifices. Vardhmana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha were two great teachers who went up and down the country and put before the people two such sects that were devoid of all that was useless in the Hindu religion and were easy to understand and easy to follow.

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Check Your Progress

4. List the first social factor responsible for the rise of Buddhism and Jainism.
5. Give two examples of how Kshatriya clan disputed the authority of Brahmins.

4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Parsva emphasized self-control and penance and advised his followers to observe four principles: (i) *Satya* (truth), (ii) *Ahimsa* (non-violence), (iii) *Aprigraha* (no possession of property), and (iv) *Asteya* (not to receive anything which is not freely given).
2. The seven propositions or the seven tattvas (truths or realities) of the Jains are:
 - (i) There is something called ‘the living’
 - (ii) There is something called ‘the non-living’
 - (iii) The two come in contact with each other
 - (iv) The contact leads to the production of some energy
 - (v) The process of contact could be stopped
 - (vi) The existing energies could be exhausted
 - (vii) Salvation could be achieved
3. Mahavira did not believe in a supreme creator or God. The highest state of a soul was regarded as God by him. According to Jainism, therefore, 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.
4. The first social factor responsible for the rise of Buddhism and Jainism was the defective caste system of the times.
5. Examples of Kshatriya Clan disputing the authority of the Brahmins are Vardhamana Mahavira, who founded Jainism, and Gautama Buddha, who founded Buddhism.

4.5 SUMMARY

- The sixth century BC was characterized by mass reforms in the area of religion and saw the rise of various religious movements. The primary cause behind this was the disappointment faced by the masses with the traditional Varna system prescribed by the Vedic religions.
- The Brahminical system was becoming selfish and exploitative and believed in strict class and caste boundaries. Many lower classes and women faced bias and partiality.

- Jainism and Buddhism emerged as alternatives to the above mentioned system.
- The real founder of Jainism was its 24th Tirthankara, Mahavira. His childhood name was Vardhamana. He was born in a suburb of Vaisali, called Kundagrama, in nearabout 540 BC.
- The principal sects of Jainism are two: (a) *Svetambaras* and (b) *Digambaras*. The preachers of *Svetambara* sect wore white clothes while the preachers of *Digambara* sect practise complete nudity.
- 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.
- Mahavira did not believe in a supreme creator or God. The highest state of a soul was regarded as God by him.
- Jainism has helped in enriching Indian culture, particularly in the fields of literature, architecture and sculpture.
- From the very beginning, there has been a freedom of religious thinking in India. This led the people to remove the evils that had crept in the prevailing religion.
- The real cause of the rise of these new religions lay in the introduction of a new agricultural economy in North-Eastern India.
- Degradation of Brahmins was one of the main causes of religious revolution. Leaving the virtues of learning, good conduct and a life of high character, they lost themselves in the marshes of the worldly and earthly objects.

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4.6 KEY WORDS

- **Samkhya:** It is the philosophy which ignores the idea of god and believes in Karma
- **Ratnatreya:** It refers to the three jewels of Jain religion viz. right belief, right knowledge and right action.
- **Parvar:** It refers to the original Jain texts.
- **Svetambaras:** It refers to a major Jain sect whose members clothe themselves and their sacred images in white and in contrast to the Digambaras assert that women can attain salvation.
- **Digambaras:** It refers to one of the two principal sects of the Indian religion Jainism, whose male ascetics shun all property and wear no clothes.

4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. Differentiate between the two sects of Jainism.
2. Discuss the causes behind the rise and fall of Jainism.
3. What were the major contributions of Jainism to Indian culture?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write an essay on the philosophy of Jainism.
2. What was the contribution of Mahavira to Jainism?
3. Examine the reasons for the rise of new religions in India in the sixth century BC.

4.8 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - II
ORIGIN OF INDIAN RELIGION

*Buddha and His
Teachings*

**UNIT 5 BUDDHA AND HIS
TEACHINGS**

NOTES

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture
 - 5.2.1 Teachings of Buddha
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 - 5.2.3 Teachings of Buddha and Indian Society
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5.0 INTRODUCTION

India is the origin of many world religions including Buddhism. Buddha's entire events of life took place in India. The advent of Buddha Shakyamuni in 6th century BC brought a radical reformation in the culture of philosophy and spirituality in India. His teachings of Karuna, compassion; and Maitri, loving kindness, gave an equal perspective towards all sentient beings including human beings within which no classes are allowed. With the philosophy of dependent origination and the practice of non-violence rooted in love and compassion, Buddhism made immense contribution to the culture of peace. This unit deals with Buddha and his teachings and the contribution made by Buddhism to Indian culture.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the life and teachings of Buddha
- Explain the contribution made by Buddhism to Indian culture

- Analyse the causes of the rise and fall of Buddhism in India
- Assess the inherent defects in Buddhism

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5.2 CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

Gautama Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His childhood name was Sidhartha. He was the son of the Shakya King Shuddhodan of Kapilvastu (Nepal). He was born in 563 BC in Lumbini forest at a time when his mother was passing from there on the way to her parents' house. His mother died within a week of his birth. Like Mahavira, Buddha was also associated with a respectable family. At the time of his birth, a priest had foretold that he would be fond of meditation and would be more inclined towards penance. The priest also predicted that he would either be a great king or a great sage. From his early childhood, he was not at all interested in sports and other recreations. Gautama's father was scared of his turning into a *sanyasi*. So he tried to tie him up in married life. Gautama was married to Yashodhara. But he did not take interest in married life as he used to feel a great sorrow upon seeing the miseries of this world and was always thinking of the way and means to get rid of them.

At the age of twenty-nine, he left his house one night. He led a wandering life for about seven years. First, he became the disciple of a sage and then he himself started to do penance. He got some mental comfort through penance but his aim was to attain knowledge. At last, at the age of thirty-six years, when he was performing meditation sitting under a *pipal* tree in Bodh Gaya, he attained real knowledge. Since then he came to be called 'the Buddha'. Gautama Buddha gave his first sermon at Sarnath. For more than forty years, he continuously preached *Dharma*. His followers included men, women, poor, rich and people of all classes. This great sage died in Kushinagar at the age of eighty years in 483 BC.

5.2.1 Teachings of Buddha

The teachings of Buddha are as follows:

- Four Great Truths:** Buddha preached four great teachings which became famous as the Four Great Truths. He said that: (i) the world was full of misery, (ii) there were causes for misery, (iii) one can attain freedom from this misery and (iv) suppression of one's desire alone can end the misery, i.e., if one can conquer one's desires he can attain *Nirvana* or freedom from the constant cycle of birth and death. For controlling one's desire, he preached the Middle Path.
- Middle Path or Madhyam Marg:** Gautama Buddha exhorted his followers to follow the Middle Path. He compared life to the strings of 'Vina'. He stated that if the strings of the Vina are pulled very hard, there is a danger of

their breaking, and if they are left very loose, they will not produce sweet sound. Similarly, if one leads a life of too severe penance, he would not survive and if one leads a life of luxury, he will not attain *Nirvana*. Therefore, one should follow the middle path in life.

- (iii) **The eight-fold path:** Gautama Buddha asked his followers to follow the eightfold path, viz., right view, right aspirations, right speech, right action right living, right disposition, right memory and right meditation. The eight-fold path leads to the attainment of *Nirvana*.
- (iv) **Nirvana:** According to Buddha, *Nirvana* was the goal of life. *Nirvana* means freedom from the cycle of birth and death. One can attain *Nirvana* only when his desires are in control and desires can be controlled only by following the eight-fold path. *Nirvana* can be attained by people of all castes and classes. It is related to one's action or *karma*.
- (v) **Doctrine of reward and retribution for action:** Buddha believed in the doctrine of *karma*. Whatever we are experiencing in our present life is a consequence of our past deeds and whatever actions we do in this birth will determine our fate in the next birth. This doctrine is propounded in the great work of Hinduism, viz., the *Bhagvad Gita* and Jainism also accepts it.
- (vi) **Ahimsa:** Like Jainism, Buddhism also believed in the doctrine of *Ahimsa*, which means abstaining from giving trouble to any living being. One should love all the living beings. Buddhism was opposed to the practice of offering sacrifices.
- (vii) **Silence on the existence of God:** Buddha did not enter into the controversy about the existence of soul and God. He did not believe in the physical existence of God. He considered that the cycle of life moved according to the natural laws. He also did not preach the worship of many gods. This doctrine is common to Buddhism and Jainism. He confined his teachings to the solution of worldly miseries and restricted himself to following only the first five paths.
- (viii) **Code of Behaviour or Ten Commandments:** Buddha enumerated ten rules for his followers. For a monk, it was compulsory to observe all the ten rules, whereas a layman could restrict himself to following only the first five rules. His ten rules were as follows:
 - (a) Absention from snatching other's wealth
 - (b) Absention from violence
 - (c) Absention from drunkenness
 - (d) Not to tell lies
 - (e) Absention from mean behaviour
 - (f) Not participating in dancing and singing
 - (g) Not having food at-odd times

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- (h) Absention from using soft beds
- (i) Not using incense or flower wreaths
- (j) Renouncing gold and women

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These rules of conduct are generally similar in all the religions. Buddhism was not an entirely new religion; it may be considered a way of life for practising a moral code. Buddha did not discuss the nature God or the soul, nor he deemed or doubted their existence. He denied the authority of the Vedas and condemned blood sacrifices. However he never interfered with the current beliefs and practices of the Hindus.

5.2.2 Social Background or Causes of Origin of Buddhism

In post-Vedic times, Indian society was clearly divided into four *varnas*: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Each Varna was assigned well-defined functions, although it was emphasized that varna was based on birth and the two higher varnas were given some privileges. The Brahmins, who were given 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. In the post-Vedic texts, we have several instances of such privileges enjoyed by them. The Kshatriyas ranked second in the *varna* hierarchy. They fought and governed and lived on the taxes collected from the peasants. The Vaishyas were engaged in agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade. They appear as principal tax payers. However, along with the two higher *varnas* (i.e., Brahmins and Kshatriyas), they were placed in the category of *dvija* (the twice born). A *dvija* was entitled to wear the sacred thread (*janehu*) and study the Vedas from which the Sudras were kept out. The Sudras were meant for serving the three higher varnas and along with them, women were also barred from taking up Vedic studies. They appeared as domestic slaves, agricultural slaves, craftsmen and hired laborers in Post-Vedic times. They were called cruel, greedy and thieving in habits and some of them were treated as untouchables. In brief, in Indian society we can say that before Buddhism, there were very wrong social notions and set up. The higher the varna, the more severe was the punishment prescribed for him. Naturally, the varna-divided society seemed to have generated tensions. We have no source to find out the reactions of the Vaishyas and the Sudras. The Kshatriya who acted as rulers, however, reacted strongly against the ritualistic domination of the Brahmins, and seemed to have led a kind of protest movement against the importance attached to birth in the varna system. The Kshatriya reaction against the dominations of the priestly class called Brahmins who claimed various privileges was one of the causes of the origin of Buddhism. Gautama Buddha who founded Buddhism belonged to the Kshatriya clan. He disputed the authority of the Brahmins.

5.2.3 Teachings of Buddha and Indian Society

Gautama Buddha took his message far and wide. He kept on wandering, preaching and meditating continuously for fourty years, resting only in the rainy season every

year. During this long period, he encountered many staunch supporters of rival sects including the Brahmins but defeated them in debates. His missionary activities did not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the high and the low and men and women.

The Buddha proved to be a practical reformer who took note of the realities of the day. He did not involve himself in fruitless controversies regarding the soul (*atman*) and *Brahma* which raged strongly in his time. Buddha laid down a code of social conduct for his followers. The main items in this social conduct were:

- (i) Do not covet the property of others
- (ii) Do not commit violence
- (iii) Do not use intoxicants
- (iv) Do not tell a lie
- (v) Do not indulge in corrupt practices

These teachings are common to the social conduct ordained by almost all the religions.

Check Your Progress

1. How did Buddhism make immense contribution to the culture of peace?
2. State the similarity between Mahavira and Buddha.
3. What does the eight-fold path lead to?
4. What were the main items in the social conduct laid down by Buddha for his followers?

5.3 SOCIAL CAUSES OF THE RISE AND FALL OF BUDDHISM

Since early times, Buddhism was not enmeshed in the clap-trap of philosophical discussions, which appealed to the common people. It particularly won the support of the lower orders as it attacked the *varna* system. People were taken into Buddhist order without any consideration of caste. Women were also admitted to the *sangha* and thus were brought at par with men. The use of Pali, the language of the people, also contributed to the spread of Buddhism. Buddha also organized the *sangha* or the religious order, whose doors were kept open to everybody, irrespective of caste and sex.

By the twelfth century AD, Buddhism became practically extinct in India. What were the social causes behind it? We find that in the beginning, every religion inspires the spirit of reform but eventually it succumbs to rituals and ceremonies it originally denounced. Buddhism underwent a similar metamorphosis. It became victim to the evils of Brahmanism against which it had fought in the beginning.

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To meet the Buddhist challenge, the Brahmins reformed their religion. They assured women and Sudras of admission to heaven. Buddhism, on the other hand, changed for the worse. Gradually, the Buddhist monks were cut off from the mainstream of people's life; they gave up Pali, the language of the common people and took to Sanskrit, the language of intellectuals. By the seventh century AD, the Buddhist monasteries had come to be dominated by ease-loving people and became centres of corrupt practices which Gautama Buddha had strictly prohibited. The new form of Buddhism was known as *Vajrayana*. The enormous wealth of the monasteries with women living in them led to further degeneration; Buddhists came to look upon women as objects of lust.

5.3.1 Effects and Contribution of Buddhism in the Field of Social Reconstruction

Buddhism made an important impact on society by keeping its doors open to women and Sudras. Since both women and Sudras were placed in the same category by Brahmanism, they were neither given sacred thread nor allowed to read the Vedas. Their conversion to Buddhism freed them from such mark of inferiority.

With its emphasis on non-violence and the sanctity of animal life, Buddhism boosted peace in the society. Buddhism created and developed a new awareness in the field of intellect and culture. It taught people not to take things for granted but to argue and judge them on merits. To a certain extent, the place of superstition was taken by logic. This promoted rationalism among people. In order to preach the doctrines of the new religion, Buddhism compiled a new style of literature. They enormously enriched Pali by their writings. The Buddhist monasteries developed as great centres of learning, and can be called residential universities. Mention may be made of Nalanda and Vikramasila in Bihar and Valabhi in Gujarat.

5.3.2 Causes of the Decline of Buddhism

By the twelfth century AD, Buddhism became practically extinct in India. It continued to exist in a changed form in Bengal and Bihar till the twelfth century, but after that this religion almost completely vanished from the country. What were its causes? We find the following causes of the decline of Buddhism:

Reforms in Hindu religion

The people left Brahmanism and accepted Buddhism not because they had lost faith in the basic principles of Brahmanism but because they condemned outward rituals and ceremonies. To meet the Buddhist challenge, the Brahmanas reformed their religion. They stressed the need for preserving the cattle wealth and assured women and Sudras of admission to heaven. Efforts were made to revive Hinduism during the Sunga, Kanva and Gupta periods. The Brahmanas gained considerable importance in the courts of Gupta sovereigns. The Guptas patronized the

Brahmanas and their language, Sanskrit. Brahmanism now regained its old enthusiasm. The Brahmin thinkers also demonstrated the superiority of Hinduism only. As a result, Buddhism lost its hold over the masses.

The Inherent Defects of Buddhism

As Buddhism gained popularity, the Buddhist monks were cut off from the mainstream of people's life and gave up Pali, the language of the common people, and took to Sanskrit, the language of the intellectuals. From the first century AD, they started practising idol worship on a large scale and received numerous offerings from devotees. The rich offerings supplemented by generous royal grants to the Buddhists monasteries made the life of monks easy. Some of the monasteries, such as Nalanda, collected revenue from as many as 200 villages. By the seventh century AD, the Buddhist monasteries had come to be dominated by ease-loving people and became centres of corrupt practices which Gautama Buddha had strictly prohibited. The new form of Buddhism was known as *Vajrayana*. The Buddha is reported to have said to his favourite disciple Ananda: 'If women were not admitted into the monasteries, Buddhism would have continued for thousands of years. But, because this admission has been granted, it would last only five hundred years.'

Some other causes of the decline of Buddhism:

- (i) **Opposition of Rajput princes:** From eighth to eleventh centuries, Northern India was ruled by the Rajput princes. They were a warrior caste and took pleasure in hunting and fighting. They did not take favourably to the Buddhist emphasis on *Ahimsa* or non-violence. Thus, Buddhist influence in North India was practically over. In the South, Hinduism had already gained sufficient popularity.
- (ii) **No royal support:** Buddhism failed to gain royal support after the death of Harsha. It had already suffered reverses during the Gupta period. State patronage was withdrawn from Buddhism. Many Buddhist monks and followers thus lost their support. They migrated to other frontier countries of India like Nepal, Tibet, etc. Consequently, its downfall was hastened.
- (iii) **Division of Buddhism:** After the death of Buddha, the differences that arose among Buddhists could not be resolved and removed. In the Buddhist councils, those differences halted the further progress of Buddhism.
- (iv) **The Huna Invasions:** The Huna invasions did more harm to Buddhism than any other cause. These people were very cruel and they destroyed the Buddhist *viharas* and temples very cruelly and violently. The Huna king, Mahar-i-Ghul, slaughtered the Buddhist *Bhikshus* in thousands. In this way, Buddhism vanished from Punjab, Rajputana and North-West Frontier Province.

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- (v) **Turkish invaders:** Buddhist monasteries, etc. were endowed with unlimited wealth and land by various kings. They accumulated vast wealth. For their riches, the monasteries came to be coveted by the Turkish invaders. They became special target of the invaders' greed. The Turks killed a large number of Buddhist monks in Nalanda, although some of the monks managed to escape to Nepal and Tibet. In any case, by the twelfth century AD, Buddhism had practically disappeared from the land of its birth.
- (vi) **Weakness of Buddhist sanghas:** The weakness of the Buddhist *sanghas* became responsible for the decline of Buddhism. With the passage of time, unworthy people began to enter the *sanghas*. They could not follow the rigid principles of the *sangha*. People got disenchanted with this religion.
- (vii) **Worship of Buddha's statues and relics:** Buddha had preached against idol worship and had strongly condemned it. But the followers of the Mahayana sect of Buddhism began to worship Buddha as a God. Temples were built where Buddha's image and his relics were worshipped. People thought that if Buddha was good, how he could differ from the Hindu gods. Moreover, the Hindus too had accepted Buddha as one of the gods. So, there was now a little difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. As such, Buddhism gradually got merged in Hinduism and after sometime, it became extinct in the land of its own birth.
- (viii) **Rise of opponent sects:** In the beginning, there existed no opponent sects of Buddhism and Hinduism. But later on Vaishnavism, Saivism and certain other sects developed and they vehemently opposed Buddhism and so its downfall was hastened.
- (ix) **Tantrik form of Buddhism:** Besides the division of Buddhism into Hinayana and Mahayana, its tantric form 'Vajrayana' had also become prevalent, encouraging magic spells, mantras, etc. The life led by the followers of 'Vajrayana' was unbearable to all intellectuals. Thus, people lost faith in Buddhism.

Check Your Progress

5. State the main reason for the decline of Buddhism in India.
6. Name some Buddhist monasteries that developed as great centres of learning.
7. What was the new form of Buddhism known as?

5.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. With the philosophy of dependent origination and the practice of non-violence rooted in love and compassion, Buddhism made immense contribution to the culture of peace.
2. Like Mahavira, Buddha was also associated with a respectable family.
3. The eight-fold path leads to the attainment of *Nirvana*.
4. The main items in this social conduct laid down by Buddha were: (i) Do not covet the property of others, (ii) Do not commit violence, (iii) Do not use intoxicants, (iv) Do not tell a lie, (v) Do not indulge in corrupt practices.
5. The main reason for the decline of Buddhism in India was that it became victim to the evils of Brahmanism against which it had fought in the beginning.
6. Some Buddhist monasteries that developed as great centres of learning, and can be called residential universities. Nalanda and Vikramasila in Bihar and Valabhi in Gujarat.
7. The new form of Buddhism was known as *Vajrayana*.

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5.5 SUMMARY

- India is the origin of many world religions including Buddhism. Buddha's entire events of life took place in India. The advent of Buddha Shakyamuni in 6th century BC brought a radical reformation in the culture of philosophy and spirituality in India.
- With the philosophy of dependent origination and the practice of non-violence rooted in love and compassion, Buddhism made immense contribution to the culture of peace.
- Gautama Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His childhood name was Sidhartha. He was the son of the Shakya King Shuddhodan of Kapilvastu (Nepal). He was born in 563 BC in Lumbini forest at a time when his mother was passing from there on the way to her parents' house.
- At the age of twenty-nine, he left his house one night. He led a wandering life for about seven years. First, he became the disciple of a sage and then he himself started to do penance. He got some mental comfort through penance but his aim was to attain knowledge.
- Buddha preached four great teachings which became famous as the Four Great Truths. He said that: (i) the world was full of misery, (ii) there were causes for misery, (iii) one can attain freedom from this misery and (iv) suppression of one's desire alone can end the misery.

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- Gautama Buddha exhorted his followers to follow the Middle Path. He compared life to the strings of 'Vina'.
- Gautama Buddha asked his followers to follow the eightfold path, viz., right view, right aspirations, right speech, right action right living, right disposition, right memory and right meditation. The eight-fold path leads to the attainment of Nirvana.
- Like Jainism, Buddhism also believed in the doctrine of Ahimsa, which means abstaining from giving trouble to any living being. One should love all the living beings. Buddhism was opposed to the practice of offering sacrifices.
- In post-Vedic times, Indian society was clearly divided into four varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Each Varna was assigned well-defined functions, although it was emphasized that varna was based on birth and the two higher varnas were given some privileges.
- Gautama Buddha who founded Buddhism belonged to the Kshatriya clan. He disputed the authority of the Brahmins.
- Gautama Buddha took his message far and wide. He kept on wandering, preaching and meditating continuously for forty years, resting only in the rainy season every year. During this long period, he encountered many staunch supporters of rival sects including the Brahmins but defeated them in debates.
- Since early times, Buddhism was not enmeshed in the clap-trap of philosophical discussions, which appealed to the common people. It particularly won the support of the lower orders as it attacked the varna system. People were taken into Buddhist order without any consideration of caste.
- By the twelfth century AD, Buddhism became practically extinct in India. We find that in the beginning, every religion inspires the spirit of reform but eventually it succumbs to rituals and ceremonies it originally denounced. Buddhism underwent a similar metamorphosis. It became victim to the evils of Brahmanism against which it had fought in the beginning.
- Buddhism made an important impact on society by keeping its doors open to women and Sudras. Since both women and Sudras were placed in the same category by Brahmanism, they were neither given sacred thread nor allowed to read the Vedas. Their conversion to Buddhism freed them from such mark of inferiority.
- The Buddhist monasteries developed as great centres of learning, and can be called residential universities. Mention may be made of Nalanda and Vikramasila in Bihar and Valabhi in Gujarat.
- The people left Brahmanism and accepted Buddhism not because they had lost faith in the basic principles of Brahmanism but because they condemned outward rituals and ceremonies. To meet the Buddhist challenge, the

Brahmanas reformed their religion. They stressed the need for preserving the cattle wealth and assured women and Sudras of admission to heaven.

- As Buddhism gained popularity, the Buddhist monks were cut off from the mainstream of people's life and gave up Pali, the language of the common people, and took to Sanskrit, the language of the intellectuals. From the first century AD, they started practising idol worship on a large scale and received numerous offerings from devotees.
- After the death of Buddha, the differences that arose among Buddhists could not be resolved and removed. In the Buddhist councils, those differences halted the further progress of Buddhism.
- The weakness of the Buddhist sanghas became responsible for the decline of Buddhism. With the passage of time, unworthy people began to enter the sanghas. They could not follow the rigid principles of the sangha. People got disenchanted with this religion.
- Besides the division of Buddhism into Hinayana and Mahayana, its tantric form 'Vajrayana' had also become prevalent, encouraging magic spells, mantras, etc. The life led by the followers of 'Vajrayana' was unbearable to all intellectuals. Thus, people lost faith in Buddhism.

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5.6 KEY WORDS

- **Shakyamuni:** It is an honorific of the historical *Buddha*, meaning 'Sage of the Shakyans', the Shakyans being the tribal republic where the *Buddha*-to-be was born.
- **Nirvana:** It means freedom from the cycle of birth and death.
- **Buddhist sanghas:** Those who followed the *Buddha* came to be called the *Sangha*—the community of monks (bhikshus) and nuns (bhikshunis).

5.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the Four Great Truths in Buddhism?
2. List the Ten Commandments of Buddha.
3. State the causes of the origin of Buddhism.
4. Write a short note on the effects and contribution of Buddhism in the field of social reconstruction.
5. What was the Huna invasion?

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Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the life and teachings of Buddha.
2. What was the contribution made by Buddhism to Indian culture? Discuss.
3. Critically analyse the causes of the rise and fall of Buddhism in India.
4. What were the inherent defects in Buddhism?

5.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 6 PERSIAN AND GREEK INVASIONS

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Structure

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- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Impact of Persian Invasions
 - 6.2.1 Achaemenian/Persian Rulers
 - 6.2.2 Effects of Persian/Achaemenian Invasions
- 6.3 Macedonian and Greek Invasions and their Impacts
 - 6.3.1 Alexander the Great's India Campaign
 - 6.3.2 Greek Influences on Indian History
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

6.0 INTRODUCTION

After the Aryan invasion in India, the most important invasion was made by the Persians around 500 BC when kings Darius and Cyrus conquered the Indus Valley Civilization. The fertile lands of India have always been an attraction for rulers in the West. As dynasties ruling the middle and lower Ganga basins and the north-western regions of India fought among themselves, they fell victim to the invasions from the West, first by the Persians and then by the Greeks. The Persian influence paved the way for Alexander to conquer India. Alexander, son of King Philip II of Macedonia, defeated the Achaemenian Empire in 326 BC. Alexander's invasion brought about changes in the culture of India and spread the Greek culture as well as Buddhism at the same time which led to the development of Greco-Buddhism hybrid culture in parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This unit will describe the Persian and Greek invasions in India and its impact on the Indian culture. It will also describe the influence of Alexander on India and its culture.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Assess the Achaemenian invasions in north-west India
- Describe the course of Alexander the Great's India campaign and interpret why it could not provide a lasting empire

- Discuss the influences of the Persian and Macedonian invasions on Indian politics, economy and culture

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6.2 IMPACT OF PERSIAN INVASIONS

Historian R. K. Mukherjee, the writer of *The Economic History of India*, said, ‘While the interior of India had been undergoing a process of political unification under Magadha, her undefended and insecure frontiers on the north-west invited foreign invasions. The first of these was the Persian invasion.’

Persians and Indians share the same roots, but how close they were to each other politically can never be corroborated very definitely. From the sixth century BC onward, however, we tread upon more solid ground. From classical sources we learn that the Medo-Persian kingdom, which was supreme in Western Asia during that century, came into contact with India through the eastern campaigns of its emperor Cyrus.

6.2.1 Achaemenian/Persian Rulers

The Achaemenian dynasty was a royal family that ruled over Persia, beginning with Cyrus the Great. The dynasty was named after Achaemenes who lived sometime during the 7th century BC.

Cyrus the Great (558–530BC)

India in the latter half of the sixth century BC was divided into a number of petty principalities, with no great power to curb their mutual strife and jealousies. This provided a strong tempting ground to the Achaemenian monarchy, which had risen in Persia about this time under the leadership of Cyrus.

During his reign, Cyrus invaded India through Gedrosia. However, according to Strabo, a Greek historian and philosopher, he retreated with seven men but was crowned with success in the valley of Kabul. According to the other Greek historians, such as Herodotus, Tacitus and Xenophon, in his early campaigns, Cyrus conquered Transiana, Sattagydia and Gandaritis. These provinces were situated on the Indo-Iranian borders. Cyrus died of a wound inflicted by an Indian in a battle which ‘the Indians were fighting on the side of Derbikes whom they supplied with elephants. These Derbikes might have been a frontier tribe. According to Xenophon, Cyrus brought the Bactrians under his rule and exacted tribute from certain kings on the border areas.

Greek writers who were contemporaries of Alexander did not ascribe to the view that Cyrus conquered any portion of India. According to Nearchus, an officer in the army of Alexander the Great, ‘Cyrus came to grief in trying to invade India through the inhospitable desert of Gedrosia where the greater part of his army died.’ According to Megasthenes (a Greek ethnographer in the Hellenistic

period), ‘Indians had never engaged in foreign warfare, nor had they ever been invaded and conquered by a foreign power, except by Heracles, Dionysus, and lately by the Macedonians’. He also mentioned Semiramis, an Assyrian queen who planned an invasion of India but died before giving a practical shape to her plan. Arrian, another Greek historian, also agrees with Megasthenes and states that, no foreign ruler prior to Alexander had invaded India. Both Nearchus and Megasthenes agree that Cyrus never reached India. But these Greek writers regard the Indus (Sindhu) to be the western limit of India and possibly Cyrus’s conquests were confined to the west of the Indus.

Cyrus probably conquered Kapisa in the Ghorband valley. Arrian supports this view. He says, ‘Indians between the Indus and Kabul were in the ancient times subject to the Assyrians, the Medes, and, finally to the Persians under Cyrus to whom they pay tribute he imposed upon them’. Edward Meyer, a German scholar of the ancient history, concludes, ‘Cyrus appears to have subjugated the Indian tribes of the Hindukush and in the Kabul valley, especially the Gandarians; Darius himself advanced as far as the Indus.’

Death of Cyrus

Cyrus died in 530 BC and was succeeded by Cambyses, who ruled for eight years. He could not lead an expedition to India as he was occupied with the internal troubles in his empire.

Darius I (522–486 BC)

Darius was the third monarch of Achaemenian dynasty. He ruled for 36 years. The inscriptions of his reign themselves speak of his campaigns and achievements. These inscriptions include the following:

- *Behistun* inscription 520–518 BC
- *Persepolis* inscription 518–515 BC
- *Naksh-i-Rustam* inscription 515 BC

The *Behistun* inscription (Figure 6.1) gives a list of twenty three provinces that comprise his empire. On the basis of this inscription, it can be said that no part of India was conquered by him yet. But, *Persepolis* and *Naksh-i-Rustam* refer to northern Punjab as forming part of his empire. So, Darius must have conquered northern Punjab around 518 BC.

Darius’ Hamadan gold and silver tablet inscription mentions Sindh as a province of his empire. These inscriptions do not clearly indicate whether Darius inherited these provinces from Cyrus or he himself pushed his Indian conquest further into the region. It appears that he inherited Gandhara as it was conquered by Cyrus. Thus, the Persian Empire was further extended by Darius in the Sindh region.

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Fig. 6.1 *The Behistun Inscription of Darius I*

India formed the twentieth satrap of the Persian Empire, to which it contributed one-third of the total revenue. A naval expedition was also ordered by Darius in 518 BC under Scylax to explore the Indus River. Scylax sailed down the Indus and in the due course of his voyage collected a good deal of information that was afterwards utilized by Darius I.

Persian Empire

On the basis of the inscriptions, R. K. Mukherjee established the extent of the Persian Empire in India as follows:

- Yauna-Yavana-Ionia
- Parthava-Parthia
- Zaranka-Zranka-Ddrangiana
- Haraiva (Sarayu)-Aria-Herat
- Bakhtrish-Bactria, Balkh
- Suguda-Sogdiana
- Saka-Sakasthana-Seistan
- Phatagush-Satagu-Sattagydia
- Harauvatish-Sarasvati-Arachosia-Kandhar
- Maka-Makran

Darius I died in 468 BC and was succeeded by his son Xerxes who ruled up to 465 BC.

Xerxes (468–465 BC)

Xerxes continued ruling over the Indian provinces that he inherited from Darius I. He is said to have recruited an army of the Indian soldiers who fought for him in Greece. Herodotus gives the following account of these Indian soldiers:

The Indians, clad in garment made of cotton, carried bows of cane and arrows of cane, the latter tipped with iron; and thus the Indians were marshalled under the command of Pharnazathres, son of Artabates. Besides the infantry, India also supplied Xerxes with cavalry and chariots, riding horses, and also horses and wild asses to draw the chariots, together with a very large number of dogs.

It may be noted that these Indian troops who fought for the first time in Europe had to experience a terrible ordeal in storming the bloody defiles of Thermopylae. The heroism they displayed on this occasion created a further demand for their service. The result was that after the retreat of Xerxes from Europe, Indian soldiers took part in the Boeotian campaign under the Persian Commander Mardonius.

The Persians continued enjoying a hold over India up to 330 BC. The last Archaemenian emperor Darius III demanded Indian troops to resist Alexander's invasion. According to Arrian, one contingent of Indian soldiers fought at Gaugamela under the satrap of Bactria, along with the Bactrians and Sogdians while another fought under the satrap of Archosia.

6.2.2 Effects of Persian/Achaemenian Invasions

Indo-Aryans and Persians share the same roots. There was great similarity in their languages, traditions, religious faiths, rites and rituals. Even later, political, commercial and cultural relations continued existing between the two nations. The Kharoshti script, used in north-west India during the time of Ashoka, is most likely a result of Persian legacy. The Persian architecture also greatly influenced the Indian architecture. It could be said that Persian influence continued for about a period of two or three centuries. The inscriptions of Ashoka are a testimony to this fact.

It was only at the time of Alexander's invasion that various independent monarchical and non-monarchical states had come into existence in north-west India. It may be presumed that by then, the Persians did not control any part of India.

The Persian invasions left a deep impression upon the politics and cultural life of India. Some scholars believe it was the Persians who introduced the concept of an empire in India. It is also believed that Indians learnt courtly customs and etiquettes from the Persians. The following were the major effects of the Persian invasions.

- Commercial relations between the two countries received an impetus and both countries prospered.

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- The Persian invasions exposed the political weakness of north-western India and as a consequence, they were followed by Greeks and Bactrians.
- Cultural exchanges between Indians and Persians started taking place. This also led to matrimonial relations, and job prospects for Indians in western Asia.
- The Persians had a great influence on Indian art and architecture, as can be seen in the Ashokan pillars.
- Indian rulers started keeping Persian women as their bodyguards.
- The various inscriptions of Ashoka bear the stamp of Persian influence. Without this contact, we would have been deprived of the valuable source of information about the most illustrious king of ancient India.

Check Your Progress

1. After whom was the Achaemenian dynasty named?
2. What were the similarities between Indo-Aryans and Persians?
3. What led to matrimonial relations and job prospects for Indians in western Asia?

6.3 MACEDONIAN AND GREEK INVASIONS AND THEIR IMPACTS

In the 4th century BC, India comprised a series of small principalities that were constantly at war with each other. Some of these states were republics, while the others were monarchies. They lacked a central sovereign authority. This provided fertile ground for new invaders, the Macedonians.

6.3.1 Alexander the Great's India Campaign

According to historian Vincent A. Smith, the author of *Oxford History of India*, 'Alexander the Great (Figure 6.2) having completed the subjugation of Bactria resolved to execute the cherished purpose of emulating and then surpassing the mythical exploits of Dionysos, Herakles and Semiramis by effecting the conquest of India.'

Alexander, the Macedonian king and son of Philip II, wanted to expand his empire beyond the territory of Greece. Unmindful of the rigours of climate and the numerous obstacles presented in his progress by man and nature alike, Alexander set himself with great foresight to the task of subjugating the lands that lay on his route in order to maintain free and uninterrupted communication with his distant base. In 327 BC, he conquered Seistan and then southern Afghanistan, where he founded a city called Alexandria-among-the-Arachosians, today called Kandahar.

In 326 BC, Alexander made his way into the Kabul Valley. Before concentrating on India, Alexander had to subdue Bactria and the other adjacent territories. After reducing them to submission, Alexander crossed the Hindukush Mountains and advanced toward Nikaja, situated to the west of modern Jalalabad on the road from Kabul to India. Here he divided his forces into two sections. General Hephaestion and Perdikkas were ordered to proceed in advance with one section of the army who were required to reach the Indus in advance and construct a bridge over it for the safe passage of forces. The other section was led by Alexander himself to fight against the warlike tribes of the frontier.

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Fig. 6.2 *Bust of Alexander the Great*

Conquest of the Aspasians

The Aspasians were the first to be conquered by Alexander. They are said to have lost more than 40,000 men and 2,30,000 oxen. Alexander selected the best of the captured cattle and sent them to Macedonia for use in the agriculture.

Conquest of Nysa

Nysa was the next attacked by Alexander. It was situated between the River Kabul and Indus and had a republican constitution, ruled by Akouphis. The Nysaens claimed descent from Dionysos, because ivy and vine were widespread in their country, and was dominated by a triple peaked mountain called Mount Meros.

The defeat of the Assakenoi and Massaga

Alexander now undertook in person the defeat of the formidable nation of the Assakenoi. They were awaiting Alexander with an army of 20,000 cavalry, 30,000 infantry, and thirty elephants. The capital, Massaga, was strongly fortified by nature, with a mountain stream on the east flowing between steep banks, while on the south and west, big rocks, deep chasms and treacherous morasses impeded the approach of an assailing force. A rampart of bricks, stone and timber, about four

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miles in circumference, guarded by a deep moat, circled the city. Chief Assakenos, however, was killed by a chance shot, and there are legends of his consort Kleophis surrendering herself to Alexander and later bearing him a son.

After the fall of Massaga, Alexander advanced further, and in the course of a few months captured the strategic fortresses of Ora, Bazira, Aornos Pushkeravati, Embolima and Dyrta.

Advance of Alexander

After stationing sufficient Greek garrisons, Alexander advanced further. Conditions were favourable for him as Punjab was divided and mutual dissension had sapped its vitality. In the spring of 326 BC, Alexander crossed Indus and received a warm welcome from Ambhi or Omphis, the king of Taxila. The ready submission of the rulers of Taxila is explained by the fact that they desired Alexander's help against their enemies in neighbouring states. At that moment Taxila was at war both with the hill kingdom of Abhisara and with the more powerful neighbouring state governed by king Porus.

While Alexander was at Taxila, the ruler of Abhisara sent envoys who professed to surrender to him. This mission was favourably received by Alexander and he hoped that Porus would also surrender. Summons were sent requiring him to pay homage and tribute but were met with the proud answer that he would indeed come to his frontier to meet the invader, but at the head of an army ready for battle.

When Alexander reached the banks of the river Jhelum, he found Porus waiting on the other side. It was difficult for Alexander to cross the river. At last, as Arrian puts it, Alexander decided to steal a passage and with 11,000 soldiers moved up the river from his camp. He also endeavoured to lull the vigilance of the enemy by publicly announcing that he intended to wait for a change of season. He marched at night and crossed the river. When Porus learnt of this, he sent his son with 2,000 horses and 120 chariots. This force was speedily routed out by Alexander. Fugitives carried the disastrous news to Porus. Porus now moved out to fight the invader. The battle took place in the plain now known as Karri.

The Indian army and cause of the defeat of Porus

Porus had 200 elephants stationed at the intervals of not less than a hundred feet from one another, probably in eight ranks, forming the front in the centre. Porus chiefly relied on his elephants who he thought would terrify the foreign soldiers and render the dreaded cavalry unmanageable. In the battle, the Indians fought with great courage and obstinately maintained their ground till the eighth hour of the day, but eventually luck did not favour them. The main strength of Porus lay in the chariots, which became useless due to the rains. The rain and storm had made the ground slippery and unfit for horses, while the chariots kept sticking in the muddy sloughs formed by the rain and proved almost immovable from their great

weight, the Indian archers also could not fix their bows because of the slippery ground. The Indian army could not withstand the manoeuvres of the Macedonian cavalry. At last, the elephants being now cooped up within a narrow space, did no less damage to their friends than to their foes, trampling them under their feet as they wheeled and pushed about.' The Indian army was annihilated; all the elephants either killed or captured and the chariots destroyed. Porus himself fought to the end, but at last was taken prisoner. Figure 6.3 shown a silver coin depicting the defeat of Porus.

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Porus honoured

When Alexander heard of Porus' arrival, he with his companions came forward to meet him. Alexander admired Porus, who did not seem to be broken in spirit. He asked Porus to say how he wished to be treated. 'Treat me, Alexander, as befits a king,' was the reply.

Justin says that Alexander reinstated Porus in his kingdom and added a few more territories. This act was based on political farsightedness and wisdom. Alexander was conscious of the fact that it was impossible for him to rule all the conquered lands without enlisting local loyalty, assistance and cooperation. Alexander may also have wanted Porus and Ambhi to keep a check on each other. R. S. Tripathi, the author of *History of Ancient India*, has pointed out that Alexander was not only acting in consonance with the dictates of diplomacy and statecraft, but strangely enough, he was also following the traditional policy of Hindu conquerors, advocated by Manu and Kautilya, viz. the policy of placing either the vanquished monarch or some scion of his family upon the throne instead resorting to direct annexation.



Fig. 6.3 Silver Coin Depicting the Defeat of Porus

Founding cities

Alexander founded two cities, one was named Boukephale after his faithful horse and the other Nikaia, both to commemorate his victory over Porus. After performing the traditional and customary sacrifices into the territory of Gausai, Alexander occupied all its thirty-seven cities. It was here he received the news of a revolt in

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his subdued areas. Nikanor, the governor of the western provinces of the Indus, was put to death. To the close of 326 BC, Macedonian armies crossed the Ravi River and Pimprama, which belonged to the Adraistai.

Subjugation of Sangala

After capturing Pimprama, Alexander captured Sangala, the stronghold of the Kathaians. The Kathaians fought so hard that even Porus had to come to Alexander's aid. After victory, Alexander razed the city to the ground.

Refusal of Greek army to advance

When Alexander reached the Beas River, his armies refused to advance any further.

Reasons for revolt

Before we discuss Alexander's retreat it is necessary to discuss the reasons for revolt. Why did the same soldiers, who were undaunted and unaffected by all the difficulties that had come their way, refuse to advance? The Greek soldiers were war-worn, homesick, disease stricken and destitute, and many of them were ill-equipped, for it was now increasingly difficult to transport and supply garments from Greece, and not a few were depressed because their friends had perished by disease or fallen victims to battles. But was there any other ground for their conduct? Even after the contest with Porus the Macedonian forces were considerably dispirited, and it was with reluctance that they had advanced as far as the Beas at Alexander's bidding. The Greeks had also been impressed by the skill of the Indian soldiers. During their advance towards the Beas, the armies of Alexander heard rumours that beyond the river there were extensive and uninviting deserts, impetuous and unfathomable rivers, and what was more disquieting, powerful and wealthy nations. His armies had heard that the farther bank of the Ganges was inhabited by the Gangaridae and the Prasii, whose king Agrammes was ready with 20,000 cavalry and 200,000 infantry besides 2,000 four-horsed chariots and the most formidable force of all, a troop of 3,000 elephants. These facts have also been supported by the indigenous sources, which tell of the enormous riches, wealth and power of the Nanda monarchs. Of the country immediately beyond the Beas, Arrian says, 'It was exceedingly fertile, and the inhabitants were good agriculturists, brave in war and living under an excellent system of internal government. It was also reported that the people there had a greater number of elephants than the other Indians and that those were of superior size and courage.' All these details made Alexander keen to advance into the interior, but on the other hand, his soldiers began to lose heart. Alexander's appeals had no effect on them. Alexander had no alternative but to retreat. It is said that before his retreat he ordered for the construction of twelve altars, dedicated to the chief Greek gods.

Thus, the Macedonian invasion was confined to the land of the five rivers. As he left, Alexander placed his ally Porus in charge of all the areas between the

Beas and the Jhelum. The areas between the Indus and the Jhelum were placed in the hands of Ambhi. The valley of Kashmir was given to Abhisara and Urasa to Arsakes who was made the vassal of Abhisara, and as a counterpoise to the rule of these Indian princes, Alexander stationed Greek troops in cities founded by him.

Alexander then made preparations for sailing down the rivers. Having repulsed the opposition of the kings of the lower Indus, Alexander reached Patalene. Here, he divided his army into two sections. One was led by sea and the other marched with Alexander along the southern coast of Balochistan.

In 323 BC, Alexander reached Babylonia and died there.

6.3.2 Greek Influences on Indian History

Alexander stayed in India for only about nineteen months. While his invasion of India was a stormy and tumultuous affair, it is an incident of minor importance in the history of ancient India. India remained unchanged. The wounds of battle were quickly healed. India was not Hellenised. She continued to live her life of splendid isolation and soon forgot the passing of the Macedonian storm. No Indian author, Hindu, Buddhist or Jain, makes even the faintest allusion to Alexander or his deeds.

Alexander's campaign was not a political success, for it did not result in any permanent Macedonian occupation of the Punjab. It left no permanent mark on the literature, life or government of the people. What remained of the foreign occupation after Alexander's retreat from India and his death in 323 BC was wiped out in the war of liberation fought successfully by the Indian leader Chandragupta Maurya, who became ruler of the Punjab about that time.

The following were the reasons of the impermanent effects of Alexander's invasion:

- **Untimely death of Alexander:** After the conquest of India, Alexander could not even return to his homeland. Death made his conquests impermanent.
- **Short stay:** Alexander stayed in India for very short duration; only nineteen months.
- **Invasion on the fringes:** Indian culture remained impregnable to Greek culture as most of the exchanges had taken place at the fringes.
- **Rise of the Maurya Dynasty:** Chandragupta Maurya established a powerful empire immediately after Alexander's invasion. He not only subdued the Punjab and Magadha but also drove out the Greeks from India.

Alexander failed to leave a rich legacy. But it would be underestimating the achievements and effects of the Macedonian conqueror. His invasion did have various glaring and obvious political, economic and cultural effects.

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Political effects

Political effects of the Macedonian invasions may be summarized as follows:

- Alexander's invasion rendered the north-western principalities utterly weak. It paved the way for the rise of Chandragupta Maurya, whose task now became easy. He conveniently subdued all those states and laid the foundation of a powerful empire on the ruins of those principalities.
- As a result of this invasion, Greek rule was permanently set up on the border provinces of western Punjab and Sindh. There began the rule of the Satraps.
- The Macedonian invasion created a sense of political unity among the people of the north. At the time of his invasion India was divided into many small states which were always at daggers drawn with one another. Chandragupta Maurya subdued and subjugated the whole of northern India and gave it a political unity. He also saved the country from foreign invasion. It is due to this reason he is regarded to be the first national king of India.
- Alexander's invasion has greatly added to the sources of Indian history as it helped construct the history of ancient India in a chronological setting. The historians who accompanied Alexander were very particular about referring to all the events with proper dates. Their writings have proved a valuable source of information for the construction of the history of the ancient India.
- Due to the Macedonian invasions, Indians learnt new methods of warfare such as the organization of the armies, discipline and new tactics. By encountering Greek forces, Indians realized that a disciplined and organized army, even if smaller in number, could overpower a stronger adversary.

Economic effects

Economic effects of the Macedonian invasions may be summarized as follows:

- The Macedonian invasion eradicated the wall of separation between the East and the West. Although India had close ties with the people of the West even prior to this invasion, this invasion caused the opening of three new land routes and one sea route.
- The new routes promoted commercial relations between the two countries.
- Indians also learnt minting coins from the Greeks. Alexander had issued certain silver coins to commemorate his victory over Porus. One such coin depicts an effigy of Alexander on one side and Porus on an elephant hotly pursued by horsemen on the other.

Cultural effects

Cultural effects of the Macedonian invasions may be summarized as follows:

- The establishment of Greek kingdoms in Western Asia led to the exchange of views between the Indians and the Westerners.

- The Greek kingdoms in Syria, Bactria and other parts of Asia, which had been established on the disruption of Alexander's empire, enabled in course of time close cultural contact between India and Europe. Kanishka, it is said, invited many Greek Bactrian sculptors to Gandhara for making images of the Buddha and Bodhisattavas. They blended Greek and the Indian styles in art leading to the development of the Gandhara School of Art.
- It is also said that the system of Indian astronomy is largely influenced by the Hellenic system.

As for the Greeks, they learnt a lot about the sciences, arts, philosophy, mathematics and medicine from India.

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Check Your Progress

4. Who were the Aspasiens?
5. Name the two cities founded by Alexander.
6. Name the Indian ruler who established a powerful empire immediately after Alexander's invasion.

6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Achaemenian dynasty was a royal family that ruled over Persia, beginning with Cyrus the Great. The dynasty was named after Achaemenes who lived sometime during the 7th century BC.
2. Indo-Aryans and Persians share the same roots. There was great similarity in their languages, traditions, religious faiths, rites and rituals.
3. Cultural exchanges between Indians and Persians started taking place. This also led to matrimonial relations, and job prospects for Indians in western Asia.
4. The Aspasiens were the first to be conquered by Alexander.
5. Alexander founded two cities, one was named Boukephale after his faithful horse and the other Nikaia, both to commemorate his victory over Porus.
6. Chandragupta Maurya was the Indian ruler established a powerful empire immediately after Alexander's invasion.

6.5 SUMMARY

- After the Aryan invasion in India, the most important invasion was made by the Persians around 500 BC when kings Darius and Cyrus conquered the Indus Valley Civilization.

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- The fertile lands of India have always been an attraction for rulers in the West. As dynasties ruling the middle and lower Ganga basins and the north-western regions of India fought among themselves, they fell victim to the invasions from the West, first by the Persians and then by the Greeks.
- While the interior of India had been undergoing a process of political unification under Magadha, her undefended and insecure frontiers on the north-west invited foreign invasions. The first of these was the Persian invasion.
- Cyrus was the first Persian ruler to attempt an invasion of India.
- Under the rule of Darius, India formed the twentieth satrap of the Persian Empire, to which it contributed one-third of the total revenue.
- Xerxes continued ruling over the Indian provinces that he inherited from Darius I. He is said to have recruited an army of Indian soldiers who fought for him in Greece.
- Political, commercial and cultural relations continued existing between India and Persia.
- The Kharoshti script, used in north-west India during the time of Ashoka, is most likely a result of Persian legacy.
- The Persian architecture also greatly influenced the Indian architecture.
- Alexander the Great having completed the subjugation of Bactria, resolved to execute the cherished purpose of emulating and then surpassing the mythical exploits of Dionysos, Herakles and Semiramis by effecting the conquest of India.
- In the spring of 326 BC, Alexander crossed Indus and received a warm welcome from Ambhi or Omphis, the king of Taxila.
- In 323 BC, Alexander reached Babylonia and died there.
- Alexander's invasion of India had several political, economic and cultural effects.
- Chandragupta Maurya established a powerful empire immediately after Alexander's invasion. He not only subdued the Punjab and Magadha but also drove out the Greeks from India.
- The Macedonian invasion eradicated the wall of separation between the East and the West. Although India had close ties with the people of the West even prior to this invasion, this invasion caused the opening of three new land routes and one sea route.
- The Greeks, learnt a lot about the sciences, arts, philosophy, mathematics and medicine from India.

6.6 KEY WORDS

- **Kharoshti:** It is a north-west Indian script mostly written right to left.
- **Inscription:** It is text carved on a wall or plaque, such as memorial or gravestone.
- **Behistun inscription:** It is a multilingual inscription and large rock relief on a cliff at Mount Behistun in the Kermanshah Province of Iran, near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran.
- **Hellenization:** It is the historical spread of ancient Greek culture, religion and, to a lesser extent, language, over foreign peoples conquered by Greeks or brought into their sphere of influence, particularly during the Hellenistic period following the campaigns of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC.
- **Satrap:** It is the name given to the governors of the provinces of the ancient Achaemenid (Persian) empires.

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6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What political circumstances in north-west India prompted the Achaemenid invasions of India?
2. Who was the first Achaemenid king to invade India?
3. Write a short note on Darius and his achievements.
4. What were the effects of Persian/Achaemenian invasions in India?
5. What were the reasons for revolt of the Greek soldiers to advance further after reaching the Beas River during the Macedonian invasion?

Long-Answer Questions

1. What impact did the Persian invasions have on India?
2. Describe the reasons that prompted Alexander the Great to invade India.
3. Why did Alexander the Great's invasion fail to leave a lasting impact on the Indian history?
4. What were the political, economic and cultural influences of the Greek invasions on India?

6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 RISE OF MAGADHA AND THE MAURYAN DYNASTY

*Rise of Magadha and the
Mauryan Dynasty*

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Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Mahajanapadas and Rise of Magadha
 - 7.2.1 Rise of Mahajanapadas, Republics and Monarchies
 - 7.2.2 Emergence of Cities and Territorial States
- 7.3 Culture and Civilization During Mauryan Ages
 - 7.3.1 Chandragupta Maurya
 - 7.3.2 Decline of the Mauryan Empire
- 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
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7.0 INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the Mauryan dynasty was made by Chandragupta Maurya by displacing the erstwhile rulers of Magadha namely the mighty Nanda dynasty. The exact date of the beginning of the Maurya rule is not known but is generally accepted as being between 321 BC and 325 BC. However it is clear that Maurya rule was established in Magadha with its capital at Pataliputra.

There was a long history of Magadha before the Mauryas came into prominence. Magadha, (the region of present day southern part of Bihar), was one of the sixteen territorial polities called Mahajanapadas during the time of the Buddha. At the beginning, it was just one of these Mahajanapadas, but it soon began to rise fast under the two very energetic rulers, Bimbisara and Ajatasatru in the 6th-5th centuries BC. It was possibly by the early part of the 4th century BC that the Nandas came to occupy power in Magadha, and by that time Pataliputra was already recognized as an important city, which figured even in Greek accounts as Palibothra, at the time of Alexander's invasion of India.

By destroying the small kingdoms of the north-west, Alexander paved the way for the establishment of Mauryan dynasty's rule. Alexander's army was tired and reluctant to move further ahead and face the fierce army of Chandragupta Maurya. Chandragupta was not only a great conqueror but also a great administrator. They turned back and headed for Babylon, where Alexander breathed his last in 323 BC. Chandragupta Maurya, thus, was able to lay the foundation of the Empire that would ultimately change the course of the ancient Indian history.

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Ashoka was another great king not only in the history of India but also across the whole world. A lot of information about him is available through his inscriptions and the Buddhist literature. He was the son of Bindusara and the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya. In his later life after he saw the bloodshed in the Kalinga war, he renounced violence and adopted Buddhism.

With the beginning of the Mauryan Empire in around 321 BC, Indian history entered a new era as for the first time India attained political unity and administrative uniformity. The Mauryan administration was the most well-organized and efficient in ancient India. This may be corroborated by the fact that even the Gupta Empire continued to follow their patterns in administration despite themselves being brilliant in all spheres of life. The Mauryan Empire had brought to the forefront amazing dexterity in managing the vast kingdom they had. The unit will describe the rise of Magadha and Mahajanapadas, and the Indian culture during the Mauryan age.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the rise of mahajanapadas, republics and monarchies in India
- Evaluate the economic conditions of India during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya
- Assess the basic principles of Ashoka's 'dhamma'
- Explain the causes for the decline of the Mauryan Empire

7.2 MAHAJANAPADAS AND RISE OF MAGADHA

By the Later Vedic Age, the Aryans had moved further into the Ganga Valley, a process facilitated by use of iron implements, which helped them to clear the thick forests with greater ease. In time, some of these *janas* (In ancient India, the groups of villages belonged to a clan or *vis*. Many clans made a community called *jana*) grew in size and power and came to be known as janapadas (literally meaning foothold of tribe). Gradually, many of these janapadas further evolved into larger political entities by capturing more and more land. These came to be known as mahajanapadas (from Sanskrit *maha* = great). By the 600 BC, there were sixteen mahajanapadas. The kings or groups of Kashatriyas, the chiefs of which called themselves rajas or kings, ruled over Janapadas or Mahajanapadas.

7.2.1 Rise of Mahajanapadas, Republics and Monarchies

Ancient Buddhist texts make frequent reference to the sixteen great kingdoms (mahajanapadas) and republics which had evolved and flourished in the northern/north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent before the rise of Buddhism in India. Of the sixteen mahajanapadas, four were prominent monarchies—Kosala,

Vatsa, Avanti and Magadha. They were constantly fighting with each other. Ultimately, Magadha emerged supreme.

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Republics and monarchies

The mahajanapadas had two kinds of political systems. They were either republics or monarchies. A republican mahajanapada was ruled by a group of people elected by the people of that tribe. There was no hereditary ruler. Decisions were taken on the basis of majority consent. So, it was a kind of a democratic system where the people of the tribe had a say in their political system. The Sakya mahajanapada, for example, was an important republic.

Most of the mahajanapadas had a monarchical system. The king ruled according to his own wish. After his death, his son succeeded to the throne. Magadha, for example, was a monarchical mahajanapada.

The Aryans slowly and steadily expanded their civilization and culture. They expanded rapidly in northern India. Many strong Aryan centres were established till the 6th century BC and the states were being called on the basis of caste. None had full control over whole India, which divided into many smaller states. In order to expand the states, the janapadas were extended and changed into mahajanapadas later.

7.2.2 Emergence of Cities and Territorial States

Although there has not been enough evidence concerning mahajanapadas, important Buddhist and Jaina books provide the following information about the sixteen major mahajanapadas:

- 1. Anga:** This was situated near modern Bhagalpur (located on the borders of modern Bihar and Bengal). Champa was its capital. Champa has been considered one of the six great cities in the sixth century BC. It was famous for its trade and commerce. Anga was an enemy of Magadha. It was defeated by Magadha by mid-sixth century BC.
- 2. Magadha:** It was situated where modern Patna and Gaya districts of Bihar are located. Its capital was at Rajagriha. Rajagriha was an impenetrable place surrounded by five hills. The remains of the walls of Rajagriha provide 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 Magadha kings. Magadha rose to prominence because its fertile agricultural tracts were best suited for the cultivation of wet rice. Further, it had iron ore deposits of south Bihar (modern Jharkhand) were under its control. Last but not the least, the open social system of the Magadhan Empire made it the most important monarchy in the years to come.
- 3. Kashi:** Of the sixteen mahajanapadas, Kashi was the most powerful in the beginning. It was located in and around modern Varanasi. Its capital Varanasi was the foremost city of India situated on the confluence of the Ganges and

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the Gomati River and in the middle of the most fertile agricultural areas. It emerged as a leading centre of textile manufacture and horse trade in the time of the Buddha. However, by the time of the Buddha, the Kashi mahajanapada had been taken over by Kosala and this led to a war between Magadha and Kosala kingdoms.

4. **Kosala:** Kosala was bound on the west by the river Gomati, on the south by the Sarpika, on the east by the river Sadarvira (Gandak) and on the north by the Nepal hills. Kosala mahajanapada emerged out of an assimilation of many smaller principalities and lineages. Hiranyanabha, Mahakosala Prasenjita and Suddhodhana have been named as rulers of Kosala in the sixth century BC. Saketa, Shravasti (modern Sahet-Mahet) and Bahraich districts of Uttar Pradesh were three important Kosala cities. The capital of Kosala was Shravasti. King Prasenjita was a contemporary and friend of the Buddha. Later, Kosala emerged as one of the most powerful rivals to the emergent Magadha Empire.
5. **Vajji:** This was located in contemporary Bihar. This mahajanpada came into existence by the coming together of several castes. Its capital was Vaishali.
6. **Malla:** There were two branches of the Mallas, namely Kushinagar and Pava. This was a federal democracy.
7. **Vatsa:** Vatsa was one of the most powerful mahajanapadas with its capital at Kaushambi (near modern Allahabad) on the bank of the Yamuna. This means that the Vatsas were settled around modern Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. Bhasa, one of the greatest Sanskrit dramatists in ancient India, has immortalized Udayan, a Vatsa king, in his plays. These plays are based on the story of the love affair between Udayana and Vasavadatta, the Princess of Avanti. These plays also point to the conflict among the powerful kingdoms of Magadha, Vatsa and Avanti. Vatsa lost its significance in the ensuing struggle because the later texts do not refer to them with great importance.
8. **Chedi:** Contemporary Bundelkhand and its nearby landmass came under Chedi. Its capital was Shaktimati or Sandhivati.
9. **Kuru:** This mahajanapadas covered the regions of Thaneshwar, Delhi and Meerut. Its capital was Indraprastha.
10. **Surasena:** This was located to the south of Matsya state. Its capital was Mathura.
11. **Panchal:** This was located in the territory between rivers Ganga and Yamuna. It also had two branches. The capital of northern Panchal was Ahichatrapur, while that of southern Panchal was Kampilya.
12. **Matsya (Maccha):** This was located in modern Jaipur, Alwar and Bharatpur regions of Rajasthan. Its capital was Viratnagara.

13. **Avanti:** Avanti was one of the most powerful mahajanapadas in the sixth century BC. The central area of this mahajanapad or kingdom roughly corresponds to Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh. The kingdom was divided into two parts. Its southern capital was Mahasmati, while its northern capital was Ujjain. The latter was more important. The kingdom controlled the trade with the south. According to a legend, from an enemy he became father-in-law of Udayan who ruled over Vatsa kingdom.
14. **Ashmak:** This region was located in south India. Its capital was Paudanya (Potan).
15. **Gandhara:** The states of contemporary Taxila and Kashmir came under this region. It had two capitals, namely Pushkalavati and Taxila. Taxila was a famous centre of learning.
16. **Kambhoj:** This janapad was located to the north of Gandhar at Pamir and Badakhshan. Its capital was Rajpur.

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Republics

We get the knowledge about the republics of the sixth century BC from Buddhist books. These republics were as follows:

1. **Shakyas of Kapilvastu:** It was located on the border of Nepal on the foothills of the Himalayas. This republic was located in the western part of contemporary Gorakhpur. Gautama Buddha was born in this state. Its capital was Kapilavastu. The people of this area considered themselves to be the descendants of Eshvak. This was a major site of learning.
2. **Bulis of Allakappa:** This area was located between the contemporary districts of Shahabad and Muzaffarpur. According to *Dhammapada*, this area was situated near the Veth Island.
3. **Kalamas of Kesputta:** The spiritual guru of Buddha, Aalar Kalam, belonged to this dynasty. This dynasty is related to the Panchal Keshis as described in *Shatapatha Brahman*.
4. **Bhaggas of Susamagiri:** According to *Sanyuttamkaya*, this area was situated in Bhargadisa. Contemporary Mirzapur was located near this area.
5. **Kolis of Ramgram:** This republic was situated in the east of Shakyas of Kapilavastu.
6. **Mallas of Pava:** This dynasty was ruled by the kshatriyas of the Vashistha gotra. The Mallas were settled in contemporary Padrauna in Uttar Pradesh.
7. **Mallas of Kushinagar:** They were the second branch of Mallas. Buddha attained *Parinirvana* here.
8. **Moris of Pippalivan:** According to *Mahavansh*, the Moris were earlier known as the Shakyas. However, later they shifted to a hilly region of the Himalayas due to the brutality of Vidudabh where they established the

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Pippalivan city. This city has always been famous for the sound of peacocks and, as a result, is referred to as 'Moris'.

9. Videhas of Mithila: Mithila was a renowned learning centre.

10. Lichchavis of Vaishali: The Lichchavis belonged to the Kshatriya clan.

11. Naga of Vaishali: The combination of the Videhas and the Lichchavis led to the establishment of the federation of Vajji. There was also a federation of Lichchavis and Nagas which was called Asthakul in which Videhas, Yangyik, Lichchavi and Vajji were included.

Thus, the powerful republics of this period included the Shakya, Lichchavi, Videha, Vajji and Malla. According to D. R. Bhandarkar, an authority on the ancient history of India from 650 BC – 325 BC, 'The meaning of republic and federation was a group of well decided and well organized men.' However, it seems that a unit of a federation was usually called a republic. Several republics made a federation. Thus, many *grihas* made a *kul* and a group of *kulas* formed a republic.

Check Your Progress

1. Of the sixteen mahajanapadas, name the four prominent monarchies.
2. What were the two kinds of political systems in the mahajanapadas?
3. Name the foremost city of India, which was the capital of Kashi.

7.3 CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION DURING MAURYAN AGES

In 322 BC, Magadha, under the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, began to assert its power over neighbouring areas. Situated on rich alluvial soil and near mineral deposits, especially iron, Magadha was the centre of bustling commerce and trade. The primary source of our knowledge about the Mauryan Empire is based on the *Arthashastra* by Chanakya or Kautiliya, which is a treatise on statecraft. It gives us a picture of the administration, society and the economy of the country. In the book, he explains how a strong and an efficient government should be organized and what the duties of a ruler are. Chanakya was Chandragupta's Chief Minister and mentor. The Sanskrit play *Mudrarakshasa* by Visakadatta is a political literature revealing the struggle undertaken by Chandragupta Maurya with the help of Chanakya to overthrow the Nandas. It is also an insight into Chandragupta's life. The *Jataka* tales of the Buddhist literature and the *Indica* written by Megasthenes, the Greek traveller to Chandragupta's court, gives an account of the Mauryan capital, its administrative system and social life. The Ceylonese chronicles, the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*, give the accounts of the

conversion of Ceylon to Buddhism. They have also helped in reconstructing the history of Ashoka. The rock edicts of Ashoka provide information about the Mauryan rule. According to them, India constructed a new world on the basis of peace, brotherhood and cultural unity under the rule of the Mauryans.

The arrival of the Mauryans was an important incident in the Indian history. Considering the unfavourable conditions in which the foundations of this dynasty were laid down and became strong, it can be said that its place was really very high. The Mauryan Empire marked a new epoch in the history of India. It was a period of unification of the territories, which were fragmented kingdoms under different rulers. Moreover, trade routes between Europe and India over land and sea paved the way for contact with the outside world. It was a period when politics, art, trade and commerce flourished.

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7.3.1 Chandragupta Maurya

Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire. After establishing himself firmly on the throne of Magadha, Chandragupta set out to expand his empire. He conquered the whole of northern India up to the river Indus. Chandragupta had vast resources; hence he could maintain a huge army. In 305 BC, he defeated Seleucus Nikator and north-western India was liberated from Greek control. Seleucus surrendered Afghanistan and Baluchistan and also gave his daughter Helen's hand in marriage to Chandragupta. In return, Chandragupta presented Seleucus with 500 war elephants. Seleucus sent Megasthenes as an ambassador to the court of Chandragupta.

Megasthenes stayed with Chandragupta for over five years, travelling through the Mauryan Empire and wrote an account of his travels in the book *Indica*. Chandragupta, who ruled from 324 to 297 BC, was the architect of the first Indian imperial power whose capital was Pataliputra, near modern-day Patna in Bihar. The rule of this remarkable king came to an end in 297 BC. After ruling for twenty-four years, Chandragupta abdicated the throne in favour of his son, Bindusara, and became a Jain ascetic. According to a Jain text, he starved himself to death in order to attain *nirvana*. His son, Bindusara, extended the empire into central India and parts of southern India. Only the kingdom of Kalinga was unconquered at the time of his death. His son, Ashoka, succeeded him in 273 BC.

Early Life of Chandragupta Maurya

Though much is not known about the earlier life of Chandragupta, inscriptions suggest that he was born in 345 BC in a Kshatriya family residing between present Gorakhpur and the Terai in Nepal. A number of Indian historians are of the view that Chandragupta was the illegitimate son of a king from the Nanda dynasty of Magadha from a maid named 'Mura'. The dynasty was named after Chandragupta's mother. Chanakya, a teacher in the Takshasila University found him playing with his friends, where he pretended to be their king. The devout

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wisdom in the boy impressed Chanakya who was amazed at his leadership skills and decided to make him a disciple. Chanakya trained Chandragupta in warfare and statecraft. They conquered Magadha and established a new rule in Gandhara.

Chandragupta was a great commander and an efficient warrior. The talent and ambitious attitude of Chandragupta combined with the shrewd politics of Chanakya were enough to face any opposition efficiently. Chandragupta fought many battles during his reign. He took over Magadha, fought against the Greeks, the Nanda dynasty of the east. By the time he was twenty-years-old, his kingdom stretched from the Bay of Bengal in the east to River Indus in the west to the Arabian Sea in the south. Under Chandragupta Maurya, many kingdoms freed from barbaric administration on one hand and on the other hand also released from the clutches of foreign slavery. His political and soldierly achievements were great.

Economy under Chandragupta Maurya

Under the Mauryan Empire, India was an agricultural country. According to Megasthenes, majority of the population consisted of agriculturists. They neither participated in warfare nor did they participate in the state affairs. They were not harmed during wars. The tillers of the soil carried on their work uninterrupted. The land was rich and fertile. The means of irrigation were simple. Therefore, people never saw disasters caused by famines. There were two seasonal rainfalls in India, and farmers reaped harvest twice a year. Besides, there were orchards of myriad kinds. Kautilya has given a description of ploughed, fallow and rocky lands. The land was tilled with the help of oxen. The state paid special attention towards the methods of irrigation. Many officials were appointed for inspecting the towns. According to the Junagarh inscription, Pushpagupta, an official of Chandragupta got Sudarshana Lake constructed for irrigation in Saurashtra.

The following were the means of irrigation as given in *Arthashastra*:

- Canals, tanks, wells, ponds and rivers bullocks
- Water was drawn from the wells with the help of buckets, and big leather bags
- Building dams over the river

Kautilya also refers to manure made of the mixtures of ghee, honey, fats, cow dung and powdered fish. It was used in order to increase the fertility of the soil. Wheat, sugar, maize, rice, barley, sugarcane, mustard, peanuts, cotton, tobacco, potatoes, watermelons, etc., were the main crops of the Mauryan times. Fruits like mangoes, grapes, lemons were aplenty.

Occupations

During the Mauryan times, the cloth industry had greatly developed. The main clothes centres were Kashi, Vatsa, Madura, Vanga, Apranta, etc. Spinning was done by the spinning wheels and big looms were used for weaving clothes.

According to *Arthashastra* and Megasthenes, cotton was produced in great quantity the weavers of cotton clothes worked round the clock. Jute too, was utilized for weaving. Magadha and Kashi were well known towns for jute productions.

During those days clothes were prepared out of the leaves and bark of the trees and the fibres of many kinds. *Arthashastra* presents an elaborate description of woollen clothes and blankets. They were made in different ways. The woollen garments were made of wool of many colours and with strong threads. Nepal was the main centre of blanket trade. Megasthenes has pointed out that the Indians dressed in costly and beautiful attires. The people of Bengal had the chief occupation of producing muslin cloth, which was in great demand for making clothes. While cotton was grown in the country, silk clothes were imported from China.

Metallurgy

According to Megasthenes, during the Mauryan age, there was an enormous quantity of gold and silver in India. Iron, copper and brass was also available in large quantities. Iron was used for manufacture of arms. Ordinarily, the work of mining was done by the state officials. The state representative who was in-charge of the mines was known as Akradhayaksha. During the Mauryan times, ornaments were worn by members of both the sexes. The wealthy section of the society wore ornaments made of ivory.

Diving and finding pearls, jewels, shells, diamonds from the sea was the most difficult task. Ornaments studded with pearls and beads were in much demand. The Mauryans wore clothes embroidered with golden threads. The utensils were made of metal; the process of making pots out of metal, its casting and softening is also given in the *Arthashastra*.

Forests, in this period, constituted the property of the state. There were efficient methods of cutting and loading the wood. Bamboo, leaves and bark was used for making a number of everyday things. Wood of an excellent quality was required for making ships. *Arthashastra* gives a description of skins of different animals used for manufacturing things. During the Mauryan Age, a brisk wine trade flourished too. There is a mention of six types of wine in *Arthashastra*. Wine trade was under the complete control of *Suradhyabha*.

The state paid avid attention to the progress of every trade and occupation and traders enjoyed the security of the state. People blinding or chopping off the hands of any sculptor or craftsman was given life sentence. Traders had the privilege of enjoying feasible profit but anyone who indulged in making graft money, cheating, gaining undue profit and adulterating everyday products was severely punished. Kautilya followed the middle path in state affairs and a mutual one in professional sphere.

The external and internal trade had developed sufficiently during the Mauryan period. The internal trade was carried through safe land routes. The roads going from Pataliputra to western India was 1,500 miles long. In southern India there were important busy land routes. According to Kautilya, the southern roads going

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through the mines were very significant. They involved less exertion and labour. Another road ran from Pataliputra to the east. Besides these major routes there existed many minor land routes that connected the small cities with the main roads. On the main roads there were milestones at a distance of every half kilometre.

Judges were appointed for the regular inspection and supervision of these roads. The internal trade was also carried through rivers. Small boats and vessels were used for this purpose. In the entire Kingdom every town was known for its particular product. Nepal was famous for woollen clothes, the Himalayan area for skin industries, Magadha for tree bark and clothes, Kashi for all types of clothes, Bengal for fine muslin, Kerala for pearls. The people of the professional class travelled to far off lands to sell their wares.

According to *Arthashastra*, during the Mauryan times active trade was carried on by sea routes in big ships known as *Pravana*. There were ports and harbours. The management of the ports was under a port official. The person in charge of the port had to rescue ships caught in the stormy waves of perilous seas. Pearls were imported from China. There were good commercial relations between Egypt and India. Sikandria was the chief port of Egypt and three land routes connected it with India. The existence of a special assembly for receiving the foreign ambassadors in the royal court of Mauryas indicates that there existed close relations between India and countries abroad. Thus, during the Mauryan times, kings had to maintain foreign relations and formulate the appropriate external policies.

Coinage

The following were the Mauryan coins:

- Gold coins known as *Sauvamik*
- Silver coins called *Kashaparna*
- Copper coins called *Mashaka*
- *Kakni* was also a copper coin which was less valuable to *Mashaka*

Kautilya has divided the Mauryan coinage into two parts. These are as follows:

1. **Legal tender:** In this category were the coins collected in the state treasury. They were used for state taxation and export and import or exchange.
2. **Token money:** This was a token currency used by the people or their daily transactions. Such coins were not deposited in the royal treasury. The coins were made by the state foundries. But anyone could cast the coins at his own cost. There was no paper currency. The chief of the foundry was called *Suvarnika* or *Lakshanadhyaksha*.

Chandragupta Maurya started his career from a very humble position and there are differences of opinion regarding his family. It is now the accepted view of

a majority of scholars that Chandragupta belonged to the Kshatriya clan called the Moriyas originally ruling over Pippalivana, which probably lay in modern Uttar Pradesh.

After the death of her husband, the mother of Chandragupta shifted to Pataliputra for safety where she gave birth to her illustrious son. Chandragupta was first brought up by a cowherd and then by a hunter. Chanakya, his mentor marked out Chandragupta for the twin tasks of winning the entire India and killing Dhana Nand. It is now generally believed that Chanakya and Kautilya, the author of *Arthashastra*, were the names of the same person.

The classical writers have described that Chandragupta had visited Alexander who felt offended by his behaviour and gave orders to kill him. However, Chandragupta managed to escape. After the return of Alexander, he with the help of Chanakya, raised an army by recruiting soldiers mostly from the warlike people of the republican states of Punjab who had given fierce resistance to Alexander. He kept before the people the idea of turning the foreign Greek invaders out of the country and succeeded. He was supported by Parvataka—a hill-tribe chief who became his friend. Probably, Chandragupta started his war of liberation in the lower Indus Valley, before 321 or even before 323 BC and finally succeeded. By 317 BC, no Greek governor remained in India and Punjab and Sindh were occupied by Chandragupta. The desire of the Greek *Satrap* and their soldiers to go back to their own country, their mutual conflicts, the revolt of the Indian *Satrap*s and the assassination of Philippos of the Upper Indus Valley in 325 BC and the death of Alexander in 323 BC facilitated the work of Chandragupta of turning the Greeks out of the Indian Territory.

The next task of Chandragupta was to conquer Magadha. He failed to achieve this objective probably once or twice but ultimately grabbed the throne of Pataliputra and killed Dhana Nand. The incompetence of Dhana Nand, his unpopularity amongst his subjects, the astute diplomacy of Chanakya and the bravery and military skill of Chandragupta were mainly responsible for the downfall of the Nanda dynasty. Chandragupta also kept Pataliputra as his capital.

Extension of the Empire

When Chandragupta was busy in the extension and consolidation of his empire, Seleucus, one of the able generals of Alexander who had obtained possession of the Eastern Empire of his master, proceeded towards India to recover the lost possession of the late emperor. He reached India in around 305 BC where Chandragupta faced him in a battle. The Greek writers do not give the details of the conflict. It is also not certain whether a decisive battle took place between the two or not. But, in view of the terms of peace between the two, it is definite that Seleucus failed miserably in his expedition. He had not only to abandon the idea of re-conquering Punjab but had to surrender to Chandragupta a part of his territories in the East with its capital cities Herat, Kandahar and Kabul and also the territories of Baluchistan.

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Thus, this settlement between the two extended the territories of Chandragupta in the North-West up to the borders of Persia and also secured his frontiers in that direction.

No written record is available of the other conquests of Chandragupta, yet it is certain that he ruled over a vast empire. Bindusara, his successor is not known to history as a conqueror while Ashoka conquered only Kalinga.

Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the empire of the Mauryas, (which is believed to have extended from the border of Persia in the North-West to Bengal in the East and from Kashmir in the North to Mysore in the South), was mostly built up by Chandragupta.

In his last days, Chandragupta went South with the Jain monk Bhadrabahu. The hill where he lived during the last days of his life is known as Chandragiri where a temple known as Chandragupta Basti was also erected by his grandson, Ashoka. It is in Mysore.

Chandragupta as an Administrator

Chandragupta was not only a great conqueror but also a capable administrator. The way he carried on the administration of his empire was pursued by his successors and no change was felt necessary except that Ashoka tried to liberalize it further and elaborated the public duties of the state officials. The basic principles of the administration of the Mauryas remained the same as established by Chandragupta till subsequently the weaker Mauryas lost their hold over it. Primarily, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the description of Megasthenes give us a fair idea of the administration of Chandragupta.

The polity

By the time of the Mauryas, the office of the king had become hereditary and the divine origin of monarchy had attained maturity and had given the king wide powers. But, strictly speaking, as Hindu political theory vests sovereignty in the dharma or law in the widest sense of the term and the state is separated from the king who is a part of it, no king could be tyrannical or a wielder of absolute personal powers. Of course, the necessity of a strong king was stressed but it was equally emphasized that he had to rule according to the dharma and for the establishment of the dharma, which was conducive to the highest good.

The dharma actually upheld an ideal that elevated the soul to the loftiest heights and, therefore, the function of the state was to create those conditions of life which would help every citizen attain this goal. It also meant that the state would enjoy all the embracing powers. Therefore, its scope of activities was unlimited and no distinction was made between the personal and the civic rights and duties, or between the moral principles and positive law. Everything that had any bearing upon the moral, spiritual or material condition of a citizen came within the scope of the state activities. The state had the right to regulate the family life of the citizens, to promote true religion and control all professions and occupations

as well. Thus, the state held the ring for the interplay of social forces, intellectual influences, economic enterprises and above all the spiritual tradition. But in no case, the extensive activities of the state and the divine origin of the monarchy meant to support the divine right of the king. Therefore, the power of the king has increased but not without an increase in his corresponding duties. No wicked son of a king was allowed to become the successor and, consequently, the right of the people to rebel against a wicked and tyrannical king was also recognized. For the same purpose, special care was taken to impart sound education and moral training to the future king and if the prince failed to reach a requisite standard, he forfeited his right to the throne.

The king

Sometimes, the king could be elected but hereditary kingship was the established practice. Females were not excluded from the right of kingship but in practice it was rarely to be found. The king was the supreme head of the state and performed military, judicial, executive and legislative functions. His permanent duty was to protect the people and seek their welfare. In *Arthashastra*, it is mentioned that the happiness of the king lies in the welfare and the ultimate good of his subjects. Therefore, the king was the busiest person in the kingdom. The twenty-four hours of each day and night were divided into eight parts and in each part he performed different duties punctually. Chandragupta could sleep hardly for six hours. Even when he was dressed and his hair being combed, he used to listen to the reports of his spies and assign them their duties. Besides, he was easily accessible to his subjects. The king was paid in the form of taxes by his subjects in return for his services to the kingdom. He lived in a large and comfortable palace, which was highly praised by Megasthenes. He was protected by lady bodyguards and every precaution was taken to protect his life from treachery and poisoning.

7.3.2 Decline of the Mauryan Empire

In 184 BC, the last Mauryan king Brihadratha was killed by his commander Pushyamitra Shunga, who then established the Shunga dynasty in Magadha. Several reasons were responsible for the decline of the Mauryan Empire. Some of them are discussed as follows:

- **Monarchical type of government:** Monarchical type of government in itself is a great weakness. A day is bound to come when strong kings will be followed by weak ones and the empire will inevitably decline. Dr J. N. Sarkar, a prominent historian, has pointed out, 'If we turn the pages of Indian history we shall not come across even a single dynasty which might have produced more than five powerful kings. So, a day is bound to come when strong kings will be followed by weak kings and the empire would decay.' Ashoka (we will read about him in detail in Unit 8) too was succeeded by weak kings who neither possessed the same personality nor the same prowess, so the empire followed the path of disintegration.

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- **Ashoka's propagation of ahimsa:** Some writers ascribe the downfall of the Mauryas to Ashoka's policy of ahimsa. Ashoka, after the Kalinga war, did not wage war and instead of conquest of territories, he began with the conquest of dharma. As a result of which, the military strength of the Mauryan Empire declined, the militant attitudes also began to be absent from the minds of the people. Ashoka's successors too followed the path of ahimsa which further rendered the empire militarily impotent. It was due to this reason that Mauryan Empire could not survive long after Ashoka's death.
- **Oppressive attitude of the official:** In the outlying provinces of the Mauryan Empire, the governors tyrannized and oppressed the people due to which revolts were a common occurrence. During the reign of Bindusara, the people of Takshasila rose into rebellion against the maladministration and the oppressive rule of the governors. Such revolts were there even during the reign of Ashoka. After the death of Ashoka, Takshasila or Taxila was the first province to declare its independence.
- **Wide extent of empire:** The Mauryan Empire had become sufficiently vast which could only be controlled by a strong hand like Ashoka or Chandragupta Maurya. Ashoka's successors, as weak they were, could not control such a vast empire. Moreover, the lack of the means of transportation and communication also loosened the hold of central authority on far-off cities. The result was the disintegration of the entire empire.
- **Division of empire:** Ashoka's death was followed by the division of empire amongst his sons and grandsons. While Jalauka became the ruler of Kashmir, Virasena established his sway over Gandhara. The remaining empire was divided between Samprati and Dasharatha. This division sounded the death knell of the Mauryan Empire.
- **Lack of law of succession:** There existed no definite law of succession in the Mauryan empire, as a result of which there followed a war of succession amongst the sons and grandsons of Ashoka. The palace had become a virtual centre of conspiracies. It is believed that as a result of such conspiracy, Kunala was blinded by his stepmother.
- **Disloyalty of the officials:** During the later Mauryan kings, the court and the palace had become centres of conspiracies and the officials had become disloyal. The example of Pushyamitra is a testimony to this belief.
- **Deterioration in financial conditions:** Now it is also believed that proper care was not taken to collect the revenues as a result of which the later Mauryan kings had to face a financial crisis. The internal rebellions too emptied the treasury. The administration also suffered and so the empire became weak.
- **Ambition of Pushyamitra:** Pushyamitra Sunga was the Commander-in-Chief of the last Mauryan king, Brihadratha. He was an ambitious man. He

took full advantage of the weak position of the king and killed him, thereby becoming the ruler. He also laid the foundation of the Sunga Empire in Magadha.

*Rise of Magadha and the
Mauryan Dynasty*

Shastri's theory of the Mauryan decline

In 1910, Haraprasad Shastri, a Bengali historiographer and academician, propounded this theory of the Mauryan decline according to which Brahminical reaction sapped the vitality of Mauryan authority and shattered its very foundations. Shastri has advanced the following arguments in support of his theory:

- The first and the foremost cause of the alienation of the Brahmins was Ashoka's edicts against the animal sacrifice. Shastri maintains that these edicts were directed against Brahmins as animal sacrifice formed an important part of Brahminical rituals. As a result of which, the Brahmin felt offended and revolted against the Mauryas.
- Having referred to the prohibition of animal sacrifices, Shastri goes on to say, 'This was followed by another edict in which Ashoka boasted that those who were regarded as gods on earth have been reduced by him into false gods. If it means anything, it means that the Brahmin who were regarded as Bhudevas or gods on earth had been shown up by him.'
- The appointment of *Dharma-Mahamatras*, i.e., Superintendent of Morals was a direct invasion on the rights and privileges of Brahmins, which the Brahmins could not tolerate.
- Another cause of the alienation of Brahmins was a passage where Ashoka insisted upon his officers strictly observing the principles of Danda-Samata and Vyavahara-Samata. Shastri takes his expressions to mean equality of punishment and equality in law-suits irrespective of caste, colour and creed, and adds that this order, was very offensive to the Brahmins who claimed many privileges including immunity from capital punishment.
- In conclusion, Pandit Shastri refers to the assassination of the last Maurya king Brihadratha by Pushyamitra Sunga. He says, 'We clearly see the hands of the Brahmins in the great revolution.' Pushyamitra killed Brihadratha because he was a Brahmin.

Raychaudhri's objections

Dr Hem Chandra Raychaudhri has not accepted the arguments advanced by Haraprasad Shastri in support of his theory. He has criticized all the arguments in the following manner:

- As regards the first point, Dr Raychaudhri has pointed out that prohibition of animal sacrifices did not necessarily imply hostilities towards the Brahmins. Long before Ashoka, the Sruti literature contain references against sacrifices and in favour of ahimsa. In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Ghora Angirasa

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lays great stress on Ahimsa and non-killing of animal. If Ashoka prohibited animal sacrifice, there was no question of the alienation of Brahmins.

- As regards the second argument advanced by Pandit Shastri, Raychaudhri says that the former has not followed the correct interpretation. The meaning of the entire passage is 'during that time the men in India who had been unassociated with the gods became associated with them.' There is thus no question of 'showing up' anybody.
- The appointment of *Dharma-Mahamatras* was not a direct invasion upon the privilege of the Brahmins. First of all, they were not simply superintendents of morals, they also had other enormous duties. Moreover, there is nothing to show that the *Dharma-Mahamatras* were wholly recruited from non-Brahmins.
- By *Danda-Samata* or *Vyavahara Samata* (equality of treatment or punishment), Ashoka did not want to infringe the rights and privileges of the Brahmins; rather, he was desirous of introducing uniformity in judicial procedure in his empire. It is to be understood in connection with the general principles of decentralization. It did not necessarily infringe on the alleged immunity of the Brahmins from capital punishment.
- As regards the fifth argument advanced by Pandit Shastri, there is no denying the fact that the last Mauryan king Brihadratha was put to death by Pushyamitra who was a Brahmin, but we must not forget that Pushyamitra was also the Commander-in-chief of the forces of Mauryas, and he took advantage of his position. Such rebellions are numerous in history. Moreover, if the relations of the Mauryas and the Brahmins would not have been cordial, how could it be possible that a Brahmin might assume the office of the Commander-in-chief?

Check Your Progress

4. What is the primary source of our knowledge on the Mauryan Empire?
5. What were the main centres of clothes under the Mauryan Empire?
6. List the various coins that were minted under the Mauryan Empire.
7. How did the division of empire lead to the decline of the Mauryan Empire?

7.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Of the sixteen mahajanapadas, four were prominent monarchies—Kosala, Vatsa, Avanti and Magadha.
2. The mahajanapadas had two kinds of political systems. They were either republics or monarchies.

3. The capital of Kashi, Varanasi was 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. It emerged as a leading centre of textile manufacture and horse trade in the time of the Buddha.
4. The primary source of our knowledge on the Mauryan Empire is based on the *Arthashastra* by Chanakya, which is a treatise on statecraft.
5. During the Mauryan times the cloth industry had greatly developed. The main clothes centres were Kashi, Vatsa, Madura, Vanga, Apranta, etc.
6. The following coins were minted under the Mauryan dynasty:
 - Gold coins known as Sauvamik
 - Silver coins called Kashaparna
 - Copper coins called Mashaka
 - Kakni was also a copper coin which was less valuable to Mashaka
7. Ashoka's death was followed by the division of Mauryan empire amongst his sons and grandsons. While Jalauka became the ruler of Kashmir, Virasena established his sway over Gandhara. The remaining empire was divided between Samprati and Dasratha. This division sounded the death knell of the Mauryan Empire.

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7.5 SUMMARY

- There was a long history of Magadha before the Mauryas came into prominence. Magadha, (the region of present day southern part of Bihar), was one of the sixteen territorial polities called Mahajanapadas during the time of the Buddha.
- At the beginning, it was just one of these Mahajanapadas, but it soon began to rise fast under the two very energetic rulers, Bimbisara and Ajatasatru in the 6th-5th centuries BC.
- Ancient Buddhist texts make frequent reference to the sixteen great kingdoms (mahajanapadas) and republics which had evolved and flourished in the northern/north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent before the rise of Buddhism in India.
- Of the sixteen mahajanapadas, four were prominent monarchies—Kosala, Vatsa, Avanti and Magadha. They were constantly fighting with each other. Ultimately, Magadha emerged supreme.
- The mahajanapadas had two kinds of political systems. They were either republics or monarchies. A republican mahajanapada was ruled by a group of people elected by the people of that tribe. There was no hereditary ruler.
- The Aryans slowly and steadily expanded their civilization and culture. They expanded rapidly in northern India. Many strong Aryan centres were

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established till the 6th century BC and the states were being called on the basis of caste. None had full control over whole India, which divided into many smaller states. In order to expand the states, the janapadas were extended and changed into mahajanpadas later.

- Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire. The rulers of the Mauryan period organized the administration system, which resulted in the all-round development of India. India constructed a new world on the basis of peace, brotherhood and cultural unity under the rule of the Mauryas.
- Under the Mauryans, India was an agricultural country. According to Megasthenes, majority of the population consisted of the agriculturists. They neither participated in warfare nor did they participate in the state affairs. They were not harmed during wars. The tillers of the soil carried on their work uninterruptedly.
- Spinning was done by the spinning wheels and big looms were used for weaving clothes. According to *Arthashastra* and Megasthenes, cotton was produced in great quantity; the weavers of cotton clothes worked round the clock.
- Though Ashoka is known as the greatest king of India, historians learned about him only in the 19th century.
- The causes for the downfall of Mauryan dynasty were many among which the most important were the vastness of the empire; incapable successors; deteriorating financial position and disloyalty of the chief army officials.

7.6 KEY WORDS

- **Jana:** In ancient India, the groups of villages belonged to a clan or many clans made a community called jana.
- **Mahajanapadas:** They were sixteen kingdoms or oligarchic republics that existed in ancient India from the sixth to fourth centuries BC.
- **Portrait:** It is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant.
- **Schist:** It is a type or quality of stone formed through layers.
- **Ivory:** They are images or figures made from the bones, primarily of elephant
- **Conquest:** It refers to the subjugation and assumption of control of a place or people by the use of military force.
- **Sculpture:** It is a three-dimensional artwork created by shaping or combining hard materials (such as stone, glass and wood).

7.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Why were the janapadas extended and changed into mahajanpadas later?
2. What kind of political system did the mahajanapadas have?
3. What were the Republics of the sixth century BC provided in the Buddhist books?
4. State Shastri's theory of the Mauryan decline.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the rise of mahajanapadas, republics and monarchies in India during the Mauryan rule.
2. What important information do the Buddhist and Jaina books provide about the sixteen major mahajanapadas?
3. Write a descriptive note on the economic conditions of India during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya.
4. Explain the causes for the decline of the Mauryan Empire.

7.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 8 KAUTILYA AND ASHOKA

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Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Kautilya's *Arthashastra*
- 8.3 Ashoka the Great and the Spread of Buddhism
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- 8.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.8 Further Readings

8.0 INTRODUCTION

The empire that Ashoka ruled was founded by his grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya, more than 2300 years ago. Chandragupta was supported by a wise man named Chanakya or Kautilya. Many of Chanakya's ideas were written down in a book called the *Arthashastra*. Chandragupta was not only a great conqueror but also a capable administrator. The way he carried on the administration of his empire was pursued by his successors and no change was felt necessary except that Ashoka tried to liberalize it further and elaborated the public duties of the state officials. The basic principles of the administration of the Mauryas remained the same as established by Chandragupta till subsequently the weaker Mauryas lost their hold over it.

Ashoka was another great king not only in the history of India but also across the whole world. A lot of information about him is available through his inscriptions and the Buddhist literature. He was the son of Bindusara and the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya. In his later life, after he saw the bloodshed in the Kalinga war, he renounced violence and adopted Buddhism. This unit will discuss Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Ashoka's *Dhamma* and the spread of Buddhism.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the polity, bureaucracy and agriculture during the Mauryan period as given in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*
- Discuss the trade and industry, the provincial administration, and the judicial administration of the Mauryan period as described in *Arthashastra*

- Assess Ashoka as a ruler and his *Dhamma*
- Analyse the role of Ashoka in spreading Buddhism in India

8.2 KAUTILYA'S ARTHASASTRA

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Primarily, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the description of Megasthenes give us a fair idea of the administration of Chandragupta.

The polity

Regarding the inter-state relations, the *Arthashastra* states that the normal relations between the states can only be that of mutual hostility and material interests alone should guide the relations of one state with another. A ruler should adopt the policy which is calculated to increase the power and wealth of his state, irrespective of any legal justice or moral consideration and for this purpose; he should adopt any or all the four instruments, viz. *Sama* (conciliation), *Dama* (gift), *Danda* (aggressive action) and *Bheda* (sowing dimensions in a hostile state or among different enemy states).

The king

As per the *Arthashastra*, the busiest person in the kingdom, was the king. Different duties were assigned for different times of the day. The welfare of the state and its subject were the source of happiness for the king.

The council of ministers and the state council

According to Kautilya, there were two committees to assist the king in the administration. He says, 'Sovereignty is possible only with assistance.' It implied that these committees were not only necessary but also effective in administration as well. The council of ministers was a small body consisting of 3–12 members. Each of them was the head of one or a few of the administrative departments and sometimes, one of them could be appointed as the chief or prime minister. All of them were appointed by the king on merit and could also be dismissed by him. All the administrative measures were preceded by deliberations in the council of ministers. Each minister had free access to the king but in policy matters they advised the king as a body. The State Council was a large body and the number of its members varied between 12, 16 or 20 and, according to Kautilya, it could include as many members as the need of the state required. These councils played an effective role in the administration of the kingdom. Kautilya has clearly distinguished the two and has given pre-eminence to the Council of Ministers as compared to the State Council. Of course, the king had the legal power to refuse to work on their advice but, in practice, he hardly did so.

Agriculture

During the Mauryan times, India was an agricultural country. According to Megasthenes, a majority consisted of the peasants and farmers. The land used to

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be rich and fertile. Means of irrigation were simple and as such the people never saw the disasters caused by famines or rot, the prices of the daily necessities gained momentum. There were two seasonal rainfalls in India and the farmers reaped the harvest twice a year. The following were the means of irrigation as given by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra*:

- (i) Rivers, canals, ponds and tanks.
- (ii) The water was drawn from the wells with the help of bullocks, by buckets and big leather bags.
- (iii) By building dams over the rivers.
- (iv) Through an air driven mill.

Water or irrigation tax collection by government

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* refers to a water tax which was regularly collected wherever the state assisted in providing irrigation. One of the Chandragupta's governors was responsible for building a dam across a river near Girnar in Western India, resulting in a large lake to supply water for the region. An inscription in the neighbourhood mentions the continuous maintenance of this dam for eight hundred years after it was built. Although the construction and maintenance of reservoirs, tanks, canals, and wells were regarded as part of the functions of the government, there is no ground for holding that the control of irrigation was the key to the political control of the country. We have epigraphic evidence for the existence of rural store-house, which show that taxes were also collected in kind and these granaries were meant for helping local people in times of famines, drought, etc.

Trade and industry

Besides agriculture, which was the main profession, trade and industry flourished well. One salient feature of the economic conditions of the Mauryan period was that major industries were under the state control and state had control over industry. Mines were nationalized and various diamonds, gems, precious stones, copper, lead, tin, iron and bitumen were managed by the state. Efficiency in administration rendered the organization of trade easier, and crafts were gradually converted into small scale industries. The state directly employed some of the artisans such as armours, ship-builders, etc., who were exempted from tax, but others who worked in state workshops, as for example the spinning and weaving shops and the state mines, were liable to tax. The rest worked either individually or, as most often was the case, as members of a guild. The guilds were large and complex in structure, and artisans found it advantageous to join them, since this eliminated the expense of working alone and having to compete with the guilds. From the point of view of the state, guilds facilitated the collection of taxes and the general running of the industry. Localization of occupation and the hereditary nature of occupations strengthened the guilds.

The bureaucracy at the centre

The Mauryan administration was carried on by an organized, efficient and a highly centralized bureaucracy. Besides the ministers who were the heads of various departments, the *Sannidhara* (Head of Treasury), the *Samawrta* (Collector General of Revenue), the *Purohita* (Chief priest), the *Senapati* (Commander of the army), the *Pratihara* (Gate-keeper or the protector of the King's palace and person) the *Antarvamsika* (Leader of the harem guards), *Durgapala* (Governor of the fort), the *Anrapala* (Governor of the frontier), *Paur* (Governor of the capital), the *Nyayadeish* (Chief Justice) and *Prasasta* (Head of the Police) were the other important officials. There were other numerous officers who worked in various other departments such as Audit and Accounts, Treasury, Records, Mines, Mint, Commerce, Excise, Agriculture, Toll, etc. The efficiency of the Mauryan administration depended on the loyalty and capability of its bureaucracy. Prof. Nilakanta Sastri an eminent Dravidologist opines that the Mauryan bureaucracy was vast, versatile and kept itself aligned with all the aspects of the economic and social life of the state.

The provincial administration

The Mauryan Empire was divided into a number of provinces. The provinces were of two categories, viz. one which were ruled over by the subordinate rulers and the other which were created after dividing the territories under the direct rule of the Mauryas. During the reign of Ashoka such provinces, were four in number, viz. Utrapath, Avanti-Rashtra, Kalinga and Dakhsinapath having Taxila, Ujjayani, Tosh and Suvaranagiri, respectively as their capitals. The fifth part of the empire was called Prashad, which was ruled by the emperor himself from the capital Pataliputra. In each of these provinces there was a Governor or Viceroy who was sometimes a prince of royal blood. The princes, when appointed as Viceroys, were called Kumar-Mahamartras while the rest of the Viceroys were simply designated as Mahamatras. These were the provinces which were formed as cuts of administration after dividing the imperial territories, which were under the direct rule of the Mauryas. Yet, there were another type of provinces. These were the states which had accepted the over-lordship of the Mauryas but had been left free to be governed by their own rulers. The number of provinces during the period of Chandragupta is not clear but Ashoka definitely had at least four provinces directly under his rule, which had their capitals at Taxila, Tosali, Ujjain and Suvarnagiri. Magadha and its nearby territories were administered by the emperor himself from its capital Pataliputra.

Mahamatras carried on the administration under the guidance of the emperor but it was difficult to control such a vast empire from a single centre because of the difficulty of communications in those days. Hence, they must have enjoyed wide and independent powers. It is also believed that there was an advisory committee like the council of ministers at the centre to help every Mahamatra. Besides, there

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were many other officers who helped a Mahamatra in carrying out the administration. Amongst them *Yuta* (tax-collectors), *Rajuka* (revenue collectors) and *Sthaniks* (district officers) were important.

The provinces were divided into districts under *Sthaniks* who were helped by another class of officers called Gopas. The village was the smallest unit of administration where an officer known as Gramika either elected by the local people or by the government, looked after the administration of the village with the help of a village-assembly. The village assembly managed cleanliness, construction of bridges and roads, justice and other things.

The administration of city

City administration was looked after in its minutest detail. Every city was divided into Wards and further into the groups of households under Sthaniks and Gopas, respectively. The entire city was under a city-superintendent assisted by a municipal corporation.

An idea of city administration can be perceived from the administration of the capital Pataliputra well described by Megasthenes. As described by him, Pataliputra was nine miles in length and $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles in breadth. It had sixty-four gates and 570 towers. It was protected by a wooden wall and surrounded by a sixty feet wide ditch. A commission of thirty members administered it. The commission was divided into six boards each of which had five members. Each board looked after separate work. The first two boards looked after trade and commerce, the third after manufactured articles, the fourth after foreigners, the fifth maintained the record of births and deaths and the sixth collected $\frac{1}{10}$ th of the prices of the articles sold in the market. In its collective capacity, the commission looked after all the matters of public interest and those connected with civic amenities.

Elaborate regulations were made for proper sanitary arrangements and to prevent the outbreak of fire in the city. It had temples, roads, foot-paths, wells, tanks, hospitals, gardens and various places of entertainment.

Thus, Pataliputra was a well-planned, well administered and a beautiful city.

Espionage

The Mauryas had developed an efficient system of espionage. Spies were kept not only by the emperor but also by all the important officials of the state. Female spies were also quite popular. Spies were deputed to foreign countries also. Kautilya and Chandragupta had given great importance to this system in an administration. The emperor was kept informed about all the relevant affairs of his state and also about the affairs of the foreign states.

Judicial administration

Both Megasthenese and Kautilya describe that the penal code was severe. Even for ordinary offences, fines were imposed and for severe crimes there was a

provision of either penalty of death or cutting off the limbs of the body. However, crimes were few.

The courts were of two types: central and local. At the centre, the king held his own court and provided justice. Besides, there was the court of the Chief Justice who arranged court with the help of four or five other judges.

The local courts were of three types. The first type of court was formed by the citizens themselves to sort out their disputes, the second type of court was formed by the business-guilds and the third were the village assemblies. Besides, there were civil and criminal courts of the state. The Civil Courts were called Dharmasthiya and the criminal courts Kantaksodhan. Prof N. K. Shastri has expressed the view that the changed economic and social circumstances had created new complications in the society at that time. The courts called Kantaksodhanas were created primarily to face the challenges posed by those complications and hence were supposed to decide the cases immediately. Ashoka had decided that the orders of death penalty would be carried out after three days.

Finance

The primary source of income for the state was land revenue. The royal share of the produce of the soil called the Bhaga generally amounted to 1/6th, but it differed and ranged from 1/4th to 1/8th. It was based on the land used by each individual cultivator, not on the village as a whole and also in accordance with the quality of the land. Ashoka had reduced it to 1/8th of the produce in the district of Lumbini where Buddha was born. The state was accepted as the owner of the land. The state had increased the area of cultivation after clearing the forests. Large number of slaves were brought to new land for cultivation from the heavily populated areas. One and a half lakh people were brought from Kalinga after the war for the clearance of the forests and cultivation of the new land.

Besides, there were various other sources of income for the state. It taxed the shepherds and the livestock breeders on the number and produce of the animals. The state charged toll-tax and trade-tax on the articles sold. There was forest tax, tax on intoxicants, mine-tax, fish tax, irrigation tax, license tax, etc. The state owned vast estates and forests. It had a monopoly of mines and traded in mineral products. It had its own factories which produced all sorts of articles, particularly cloth. Trade by waterways was also controlled by the state. Actually, the state not only owned but also directly participated in the organization and development of agriculture, industry and trade. The state had the right to confiscate the property of the individuals on several grounds. In times of crisis, the state organized festivals and exhibitions for earning money. All this provided some additional income to it.

The king's household, the army, salaries of officials and members of the bureaucracy and expenditure on public works were the main items of the expenditure of the state. The employees of the state were paid salaries in cash. The difference between the highest paid civil or military officer and the lowest paid employee ranged proportionally.

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Roads and irrigation

Large irrigation projects and construction and maintenance of public highways were the responsibilities of the state. Megasthenese has described the main highway which ran from the North-West up-to Pataliputra and towards the East. It was 1,150 miles long and quite wide. Trees were planted on its both sides. Milestones and direction-posts were erected on it and arrangements were made for its proper maintenance. It gives us an idea of the other highways of the empire. They were safe, properly maintained, of long distances and were up to thirty-two feet or even more in width.

The Maurya rulers constructed large numbers of canals and set up other irrigation projects and their example was circulated by their provincial governors. One of Chandragupta's governors was responsible for building a dam across a river near Girnar in western India, resulting in a large supply of water for the region. The state, however, charged irrigation tax which ranged from 1/5th to 1/3rd of the produce.

Public health, sanitation and census

The state took proper care of the public health in general. Elaborate rules were framed for sanitation purposes, which were strictly enforced. There were hospitals not only for human beings but also for birds and animals. There was a separate department for public census and it kept records of birth and deaths at every place.

Military administration

The Mauryas kept a large and powerful standing army. Chandragupta had laid its foundation and there is no evidence to prove that even Ashoka who gave up wars of conquest after the war with Kalinga reduced the number and strength of the army. The Mauryas kept a navy also but the force consisted mainly of infantry, cavalry, war-elephants and chariots. Pliny, who based his statement on Megasthenese, puts the strength of Chandragupta's forces at 60,000 of infantry, 30,000 of cavalry and 9,000 elephants. He did not mention the number of chariots but Plutarch placed their number at 8,000. The administration of the army was looked after by a council of thirty members, which was divided into six committees of the five members each to look after the six departments of the army, which were as follows:

- Admiralty (Navy)
- Transport
- Infantry
- Cavalry
- War-chariots
- War-elephants

The success of Chandragupta against Seleucus and the conquest of Kalinga by Ashoka are sufficient proofs of the strength of the Mauryan army.

Kautilya and Ashoka

Check Your Progress

1. Why did Ashoka renounce violence and adopted Buddhism?
2. State a salient feature of the economic conditions of the Mauryan period.
3. What was the primary source of income of the Mauryan state?

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8.3 ASHOKA THE GREAT AND THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

Ashoka has an unmatched place in the history of ancient India. He is not only famous for the vastness of his empire but also for his personal character, aims and ideals. He was an able ruler and an ideal human being. Not every age and every country can give birth to such a king. Ashoka cannot be compared even today with any other ruler from the history of the world.

8.3.1 Ashoka's Reign

Ashoka was a great king not only in the history of India but also across the whole world. We possess a lot of information about him from his inscriptions and the Buddhist literature. According to the Buddhist tradition, Bindusara had sixteen wives and 101 sons. Sumana or Susima was the eldest son, Ashoka the second and Tishya the youngest son. In the northern tradition, the name of Ashoka's mother is mentioned as Subhadraangi, but in the southern tradition she is named Dharma. When Ashoka was only eighteen, he was appointed by his father the Viceroy of Rashtra with its capital at Ujjayini. It was there that Ashoka married Mahadevi and his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra were born.

There was a rebellion in Taxila and Ashoka was sent to suppress the same. There was another rebellion at Taxila which its Viceroy Susima failed to suppress. It is stated that when Bindusara died Ashoka captured the throne with the help of the Ministers headed by Khallataka or Radhagupta. That led to a war of succession between Ashoka and Susima. Yuvaraja Susima, was helped by his other ninety-eight brothers except Tishya. The story is that Ashoka killed all his ninety-nine brothers and waded through blood to the throne and thereby got the notorious title of *ChandAshoka*. There are many stories giving details of the cruelty of Ashoka before he ultimately ascended the throne.

While it is conceded that there might have been a struggle for power, it is not admitted that Ashoka was responsible for the murder of all of his brothers except Tishya. Dr Smith regards the story of the slaughter of his brothers as

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something absurd and false. He points out that even the inscriptions of Ashoka prove that his brothers and sisters were alive in the 17th and 18th years of his reign and their households were the object of his anxious care. It is pointed out that the fifth rock edict refers to the family establishments of his brothers as existing. This does not necessarily mean that his brothers were also alive. But there is nothing to show that his brothers were dead.

It is difficult to settle the controversy regarding the first four years of the reign of Ashoka. However, it is certain that Ashoka was consecrated after four years after his accession to the throne.

Ashoka took up the title of Devanampiya Piyadasi or the beloved of the gods and was of an amiable nature. The name Ashoka is found in literature and also in the Makti Edict of Ashoka and the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman I. The name DharmAshoka is found on the Sarnath inscription of Kumaradevi. Not much is known about the early years of the reign of Ashoka. His personal reminiscences shows that he lived the life of his predecessors, consuming food freely, enjoying the pleasures, and encouraging festive assemblies accompanied by dancing and drinking. During his first thirteen years, he carried on the traditional policy of expansion within India and maintained friendly relations with foreign powers. He was aggressive at home but a pacifist abroad. He exchanged embassies with the foreign countries. He employed Yavana officials like Tushaspa.

The Edicts of King Ashoka

King Ashoka, the third monarch of the Indian Mauryan dynasty, has come to be regarded as one of the most exemplary rulers in world history. The British historian H. G. Wells has written: 'Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history ... the name of Ashoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star.' Although Buddhist literature preserved the legend of this ruler—the story of a cruel and ruthless king who converted to Buddhism and thereafter established a reign of virtue—definitive historical records of his reign were lacking. Then in the nineteenth century there came to light a large number of edicts, in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. These edicts, inscribed on rocks and pillars, proclaim Ashoka's reforms and policies and promulgate his advice to his subjects. The present rendering of these edicts, based on earlier translations, offers us insights into a powerful and capable ruler's attempt to establish an empire on the foundation of righteousness, a reign which makes the moral and spiritual welfare of his subjects its primary concern. The Australian Ven. S. Dhammika, the compiler of the present work, is the spiritual director of the Buddha *Dhamma* Mandala Society in Singapore.

The extent of Ashoka's empire

Ashoka himself has given quite an explicit list of the places which were under his rule. These include Magadha, Pataliputra, Barabar hills, Kaushambi, Lumbinigama, Kalinga, Atavi (the forest tract of mid India), Suvarnagiri, Isila, Ujjaini and

Taxila. Even beyond Taxila, Ashoka's kingdom included the areas around Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra, which were adjacent to the eastern boundaries of the realm of Amityako Yonaraja (Antiochos II Theos of Syria). Exact location of this Yona country has now been confirmed as Arachosia. Apart from this, the north-west frontier of Ashoka's Empire also included Kamboja, which corresponds to Rajapur or Rajaur near Punch in Kashmir, and also Gandhara, territory now west of Indus with its capital Pushkaravati. The inclusion of Kashmir in the dominions of Ashoka has been confirmed both by Hiuen-Tsang and also by Kalhana in his *Rajatarangini*. Kalhan mentions a number of stupas and viharas built by Ashoka. Ashoka also founded the city of Srinagara.

Apart from this, we have a clear proof that Gangaridai, i.e., the area of Bengal was under Ashoka but Kamarupa was out of his dominions. In south India, the areas up to the river Pennar near Nellore formed the frontier of Ashoka's kingdom. There is a mention of some Tamil kingdoms beyond this, which are explicitly addressed as the neighbouring states.

Early life

Though Ashoka is known as the greatest king of India, historians learned about him only in the nineteenth century. In 1837, a British scholar named James Prinsep deciphered the inscriptions on the pillars and rocks that are found in many parts of India. It was in Brahmi script. From these inscriptions, it was concluded that Ashoka and the ruler named *Devanampiya Priyadarsi* were one and the same person. An inscription discovered by Prinsep in 1915 used the name Ashoka along with the other name. These inscriptions gave historians valuable information about Ashoka's rule and the extent and condition of his empire. The land he ruled stretched from the Himalayas in Nepal and Kashmir to Mysore in the south, from Afghanistan in the northwest to the banks of the River Brahmaputra in the east. In the west his territory covered Saurashtra and Junagarh. Kalinga was one of the kingdoms, which remained unconquered and hostile when Ashoka succeeded to the throne. It was important to Ashoka from a geographical point of view, since the route to south India both by land and by sea passed through it. It would also bring added prosperity to the Mauryan Empire. It was for these reasons that Ashoka attacked Kalinga.

Battle of Kalinga

Kalinga was a prosperous little kingdom lying between the river Godavari and Mahanadi, close to the Bay of Bengal. It had an infantry of 60,000 men, 10,000 horsemen and 600 elephants. Ashoka wanted to capture this fertile land, and so had it surrounded. A fierce battle followed in which an enormous amount of life and property was lost. Kalinga surrendered and, for the first time in the Indian history, almost the whole sub-continent except the extreme south was under a single ruler. However, this battle affected the king deeply.

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Fig. 8.1 Mauryan Empire under Ashoka

In the midst of the battlefield, Ashoka stood with the wounded, crippled and the dead all around him. The sight of the terrible carnage and the miseries of war filled Ashoka with remorse. He vowed never to make war again. The war drums (*Bherighosh*) were silenced forever and henceforth were heard only the reverberations of the *Dhammaghosh* (the call to non-violence and universal peace).

8.3.2 Ashoka's Dhamma

The word *Dhamma* was derived from the Sanskrit word 'dharma.' Ashoka followed the principles of Buddhism—that of truth, charity, kindness, purity and goodness. He wanted his people to lead pure and virtuous lives, irrespective of their religion or culture. He considered all subjects his children. He explained his ideas in his edicts by engraving his principles on pillars throughout his kingdom. The edicts were written in Prakrit, which was the language of the common people, so that they could understand and follow them. Some of the edicts such as those in Afghanistan were composed in Greek for the same reason. The purpose of the edicts was to inform the people of Ashoka's reforms and to encourage them to be more generous, kind and moral. He strictly prohibited animal slaughtering in the kingdom and asked people to be respectful of each other. People should respect nature, their parents, everything living as well as non-living. Brahmins should be treated with respect and servants should be treated as equals. Donating alms to the poor and the needy was practiced and advised by the state. He preached

harmony and peace and advised people to get rid of anger, jealousy, cruelty and arrogance. According to Romila Thapar, an Indian historian whose principal area of study is ancient India, '*Dhamma* was a way of life which was based on the social and moral responsibilities.'

Ashoka was an able administrator, an intelligent human being and a devout Buddhist. He attempted to spread this religion to Syria, Egypt and Macedonia, and also sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka. The Buddhist *Sangha* of the time decided to send missionaries to many places, like modern day Burma and Sri Lanka.

Following are the important aspects of *Dhamma* through the study of the scripts:

- Earliest signals of Dhammalipi are seen in the Minor Rock Edict I and II (MREI and II).
- The core of Ashoka's *Dhamma* is enshrined in the first and the second Minor Rock Edict. Minor Rock Edicts (now onwards MREI and II) refer to following important points:
 - o Gujarr version of MRE-I mentions that both rich and poor should be encouraged to practice *Dhamma*.
 - o Brahmagiri version of MRE-II has the following points. Beloved of the god (Ashoka) said that:
 - (a) Mother and father should be obeyed and likewise the elders.
 - (b) Steadfastness (in kindness) should be shown towards the living beings.
 - (c) The truth must be spoken.
 - (d) Teachers should be honoured by the pupil.
 - (e) Relatives should be respected.

These principles have been engraved just after the mention of Ashoka's *Dhammayatra* and form the core of his *Dhamma*.

- The concept of *Dhamma* was based upon the ancient values and customs. They have been repeated and stressed a number of times. There is a special stress on the following:
 - o Abstention from slaughter of life (lives) (*Arambho prananam*).
 - o Avoidance of injury to the creatures (*Avihisa Bhutanam*).
- In REIII the Government officials are asked to preach the following:
 - o Obedience to father and mother is an excellent thing.
 - o Liberty to friends, acquaintances and relatives and to Brahmins and Sramanas is an excellent thing.
 - o The abstention from slaughter of living creatures is an excellent thing.

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- o Tendency towards spending little and storing little is an excellent thing.
- o RE IX and XI advocate a proper courtesy even towards the slaves and servants. RE VII speaks to show courtesy to miserable and wretched (*Kapanivalakesu*).

Now, dealing with the important part, let us understand the constituents of the *Dhamma* policy. *Dhamma* is clearly defined in PEII as consisting of the following:

- Freedom from sins (or few sins): *Apasinave*
- Many virtuous deeds: *Vahukayane*
- Compassion: *Daya*
- Liberality (or making gifts): *Dana*
- Truthfulness: *Satya*
- Purity (of mind): *Sochye*

PEVII adds gentleness (*Sadhve*) to the mentioned list.

According to PE VII, people of all sects should be obliged to have the following:

- Self-control (*Sayame*)
- Mental purity (*Bhava shuddhi*)
- Gratefulness (*Kilanala*)
- Firm devotion (*Didhabhalila*)

PE III says that man should guard himself against those passions which lead to sin. These are as follows:

- Fierceness (*Chamdiye*)
- Cruelty (*Nilhuliye*)
- Anger (*Kodhe*)
- Pride (*Mane*)
- Jealously (*Irshiya*)

Though in the conduct of *Dhamma* (Law of Piety) the renouncement of killing, non violence, non-injury, self-control was a prominent part but that does not suggest that Ashoka totally renounced war.

Ashoka's *Dhammayatra* was initiated with Ashoka's visit to Sambodhi when he had been consecrated for ten years. He, in course of *Dhammayatas* or *Dharmayatra* visited *Brahmanas* and *Sramanas* and offered gifts. He visited elders and offered gifts of gold and made contact with the people of countryside and instructed them in *Dhamma*.

Nature of Dhamma

Scholars are not totally unanimous about the exact explanation of the nature of *Dhamma*. Rhys Davids understands it, as a whole, as the duty of laymen while Smith says that the character of Ashoka's teaching is purely human and severely practical. He also identifies the ethics in the edicts as Buddhist rather than Brahmanical. Dr. C Sircar says that *Dhamma* was a code of morals preached by Ashoka. It was basically extracted from the teachings of Buddha. According to K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, Ashoka's *Dhamma* embraced all the living beings as it was based upon the ethics of benevolence.

In the light of this comparative analysis you may infer that the crux or core of Ashoka's *Dhamma* was to enhance the ethics and moral standards of people by preaching non-violence, respect for other sects, and respect for people in general, etc. What also seems pertinent to note here is that *Dhamma* was also driven by political and geographical compulsions. It was rather a political philosophy based upon the ancient customs to maintain peace, tranquility and harmony in such a vast empire. This seems to be an important reason for creating an administrative machinery for the dissemination of the concept amongst the people.

The Foreign Policy after Kalinga

After Kalinga, Ashoka renounced the path of warfare, and this is amply evident by the fact that he made no attempt to annex his neighbouring countries namely, Chola, Pandya, Satiyaputra, Kerelaputra, Ceylon and the realm of Amtiyako Yonaraja, who is identified with Antiochos II Theos, king of Syria and western Asia. The concept of *Digvijaya* was replaced by the concept of *Dhammavijaya*.

Dhamma of Ashoka brought him in contact with the Hellenistic powers. Ashoka looked towards these countries for the expansion of *Dhamma* through *Dhammavijaya*. He says, 'My neighbours too, should learn this lesson.' The text of the Rock Edict XIII says, 'Conquest of the Law of Piety... has been won by his sacred Majesty ...among all his neighbours as far as six hundred leagues, where the king of Greeks named Antiochos dwells, and beyond (the realm) of that Antiochos (where dwell) the four kings severally Ptolemy (*Turamayo*), Antigonus (*Amekina*), Magas (*Maga*), and Alexander (*Alikasudara*) (like wise) in the south (*micha*), the Cholas and the Pandyas as far as Tambapani... .. Even where the duties of his sacred Majesty do not penetrate, those people, too are hearing his sacred Majesty's ordinance based upon the Law of Piety and his instruction in the law, practice and will practice the law.'

Due to such serious efforts undertaken by Ashoka, Buddhism did make a progression in the region around west Asia. Ceylonese chronicles also mention that envoys were sent to Ceylon and Suvarnabhumi (lower Burma and Sumatra). Mahendra, perhaps the younger brother or son of Ashoka along with his sister Sangamitra, went to Ceylon and successfully secured the conversion of *Devanampiya Tissa* and many more people.

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The last major recorded event in the life of Ashoka is the issuance of seven Pillar Edicts in around 242 BC. The council of Pataliputra may be placed around 240 BC. The main purpose of the council was to stop heresy, and supervise publication of special edicts to stop the schisms in the *sangha*. Some sources tell us that during his old age, Ashoka wasted huge resources of the empire to give charity to the monks and the *Sanghas*. Some others tell us that he abdicated to pursue devotion but it is not corroborated through evidence.

Though the exact knowledge as to where and how he died is not available but he died sometime around 232 BC after a reign of almost forty years. A Tibetan source tells us that he left for his heavenly abode at Taxila.

The Junagadh rock contains inscriptions by Ashoka (fourteen of the Edicts of Ashoka), Rudradaman I and Skandagupta.

Ashoka ruled for an estimated forty years. After his death, the Mauryan dynasty lasted just fifty more years. Ashoka had many wives and children, but many of their names are lost to time. Mahindra and Sanghamitra were twins born by his 2nd wife, Devi, in the city of Ujjain. He had entrusted to them the job of making his state religion, Buddhism, more popular across the known and the unknown world. Mahindra and Sanghamitra went to Sri Lanka and converted the King, the Queen and their people to Buddhism. They were naturally not handling state affairs after him.

In his old age, he seems to have come under the spell of his youngest wife Tishyaraksha. It is said that she had got his son Kunala, the regent in Takshashila, blinded by a wily stratagem. The official executioners spared Kunala and he became a wandering singer accompanied by his favourite wife Kanchanmala. In Pataliputra, Ashoka hears Kunala's song, and realizes that Kunala's misfortune may have been a punishment for some past sin of the emperor himself and condemns Tishyaraksha to death, restoring Kunala to the court. Kunala was succeeded by his son, Samprati, but his rule did not last long after Ashoka's death.

The reign of Ashoka could easily have disappeared into history as the ages passed by, and would have had not left behind a record of his trials. The testimony of this wise king was discovered in the form of magnificently sculpted pillars and boulders with a variety of actions and teachings he wished to be published etched on stone. What Ashoka left behind was the first written language in India since the ancient city of Harappa. The language used for inscription was the then current spoken form called Prakrit.

In the year 185 BC, about fifty years after Ashoka's death, the last Maurya ruler, Brhadrata, was assassinated by the commander-in-chief of the Mauryan armed forces, Pusyamitra Sunga, while he was taking the Guard of Honor of his forces. Pusyamitra Sunga founded the Sunga dynasty (185 BC–78 BC) and ruled just a fragmented part of the Mauryan Empire. Many of the northwestern territories of the Mauryan Empire (modern-day Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan) became the Indo-Greek Kingdom.

In 2001, a semi-fictionalized portrayal of Ashoka's life was produced as a motion picture under the title *Ashoka*. King Ashoka, the third monarch of the Indian Mauryan dynasty, has come to be regarded as one of the most exemplary rulers in world history. The British historian H.G. Wells has written: 'Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Ashoka shines, and shines, almost alone, a star.'

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Buddhist Kingship

One of the more enduring legacies of Ashoka Maurya was the model that he provided for the relationship between Buddhism and the state. Throughout Theravada Southeastern Asia, the model of rulership embodied by Ashoka replaced the notion of divine kingship that had previously dominated (in the Angkor kingdom, for instance). Under this model of 'Buddhist kingship', the king sought to legitimize his rule not through descent from a divine source, but by supporting and earning the approval of the Buddhist *sangha*. Following Ashoka's example, kings established monasteries, funded the construction of stupas, and supported the ordination of monks in their kingdom. Many rulers also took an active role in resolving disputes over the status and regulation of the sangha, as Ashoka had in calling a conclave to settle a number of contentious issues during his reign. This development ultimately led to a close association in many Southeast Asian countries between the monarchy and the religious hierarchy, an association that can still be seen today in the state-supported Buddhism of Thailand and the traditional role of the Thai king as both a religious and secular leader. Ashoka also said that all his courtiers were true to their self and governed the people in a moral manner.

Ashoka Chakra

The Ashoka Chakra (the wheel of Ashoka) is a depiction of the Dharmachakra or Dhammachakka in Pali, the Wheel of Dharma (Sanskrit: Chakra means wheel). The wheel has twenty-four spokes. The Ashoka Chakra has been widely inscribed on many relics of the Mauryan Emperor, most prominent among which is the Lion Capital of Sarnath and the Ashoka Pillar. The most visible use of the Ashoka Chakra today is at the centre of the National flag of the Republic of India (adopted on 22 July 1947), where it is rendered in a Navy-blue colour on a white background, by replacing the symbol of Charkha (Spinning wheel) of the pre-independence versions of the flag. Ashoka Chakra can also be seen on the base of Lion Capital of Ashoka which has been adopted as the National Emblem of India.

The Ashoka chakra was built by Ashoka during his reign. Chakra is a Sanskrit word which also means cycle or self-repeating process. The process it signifies is the cycle of time as how the world changes with time.

A few days before India became independent on August 1947, the specially constituted Constituent Assembly decided that the flag of India must be acceptable

to all parties and communities. A flag with three colours, saffron, white and green with the Ashoka Chakra was selected.

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Check Your Progress

4. What is the primary source of information about the life of Ashoka?
5. What led to a war of succession between Ashoka and Susima?
6. What is the last major recorded event in the life of Ashoka?
7. What is the Ashoka Chakra?

8.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. After Ashoka saw the bloodshed in the Kalinga war he renounced violence and adopted Buddhism.
2. One salient feature of the economic conditions of the Mauryan period was that major industries were under the state control and state had control over industry.
3. The primary source of income for the state was land revenue.
4. Ashoka was a great king not only in the history of India but also across the whole world. We possess a lot of information about him from his inscriptions and the Buddhist literature.
5. It is stated that when Bindusara died Ashoka captured the throne with the help of the Ministers headed by Khallataka or Radhagupta. That led to a war of succession between Ashoka and Susima.
6. The last major recorded event in the life of Ashoka is the issuance of seven Pillar Edicts in around 242 BC.
7. The Ashoka Chakra (the wheel of Ashoka) is a depiction of the Dharmachakra or *Dhammachakka* in Pali, the Wheel of Dharma (Sanskrit: Chakra means wheel). The wheel has twenty-four spokes.

8.5 SUMMARY

- The empire that Ashoka ruled was founded by his grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya, more than 2300 years ago. Chandragupta was supported by a wise man named Chanakya or Kautilya. Many of Chanakya's ideas were written down in a book called the *Arthashastra*.
- Primarily, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the description of Megasthenes give us a fair idea of the administration of Chandragupta.

- Regarding the inter-state relations, the *Arthashastra* states that the normal relations between the states can only be that of mutual hostility and material interests alone should guide the relations of one state with another.
- In *Arthashastra*, it is mentioned that the happiness of the king lies in the welfare and the ultimate good of his subjects. Therefore, the king was the busiest person in the kingdom.
- Kautilya's *Arthashastra* refers to a water tax which was regularly collected wherever the state assisted in providing irrigation. One of the Chandragupta's governors was responsible for building a dam across a river near Girnar in Western India, resulting in a large lake to supply water for the region.
- The Mauryan Empire was divided into a number of provinces. The provinces were of two categories, viz. one which were ruled over by the subordinate rulers and the other which were created after dividing the territories under the direct rule of the Mauryas.
- City administration was looked after in its minutest detail. Every city was divided into Wards and further into the groups of households under Sthaniks and Gopas, respectively. The entire city was under a city-superintendent assisted by a municipal corporation.
- Both Megasthenese and Kautilya describe that the penal code was severe. Even for ordinary offences, fines were imposed and for severe crimes there was a provision of either penalty of death or cutting off the limbs of the body. However, crimes were few.
- The primary source of income for the state was land revenue. The royal share of the produce of the soil called the Bhaga generally amounted to 1/6th, but it differed and ranged from 1/4th to 1/8th.
- The state took proper care of the public health in general. Elaborate rules were framed for sanitation purposes, which were strictly enforced.
- Ashoka has an unmatched place in the history of ancient India. He is not only famous for the vastness of his empire but also for his personal character, aims and ideals. He was an able ruler and an ideal human being. Not every age and every country can give birth to such a king. Ashoka cannot be compared even today with any other ruler from the history of the world.
- The land Ashoka ruled stretched from the Himalayas in Nepal and Kashmir to Mysore in the south, from Afghanistan in the northwest to the banks of the river Brahmaputra in the east.
- In the west, the territory of Ashoka covered Saurashtra and Junagarh.
- Kalinga was one of the kingdoms, which remained unconquered and hostile when Ashoka succeeded to the throne.
- The word '*Dhamma*' was derived from the Sanskrit word '*dharma*'.

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- Ashoka followed the principles of Buddhism—that of truth, charity, kindness, purity and goodness. He wanted his people to lead pure and virtuous lives, irrespective of their religion or culture. He considered all subjects his children. He explained his ideas in his edicts by engraving his principles on pillars throughout his kingdom. The edicts were written in Prakrit, which was the language of the common people, so that they could understand and follow them.

8.6 KEY WORDS

- **Sangha:** It is a word in Pali and Sanskrit meaning association, assembly, company or community and most commonly refers in Buddhism to the monastic community of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.
- **Bherigoshha:** It means war drums.
- **Dhamma ghosha:** It means the siren of Dharma.

8.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What does the *Arthashastra* state regarding inter-state relations?
2. List the means of irrigation as given by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra*.
3. How were roads and irrigation managed in the Mauryan period?
4. Write a short note on Ashoka's early life.
5. What was the extent of Ashoka's empire?

Long-Answer Questions

1. How does Kautilya's *Arthashastra* describe the polity, bureaucracy and agriculture during the Mauryan period?
2. Discuss the trade and industry, the provincial administration, and the judicial administration of the Mauryan period as described in *Arthashastra*.
3. Write a detailed note on Ashoka's reign.
4. 'Ashoka followed the principles of Buddhism—that of truth, charity, kindness, purity and goodness.' With regard to this statement, describe Ashoka's *Dhamma*.
5. How instrumental was Ashoka in spreading Buddhism in India? Explain in detail.

8.8 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - III
SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

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UNIT 9 BUDDHIST CONFERENCES

Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Cultural Contributions of Sungas
 - 9.2.1 Origin of Sungas
 - 9.2.2 Pushyamitra Sunga
- 9.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.4 Summary
- 9.5 Key Words
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- 9.7 Further Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

The post Mauryan Period saw the rise of three major dynasties in Northern India: the Sungas, Kanvas and Chedis. Pushyamitra Sunga came to power after overthrowing the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha. But after his death there were no significant emperors. Then the Kanvas came to power and ruled for forty-five years. In Kalinga, under the kingship of Kharavela of the Chedi dynasty, the kingdom rose to power and eminence. His kingdom was vast. This unit will describe the cultural contributions of the Sungas and the role played by Pushyamitra Sunga in it.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the cultural contributions made by the Sungas in the post-Mauryan period
- Analyse the role played by Pushyamitra in the administration of the country in the post-Mauryan period

9.2 CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF SUNGAS

The Mauryas were succeeded by the Sungas who ruled for 112 years from about 185–73 BC. Pushyamitra, the Mauryan Commander-in-Chief, killed the last Mauryan king, Brihadratha and ruled the kingdom for thirty-six years. Pushyamitra

was successful in usurping the throne on account of a general feeling of dissatisfaction against the weak Mauryan rulers who had failed to protect the people against the Greek invaders. These invaders had succeeded in penetrating the kingdom up to Pataliputra.

9.2.1 Origin of Sungas

There are many theories with regard to the origin of the Sungas. The Sungas appear to have been Brahmins. The celebrated grammarian, Panini, connects them with the Bharadvaja family, and in the *Asvalyana Srautasutra* the Sungas are known as teachers. They were Brahmins who occupied a high position in the theological world. Pushyamitra belonged to a family of the royal chaplain or *Purohita*. The later Mauryas were politically weak and Pushyamitra was forced to kill Brihadratha in the interest of the empire which was threatened by foreign invaders.

9.2.2 Pushyamitra Sunga

Pushyamitra (see Figure 9.1), according to historians, ruled for thirty-six years. There are references not only to his son, but also to his grandson taking part in the administration of the country.



Fig. 9.1 Pushyamitra Sunga

War and Vidarbha

The first major event during Pushyamitra's reign was his conflict with Vidarbha. According to the *Malvikagnimitram* (a play in Sanskrit by Kalidasa), the kingdom

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had been newly established and its ruler Yajnasena, who was related to the minister of the fallen Maurya, is described as a 'natural enemy' of the Sungas. Perhaps, the former had made himself independent in Vidarbha in the confusion following Brihadratha's murder, and as soon as Pushyamitra felt his position secure on the throne he demanded Yajnasena's allegiance. The course of the tussle is obscure but it seems Agnimitra, who was Pushyamitra's son and responsible for the victory at Vidisa, carried on hostilities. He won over to his side Yajnasena's cousin, Madhavsena and when the struggle ended, Vidarbha was divided between the two cousins.

Yavana incursions

The throne which Pushyamitra ascended was not a bed of roses. He had to meet difficulties from various quarters. It is contended that there were two Yavana wars which Pushyamitra had to fight—one in the beginning of his reign and the other at the close of his reign. The invasion of the Yavanas—which is mentioned in the *Gargi Samhita*—was a formidable one wherein it is stated that after conquering Saketa, Panchala and Mathura, the Yavanas reached Kusamadhvaja or Pataliputra and retired without fighting. There is no mention in literature that Pushyamitra lost his capital to the foreign invaders. Demetrios, the leader of the foreign invaders who reached as far as Pataliputra is mentioned in the *Gargi Samhita*. Demetrios had to retire from India on account of troubles at home. Eukratides had revolted in Bactria and Demetrios had to go back to fight him.

There is a reference to the second conflict with the Yavanas in the *Malvikagnimitram* written by Kalidas. By this time, Pushyamitra had grown old. Vasumitra, the grandson of Pushyamitra fought against the Yavana invaders. The battle was fought on the river Sindhu, Menander, in which the Yavana leader was defeated. It is pointed out that Menander is credited to have conquered more nations than Alexander. He was also the person who came after Demetrios. Coins from this period show that his territory extended up to Mathura. Buddhist accounts maintain that Menander converted to Buddhism and his court at Sakala or Salkot became a refuge for Buddhist monks.

Asvamedha sacrifice

The performance of the *Asvamedha Yajna* was one of the notable events of Pushyamitra's reign. It is referred to in the *Malvikagnimitra*. In fact, Patanjali, the sage who is considered the father of Yoga officiated as priest in this sacrifice. The Ayodhya inscription further informs us that Pushyamitra performed not one, but two horse sacrifices.

Extents of the kingdom

Pushyamitra's jurisdiction extended to Jalandha and Sakala in Punjab according to accepted testimony of the Tibetan historian Taranatha and the Buddhist text,

Divyavadana. The latter also indicates that Pataliputra continued to be the royal residence. Pushyamitra's sway over Ayodhya is proved by an inscription found there. According to *Malvikagnimitra*, however, his dominion comprised Vidisha and the southern region as far as the Narmada. Pushyamitra appears to have virtually made a feudal division of his extensive territories, as one version of the *Vayu Puranas* states that all eight sons of Pushyamitra ruled simultaneously.

Pushyamitra's persecutions

According to the *Divyavadana*, Pushyamitra was a persecutor of Buddhists. He is said to have made the notorious declaration at Sakala setting a price of one hundred gold dinars on the head of every Buddhist monk. Taranath also affirms that Pushyamitra was the ally of non-believers and participated in burning monasteries and slaying monks.

Pushyamitra's successor

Pushyamitra died around 148 BC and was succeeded by his son Agnimitra who was then the viceroy at Vidisa. He had ample experience of the methods of administration followed by his father. He ruled for a brief period of eight years and was followed by Sujyestha or Jethamitra (as mentioned in contemporary coins) who was perhaps his brother. Jethamitra was succeeded by Agnimitra's son Vasumitra. In his earlier days, he defeated the Yavanas who had tried to obstruct the progress of the Ashwamedha Yagna. The Sunga dynasty consisted of ten rulers but history has not condescended to record anything of note about the others.

Check Your Progress

1. Name the dynasty that succeeded the Mauryas.
2. What was the first major event during Pushyamitra's reign?
3. When did Pushyamitra die and who succeeded him?

9.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Mauryas were succeeded by the Sungas who ruled for 112 years from about 185–73 BC.
2. The first major event during Pushyamitra's reign was his conflict with Vidarbha.
3. Pushyamitra died around 148 BC and was succeeded by his son Agnimitra who was then the viceroy at Vidisa.

9.4 SUMMARY

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- The post Mauryan Period saw the rise of three major dynasties in Northern India: the Sungas, Kanvas and Chedis. Pushyamitra Sunga came to power after overthrowing the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha. But after his death there were no significant emperors. Then the Kanvas came to power and ruled for forty-five years.
- The Mauryas were succeeded by the Sungas who ruled for 112 years from about 185–73 BC. Pushyamitra, the Mauryan Commander-in-Chief, killed the last Mauryan king, Brihadratha and ruled the kingdom for thirty-six years.
- Pushyamitra was successful in usurping the throne on account of a general feeling of dissatisfaction against the weak Mauryan rulers who had failed to protect the people against the Greek invaders. These invaders had succeeded in penetrating the kingdom up to Pataliputra.
- There are many theories with regard to the origin of the Sungas. The Sungas appear to have been Brahmins. The celebrated grammarian, Panini, connects them with the Bharadvaja family, and in the *Asvalyana Srautasutra* the Sungas are known as teachers.
- The first major event during Pushyamitra's reign was his conflict with Vidarbha.
- The throne which Pushyamitra ascended was not a bed of roses. He had to meet difficulties from various quarters. It is contended that there were two Yavana wars which Pushyamitra had to fight—one in the beginning of his reign and the other at the close of his reign.
- The performance of the *Asvamedha Yajna* was one of the notable events of Pushyamitra's reign. It is referred to in the *Malvikagnimitra*.
- Pushyamitra's jurisdiction extended to Jalandha and Sakala in Punjab according to accepted testimony of the Tibetan historian Taranatha and the Buddhist text, *Divyavadana*.
- According to the *Divyavadana*, Pushyamitra was a persecutor of Buddhists. He is said to have made the notorious declaration at Sakala setting a price of one hundred gold dinars on the head of every Buddhist monk.
- Pushyamitra died around 148 BC and was succeeded by his son Agnimitra who was then the viceroy at Vidisa. He had ample experience of the methods of administration followed by his father.

9.5 KEY WORDS

- **Purohita:** It refers to an early functionary in Aryan India, who counselled the ruler, especially through ritual techniques.
- **Ashvamedha:** It is a horse sacrifice ritual followed by the Śrauta tradition of Vedic religion.

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9.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the origin of Sungas.
2. What difficulties did Pushyamitra had to undergo after his ascension to the throne?
3. Who were Pushyamitra's successors?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the cultural contributions made by the Sungas in the post-Mauryan period.
2. Analyse the role played by Pushyamitra in the administration of the country in the post-Mauryan period.

9.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 10 THE AGE OF KUSHANAS

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Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
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10.0 INTRODUCTION

The rise of the empire of the Kushans or the Kushanas is an important landmark in the history of Central Asia. Known to Chinese historians as Kuei-shuang, they were one of the important tribes of the Great Yueh-chi who had been driven out from their original homeland by another warring tribe, the Hsiung-nu (Huns) and had settled in northern Bactria.

The *Hou Han-shu* (Annals of the Later Han), compiled by Fan Yeh, based mainly on the report submitted to the Chinese emperor by General Pan Yung in or before AD 125, describes their rise. Ch'iu-chiu-ch'ueh (Kujula Kadphises), the yabghu of Kueishuang, attacked and destroyed the other four yabghu and made himself King of the Yüehchih. He attacked An-hsi (Parthia) and took the territory of Kao-fu (Kabul). He also overthrew P'u-ta and Chi-pin (Kashmir) and annexed these countries. It was argued by Jitzuzo that the five yabghu already existed in Bactria when the Yueh-chi arrived, and so the Kushans could not have been the Yueh-chi. Some scholars, therefore, refer to the Saka-Kushans in the Yueh-chi hoard. But Tarn regards this theory as an unhappy offshoot of an elementary blunder that started the belief in a Saka conquest of Graeco-Bactria; most scholars now agree that the *Hou Han-shu* gives an authentic account that is trustworthy. The chronology, however, of these events relating to the rise and consolidation of the Kingdom of Kuei-shuang is disputed because it is closely related to the history of the Great Kushans and the date of Kanishka. Excavations at Taxila and elsewhere have conclusively settled the old argument as to whether the Kadphises preceded the Kanishka group of kings as coins of the Kadphises group, but not of Kanishka, Huvishka, etc., are found in the Early Kushan levels of Sirkap. The *Hou Han-shu*

further informs us that Ch'iu-chiu-ch'üeh (Kujula Kadphises) died at an age of more than 80 and was succeeded by his son Yen-kao-chen (Vima Kadphises), who in turn destroyed T'ien-chu (India) and placed a general there to control it.

This unit will deal with the origin and fall of the Kushana Empire, the role played by Kanishka in strengthening the empire, and art and architecture under the Kushanas.

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10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Trace the origin of the Kushanas and describe the importance of the Yueh-chi race
- Discuss the role played by Kanishka in strengthening the Kushana dynasty
- Assess the reasons for the downfall of the Kushana Empire
- *Discuss the art and architecture under the Kushanas*

10.2 THE KUSHANA EMPIRE AND KANISHKA

The Chinese historians inform us that the Kushanas were a section of the Yueh-chi race. The Yueh-chi were nomadic horde who inhabited the borders of modern China. In the middle of the second century BC, they came into conflict with a neighbouring barbarian tribe known as Hsiung-nu. The king of the Yueh-chi was defeated by the Hsiung-nu and killed in that battle. The latter made a drinking vessel of his skull. The Yueh-chi, under the leadership of the widow of the slain Yueh-chi king, refused to submit to the victors and decided to move westwards in search of fresh pasture grounds. The number of persons who migrated is estimated to be between six and ten lakhs. While they were moving, the Yueh-chi came into conflict with another smaller horde known as the

Wu-sun, which occupied the basin of the Ili River and its tributaries. The Wu-sun were no match for the Yueh-chi and consequently they were defeated and their king was killed. At this time, the Yueh-chi was divided into two sections. Those Yueh-chi who settled on the border of Tibet came to be known as the Little Yueh-chi and those Yueh who continued the westward march, came to be known as the Great Yueh.

The Yueh-chi had to meet the Sakas next who were occupying the territories west of the Wu-sun and to the north of the Jaxartes. The Sakas tried to defend themselves but were defeated. They were forced to vacate their pasture-ground in favour of the Yueh-chi who occupied them. The Sakas had to migrate in search of new homes and they made their way into India through the northern passes.

For about 15 or 20 years, the Yueh-chi remained undisturbed in the territory occupied by them. However, they were defeated by the son of the chieftain (who

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had been killed by the Yueh-chi) with the help of the Wu-sun who had brought up the infant son under their care. The Yueh-chi were driven out from the lands which they had snatched from the Sakas and were forced to resume their march. They occupied the valley of the Oxus and reduced to subjection its peaceful inhabitants. It is possible that the domination of the Yueh-chi extended over Bactria to the south of the Oxus. In course of time, the Yueh-Chi lost their nomadic habits and settled down.

Fa Hien has given the following account of the Yueh-chi: 'In old days the Yueh-chi were vanquished by the Hsiung-Nu. They then went to Tahia and divided the kingdom among five Hsi-h (e) on or Yabgous, viz. those of Hsiumi, Shuangmi, Kuei-shuang, Hsitun and Tumi. More than hundred years after that, the Hsihou or Yabgou (Yavuga) of Kueishuang (Kushan) named K'iutsiu-k'io attacked and annihilated the four other His-hou and made himself king or lord (Wang), he invaded Nagad-si (the Arsakid territory, i.e., Parthia) and took possession of the territory of Kaofou (Kabul), overcome Pota and Ki-pin and became complete master of these kingdoms. K'iutsiu-k'io died at the age of more than eighty. His son Yen-kao-tchen succeeded him as king.' In turn, he conquered Tien-tchou (India, on the banks of a great river, apparently the kingdom of Taxila referred to by Philostratos), and established there a chief for governing it. From this time the Yueh-chi became extremely powerful. All the other countries designated them Kushan after their king, but the Han retained the old name and called them Ta-Yueh-chi.

Kadphises I

The leader of the Kushans then was Kadphises I. He adopted the title of *Wang* or king. He also invaded and captured the kingdom of Parthia, Kabul and Kafistan. Kujala Kadphises or Kadphises I died at a mature age of 80. On the basis of contemporary sources it is also believed that he also embraced Buddhism at the end of his reign. He also issued a number of coins which were directly imitated from the coins of Augustus (27 BC-AD 14). Tiberius Kadphises, who died at the ripe old age of more than eighty, may be assigned roughly to the period AD 15-55.

Vima Kadphises or Kadphises II

Kadhises II (AD 78-120) extended his kingdom over a good portion of northern India and governed the Indian provinces through military deputies. He had trade relations with China and the Roman Empire. He issued both gold and silver coins on which life-like representation of the king was inscribed. From these coins it appears that he was the worshipper of Shiva.

10.2.1 Kanishka

After a brief interregnum, Virna was succeeded by Kanishka, whose relationship with the two preceding kings is uncertain. The Kushana dynasty flourished under him. The date of his accession is a matter of inconclusive debate, but AD 78 seems to be the most probable of the dates suggested so far. This year marks the beginning

of an era which came to be known as the Shaka Era. Under Kanishka the Kushana Empire reached the height of its power and became a mighty force in the world of its day. He was a capable administrator. He kept his vast empire intact during his lifetime. He himself ruled the territories around his capital *Purushpura* (Peshawar) while his *Kshatrapas* (governors) ruled over distant provinces under his directions. These provincial governors enjoyed vast powers in relation to their territories, yet there is no evidence of any revolt against the emperor.

Kanishka was undoubtedly the most striking figure from the Kushana dynasty. A great conqueror and a patron of Buddhism, he combined in himself the military abilities of Chandragupta Maurya and the religious zeal of Ashoka. However, there is no unanimity among scholars regarding the date of his accession to the throne even though most of them believe that Kanishka was the founder of the Saka era, which started in AD 78. He ascended to the throne in the same year.

Kanishka's public works

Like Ashoka, Kanishka was a great builder of Stupas and cities. He erected in his capital a monastery and a huge wooden tower in which he placed some relics of the Buddha. An important relic of this period is a statue of Kanishka with a missing head. Besides the Shah-ji-ki dheri at Peshawar, his important buildings and works of art are found in Peshawar, Mathura, Kanishkapura and Takshasila. Mathura became an important centre of art during the time of Kanishka. Kanishka beautified the city with a large number of monasteries, statues and sculptures.

Kanishka's religion

The question of Kanishka's religion is a controversial one. He helped in the spread of Buddhism, many old monasteries were repaired and many new ones were also built. Kanishka invited scholars for the fourth Buddhist Council, which was attended by five hundred monks. The truth is that before his conversion to Buddhism, he believed in many gods, which is clearly reflected in his earlier coins. However, he ultimately embraced Buddhism and promoted it as the state religion.

Kanishka's estimate as a ruler

Kanishka was undoubtedly one of the greatest kings of ancient India. He was an excellent warrior, an efficient empire-builder and a brilliant patron of art and learning. No Indian ruled over such a vast empire as was done by Kanishka. He was the only Indo-Asiatic king whose territories extended beyond the Pamirs.

Kanishka occupied a unique position in Indian history. He was not only a great conqueror, but also a great administrator. It is worthy of note here that not a single revolt was reported during his reign.

10.2.2 Downfall of the Kushana Empire

The mighty Kushana Empire reached its zenith during the time of Kanishka I. Under him, the Kushanas were feared not only in India, but also in Central Asia.

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However, his successors failed to maintain his feat. Vasishka, the successor of Kanishka I, is stated to have ruled only over Mathura and its surrounding regions. Probably, he had the Sanchi region also under his control. As no inscription of Vasishka has been discovered in any other part of India, it is concluded that he lost control over the distant parts of the Kushana Empire. No cause is given for the collapse of the Kushana power during his reign, but it is contended that the collapse was merely a temporary one.

Kanishka was succeeded by Huvishka and the latter is stated to have recovered the fortunes of the Kushanas during his long and prosperous rule lasting for more than thirty years. Inscriptions showing references to Kanishka were found not only in the Mathura region but also in north-west frontier India and in eastern Afghanistan. It is contended that the region lying about thirty miles to the west of Kabul was included in Huvishka's Empire. He is described as *Maharajadhiraja* Huvishka. Kanishka II is also stated to have ruled at the same time as a contemporary of Huvishka.

Huvishka was succeeded by Vasudeva I. Even though there is no evidence regarding the exact limits of his empire, it is assumed that his rule did not extend beyond a part of modern Uttar Pradesh. Almost all the Brahmi inscriptions have been found in Mathura and its neighbourhood. It appears that the imperial Kushanas of India had by this time lost their hold over the extreme northern and north-western parts of India. It is possible that the local chiefs took advantage of the weakness of the central power and declared independence. The last known date of Vasudeva is around AD 176–77 and soon after his death the mighty Kushana Empire dissolved away.

It is practically impossible to give an orderly account of the successors of Vasudeva I. Our only sources of information are the coins and they do not give us any definite information. However, it is maintained that Vasudeva was succeeded by Kanishka III who is believed to have ruled from about AD 210 to 230.

The final breakup of the Kushana Empire seems to have happened during the reigns of the successors of Vasudeva II. Most of the territories in the interior of India were lost to the Indian chiefs. Most important of them were the Nagas, the Yaudheyas, Malavas and the Kunindas. The evidence from the inscriptions tells us that the Nagas came into prominence more than a century before the reign of Chandragupta II. The early Nagas held control over Padmavati and Mathura, which were formerly included in the Kushana Empire. The Puranas tell us that seven kings had already ruled at Mathura and nine at Padmavati when the Guptas came to power. All these must have been done by the Nagas at the expense of the Kushanas and that partly explains the disappearance of the Kushana Empire.

The Yaugheyas, a martial tribe, also had a significant role in the destruction of the Kushana Empire. Their rule over the areas on the banks of the Sutlej as far as the borders of Bahawalpur lasted for more than a century. The copper coins of the Yaudheyas are similar to those of Kushanas. It appears that the Yaudheyas made these coins after the Kushanas were overthrown.

The Malavas and the Kunindas became independent after successfully revolting against the authority of the Kushanas. They divided between themselves the territories formerly held by the Kushanas. While the Malavas made Malvanagar in Rajputana their capital, the Kunindas occupied the territory between the Yamuna and the Sutlej as well as the upper courses of Beas and Sutlej.

Another cause of the downfall of the Kushana Empire was the rise of the Sassanian Satraps and the Satavahana power in Iran. The Sassanian Empire was founded in AD 225–26 by Ardashir I and from the very beginning its rulers turned their attention towards the east. Ardashir I came as far as Khorasan. It is stated that the Kushana Shah or ruler sent his envoy to Ardashir I to acknowledge his suzerainty. Gradually, the Sassanian power extended towards Seeistan. In course of time, it spread over parts of western and central India and the north-western regions and borderlands of India. The Sassanian expansion towards western and central India was made at the expense of the Western Satraps and the Satavahanas. Not only Bactria, but also the whole of north-western India became important provinces in the eastern division of the Sassanian Empire. An attempt was made by the Kushanas to become independent of the Sassanians in the time of Emperor Varhram II (AD 276–93) but this seems to have failed. It is obvious that the rising power of the Sassanians dealt a severe blow to the declining strength of the Kushanas in the northern and western parts of India and beyond.

It appears that in due course of time, the Kushanas on the border of India and also in Punjab intermingled with other tribes. They continued their chequered existence even up to the time of Samudra Gupta and the latter subdued them. They are described in the Allahabad Pillar inscription as *Daivaputra Shahi Shahanushahi*. In the later part of the fourth century and early fifth centuries, the Kushanas got a new title—*Kidara*. Their existence has been proved by the discovery of a large number of coins. However, it is difficult to say anything about the exact period of their rule, their order of succession and even the limits of their territory.

Kushana administration

A critical study of the coins and inscriptions of the Kushanas helps us to gather an idea of India under the Kushanas. We find that the administrative systems of the Kushanas were a mix of both foreign elements and Indian elements. The important foreign element was the government by *satraps*. The latter were viceroys or governors of the provinces. There were some functionaries who had foreign names. The name *strategos* stood for a general or military governor, while *meridach* represented district magistrate. *Amatyas* and *mahasenapatis* were officers of Indian origin. The officers having foreign names were stationed in the north-west, while officers having Indian names were stationed in the interiors.

Kingship was the prevailing type of polity, although there are references to republics also. The Kushana rulers took up such titles as *Mahisvara*, *Devaputra*, *Kaiser* and *Shahi-Sahanushabi*. There was a tendency to deify the ancestral

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kings. The Mathura inscription of Huvishka refers to a *devakula* or a shrine where the statue 'the grandfather of Kanishka' was installed. A strange system of two kings ruling at the same time also prevailed during the Kushana period. It is also known that Kanishka II and Huvishka ruled jointly. It is possible that this institution was borrowed from the Indo-Greeks.

The Kushana kings are said to have had unfettered powers. Although there is a reference to an advisory body to assist the king in Buddhist literature, it is not safe to assert that such a council existed in the Kushana period as there is no reference to such a body in the Kushana records.

The satraps in India were called *mahakshatrapas* and *kshatrapas*. Some of them are mentioned as *rajan mahakshatrapas*. These officials had powers to issue coins. The assumption of the title points its conferment by some overlord. The term *kshatrapas* in Sanskrit literature is used in the sense of dominion, rule and power, as exercised by gods and men. It is used in the sense of a ruler in the Rig Veda. Even before the Kushanas, there were *Kshatrapas* of Kapisa and Abhisara Prastha and of Mathura. The Kushana rulers followed the system of their predecessors. Kanishka's *kshatrapas* enjoyed a position different from that of the western *kshatrapas*. It is pointed out that if the *kshatrapas* had been independent, their names would have occurred in the inscriptions and not those of Kanishka or Huvishka alone.

The terms *dandanayaka* and *maha dandanayaka* formed a link in the Kushana administrative machinery. These terms occur for the first time in the Kushana records. The term *dandanakaya* has been translated as 'magistrate', 'the leader of the four forces of the army,' a fortunate general, 'commander of force', a 'judge', 'administrator of punishment', 'criminal magistrate', 'the great leader of the forces', 'prefect of police' and 'Commissioner of Police'. It is maintained that *dandanayakas* were feudatory chiefs who were appointed by the king. They owed allegiance to the king and were required to render civil and military service. The civil aid was in the form of personal service for maintaining law and order. The Kushanas were the first to introduce this system which was later followed by the Guptas. The names of all the *kshatrapas*, *mahakshatrapas* and *mahadandanayakas* appear to be foreign and that explains the absence of Indian official heads at the higher level.

There are references to *gramikas* and *padrapalas*. The term *gramika* was used for the head of the village while *padrapala* was a local head. Some historians hold the view that the Kushana administration must have ensured safety as there are references to people coming to Mathura from Abhisar, Nagara, Odayana and even Wokhana or Badakshan. The administration was responsible for the safety and security of the common people that helped in the progress and prosperity of the country. This was evident from the life of people in general and a large number of welfare schemes that were initiated by the rulers of the state.

Wars and conquests of Kanishka

Kanishka was a doughty warrior and a great conqueror. He believed in the policy of aggression and aggrandizement and in this respect, he may be compared to Akbar and Samudragupta. He conquered many states in India as well as abroad and incorporated them into his empire. At the time of his accession Afghanistan, Batria, Parthia, Sindh and Punjab were included in his empire. He extended his empire by the following wars:

- **Kashmir:** First of all Kanishka conquered Kashmir where he built many monuments. He laid the foundation of a town Kanispura. He too, like Jahangir, liked the Kashmir valley very much. The natural scenery of the valley was a great attraction for him. It is also said that he wished that after his death he should be buried in Kashmir. Kalhan the author of Rajtarangini writes that Kashmir was under Kanishka and he used to spend his summer there. It was Kashmir where he called the fourth Buddhist Council.
- **Magadha:** Secondly, Kanishka invaded Magadha and conquered it. It is said that after the conquest he demanded from the Magadhan king the compensation for the war. The Magadhan ruler gave Ashvaghosh, a great scholar, as compensation and Kanishka brought Ashvaghosh with him.

His other wars

He carried on a successful warfare against Parthia. About the close of first century AD the Chinese General Pau-Chao steadily advanced to the west and brought to submission the trans-pamir regions of Kashagar, Yarkand and Khotan and threatened the eastern frontier of the Kushana Empire. About AD 90 Kanishka challenged the supremacy of the Chinese emperor and asserted his equality with him by demanding a Chinese princess in marriage. General Pau-Chao, who considered the proposal as an affront to his master, arrested the envoy and sent him home. At this, Kanishka sent an army of 70,000 cavalry under his general Si to attack the Chinese across Pamirs. Kanishka's forces were totally defeated and he was compelled to pay a tribute to China. Some years later he himself led another expedition across the plateau of Pamir to avenge his former defeat. Now he was successful against the Chinese but was killed by his own soldiers and commanders during this very expedition. His soldiers had become tired of constant fighting, and, therefore revolted and killed him. Yet his military success proves that he was a great commander and conqueror.

10.2.3 Kanishka and Mahayana Buddhism

Kanishka was a great warrior and conqueror. There can be no two opinions about it; at the same time he was a great devotee and a patron of Buddhism.

Today, his fame rests upon his being a Buddhist. Like Ashoka the great, he too, took up the task of spreading Buddhism both in and outside the country. About this time two sects arose in the Buddhist religious philosophy, (1) Hinayans which

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wanted to retain the simple creed of Buddha, and (2) the Mahayans, which preferred to worship the image of Buddha and preached personal devotion to him.

Kanishka built a remarkable tower over the relics of Buddha. Its fourteen storey carved timber surmounted by an iron column rose to a total height of 194 metres. Both Hiuen Tsang and Alberuni have stated that the great monastery of Peshawar was built by him and Peshawar became a great centre of Buddhist culture during his time. The fourth Buddhist council, which was not recognized by the followers of the Hinayana sect, was held during the age of the famous author Vasumitra either in Kashmir or in Gandhara or Jalandhara. Limited excavations at Peshawar have succeeded in providing a plan of the stupa, the location of the Vihara, a few examples of figurative sculptures in stone and the celebrated Kanishka reliquary.

Several Buddhist theologians are associated with Kanishka such as Ashvaghosha, Vasumitra, Parshva, Sangharaksha, Dharamatrata and Matricheta. But Kanishka's patronage of Buddhism seems to have been essentially political. Legends apart, there is little evidence to suggest that his conversion to Buddhism was a profound experience. Buddhist emblems appear on his coins but they are very few and are outnumbered by other types.

- **Building Activities:** Kanishka was a great builder. He got constructed many cities and beautiful buildings. He constructed a 600 ft. high citadel in his capital Purushpur. It had fourteen storeys. Its top was made of iron. All round the citadel many statues of Buddha were erected. After conquering Kashmir he constructed the city of Kanishkapura near Srinagar, which exists even today as a big village. He constructed many stupas, monasteries and shrines in Mathura as well. Gandhara school of Art attained popularity mainly due to Kanishka's efforts. Kanishka was a great builder and a patron of art, who patronized architecture and sculpture.
- **A Patron of Learning:** Kanishka was a lover of knowledge. He patronized many scholars. Buddhist scholar Ashvaghosha was a great poet, play-wright and musician. Nagarjuna and Vasumitra were great Buddhist philosophers of the time of Kanishka. It not only caused the collection of Mahabhash but also of the Ayurvedic book *Charak Samhita*.

Causes for Kanishka being called the Second Ashoka

Similarities between Ashoka and Kanishka

- (i) Kanishka was also like Ashoka in many of his qualities and personality.
- (ii) Like Ashoka, Kanishka had embraced Buddhism after his accession to the throne.
- (iii) Like Ashoka he not only caused the spread of Buddhism in the neighbouring areas of his vast empire but sent missionaries in some foreign countries also.

- (iv) Like Ashoka, Kanishka also desired the welfare of his people and he also carried many related activities.
- (v) Like Ashoka, Kanishka also patronized literature, art and extended patronage to many scholars.
- (vi) Like Ashoka, Kanishka was blood thirsty before he came to throne, and like Ashoka he was touched by the bloodshed and suffering caused by wars.
- (vii) Ashoka called the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra whereas Kanishka called the Fourth Buddhist Council at Kashmir.
- (viii) Like Ashoka, Kanishka also built monastries, stupas and vihars.

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Dissimilarities between Kanishka and Ashoka

- (i) Kanishka propagated Buddha's faith through art forms mainly the images and status of Buddha whereas Ashoka built pillars and inscribed the main teachings of Buddha on these pillars and rocks.
- (ii) Kanishka belonged to the Mahayana sect whereas Ashoka belonged to the Hinayana sect of Buddhism.
- (iii) Kanishka continued to wage wars against his neighbours even after his conversion to Buddhism whereas Ashoka gave up wars and embraced non-violence after his conversion.

Successors of Kanishka and the Fall of Kushan Empire

If we accept AD 78 as the year of accession, then Kanishka's rule ended about AD 101. He was succeeded by Vasishka, who possibly ruled jointly with Huvishka. Though the latter ruled from his capital Mathura, his rule still extended in the north-west over Afghanistan. The last great king of the line in India was Vasudeva (AD 145-76). By the time of his reign, the Kushans had probably lost their hold on the north-western part of their kingdom. The Kushan Empire lasted till about AD 220. It ended about the same time as the Satavahanas kingdom in Andhra disappeared. It suffered a loss of territory and influence as a consequence of various political factors operating in India and abroad.

Check Your Progress

1. What do Chinese historians inform us regarding the Kushanas?
2. Name the leader of the Kushanas who adopted the title *Wang*.
3. During whose reign did the final breakup of the Kushana Empire took place?
4. Name the two sects of Buddhism that arose during Kanishka's reign.

10.3 ART AND ARCHITECTURE UNDER KUSHANAS

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Gandhâra style of Buddhist art is a consequence of merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian and Indian art traditions. The development of this form of art started in Parthian Period (50 BC–AD 75) and achieved its peak during the Kushana period. Mathura School of Art is regarded as a centre of Indian ancient art. The period of Mathura School of Art coincided with the rule of the Kushanas. This school also reached the zenith of success during the reign of the Kushanas and expanded further in the Gupta period. The artists of Mathura School of Art created sculptures which are immortal in the history of art in India. Amaravati School of Art and Sculpture evolved during the Satavahana period. Amaravati School is credited with depicting Buddha in the human form for the first time.

10.3.1 Mathura School of Art

Mathura art form originated in the second century BC and within a short span of time, it had become one of the chief centres of art. The art pieces of this school became so popular that they were in demand even in far off places. Within four hundred years, this school prepared a variety of sculptures and many other pieces of art for the followers of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism. Apart from producing sculptures related to various faiths, they also produced images of kings and other notable personalities. This indicates that Mathura artists had knowledge about a variety of art activities of that period. This helped them to cater to the needs of various social groups of Indian as well as non-Indian origin. The use of local red stone in making sculptures and art piece was a unique characteristic of Mathura school of art.

Another remarkable attribute of this school was the representation of various patterns of life on votive pillars. Many scenes were created on these pillars such as men and women collecting flowers from forests; women offering fruits to birds and women playing in gardens. The votive pillars from 'Kankali Tila' represent the feminine beauty in a remarkable manner. In fact, a wide variety of themes have been used by the artists of Mathura. For instance, in Sanchi and Bharhut, elements from nature have been used by the artist. The sculptures were carved out of red sandstone, which was easily accessible in the nearby areas. Thematic details of the sculpture belonging to the Mathura school are as follows.

The Buddha idols

Many archaeologists believe that the idols of Bodhisattvas and Buddha were prepared at Mathura and were sent to other regions. The Samath image, established in the period of Kanishka-I, was made at Mathura. This idol of Bodhisattvas is in the standing posture. Mainly, Buddha images are found in two postures- one is sitting and the other is standing. The idol of Buddha found at Katra (in sitting

posture) is among the oldest idols. In this idol, Buddha is sitting under a Bodhi tree, his right hand is in abhaya posture and he is holding Dharma chakra and tri-ratna in his palms and at the bottom of the feet.

Some of the unique features of the idols of Buddha are as follows:

- They are carved out of red stone which has white spots on it.
- The idols are in round shape so that they are visible from every side.
- The face as well as head is shaven.
- The right hand is in abhaya posture.
- Forehead does not have any mark.
- They are wearing a tight-fitted dress
- There is a frill on the left hand of the idol.

Jaina specimens

Mathura was as much a sacred centre for the Jains as it was for the followers of Buddhist and Brahmanical faiths. There are a number of inscriptions of Jainism in Mathura. For example, in the middle of the second century BC, a dedication by a Jaina Sravaka was named Uttaradasaka. Kankali Tila was the chief Jaina site at Mathura as there were a large number of monuments, ayaqapatas or stone slabs with Jaina figures in the centre. Jaina Stupas found in Mathura were objects of worship. A wide variety of architectural fragments like pillars, crossbars, capitals and railing-posts have also been found in Mathura.



Fig. 10.1 *Seated Tirthankar*

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The images of the Jainas or the Tirthankaras on the ayaqapatas (see Figure 10.1) existed even before the Kushana period but regular images of Jainas became common from Kushana period onward. Some of the Tirthankara images are quite difficult to identify. However, Parsvanatha is identifiable due to his canopy of snake hoods and Rishabhanatha due to hair falling on his shoulders.

Brahmanical images

Brahmanical images have also been found in Mathura.

Some of the representations are of Siva, Surya, Lakshmi and Sankarshana or Balarma. During Kushana period, Kartikeya, Kubera, Sarasvati, Vishnu, and some other gods, such as Naga images, were carved in sculpture. Images of this period have some of iconographical features that differentiate deities from one another. Figure 10.2 shows the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh.



Fig. 10.2 *The Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh*

For instance, Shiva represented in the 'linga' was carved in the form of Chaturmukha linga. The word 'Chaturmukha' means four faces, thus it denotes that the linga had four human faces of Shiva in all the four sides.

The idol of surya in the Kushana period is shown riding a beautiful chariot, which is driven by two horses. In this idol, he is wearing a heavy coat on the upper body and a salwar-like dress in the lower half of the body. He has a lotus in one hand and a sword in the other.

The image of Balarama has a turban on the head

Saraswati is shown in a sitting posture with a heavy manuscript in her hands. She is not adorned with ornaments and there are two more figures along with the figure of Saraswati.

Durga is represented as the killer of buffalo demon. This form is also known as Mahisha-mardini form of Durga (see Figure 10.3). Images of Yakshas and Yakshinis have also been found in Mathura. Such images are associated with all

the three religions popular in Mathura-Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism. The image of Kubera has also been found which is shown as a deity with bulging belly and is associated with wine. He looks like Bacchus and Dionysius who are Roman and Greek gods of wine respectively.



Fig. 10.3 *Durga Slaying the Buffalo*

The images of rulers

Mat village in Mathura had large images of Kushana Kings (see Figure 10.4) and other notables like Kanishka and Chastana. Some of the historians believe that the idea of building structures for housing portrait-statues of rulers and other notables of the state came from Central Asia. It is because many of the dresses worn by dignitaries in these statues are of Central Asian origin. Large portrait-statutes of rulers were made to give them a divine status.



Fig. 10.4 *A Kushana King*

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The fact that many heads of Scythian notables have been found at Mathura shows that Mathura was the one of the most significant centres of Kushana Empire especially in the eastern part. They forcefully suggest contact between art forms of Gandhara and Mathura. In due course of time, Mathura art forms also contributed considerably to the growth of Gupta art forms.

10.3.2 Gandhara School of Art

Gandhara, which integrated the valley of Peshawar, Svata, Buner and Bajjora, is located in the north-west part of the Indian sub-continent and covers the area of both the banks of Indus River. As a result, this place has a mixed culture. Mainly, its art form was Buddhist but due to the mixed culture, it was highly influenced by Hellenistic art. Shakas and the Kushanas were the chief patrons of Gandhara art.

Art pieces of Gandhara School have mainly been found from Jalalabad, Begram, Bamaran, Hadda and Taxila. Gandhara art may be categorized into two schools—early and later. The early school existed during first and second century AD and schist stone of blue-grey colour was used to make idols during this period. However, the later school used mud, lime, pilaster and stucco to make the idols. These idols show limbs and other organs of the body very clearly, thus, they are known to be realistic in nature. They depict features of human body with anatomical accuracy. In addition to the idols, reliefs and bas-reliefs have also been carved beautifully and these represent the life of Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

For example: At Shah-ji-kidheri, a bronze reliquary was found from the Stupa. It represents Buddha, flying geese and Kushana kings (all these are symbolic of wandering monks).

The Gandhara art had many other attributes. For example, in Bamaran, a gold reliquary has been found which has a number of figures enclosed within an arcade.

Check Your Progress

5. During which period did the Amaravati School of Art and Sculpture evolve?
6. How is the idol of surya portrayed in the Kushana period?
7. How can Gandhara art be categorized?

10.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Chinese historians inform us that the Kushanas were a section of the Yueh-chi race. The Yueh-chi were nomadic horde who inhabited the borders of modern China.
2. The leader of the Kushans was Kadphises I. He adopted the title of Wang or king.
3. The final breakup of the Kushana Empire seems to have happened during the reigns of the successors of Vasudeva II.
4. About Kanishka's time two sects arose in the Buddhist religious philosophy, (1) Hinayans which wanted to retain the simple creed of Buddha, and (2) the Mahayans, which preferred to worship the image of Buddha and preached personal devotion to him.
5. Amaravati School of Art and Sculpture evolved during the Satavahana period.
6. The idol of surya in the Kushana period is shown riding a beautiful chariot, which is driven by two horses. In this idol, he is wearing a heavy coat on the upper body and a salwar-like dress in the lower half of the body.
7. Gandhara art may be categorized into two schools—early and later. The early school existed during first and second century AD and schist stone of blue-grey colour was used to make idols during this period. However, the later school used mud, lime, pilaster and stucco to make the idols.

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10.5 SUMMARY

- The rise of the empire of the Kushans is an important landmark in the history of Central Asia. Known to Chinese historians as Kuei-shuang, they were one of the important tribes of the Great Yueh-chi who had been driven out from their original homeland by another warring tribe, the Hsiung-nu (Huns) and had settled in northern Bactria.
- The Chinese historians inform us that the Kushanas were a section of the Yueh-chi race. The Yueh-chi were nomadic horde who inhabited the borders of modern China.
- After a brief interregnum Virna was succeeded by Kanishka, whose relationship with the two preceding kings is uncertain. The Kushana dynasty flourished under him.

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- Kanishka was undoubtedly the most striking figure from the Kushana dynasty. A great conqueror and a patron of Buddhism, he combined in himself the military abilities of Chandragupta Maurya and the religious zeal of Ashoka.
- Like Ashoka, Kanishka was a great builder of Stupas and cities. He erected in his capital a monastery and a huge wooden tower in which he placed some relics of the Buddha.
- Kanishka helped in the spread of Buddhism, many old monasteries were repaired and many new ones were also built. Kanishka invited scholars for the fourth Buddhist Council, which was attended by five hundred monks.
- The mighty Kushana Empire reached its zenith during the time of Kanishka I. Under him, the Kushanas were feared not only in India, but also in Central Asia. However, his successors failed to maintain his feat.
- The final breakup of the Kushana Empire seems to have happened during the reigns of the successors of Vasudeva II. Most of the territories in the interior of India were lost to the Indian chiefs.
- Another cause of the downfall of the Kushana Empire was the rise of the Sassanian Satraps and the Satavahana power in Iran.
- A critical study of the coins and inscriptions of the Kushanas helps us to gather an idea of India under the Kushanas. We find that the administrative systems of the Kushanas were a mix of both foreign elements and Indian elements.
- Kingship was the prevailing type of polity, although there are references to republics also. The Kushana rulers took up such titles as *Mahisvara*, *Devaputra*, *Kaiser* and *Shahi-Sahanushabi*.
- Kanishka was a doughty warrior and a great conqueror. He believed in the policy of aggression and aggrandizement and in this respect, he may be compared to Akbar and Samudragupta.
- Kanishka built a remarkable tower over the relics of Buddha. Its fourteen storey carved timber surmounted by an iron column rose to a total height of 194 metres.
- Gandhara school of Art attained popularity mainly due to Kanishka's efforts. Kanishka was a great builder and a patron of art, who patronized architecture and sculpture.
- If we accept AD 78 as the year of accession, then Kanishka's rule ended about AD 101. He was succeeded by Vasishka, who possibly ruled jointly with Huvishka.
- Gandhâra style of Buddhist art is a consequence of merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian and Indian art traditions. The development of this form of art started in Parthian Period (50 BC– AD 75) and achieved its peak during the Kushana period.

- Mathura art form originated in the second century BC and within a short span of time, it had become one of the chief centres of art.
- The idol of surya in the Kushana period is shown riding a beautiful chariot, which is driven by two horses. In this idol, he is wearing a heavy coat on the upper body and a salwar-like dress in the lower half of the body.
- Gandhara, which integrated the valley of Peshawar, Svata, Buner and Bajjora, is located in the north-west part of the Indian sub-continent and covers the area of both the banks of Indus River. As a result, this place has a mixed culture.

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10.6 KEY WORDS

- **Brahmi:** It is the modern name given to one of the oldest writing systems used in Ancient India and present South and Central Asia from the 1st millennium BC.
- **Devakula:** It refers to a shrine.

10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the Yueh-chi race.
2. What similarities can be seen between Ashoka and Kanishka with respect to public works?
3. State the administration system of the Kushanas.
4. What is regarded as the centre of Indian ancient art?
5. List some of the unique features of the idols of Buddha.
6. Write a short note on the Gandhara School of Art.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Trace the origin of the Kushanas. Also describe the importance of the Yueh-chi race.
2. 'A great conqueror and a patron of Buddhism, Kanishka combined in himself the military abilities of Chandragupta Maurya and the religious zeal of Ashoka.' Throwing light on this statement, discuss the role played by Kanishka in strengthening the Kushana dynasty.
3. What were the reasons for the downfall of the Kushana Empire?

4. Kanishka has been compared to Ashoka, Akbar and Samudragupta in the text. Give reasons for this comparison.
5. Discuss the art and architecture under the Kushanas with special reference to Mathura School of Art.

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10.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 11 THE GUPTAS

Structure

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11.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the Gupta Dynasty and evaluates the Golden Age in ancient Indian history. The Gupta Dynasty, famous as 'Golden Age' of ancient India, has special importance in the history of India. The Gupta rulers re-established the political unity that existed during the Mauryan period, and ruled over a large principality of northern India. The Gupta Age is marked as an era of unprecedented progress in all aspects of polity, religion, art and literature. Indian history is proud of the Gupta emperors who nurtured Indian culture and protected Indian nationalism. In this unit, you will learn about the rise of the Gupta Empire, the reign of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II Vikramaditya, Skandagupta and the downfall of the Gupta Empire and also the development of art and architecture in the Gupta period.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the socio-economic condition during the Guptas
- Discuss the various sources of information that inform us of the Gupta period
- Analyse the rise and fall of the Guptas
- Evaluate the Gupta Period as the golden age of art and architecture in India

11.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION DURING THE GUPTAS

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The Guptas came to the centre of the political stage, as it were, by the will of God. They were not among the powers that challenged the Kushanas; they did not come up in consequence of their decline. Among their contemporaries, they were undoubtedly the only power determined to restore to the country its lost political unity. They brought the region between 'the Godavari and the Sutlej' under their direct authority and also indirectly ruled over most of other parts of the country. They commanded respect for their powerful war machine, military process and political acumen. They massacred the Huns. No one else could do it anywhere in the contemporary world. Their government was based on the accepted principle of centralization and progressive decentralization. The central government was powerful, yet in 'the district headquarters, the officials of the Central Government were assisted and controlled by popular councils, whose sanction was necessary even if the state wanted to sell its own wasteland. Villages had their own popular councils which administered almost all the branches of administration, including collection of taxes and settlement of village disputes.' The local opinion was given due cognizance, laws were effective and humane. Public welfare was attended to; poor and sick were provided relief. Roads were well protected. 'Gupta peace' brought in its wake all-round prosperity. Agriculture improved, industry progressed, commerce expanded, shipbuilding and foreign trade gained new dimensions. Gold and silver flowed into the country from abroad. Coins of precious metals were in circulation; people lived in comfort. As evidenced by the contemporary literature and paintings, they used fine clothes and ornaments.

The improved means of communication and transport, movement of men and ideas and the enrichment of urban life stimulated de-linking of Varna and vocation, encouraged caste mobility, brought about the transformation of tribes into castes and the assimilation of the foreign racial stocks into the social whole. The position of women remained distinct. The emphasis on the concept of 'ideal wife' inculcated deeper and there was a wider sense of family correspondence and social intercourse.

The orthodox and heterodox religions existed side by side everywhere, at all levels and even in the individual families. Freedom of belief and expression was valued and cherished. Thinkers and writers, debaters and preachers by their erudite postulation of dogmas and theories presented a feast of intellectuality and rationality to the interested. Conflict of views was assumed. Mutuality and harmony among the believers in the rival dogmas prevailed as a measure unknown anywhere in human civilization. It was accepted as part of the social order. The harmony of beliefs stimulated bhakti. It developed as the concomitant of people's religious belief. Religion was understood to be for the good of all. Preachers carried this message to the people beyond the heights of mountains and the expanses of the oceanic waters.

Education received full attention. The endowment of Agrahara villages made the local institutions financially independent. Scholars discussed the contributions of other people in learning. They looked out for new ideas, appreciated others' points of view and were completely free from 'self-complacency and narrowness of the outlook'. The intellectual urge of the age strengthened the rational attitude in matters that were ecclesiastical and temporal.

Sanskrit language was the vehicle of this great intellectual efflorescence. Immense literature was produced on numerous disciplines. This language was adopted as the medium of expression in quarters where Prakrits had all along held the sway. It became the link language between India beyond the frontiers and the people here.

Art touched a high standard; *sundaram* and *roopam* characterized it. It was worshipped in order to deepen the consciousness of the soul and awaken it to a new sense of spiritual joy and nobility. Kalidasa, the supreme genius and poet of this age, has expressed this attitude of life devoted to beauty in a sentence addressed to *Parvati*, the goddess of personal charm, by her consort *Shiva*: 'O fair damsel, the popular saying that beauty does not lead to sin is full of unexceptional truth.' The path of virtue is the path of beauty—this appeared to be the guiding impulse of life in the Gupta age. 'To create lovely forms and harness them to the needs of higher life—this was the golden harmony that made Gupta art a thing of such perpetual and inexhaustible attraction.'

All over the country, there developed a peculiar uniformity of social pattern, domestic order and of individual role in a particular situation; of religious practices and social ethics; ritual and ceremony and of manners and behaviour. People acquired a spirit of oneness and a sense of belonging—the hallmark of heritage. They impressed this on everything they touched and carried it along wherever they went.

The origin and the early history of the Guptas are not clear. The locality they ruled remains unspecified. The first two kings of the dynasty, Sri Gupta and his son Sri Ghatotkacha are called *Maharaja*. It has made several historians say that they might have been feudatories; but, their paramount ruler is not mentioned. It is, therefore, held that they may have been petty rulers, and like some of that class, assumed the title *Maharaja*. The son of Maharaja Sri Ghatotkacha, however, assumed a higher title of *Maharajadhiraja*, implying, obviously, that he was more powerful ruler than his predecessors. He may have given extension to his patrimony, gained greater authority and thus assumed a higher title.

J. N. Singh, who travelled to this country during AD 671–695, referred to a king Sri Gupta who happened to have raised a temple for Chinese pilgrims in Magadha. Some scholars identified him with the founder of the dynasty of the same name, traced the temple in Magadha and consequently, placed his kingdom in Magadha. There is, however, no justification for the view that the temple which this king built for the Chinese was situated in Magadha. 'The bearing and the

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distance given by the Chinese Pilgrim place it in the western borders of northern or central Bengal and this is corroborated by some other details mentioned by him. We may, therefore, hold that Sri Gupta's kingdom comprised a portion of Bengal.'

11.2.1 Sources of Information

The sources of information for the Gupta period comprise both literary and archaeological. These are found all over the country from Bengal to Kathiawar. They are comparatively richer and fuller in content and character and have proved very helpful in reconstructing the main outline of the history and chronology with greater degree of certainty.

Literary sources: The Puranas, especially the *Vayu*, *Brahmanda*, *Matsya*, *Vishnu* and the *Bhagavata Purana* are a rich source of information. They indicate the extent of the domination of Chandragupta I, make a distinction between the territory that the Guptas had under their direct control and over which they exercised paramount control and provide information on the princes subordinate to them and on their contemporaries. The Puranas, in fact, received their touch during this period. The *Smritis* of Vyasa, Pitamaha, Pulastya and of Harita though assigned to this period are available only in the quotations found in the Dharmasastras. Among the Dharmasastras, those of Katyayana, Narad and of Brihaspati belong to this period. They provide rich information on the social and religious conditions of the people.

Some dramatic works with political bearing on the Gupta period are obviously helpful. Thus, the *Kaumudi Mahotsava* depicts the political condition of Magadha during the beginning of this period. It is of considerable importance for the origin and the rise of the Gupta power. The *Devichandraguptam* by Vishakhadatta throws light on the manner in which Chandragupta II came to the throne and married Dhruvadevi. It is available, however, only in quotations. Another work of the same author, the *Mudrarakshas*, though an important source of information on the rise of Chandragupta to power, mentions people and tribes such as the Yavanas, Sakas, Kiratas, Cambojas, Bhalikas, Parasikas, Khasas, Gandharas, Cinas, Kaulutas, Maghas and others who existed during the reign of Chandra Gupta II. The *Kamandaka Nitisara*, said to have been the work of Sikhara, the chancellor of Chandragupta II, upholds the murder of the Saka king through disguise.

The accounts left by the Chinese travellers are a rich source of information. Fa-Hien travelled across this country in the reign of Chandragupta II and his record and *Fo-Kuo-ki* or *Record of Buddhist Kingdom* throws considerable light on the condition of the country during the period.

Archaeological sources: Numerous archaeological source materials on the Gupta period are available. The numerous types of coins that the Guptas

issued throw great light on their rise and fall and on the economic condition of the people. The coins both of the early and of the later Guptas have been listed in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*. In the book of Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasty, you can see a systematic study of the coins.

The epigraphic evidence available from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and the Eran Stone Inscription throws light on the military strength and the territorial expansion of Samundragupta. The Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription refers to one king Chandra, who defeated a confederacy of enemies, conquered the Vanga countries and defeated Vahlikas across the seven mouths of river Sindhu. He thus achieved sole supremacy in the world.

The Mathura Stone Inscription, the Sanchi Stone Inscription, the Gadhwa Stone Inscription and the Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta II give ample information on several aspects of his polity. Some details about Kumaragupta I are available from the Gadhwa Stone Inscription, the Bilsad Stone Pillar Inscription and the Mankuwar Stone image Inscription. The Junagadh Rock Inscription, the Kahaum Stone Pillar Inscription, the Indore Copper Plate Inscription, the Bihar Stone Pillar Inscription in two parts and the Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription refer to Skandagupta. The Bhitari Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta records his fight with Pushyamitra and probably also with the Huns during the reign of his father Kumaragupta I.

A large number of seals recovered at Vaishali (in the Muzaffarpur district) give an idea of the provincial and local administration of the period and provide a nomenclature of the officers.

Of the Gupta architecture and art, whatever has come down to us remains a rich source of information. The temples at Udayagiri, Pathari, Deogarh and Aihole reveal much about the evolution of temple architecture and point to the popular gods and goddesses. The sculptural remains are indicative of both their artistic richness and aesthetic appeals and hence of cultural maturity.

The Gupta Dynasty, famed as the 'Golden Age' of ancient India, has a special importance in the history of India. The Gupta rulers re-established the political unity that existed during the Mauryan period, and ruled over a large principality of northern India. The Gupta Age is marked as an era of unprecedented progress in all aspects of polity, religion, art and literature. Indian history is proud of the Gupta emperors who nurtured Indian culture and protected Indian nationalism.

Check Your Progress

1. On what principles was the government during the Guptas based?
2. List the stone inscriptions that give ample information on Chandragupta II's aspects of polity.

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11.3 THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

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In this section, you will learn about the rise of the Gupta Empire, the reign of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Vikramaditya, Skandagupta and the downfall of the Gupta Empire.

11.3.1 Chandragupta I

Chandragupta I (AD 319–324) was the first independent ruler of this dynasty as the previous Gupta rulers were feudatories/vassals. He adopted the title of ‘Maharajadhiraja’. He was an imperialist and an important ruler than his predecessors. Chandra of Maharauli is also equated with Chandragupta I, but unfortunately, not much information is available about him.

The main event of the age of Chandragupta was to enter into marital alliance with the Licchavi, who were very powerful during that time. He strengthened his position by establishing matrimonial relationship with the Licchavi and expanded his empire from Awadha and Magadha to Prayaga in the coastal areas of the Ganges. Chandragupta married Licchavi princess Kumar Devi. This marriage had political importance. There are several evidences of this marriage. This marriage not only increased immensely the power and grandeur of the Guptas but it also made Kumar Devi the princess of the Licchavi kingdom which she inherited from her father. As a result, the entire Licchavi kingdom came under the control of Chandragupta I.

Chandragupta not only received Vaishali on account of his marriage but also expanded his kingdom. Maharauli pillar informs that he, having crossed Sindh, fought a severe battle with Bactria and conquered it. On one side its boundary touched Bengal while on the other side it touched Central India and Punjab. This victory over the Northwest and Balkh took Chandragupta from Indus to Saurashtra.

Chandragupta started a new era, known as Gupta Samvata. Although, controversial, it is believed that Chandragupta began his accession to the throne by founding a samvata, the first year of which was AD 319–320.

11.3.2 Samudragupta

After Chandragupta I, his son Samudragupta (AD 325–375) became king of the Gupta dynasty. He established a vast kingdom by conquering different battles and strengthened the Gupta dynasty for centuries. On account of his immense talent, Chandragupta chose his successor in his own life. Samudragupta was an able emperor, skilled commander and a man of great personality. He was a great conqueror; hence, he is compared with Napoleon. It is popularly said that Ashoka is famous for his peace and non-violence, while Samudragupta is famous because of his victories.

Conquests of Samudragupta

Samudragupta, having established political unity, united entire India under one umbrella. He not only conquered North India, but also hoisted his flag of victory over South India including some principalities of abroad. His victories are described as follows:

First expedition of Aryavarta: The land between the Himalayas and Vindhya was called Aryavarta. It is known that Samudragupta launched victorious expedition twice over Aryavarta. In his first expedition, he vanquished the following kings:

- **Achyuta:** The first king Samudragupta defeated in Aryavarta was Achyuta. He was the king of Ahichchhatra. His kingdom was around modern Ram Nagar in Bareilly.
- **Nagasena:** It is known from the coins of Naga dynasty of Narwar, situated in Gwalior that he was the king of Naga dynasty and his capital was Padmavati. In Prayaga, Prashasti, the letter before 'ga' has been destroyed but the letter 'ga' is readable. Perhaps he might have been the ruler Ganapati Nagar.
- **Kotakulaja:** Samudragupta defeated this Kota king as well.

However, several scholars have expressed their views regarding the first Aryavarta expedition. Some scholars consider that the first Aryavarta battle was not his expedition of victory, but a defensive battle.

Second expedition of Aryavarta: In his second expedition, he defeated many kings. Some of them are described as follows:

- **Rudradeva:** King Rudradeva was king Rudrasena I of Kaushambi.
- **Matila:** A coin has been found in Bulandashahara, which contains the symbol of Matil and Naga. Probably he was a king of the Naga dynasty.
- **Nagadatta:** He was a king of Mathura and belonged to the Naga dynasty.
- **Chandraverma:** There is a dispute regarding this entry. Some consider him the king of Pusakarana while others consider him the king of Eastern Punjab.
- **Ganapatinaga:** He was a ruler of Vidisha and belonged to the Naga dynasty.
- **Balaverma:** He was a predecessor of king Bhaskarverma of Kamrupa.
- **Nandi:** It is mentioned in the Puranas that Shishunanda Shivanandi was the King of Central India and belonged to the Naga dynasty.

It is mentioned that Samudragupta defeated all the dynasties of North India. He annexed all these kingdoms to his empire.

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He made all the kings of *vana* (forest) his slaves. When he proceeded to conquer South India after his conquest of North India, he subjugated all Atavika kings lying on his way to southern conquest. It is assumed that Atavika state was spread from Gazipur to Jabalpur.

South expedition

Samudragupta conquered south after his first expedition of Aryavarta. He defeated twelve kings of the south and thereafter he returned their kingdoms and made them his loyalists. Thus, on the one hand, these kings were independent while on the other, they accepted the suzerainty of Samudragupta. Samudragupta conquest had three features: to imprison enemies, to free them and to return the kingdoms of the defeated king after the acceptance of conqueror's suzerainty. These kings were as follows:

- **Mahendra of Kaushal:** Mahendra was the king of Kaushal. Modern districts of Raipur, Sambhalpur and Vilaspur were included in it.
- **Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara:** Vyaghraraja was the king of Mahakantara, which was the forest area of Orissa.
- **Mantaraja of Koral:** It was the central part of Orissa and Tamil Nadu and the king of this area was Mantaraja.
- **Mahendragiri of Pishtapur:** Pishtapur in Godavari district is modern Pithapurama.
- **Swamidatta of Kottura:** Kottura is equated with Coimbatore.
- **Daman of Erandapalla:** Erandapalla is considered as Erandola of Khanadesh. Its relationship is also established with Erandapalla near Chinkokole on the coast of Orissa.
- **Vishnugopa of Kanchi:** It was the capital of Pallava. Modern Kanjeevaram near Madras is Kanchi.
- **Nilaraja of Avamukta:** It was a small kingdom in the neighbourhood of Kanchi and Vengi states. Its king Nilaraja was a member of the Pallava confederacy.
- **Hastivarman of Vengi:** It was in existence near Peduvengi in Ellore. Its king belonged to Shalankayana dynasty.
- **Ugrasena of Palakka:** It was near Palakollu on the coast of Godavari.
- **Dhananjaya of Kusthalapur:** Kuhalur, situated in Arakar district, was Kusthalapur.
- **Kubera of Devarashtra:** It was Yellamanchili in Andhra Pradesh. Some historians believe that southern rulers formed a confederation against Samudragupta and halted Samudragupta near a famous lake, known as Kolekha. Samudragupta conquered this confederation.

Subjugation of frontier states: It is clear that the frontier states, having seen the conquest-expedition of Samudragupta, accepted his suzerainty. These states were: Samatata, Davaka, Kamrupa, Nepal, Karttripur.

There were nine republics on western frontier which accepted the suzerainty of Samudragupta. These were Malava, Arjunayana, Yodheya, Madraka, Abhira, Prarjuna, Sanakanika, Kaka, Kharaparika.

Policy towards the frontier states: Samudragupta adopted three kinds of policy against these states, such as *Sarvakara*, i.e., these states accepted to pay all types of tributes, *Ajnakarana*, i.e., these states carried out the order of Samudragupta, and *Pranamakarana*, i.e., they appeared individually and greeted the king.

Conquest of foreign states

Some of the foreign states, such as Daivaputra, Shahi, Shanushahi, Shaka, Murunda, Saimhal, etc were also conquered by Samudragupta. They accepted defeat and offered their daughters to him.

Extent of Samudragupta's kingdom

Samudragupta's empire extended from the Himalayas in the north to Vindhya in the south and from Bay of Bengal in the east to Eastern Malawa in the west. He had indirect influence over Gujarat, Sindh, Western Rajaputana, West Punjab and the frontier states of Kashmir, and he had friendly relations with Saimhala and the other islands. Samudragupta's adopted the policy of expansion of his empire. The main aim of his conquest was to hoist his flag of victory.

Horse-sacrifice

Samudragupta performed horse-sacrifice in the beginning of his reign. His coins also carry depiction of horse sacrifice.

Estimate of Samudragupta's reign

Samudragupta's name is lettered in golden ink in Indian history for his talent and conquests. He was an extraordinary warrior, victor of thousands of battles and emerged invincible during his time. He was a valiant and brave king; able politician and warrior; famous musician; and well-versed and a good-hearted poet. Although he inherited a very small kingdom from his father, he expanded the boundaries of his kingdom beyond India by his talent and valour. He is regarded as the first Indian king who defeated southern and foreign rulers by his prowess. He was considered as a unique emperor. The strength of his arms was his only companion in the different battles he ably fought. He was famous for his valour and his body was adorned with several wounds and was immensely beautiful.

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11.3.3 Chandragupta II

Ramagupta ascended to the throne after the death of Samudragupta but he could not hold on to his Empire. Therefore, Chandragupta II (AD 380–412) ascended to the Gupta throne in AD 380. Like his father he proved to be a brave, valiant, invincible and able emperor. He was adorned in his coins with the titles of Devashri Vikramanka, Vikramaditya, Simha, Vikrama, Ajivikram, Simha-chandra Apratiratha, etc. Although there is no unanimity regarding the date of accession of Chandragupta II, his reign is considered from AD 380 to 412.

Matrimonial alliances

Chandragupta II adopted both the policies of matrimonial relationship as well as war for strengthening his empire. His contemporary Naga dynasty was very strong and had influence over several regions of North India. Establishment of matrimonial relationship with the Nagas helped him much in strengthening his sovereignty over the newly established empire. Matrimonial alliances with Vakatakas helped him a lot. Therefore, Chandragupta II gave his daughter Prabhavatigupta in marriage to Vakataka king Rudrasen II. Vakataka King had control over such geographical region wherefrom he could have assisted or opposed the Northern aggressor against the Shaka vassals of Saurashtra. This matrimonial alliance proved much important for him. It is evident from the Talgund inscription that the princess of Kuntal, King Kakustha Verma was married in the Gupta dynasty.

Conquests of Chandragupta II

Like his father, Chandragupta II expanded his empire by conquering many states. The most important victory of Chandragupta II was over the Shaka. The kingdom of the Shakas was spread in Gujarat, Malwa and Saurashtra. Having defeated the great Shaka vassal Rudrasimha III, Chandragupta II took the title of Shakari. Chandragupta II's war minister has written in the Udayagiri cave inscription that he came to Eastern Malwa along with his master (Chandragupta II) who aspired to conquer the whole world. With this victory, he not only ousted the foreigners from India but also ensured its monopoly over western trade by extending his empire upto the western coastal ports.

There were several small republics such as Madra, Kharapatika, etc. He conquered them and ended their existence by annexing them into his empire. It is known from the Maharauli iron pillar that Chandragupta II conquered Vahlikas by crossing over five mouths of Indus: Bengal and other eastern states formed a confederation due to the inability of Ramagupta. Chandragupta II conquered this confederation.

Horse-sacrifice

Several evidences maintain that Chandragupta II performed horse-sacrifice. A stone-horse has been discovered from Varanasi on which the word Chandraguh

(Chandragupta) is inscribed. Besides, Punadanapatra referred to the donation of several cows and thousands of coins (*aneka gau hiranya koti sahasra padah*) by Chandragupta II from which it seems that Chandragupta might have organized horse-sacrifice after his conquests.

Extent of Chandragupta II's empire

The empire of Chandragupta Vikramaditya was larger than that of Samudragupta. His empire expanded from the Himalaya in the north to river Narmada in the south, and from Bengal in the east to Arabian Sea in the west. Many famous trading cities and ports were included in his vast empire. Because of the expansion of his empire, he made Ujjain his second capital.

Estimate of Chandragupta II

Chandragupta II was one of the greatest rulers of India. Under him, the government, expansion of empire, art, economic or social aspects of life were at its zenith. 'Chandragupta tested the sharpness of his sword against the wicked and unrighteous Shakas and defeating them, he expanded his empire immensely and by conquering the unconquered states, he increased the extent of his empire more than the extent of his father's empire. He destroyed the Shakas and restored the glory of Hindu civilization and culture. The reign of Chandragupta II is also considered as the golden age of the Gupta period. Chandragupta II took his empire to a new era of maturity of political greatness and cultural revival. The governance of India had never been better than the rule of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya.

Check Your Progress

3. Name the king of Central India who belonged to the Naga dynasty.
4. What was the extent of Samudragupta's empire?

11.4 ART AND ARCHITECTURE DURING THE GOLDEN AGE

The foundation of the Gupta Empire in the fourth century AD describes the beginning of another era. The Gupta monarchs had power up to the sixth century in North India. Art, science and literature thrived greatly during this time. The iconographic canons of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist divinities were perfected and standardized. It served as ideal models of artistic expression for later centuries, not only in India but also beyond its border. It was an age of all round perfection in domestic life, administration, literature, as seen in the works of Kalidasa, in art creations and in religion and philosophy, as exemplified in the widespread Bhagavata cult, which recognized itself with a rigorous cult of beauty.

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The Gupta Period (AD fourth–seventh) is usually called as the golden age of art and architecture in India. During this period, Sarnath came up as a school similar in quality as the Buddhist art. Some of the most stunning images of Buddha are creations of this school. One of the finest sculptures from Sarnath portrays Buddha giving his first sermon. The images of the Buddhist pantheon comprise the following:

- Indra
- Surya
- Yakshas
- Yakshis
- Dwarapalas
- Mithuna couples
- Winged horses

11.4.1 Gupta Temples

This period saw a huge resurrection of Hinduism when it became the official religion of the Gupta Empire. As a result, this era was also marked by the appearance of countless images of popular Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Images of Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva, Lord Krishna, Surya and Durga were created in this period. The Udaigiri caves in Madhya Pradesh had a huge image of Lord Vishnu. Other statues of this period found in various temples and museums are analytic of the various aspects of early Hindu art and sculpture. During the Gupta period, when basic elements of the Indian temple comprising a square sanctum and pillared porch emerged, a solid foundation of temple architecture was laid.

The evolved Gupta temple also had a covered processional path for circumambulation that outlined a part of the worship-ritual. Former temples of the period had a flat slab-roof, often monumental, but the later temples in brick and stone developed a shikhara. The unhurried development of the Gupta style can be traced by growth of the plan and the decoration on the pillars and door-frame. The frames were decorated with goblins, couples, flying angels and door-keepers.

Sculptures of deities and their consorts, heavenly beings, couples, directional deities, composite animals and decorative motifs consisted of the majority of images which decorated the walls of the temples. The deities blessed in the chambers were carved firmly according to religious cannons and were fixed by carrying out a unique sanctification ritual. The brilliance of the Indian sculptor rested in his mental picture of the deities' ideal proportions, youthful bodies and kind appearances. Temple sculptures were not essentially religious. Many drew on worldly subject matters and ornamental designs. The scenes of everyday life consisted of military parades, royal court scenes, musicians, dancers, acrobats and passionate couples. Another group of non-religious figures were the apsaras or devanganas (celestial women) and vyalas (composite animals). The Parvati

temple at Nachana, the temple of Bhitaraon, the Vishnu temple at Tigawa, the Shiva temple at Bhumara and the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh are among the top models of the Gupta style of temple architecture.

Cave Architecture

The cave architecture also achieved a huge level of enhancement during the Gupta period. The Chaitya and Vihara caves at Ajanta and the Ellora caves are the perfect specimens of cave-architecture of the period. The rock-cut caves at Khandagiri, Udayagiri and Undavalli also belong to this period.

11.4.2 Gupta Sculpture

With the Gupta period, India entered a classical phase of sculpture. By the efforts made over centuries, techniques of art were perfected, definite types were evolved, and ideals of beauty were formulated with precision. There was no more experimentation. A quick grasp of the true objectives and necessary principles of art, a vastly developed aesthetic sense and proficient execution by skilled hands made those outstanding images that were to be the perfect model and despair of the Indian artists of successive ages. The Gupta sculptures not only proved to be models of Indian art for the coming ages but they also provided a perfect model for the Indian colonies in the Far East. In the Gupta period, all inclinations and drives of the artistic searches of the scheduled phases reached their peak in a united plastic tradition of ultimate significance in Indian history. Gupta sculpture was the logical result of the early classical sculpture of Amravati and Mathura. Its gracefulness was received from that of Mathura and its elegance from that of Amravati. Yet a Gupta sculpture seemed to belong to an area that was completely different. The Gupta artist seemed to have been working for a higher ideal. A new direction in the attitude towards art is seen in the endeavour to create a closer synchronization between art and thought, between the outer forms and the inner intellectual and spiritual ideas of the people.

Art of Bharhut, Amravati, Sanchi and Mathura came closer and closer; merging into one. In the composition, it was the female figure that now becomes the focus of attraction and nature recedes into the background, but in doing so it leaves behind its unending and undulating rhythm in the human form. The human figure, taken as the image, is the turn of Gupta sculpture. A new canon of beauty is evolved leading to the appearance of a new aesthetic ideal. This ideal is based upon an explicit understanding of the human body in its inherent softness and suppleness. The soft and flexible body of the Gupta sculpture with its smooth and shining texture facilitates free and easy movement, and though seemingly at rest the figure seems to be infused with an energy, which proceeds from within.

This is true not only of the images of divine beings, Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain but also of the ordinary men and women. It is the sensitiveness of the plastic surface that the artist seeks to emphasize and for this; all superfluities, etc. that tend to cover the body, are reduced to the minimum. So, the wet or transparent

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clinging drapery became the fashion of this era. But the sensuous effect of these draperies particularly in the case of female figures was restricted by a conscious moral sense, and nudity as a rule. It was eliminated from the Gupta sculpture. The great artistic creations of the period were invested with sweet and soft contours, restrained ornamentation and dignified repose. Under the patronage of the Guptas, the studies of Mathura and Sarnath produced several works of great merit. Though Hindu by faith, they were tolerant rulers.

The wonderful red sandstone image of the Buddha from Mathura is a remarkable example of Gupta workmanship datable to the fifth century AD. Buddha is revealed standing with his right hand in abhaya mudra, giving shelter and the left holding the edge of the garment. The smiling expression with unhappy eyes is robed in spiritual happiness. The robe covering both shoulders is dexterously depicted with carefully covered graphic folds and clings to the body. The head is covered with graphic spiral curls with a central bulge and the detailed halo adorned with bands of elegant decoration. The finished mastery in execution and the regal tranquility of expression of the image of Buddha came to be adopted and locally customized by Siam, Cambodia, Burma, Java, Central Asia, China and Japan, etc., when these countries accepted the Buddhist religion. The image of the standing Buddha is an outstanding example of Gupta art in its maturity from Sarnath. The softly moulded form has its right hand in the manner of reassuring protection. Unlike the delicately shaped drapery folds of the Mathura Buddha, only the edge of the almost transparent robe is here pointed out. The perfect execution of the figure compared by its serious spiritual appearance is truly praiseworthy of the inspirational being. Sarnath describes not only a gracefulness and improvement of form but also a calm approach by bending the body in the case of the standing figure, slightly on its own axis, thus conveying to it a certain suppleness and movement in comparison to the columnar inflexibility of analogous Mathura works. Also, in the case of the seated figure, the lean physiognomy expresses a feeling of movement, the body, closely following the modeling in all its delicate shades. The folds have been abandoned in general; a signal of the drapery only stays alive in the thin lines on the body signifying the periphery of the garment. The folds which fall separately are given, again, a definitely muslin-like texture. The body in its soft and shining plasticity comprises the main theme of the Sarnath artists. The conclusion of these features seen in this inspiring image of the Master embodied in the act of turning the Wheel of Law is one of the masterly creations of Gupta classical sculpture. The image has been carved in Chunar sandstone and has a surface texture of faultless softness. The Master is shown as seated in Vijraparyanka with the hands held near the breast in Dharmachakrapravartana Mudra (the sign of preaching). A fine order infuses the whole figure, both physically and mentally. It is obvious as much in the even and recurring treatment of the body as in the ethereal face reminiscent of a mind absorbed and in calm delight of spiritual ecstasy. A clean decorative backdrop is provided by the throne and a circular nimbus (*Prabha*) exquisitely carved with a broad foliated ornament within beaded borders. The decorative *prabhas* are characteristic of Mathura images.

During the Gupta period, the characteristic elements of the Indian temple emerged and the plastic forms began to be used admirably as an integral part of the general architectural scheme. The stone carving in the temples at Deogarh and those in temples of Udayagiri and Ajanta are perfect specimen of figure sculpture in their decorative setting. The large panel of *Sheshashayi* Vishnu from the Deogarh temple, representing the Supreme Being sleeping wakefully on the serpent Ananta, the symbol of eternity, in the interval between the disbanding of the universe and its new creation, is a magnificent example.

The four-armed Vishnu is reclining elegantly on the coils of the Adishesha, whose seven hoods form a cover over his crowned head. His companion Lakshmi is sitting by his right leg and many gods and celestials are lingering nearby. In the lower panel, the two demons Madhu and Kaitabha, in an aggressive manner, are confronted by the four personified weapons of Vishnu. The whole masterpiece styled with a masterly skill, breathes an atmosphere of peace and apprehension, making it an excellent piece of art.

A wonderful illustration of Vishnu belongs to the Gupta period and it comes from Mathura. The typical gown, the *vanamala*, the charming string of pearls coiled round the neck, the long and elegant *yagnopavita* are all features of early Gupta work.

Ganga and Yamuna, two life-sized terracotta images that were originally installed in places flanking the main steps leading to the upper terrace of the Shiva temple at Ahichhatra are from the Gupta period. In the image, the Ganga stands on her vehicle, the *makara* and Yamuna on the *cacchap*. Kalidas describes that the two river goddesses are attendants to Shiva and it is a regular feature of temple architecture from the Gupta period onwards. Clay figurines (Terracottas) have great value as sources of social and religious history. In India, the art of making figurines of baked clay is of great antiquity as you have already seen at Harappa and Mohenjodaro where terracottas have been discovered in huge numbers.

The Head of Shiva is a graceful example of Gupta terracottas, portrayed with matted locks, tied in a famous and graceful top knot. The look on the face is notable and both the figures, of Shiva as well as Parvati, are two of the most delightful specimens from Ahichhatra.

The Vakatakas were dominant in the Deccan, contemporary with the Guptas in the North. The high watermark of excellence in art attained in their region can be best seen in the later caves at Ajanta, the early ones at Ellora and those at Aurangabad.

11.4.3 Gupta Paintings

Painting made great progress in the Gupta period. The most famous paintings of the Gupta period were the caves of Ajanta (Maharashtra) and Bagh (Madhya Pradesh).

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Ajanta paintings

There are thirty caves in Ajanta of which 9, 10, 19, 26 and 29 are chaitya-grihas and the rest are monasteries. These caves were discovered in AD 1819 and were rebuilt. All paintings have heavy religious influence and centre on the following:

- Buddha
- Bodhisattvas
- Incidents from the life of Buddha
- Jatakas

The paintings are accomplished on a ground of mud-plaster in the tempera technique. In the caves of Ajanta, the artists observed a specific technique for doing their work. The rock walls of the cave were covered with a mixture of clay, cow dung and smashed rock. On its top a thin coat of lime plaster is applied. It was then smoothed and kept damp. On the surface the outline of the design was first sketched in dark colours such as dark brown or black. After this was done it was filled in, using a variety of colours like white, red, blue, dull green and brown. The theme of these paintings was from the Jataka tales, which is a collection of stories about the life of the Buddha. The paintings describe Buddha in various stages of his past and present lives. According to art critics, the Gupta paintings possess delicacy of lines, brilliancy of colours and richness of expression.

For long there existed a flawed assumption that the Ajanta cave paintings were frescoes. But the making of a fresco entails the application of colours to moist lime plaster whereas the Ajanta paintings were done on dry wall. The plaster made of clay, hay, dung, lime, etc., was applied to the wall and the artisans sketched beautiful drawings using vegetable colours. The brush for painting was made of animal hairs and twigs of certain plants.

The creation of these intricate Ajanta cave paintings still is a mystery due to the obvious lack of natural light inside the caves. Only thin streaks of light infuse inside, which is hardly sufficient for conducting such a painstaking craft. Historians have said that ancient artistes either used oil lamps or employed mirrors for reflecting and magnifying little natural light inside the cave.

Bagh paintings

The Bagh caves are a group of nine rock-cut monuments. They are situated among the southern slopes of the Vindhya in Kukshi tehsil of Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh state of central India. These monuments are located at a distance of 97 km from the town of Dhar. They are renowned for mural paintings by master painters of ancient India. A cave is a bit of a misnomer as these are not natural, but instead are examples of Indian rock-cut architecture.

The Bagh caves, like those at Ajanta, were dug up by master craftsmen on perpendicular sandstone rock face of a hill on the far bank of a seasonal stream,

the Baghani. Buddhist in inspiration, of the nine caves, only five have survived. All of them are *viharas* or monasteries having quadrangular plan.

11.4.4 Development of Music during Guptas

Music has been an essential part of the cultures existing in India. The range of musical phenomenon in India extends from tribal to folklore to classical to modern style. The flavour of music depends on various aspects of the culture, like social and economic organization and experience, climate and access to technology.

The conditions in which music is played and listened to, and the attitudes towards music players and writers all vary between regions and periods. Indian music has a very ancient tradition and an accrued heritage of years. Indian music has developed due to interface between different people of varied races and cultures.

The Gupta period (AD 320–480) was the golden era in the history of Indian music. The Guptas ruled in most of northern India. The Gupta period was the period of Greater India. During this period, a huge range of cultural activities occurred in India in this period that influenced the neighbouring countries as well. The Guptas not only improved the Indian culture but also had a global impact. Many music treatises like *Natyashastra* (by Bharat Muni) and *Brihaddeshi* (by Matanga) were written during this period.

Natya Shastra

The *Natya Shastra* is an ancient Indian treatise on the performing arts, comprising theatre, dance and music. The *Natya Shastra* was incredibly wide in its scope. While it basically deals with stagecraft, it has influenced music, classical Indian dance and literature as well. It consists of stage design, music, dance, makeup and basically every other aspect of stagecraft. It is very important to the history of Indian classical music as it is the only text that gives such detail about the music and instruments of the period.

After the Samaveda that dealt with ritual utterances of the Vedas, the *Natya Shastra* was the first major text that dealt with music at length. It was considered the crucial treatise of Indian classical music until the thirteenth century, when the stream split into Hindustani classical music in North India and Pakistan because of the influence of Persian and Arab music and Carnatic classical music in South India, the stronghold of the Hindu kingdoms.

While most of the discussion of music in the *Natya Shastra* concentrates on musical instruments, it also emphasizes several theoretical aspects that remained fundamental to Indian music. *Jatis* are elaborated in greater detail in the text *Dattilam*, which was composed around the same time as the *Natya Shastra*.

The *Natya Shastra* also hints at several aspects of musical performance, specifically its application to vocal, instrumental and orchestral compositions. It also deals with the *rasas* and *bhavas* that may be evoked by music.

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Brihaddeshi

Brihaddesi authored by Sangit Acharya Matanga Muni (AD 500–700) is the most important work between *Natya Shastra* (2nd century BC) and *Sangita Makarand* (AD seventh - eighth century). Brihaddesi is incomplete. Parts of it appear to be lost. It is the first major and available text for describing the ragas.

Sage Matanga's important contribution to musicology was his scholarly focus on the regional element in music.

Check Your Progress

5. Why was the Gupta era marked by the appearance of countless images of popular Hindu Gods and Goddesses?
6. Give an example of Gupta workmanship datable to the fifth century AD.
7. What are the Bagh caves?

11.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The government during the Guptas was based on the accepted principle of centralization and progressive decentralization. The central government was powerful, yet in 'the district headquarters, the officials of the Central Government were assisted and controlled by popular councils, whose sanction was necessary even if the state wanted to sell its own wasteland.
2. The Mathura Stone Inscription, the Sanchi Stone Inscription, the Gadhwa Stone Inscription and the Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta II give ample information on several aspects of his polity.
3. It is mentioned in the Puranas that Shishunanda Shivanandi was the King of Central India and belonged to the Naga dynasty.
4. Samudragupta's empire extended from the Himalayas in the north to Vindhya in the south and from Bay of Bengal in the east to Eastern Malawa in the west. He had indirect influence over Gujarat, Sindh, Western Rajaputana, West Punjab and the frontier states of Kashmir, and he had friendly relations with Saimhala and the other islands.
5. The Gupta period saw a huge resurrection of Hinduism when it became the official religion of the Gupta Empire. As a result, this era was also marked by the appearance of countless images of popular Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Images of Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva, Lord Krishna, Surya and Durga were created in this period.

6. The wonderful red sandstone image of the Buddha from Mathura is a remarkable example of Gupta workmanship datable to the fifth century AD.
7. The Bagh caves are a group of nine rock-cut monuments. They are situated among the southern slopes of the Vindhyas in Kukshi tehsil of Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh state of central India.

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11.6 SUMMARY

- The Gupta rulers re-established the political unity that existed during the Mauryan period, and ruled over a large principality of northern India. The Gupta Age is marked as an era of unprecedented progress in all aspects of polity, religion, art and literature.
- Among their contemporaries, they were undoubtedly the only power determined to restore to the country its lost political unity. They brought the region between 'the Godavari and the Sutlej' under their direct authority and also indirectly ruled over most of other parts of the country.
- Education received full attention. The endowment of Agrahara villages made the local institutions financially independent. Scholars discussed the contributions of other people in learning.
- The sources of information for the Gupta period comprise both literary and archaeological. These are found all over the country from Bengal to Kathiawar.
- The Puranas, especially the *Vayu*, *Brahmanda*, *Matsya*, *Vishnu* and the *Bhagavata Purana* are a rich source of information.
- Numerous archaeological source materials on the Gupta period are available. The numerous types of coins that the Guptas issued throw great light on their rise and fall and on the economic condition of the people.
- Chandragupta I (AD 319–324) was the first independent ruler of this dynasty as the previous Gupta rulers were feudatories/vassals. He adopted the title of 'Maharajadhiraja'. He was an imperialist and an important ruler than his predecessors.
- Chandragupta started a new era, known as Gupta Samvata. Although, controversial, it is believed that Chandragupta began his accession to the throne by founding a samvata, the first year of which was AD 319–320.
- After Chandragupta I, his son Samudragupta (AD 325–375) became king of the Gupta dynasty. He established a vast kingdom by conquering different battles and strengthened the Gupta dynasty for centuries.

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- Ramagupta ascended to the throne after the death of Samudragupta but he could not hold on to his Empire. Therefore, Chandragupta II (AD 380–412) ascended to the Gupta throne in AD 380. Like his father he proved to be a brave, valiant, invincible and able emperor.
- The Gupta Period (AD fourth–seventh) is usually called as the golden age of art and architecture in India. During this period, Sarnath came up as a school similar in quality as the Buddhist art.
- With the Gupta period, India entered a classical phase of sculpture. By the efforts made over centuries, techniques of art were perfected, definite types were evolved, and ideals of beauty were formulated with precision.
- Painting made great progress in the Gupta period. The most famous paintings of the Gupta period were the caves of Ajanta (Maharashtra) and Bagh (Madhya Pradesh).
- Music has been an essential part of the cultures existing in India. The range of musical phenomenon in India extends from tribal to folklore to classical to modern style. The flavour of music depends on various aspects of the culture, like social and economic organization and experience, climate and access to technology.
- The *Natya Shastra* is an ancient Indian treatise on the performing arts, comprising theatre, dance and music. The *Natya Shastra* was incredibly wide in its scope.

11.7 KEY WORDS

- **Agraharam/Agrahara:** It was a grant of land and royal income from it, typically by a king or a noble family, to religious purposes, particularly to Brahmins to maintain temples in that land or a pilgrimage site and to sustain their families.
- **Shikhara:** It is a Sanskrit word translating literally to ‘mountain peak’; refers to the rising tower in the Hindu temple architecture of North India, and also often used in Jain temples.
- **Devangana:** It is a Sanskrit name for girls meaning Celestial maiden.

11.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How was religion and education perceived during the Gupta period?
2. Trace the origin and early history of the Guptas.

3. Write a short note on the conquests of Samudragupta.
4. What was the extent of Chandragupta II's empire?
5. What did the images of the Buddhist pantheon comprise?
6. How did music develop during the Gupta period?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the socio-economic condition during the Guptas.
2. What are the various sources of information that inform us of the Gupta period?
3. Critically analyse the rise and fall of the Guptas.
4. 'The Gupta Period (AD fourth–seventh) is usually called as the golden age of art and architecture in India.' Is the statement true? Give reasons for your answer.
5. 'With the Gupta period, India entered a classical phase of sculpture.' Throwing light on this statement, describe the classical phase of sculpture in the Gupta period.

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11.9 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 12 HARSHAVARDHANA AND THE RAJPUTS

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Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Indian Culture During the Period of Harshavardhana
- 12.3 The Rajputs
- 12.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.8 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

To trace the development of the Vardhana dynasty, it is necessary to first study the period that was dominated by the decline of the mighty Gupta Empire and its gruesome effects. The last unit dealt with the socio-political condition of India after the downfall of the Kushanas and the detailed account of the glorious reign of the Guptas. By the time the Gupta dynasty declined, the Huns were also sent back and as a result, the whole of North India was left without any strong dominance.

This situation led to the domination of small independent kingdoms in the whole of the fifth century. One such kingdom that rose as a power centre was the Kingdom of Thaneshwar, a major part of Srikantha Janpada. According to the writings of Bana, the author of *Harsha Charita*, one person named Pushyabhuti, a great devotee of lord Shiva, was responsible for setting up the Kingdom of Thaneshwar. Even though his clan was known as the Pushyabhuti dynasty, it was here only that Parbhakarvardhan, the first king of the Vardhana Dynasty, came to the throne in 580 AD. Parbhakarvardhan also assumed the titles of *Parmabhatarka* and *Maharajadhiraj*. The new king proved himself to be a warrior of great worth. However, the greatest king of the Vardhana dynasty was none other than Harshavardhana, the younger son of Parbhakarvardhan. The unit will also discuss the emergence of the Rajput states that were concentrated in Rajasthan, Western UP and Gujarat.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the characteristic features of the socio-economic condition of post-Gupta India

- Discuss the foundation of the Vardhana Empire
- Assess Harshavardhana as a ruler and conqueror
- Discuss the emergence of the Rajput states

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12.2 INDIAN CULTURE DURING THE PERIOD OF HARSHAVARDHANA

After the decline of the Gupta Empire, the political unity of India was once again disintegrated. Anarchy prevailed everywhere in the country. Kings started fighting among themselves for the sake of their own interests. In such a situation there arose the Vardhana dynasty in Thaneshwar (*Shrikantha Janapada*, near Delhi). Pushyabhuti was the founder of this dynasty. Because of this, the Vardhana dynasty was also known as the Pushyabhuti dynasty. However, Nara Vardhana is considered as the first acknowledged king of this dynasty because the existence of Pushyabhuti could not be found in the inscriptions or literary sources. From the discoveries made in Sonapat, Nalanda, Madhubana, we know the genealogy of the Vardhana dynasty, was as follows:

King	Queen
Nara Vardhana	Vajrini Devi
Rajya Vardhana	Apsara Devi
Aditya Vardhana	Mahasenagupta Devi
Prabhakara Vardhana	Yashomati Devi

Prabhakara Vardhana was the first powerful king of the Vardhana dynasty. He had two sons, Rajya Vardhana and Harsha Vardhana, and a daughter, Rajyashri. In the last days of Prabhakara Vardhana, the Huns attacked. Rajya Vardhana was sent to face the Huns. During this battle, Prabhakara Vardhana expired.

Rajya Vardhana

When Rajya Vardhana returned to his capital after defeating the Huns, he got the news of his father's death, which made him sorrowful. So he started thinking of renouncing the worldly life. In the meantime, he was informed by his servant that the wicked king of Malwas had killed Grihaverma and his wife and Rajya Vardhana's sister Rajyashri had been imprisoned. He heard the speculation that the king of Malwa wanted to attack his kingdom since the king had expired. Rajya Vardhana attacked Malwa and became victorious in the battle. However, King Shashanka of Gaur killed him.

Rise of Harshavardhana

After the death of his brother Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana (AD 606–647) ascended the throne at the age of sixteen in AD 606. After his accession to the

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throne, he vowed to destroy Gaur and kill Shashanka. Harsha was moved by his father's and brother's death. His first priority was to free his sister Rajyashri from the imprisonment of the king of Malwa and to punish Shashanka. His army commander Simhanada said to a disturbed and grieving Harsha – 'Leaving aside your cowardice grief, keep your parental heritage and royal powers under your possession as a lion keeps fawn under its control.' Ultimately, Harsha gave up his grief and decided to seek revenge.

Harshacharita, written by Banabhatta, mentions that Harsha marched with a powerful army to take his revenge against Shashanka. On his way, he was informed by his army commander that a king named Gupta had captured Kannauj and his sister Rajyashri had fled from the prison. Handing over the command of his army to his chief commandant and an order to attack Gaur, he personally went in search of his sister Rajyashri. Harsha stopped her from entering into a funeral pyre and brought her back to camp. What happened after Harsha dispatched his commander to attack Gaur, is an issue on which, however, *Harshacharita* is silent. It is evident from the Ganjam inscription that Harsha's army forced Shashanka to return to Gaur. Defeating Shashanka, Harsha annexed his empire. It is written in the *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* that a king (Harsha) whose name begins with letter 'H' defeated a king who bears the name of 'Soma.

Problems of Kannauj

Kannauj King Grihaverma had died and he had no son. Hence, the question of a successor arose. When the throne was vacant after the death of childless Grihaverma, his throne was happily handed over to Harsha by his courtiers. Huen-Tsang's account also corroborates this action. But Harsha did not accept this proposal. Perhaps the real fact, which is mentioned in the Chinese text *Phangchi*, is that he (Harsha) ruled over Kannauj with his sister.

Harsha's conquests

Harsha wanted to hoist his flag of victory over the entire India. He had proclaimed at the time of his accession, 'All kings upto Udayanchal...SubelaAstagiri..... Gandhamadan should be ready to pay him tax or to take up arms to face him in the battle.' Huen-Tsang wrote, 'Soon he took revenge of his brother's death and he became master of India.' Harsha as a great and powerful emperor. He shifted his capital from Thaneshwar to Kannauj for administrative convenience. King Bhaskarverma of Kamrupa sent a proposal of a treaty, which was accepted delightedly by Harsha. It was a diplomatic move. The treaty was in the mutual interest of both as they were common enemy of Shashanka. When Harsha attacked Vallabhi, king Dhruvasena II sought refuge under the Gujars. Making a diplomatic move, Harsha gave his daughter in marriage to Dhruvasena. It is known from Huen-Tsang that Harsha had a desire to conquer his neighbouring states. Hence, he proceeded towards the east and became victorious after waging war for six years. The five states that Harsha conquered were Punjab, Kanyakubja, Bengal,

Bihar and Orissa. Thus, he got control over North India. Harsha plundered Sindh's wealth after conquering it.

*Harshavardhana
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War with Chalukya King Pulakeshin II

Once Harsha had conquered North India, he turned his attention towards south. Huen-Tsang wrote, 'He collected an army from Pancha Bharata (the five states of North India), invited the best commanders from all states and himself took over the command of the collected army and marched to defeat Pulakeshin.' But, Harsha was defeated by Pulakeshin II. According to the Aihole inscription, Harsha's elephantry massacred soldiers, but he still could not win the war. The battle in which Harsha was defeated was fierce. The famous battle occurred perhaps between AD 630 to 634.

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Nepal conquest

It is evident from *Harshacharita* that Harsha collected tax from the 'mountain region of white snow'. He had conquered Nepal. So, Nepal was definitely under the suzerainty of Harsha.

Kashmir conquest

Huen-Tsang wrote that Harsha had heard that one of the teeth of Buddha was in Kashmir. So, he went to Kashmir and asked permission to see the Buddha-tooth. The Buddhist order granted him permission. Kashmir king initiated mediation and he himself presented the Buddha-tooth in front of Harsha. Having seen the Buddha-tooth, Harsha was overwhelmed with joy and took away the Buddha-tooth forcefully.

Control over Uttar Pradesh and Magadha

It is evident from the inscriptions found from Banskhera Madhubana (in modern Uttar Pradesh) that Harsha captured Mathura, Govishana, Ayodhya, Prayaga, and Kaushambi. After that Harsha took the title of *Magadharaja*.

Relation with China

Harsha sent his ambassador to China with a proposal of friendship. Besides, he also had diplomatic relationship with Iran (*Pharasa*). These kings exchanged gifts with each other.

Extent of Harsha's empire

Harsha's empire was very vast. Pannikar, an Indian Historian associated with the Marxist school of historiography, mentions that Harsha was the undisputed master of North India. The areas from the Himalayas in north to the Vindhya mountain ranges in south, and Kamarupa in east to Saurashtra in west were included in his empire. Harsha was the last Hindu King of the ancient India. Harsha was called '*Savachakravartinam dhaureye*' and '*Chatuh samudradhipati*'. He had

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inherited a small kingdom from his father but he established his control over almost the entire India by means of his talent and ability. Harsha extended his suzerainty over the areas from the bank of Shatadru on the north to Narmada on the south and from the frontier state of Western Malwa to the regions near the Himalayas.

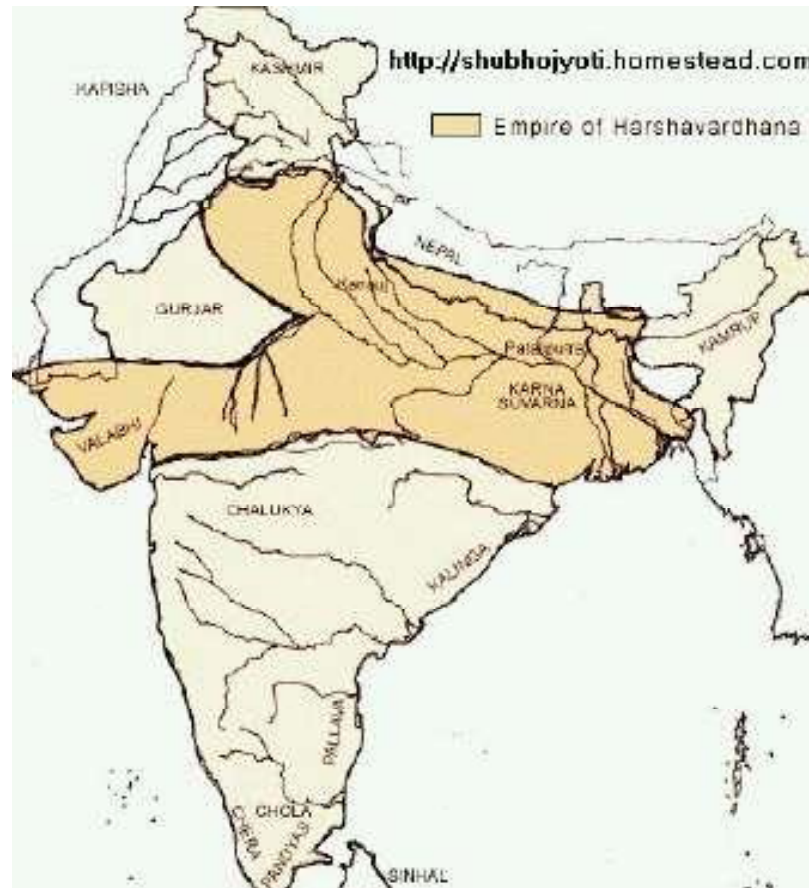


Fig. 12.1 Extent of Harsha's Kingdom

Cultural achievements of Harshavardhana

Harsha was undoubtedly one of the greatest rulers of the ancient Indian history. According to Panikkar, Harsha has a high place in the Indian History as a ruler, poet and religious king. Harsha was not only brilliant as a ruler and conqueror but more efficient as an ambassador of peace. Harsha's achievements in the cultural field are immense. His cultural achievements could be narrated as follows:

Kannauj assembly

The first example of the cultural achievements of Harsha was organizing the Kannauj Assembly. Harsha is the only king in the Indian history who is credited with holding public assemblies at regular intervals for religious and cultural purposes. According to Huen-Tsang's accounts, Harsha wished to hold great assemblies in Kanyakubja.

All Brahmins, Sramanas and non-Budhists were ordered to join the assembly so that they would relate to the religious principles of Mahayana Buddhism.

The kings of eighteen countries, 3,000 Brahmins, 3,000 Jains, and 1,000 monks of Nalanda Buddhavihara participated in the assembly of Kannauj, which was chaired by Huen-Tsang. A huge pavilion and 100 feet high *chaitya* were built on the bank of River Ganges. A human sized golden image of the Buddha was installed in it. When Huen-Tsang writes about the proceeding of the assembly, he mentions that a 3 feet high image of the Buddha, kept on an elephant was taken out daily in a procession. The procession reached the assembly hall where the image was installed on a throne and offering was made to that image. Thereafter, the scholars entered into the assembly hall. First of all, the principles of Mahayana were eulogized. And then Huen-Tsang made an announcement – ‘If any person proves my proposal logically wrong or creates doubt about it in debate, I will cut off my head on rival’s assertion to this effect.’ But, Harsha immediately announced for the protection of Huen-Tsang ‘If any one touches or hurts the religious teacher, he would be condemned to death and who would speak against him his tongue would be cut off.’ Huen-Tsang was given the title of *Mahayanadeva* or *Moksadeva*. In such a situation no one dared to speak against him.’

Brahmins reacted sharply at the promotion of Buddhism. They put this hall on fire and a conspiracy was hatched to make an assassination bid on Harsha. But Harsha survived. He captured five hundred Brahmins and expelled them. An announcement was made in the entire empire of Kannauj that the Chinese pilgrimage traveller established the doctrines of Mahayana after refuting the principles of other religions. No one could dare debate it.

Prayaga assembly

Harsha organized a great assembly in Prayaga. He organized this assembly in every five years. Eighteen kings including Huen-Tsang participated in the assembly. According to Huen-Tsang, ‘Harshavardhana worshipped the Buddha statue and offered it all his precious gems. Thereafter, he donated all this offering to the priests living therein. Harsha distributed all his property among students, orphans, widows and the poor. When nothing was left to him, he donated his gem imbedded crown and garland. When all the accumulated wealth of five years was finished he distributed all his personal ornaments and clothes, and then wore old clothes, which he asked for from his sister Rajyashri. Wearing it he worshipped the Buddha in all the ten directions...’ It is believed that Harsha established a unique record in the individual charity in the world. Harsha wanted to donate all his wealth for the welfare of humanity in order to receive blessings from Buddha. According to Dr Ishwari Prasad an Indian historian who dealt mainly with the Muslim rulers and the governments of India, ‘Harsha had forgotten the partiality of religious intolerance, what he demonstrated in the Kannauj assembly by his expressed charity and liberality in Prayaga assembly.’

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Literary interest of Harsha

Harsha is famous not only for his victories but also for his books. He demonstrated the best example of his literary talent by composing Sanskrit dramas, *Priyadarshika*, *Nagananda* and *Ratnavali*. Banabhatta called him adept in composing beautiful poetry. Harsha was not only a patron of the learned scholars, but, used his pen as skillfully as he used sword. Banabhatta was his royal poet. Besides, he patronized scholars like Shilabhadra, Jayasen, Matanga Divakar Mayur, etc.

Harsha's religious belief

There is a dispute regarding the religion that he followed. It is evident from *Harshacharita* that Harsha and his ancestors were Shaivites. Although Harsha was bent towards Buddhism, he had faith in Shiva and Surya also. But, seeing his support for Buddhism, some scholars consider him Buddhist. Perhaps he had accepted Buddhism in his later life. Huen-Tsang and Kannauj religious assembly are evidences to it. But it is not entirely clear.

Harsha's administration

Harsha's administrative system was well managed and organized like the Guptas. According to Huen-Tsang, 'Harsha was hard-working and used to forget to take even his food and sleep.' The main features of his administration were as follows:

Central government: Central government consisted of the following:

- **King:** King was the highest official of the administration. He took the titles of *Maharajadhiraja*, *Prameshwara*, *Paramabhataraka*, *Paramadevata*, etc. The responsibility of the entire governance was on the king. Harsha personally supervised his subjects' welfare. He was the supreme judge and supreme commander of his army. Apart from the administrative activities, he was also involved in religious activities and public welfare. According to the Madhubana edict, 'Harsha divided his daily activities into three parts of which one part was reserved for the administrative activities and the remaining two parts were reserved for his personal and religious acts.'
- **Council of ministers:** The king had a council of ministers to assist him in the administrative affairs. The Council of ministers had an important place in the empire as it had control over the autocratic behaviour of the king. Central administration was divided into several departments. These departments acted under the control of ministers or chairpersons. The important officials were *Mahasandhivigrahaka*, *Mahabaladhikrita*, *Senapati*, *Rajasthaniya* (Foreign Minister), *Uparika Maharaja*, etc. Huen-Tsang had written that the administration of the country was under the control of these officials.

- **Provincial administration:** Harsha's empire was very vast. Therefore, for the sake of the administrative convenience, it was divided into provinces, which were known as *Bhukti* or *Desha*. Its chief official was known as *Uparika Maharaja*. A member of the royal family was appointed to this post. Every province was divided into district (*visaya*). Its head was called *Visayapati*. The *Visayapati* was appointed by the *Uparika Maharaja*.
- **Local or village administration:** Every district or *visaya* was divided into several *pathaka* (circles), and the *pathak* was divided into several *gramas* (villages). *Gramas* was the smallest unit of the administration. An official, known as *Mahattara* was referred to among the village officials, who perhaps looked after the village administration. But, we do not know for certain whether he was a state official or respected elderly villager. *Gramika* was perhaps the head of a village.
- **Revenue system:** The main source of the income was *Udranga* (land-tax). Besides, the other taxes were *Uparikara*, weath, gold, etc. According to Huen-Tsang, royal land had four parts. One part was spent on religious activities and government works. Second was spent over public works and officials. The third part was spent to provide reward and salaries to the scholars and the fourth was spent on donation and meritorious acts. One-sixth of the produce was taken as land-tax.
- **Judicial system:** Huen-Tsang has written that there were no criminals as the administration was run with honesty and the mutual relation between the government and people was cordial. During the time of Harsha, punishment was severe. Hence, the criminals were afraid of committing any crime. The *Harshacharita* states that the criminals were set free on the occasions of festivals, ceremonies, etc. *Dandika* or *Dandapashika* was the title of the chief judicial officer.
- **Department of Defence:** To protect the vast empire, there was a need to have a very efficient and large army. It is evident from the accounts of Harsha that he organized a huge army as well as increased its numbers after extending his empire. The numbers of elephant army were 60,000 and that of mounted army were 100,000. He also increased his arsenals.
- **Espionage system:** The espionage department was under the control of the Department of Defence. This department discovered secretly any disruptive activities taking place within or without the kingdom.
- **Activity of public welfare:** Harsha executed several acts of public welfare because of which he is often compared with Asoka. He donated his wealth every five years. Besides, he also built several *chaityas*, stupas and temples. He worked for the development of the Nalanda University and other educational centres.

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Estimate of Harsha's reign

Harsha's characteristic had the mixture of the qualities of Ashoka and Samudragupta. Like Samudragupta, he launched the campaign of conquest in different parts of the country and attained the status of emperor and also achieved historical unity of the country. Harsha occupies a special place in the Indian history on account of his valour, able leadership, religious tolerance, literary love and charity. He was a distinct person and should be counted among great kings like Ashoka and Akbar. As an administrator of public welfare, literary patron, and an accomplished dramatist, etc., he should be mentioned in the pages of history as a talented and attractive king. Harsha, on the basis of his talent, extended his empire in the whole of India and, thus, united it into a political unity.

Huen-Tsang's account of India

Huen-Tsang had praised the administrative system of Harsha. He considered Harsha as a king endowed with all qualities. According to him, Harsha had a strong control over his administration, which was well-organized. The subjects were affluent and contented. Crime was negligible, and the punishment was so severe that none had the courage to commit any crime. The economic life of the society was primarily dependent on the agriculture but there were many industries and business settlement in addition to agriculture. Huen-Tsang writes that every person fulfilled his needs peacefully. One-sixth of the produce of land was paid as tax. Golden and silver coins were in vogue. Huen-Tsang was especially attracted to the religious condition of India. He found mostly Brahmins in this country. So, he called it 'the country of Brahmins.' Brahmins and the others used Sanskrit language and were divided into several categories. Some appeared with shaved head, garland of skulls, knotted hair or with the ash-painted bodies. Recluses led a life of sacrifice. Huen-Tsang has also talked about the eighteen sects of Buddhism. According to him, Harsha was a follower of Buddhism but there were also several other religions in India at that time. Brahminism was in a developed condition. Most of the people were either the followers of Shaiva or Vaishnava thoughts.

Social condition

In the social sphere, Huen-Tsang praised Brahmins and Kshatriyas. According to him, there was caste system in the society. Traditionally, there were four divisions in the caste system. Four castes had religious-rites-based purity in different quantity. The first caste was Brahmina, which was famous for knowledge and moral conduct. The second was Kshatriya, which participated in the administration. The third was Vaishya. They traded in and outside the country. The fourth was Shudra, who did menial jobs. Each person married in his own caste. Women did not remarry. Sati system and polygamy were prevalent in the society.

Huen-Tsang has categorized the character of the inhabitants of each state in the following way:

‘The people of Kashmir are cheats and cowards. The people of Mathura are learned and the best in moral conduct. The inhabitants of Kannauj are beautiful. The inhabitants of Malwa are learned and polite. The inhabitants of Kamrupa are aggressive and they respect the scholars. The inhabitants of Chola are fearful and wicked. The Dravidians are faithful, courageous and lovers of letters. The inhabitants of Maharashtra are grateful, egoist, war-lovers and self-sacrificers.’

The Indians were dutiful, truthful and talented. They always had care of the vice and virtue, and mundane and supra-mundane. Their conducts were polite and matured. There was less crime. Even for simple crime, the punishment was amputation. To prove their innocence, the criminals had to undergo tests of water, fire and poison. There were physicians and several medicines in the country. Corpses were cremated or disposed of in water. Not being cured of diseases, the old would commit suicide by immersing themselves into the Ganges. It was a pious duty. Education was mandatory for higher castes and every child had to learn grammar, art, medicine, logic and spirituality. Brahmins were respected due to their knowledge and piety.

Check Your Progress

1. Who was the founder of the Vardhana dynasty?
2. When did Harshavardhana ascend to the throne?

12.3 THE RAJPUTS

The Rajputs represented a new historical force in early medieval India and they dominated the Indian scene for several centuries. As Vincent Smith said many years ago, ‘They (i.e., the Rajput clans) became so prominent that the centuries from the death of Harsha to the Muslim conquest of northern India, extending in round numbers from the middle of the 7th to the close of the 12th century, might be called with propriety the Rajput period.’ The political authority of the Rajput clan was, of course, confined to northern and western India; eastern and southern India remained outside their political jurisdiction. However, northern and western India was always under the threat of Muslim invasions, which turned into reality as the Arabs finally occupied Sind and reached further in their conquest with the Turkish occupation of Punjab.

The south remained free from foreign raids until the close of the 13th century as the Rajputs were determined to protect themselves by all means. While, the conquering Cholas directed their military resources to naval and political exploits outside the boundaries of India, the Rajputs kept the north-western invaders at bay for several centuries and protected the holiness of the Indian soil as long as possible. However, eventually luck ran out and their valour succumbed as the

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whole of northern India came under Turkish rule and the opening of the south was only a question of time. With all its territorial limitations, therefore, the political power of the Rajputs gave a definite shape to historical forces across the entire subcontinent. There was a compelling force as also a historical purpose behind the gallant exploits of the Rajputs. From this point of view, it would not be wrong to speak of a 'Rajput Period' of Indian history.

The rise of Rajputs to political prominence was almost like a fairy tale. Vincent Smith said, 'The Rajput clans, never heard of in earlier times, begin from the 8th century to play a conspicuous part in the history of northern and western India.'

The fall of the Gupta Empire had created a political void, which led to a competition for power amongst various local dynasties of which the Pushyabhutis attained short-lived magnitude during the times of Harsha. A second and worst period of collapse followed his death and northern India did not attain political stability till the Gurjara-Pratihars, a Rajput dynasty, succeeded in establishing an empire which was larger and stronger than the Pushyabhutis Empire. In between all this, the Arabs had occupied Sind.

The 8th century witnessed the emergence of two historical forces of durable significance—first, the appearance of the Muslims in the combined role of invaders and rulers; secondly, the appearance of the Rajputs in the role of defenders of the old order. It seemed as if the old Indian dynasties were too exhausted to play an active political and military role and a new element in the population came forward to fill the void and created new history. However, it is here that the question of racial and environmental factors comes in.

The Rajput dynasties claimed power from the Kshatriyas Brahmin Pundits, who dominated contemporary society. If there were really no breaks in the continuity of the traditional system, it would not be easy to explain the rise of so many ruling families with a dynastic background which required careful explanation from Brahmin courtiers. In any case, the replacement of old dynasties by new ones of uncertain origin is a *prima facie* feature of the political changes during the Rajput period.

The origin of the Rajputs thus remains a matter of debate and has been a matter of discussion for the last fifty years, as different historians present their own point of view, and yet the subject remains extremely controversial. However, it is possible to emphasize certain points and to see the picture as a whole instead of viewing it from the angle of any particular dynasty. The chronology of the dynastic inscription should also be kept in view so that we do not miss the development of a conventional pattern of genealogical explanation.

Earliest Rajput Dynasties

The Gurjara-Pratihars were chronologically the earliest and historically the most important of the Rajput dynasties. The earliest inscription referring to the origin of the dynasty is the undated Gwalior stone inscription of Bhoja I, according to which the ancestor of the family was Saumitri or Lakshmana, the younger brother

of the epic hero Rama, who was 'the doorkeeper' (pratihara), since he rebelled in the battle with Meghananda. Moreover, Vatsaraja is described as 'foremost among the most distinguished Kshatriyas' and as one who stamped the noble race of Ikshvaku with his own name by virtue of his spotless conduct. This inscription must have been issued some years before AD 893, the earliest epigraphic date for the reign of Bhoj's successor.

A different explanation of the term 'Pratihara' is given in the Jodhpur inscription of Bauka which says, 'In as much as that every brother of Ramabhadra performed the duty of door-keeper (pratihara), this illustrious clan came to be known as Pratihara.'

This variation does not affect the origin of the dynasty from the Sun God, which is upheld in this inscription also. So, far as literary evidence is concerned, we find Rajasekhra, the well-known dramatist, describing his patron Mahendrapala as the 'ornament of the race of Raghu' and the 'leader of Raghu's family'. Mahipala is described by the same dramatist as 'the pearl-jewel of the lineage of Raghu'. Thus, the tradition of solar descent seems to have taken root. In the Harsa stone inscription of Chahamanavigraharaja II, there is a reference to the universal sovereign of the earth in Raghu's race, who is usually identified with one of the later Pratihara monarchs.

This epigraphic tradition of descent from the Sun God is connected chronologically with the period during which the Gurjara-Pratiharas were the dominant ruling dynasty in northern India. The testimony of Rajasekhara has little independent value, for a court poet had to glorify his patrons and his words cannot be taken literally. This tradition might have been acceptable if it had originated at the initial stage of the rise of the dynasty and not at that stage of imperial prominence where the temptation to establish a link with the heroic age of the epics would be readily endorsed by obliging Brahmin courtiers. The inscriptions are silent on the question of origin until the glorious days of Bhoja.

Another difficulty in the way of accepting this epic tradition is its silence with regard to the term Gurjara associated almost inseparably with the family name Pratihara as also with the history of the dynasty. What is particularly noteworthy in this connection is the well-known explanation given in the Rajor stone inscription dated AD 959 during the reign of Mathanadeva, a feudal lord of Vijayapala of Kanauj. The word 'Gurjara-Pratiharanvayah' in this inscription has been taken to mean that the Pratiharas were a clan of the Gurjaras, a foreign tribe of central Asian origin, which entered India along with the Huns. The idea of the word 'Gurjara' should be taken in a geographical sense to indicate 'and of the Gurjaras' is completely objectionable, because in the same inscription, we can find indication to 'fields cultivated by the Gurjaras'. The same word could hardly have been used in the same record to denote a region as well as a tribe.

The statements of Arab writers like Al Ma'sudi on the struggle between the Muslims and the Jurz are another indication that the word Gurjara was used ordinarily in the tribal and not in the geographical sense. The same conclusion

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follows from references in Rashtrakuta record to their struggle with Pratiharas. For instance, Govinda III is described as the ‘destruction to the valour of the head of the thundering Gurjaras’.

Commonly, a separated reference in a single inscription of a vague prince should not be allowed to leave behind a century-old epigraphic and literary tradition. However, the Rajor inscription deserves special attention since it is not directly concerned with the imperial Pratihara family and is, therefore, comparatively free from court influence. It is also the only epigraphic record that gives an explanation of the questioning and complex Gurjara-Pratihara. It also serves as a bridge, filling the gap which the composers of the imperial genealogies appear to have ignored.

Although, the evidence of the Rajor inscription seems to be decisive, some additional points are worth noting in this connection. The Kanarese poet Pampa calls Mahipala Ghurjararaja. He could hardly have used the word Gurjara in a geographical sense, for the Gurjara country was only a small segment of Mahipala’s vast empire and it would be unusual to choose him as the ruler of that small segment only. If we take the word in a tribal sense, it seems to be more appropriate in the context of his imperial position. A more significant fact is the use of certain strange personal names by the Pratiharas of Mandor from whom the imperial Pratiharas might have taken their origin.

Thus, the Jodhpur inscription of Bauka mentions two alternative names for Harichandra and Narabhata, Rohilladdhi and Pellapelli, respectively. The use of two names (one Sanskrit and the other apparently non-Indian or non-Sanskritic) seems to be an indication of the survival of the non-Indian influences in a Hindu family.

It must, however, be remembered in this connection that the Jackson-Bhandarkar theory of the foreign origin of the Gurjaras cannot be treated as anything more than a working theory.

The arguments on which that theory is based are open to ample criticism. The verbal similarity between Gurjara and Khazar cannot be stretched too far as historical evidences unless it is strengthened by more positive arguments which are based on clear facts. It has been argued that ‘there are positive grounds for dissociating the Gurjaras with the Huns.’ It is true that literary and epigraphic references to the Huns are silent in regard to the Gurjaras, but in the view of the admittedly subordinate position of the Gurjaras in relation to the Huns, this argument need not be given more significance. Furthermore, it is needless to take for granted any close connection between the Huns and the Gurjaras in order to prove the latter’s foreign origin. The information about the foreign attacks of the later Gupta period remains unsatisfactory and we cannot rule out the possibility of the Gurjaras entering India before the Huns (or along with the Huns in a separate stream). There is no record of their ‘clash with the native powers’ and it is not surprising in view of the scarcity of sources relating to that disturbed period.

Extent of Gurjara Kingdom

The distribution of the Gurjara population in the wide belt from Peshawar in the northwest to Rohilkhand in the east, Jammu and Kashmir, in the eastern districts of Madhya Pradesh and in the Rajputana is a good evidence of tribal migration from beyond the Khyber Pass. The Gurjaras could hardly have spread themselves over such a vast area if they had been, as one contemporary writer has suggested, 'living in obscurity somewhere in Rajputana' before 'lust for power impelled them to rush head-long that they came into contact with others and carved out a number of kingdoms which ultimately formed the nucleus of the big Gurjara empire'. Apart from the absence of any reference to the Gurjaras in pre-Gupta or early Gupta records, a negative fact of some significance, it is difficult to believe that a small local tribe of Rajputana could multiply so as to provide migrants for the vast area indicated above. Nor should it be forgotten that the political authority of the Gurjara-Pratiharas never extended to the Peshawar region, Central Punjab or Jammu and Kashmir, so that we cannot connect the

Gurjara settlements in these areas with the expansion of the Gurjara political power (Figure 12.2). In the absence of satisfactory epigraphic evidence the distribution of the Gurjara population should be accepted as tentative evidence of the foreign origin of the Gurjaras and, consequently, of the Gurjara-Pratiharas.

Theory of Origin of Rajputs: Agnikula Story of Origin

The Bardic tradition describes the Pratiharas as one among four tribes belonging to the Agnikula group, the other three being:

- Paramaras
- Chalukyas
- Chahamanas

According to oriental scholar, James Todd, four heroes came out of the sacrificial fire of the summit of Mount Abu, in response to the prayer of the sages to Mahadeva for help against the daityas who were disturbing their sacrifices. Among them one had not a worrier's mien and was placed as guardian of the gate (an obvious explanation of the term Pratihara). A second issued forth, and being formed in the palm (chaloo) of the hand was named Chalooka. The third was Paramar, and the fourth Chauhan. Abul Fazl records the tradition of the fire-origin of the Paramaras in a completely different form. In that story, the hero is born in a temple of fire to protect fire worship against the intrigues of the Buddhists.

Apart from the natural unlikelihood of the supernatural origin of the founders of several ruling families, as the fairy tale stories seem illogical and absurd, we must not fail to notice the admittedly unhistorical character of the Prithviraja Raso credited to Chand Bardai.

The epigraphic records of the Pratiharas and the Chahamanas do not refer to the given story at all. Inscriptions of the reign of Chalukya Bhima II, however,

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refer to the story in connection with the Paramaras. Abhavatilaka Gani, the well-known commentator on Hemachandra's *Dvyasrayatnahakaya*, says that the Paramaras were created by the sage Vasishtha to help him in his quarrel with Visvamisra over the cow Nandini. Thus, the story was not unknown in the Chalukya Kingdom, but it was not connected locally with the origin of the ruling dynasty of Gurjaraat.

Padmagupta's *Navasahananka charita*, which was composed towards the beginning of the 11th century, narrates the story of the fire-origin of the Paramaras. The hero sprang out of the sacrificial fire on Mount Abu at the behest of the great sage Vasistha and forcibly wrested away his cow from Visvamisra. It is obvious that the court poet gave the official version of the origin of the ruling dynasty. It is, therefore, not quite correct to say that the earliest reference to the fire pit origin of the Paramaras is contained in records which belong to about the middle of the 11th century. It is true that the earliest epigraphic mention of the story is to be found in the Udaipur Prasasti of Udayaditya which says that 'through his (Vasishtha's) power, a hero arose from the fire-pit, who bought back the cow'. This story was repeated in several later inscriptions, but its origin is clearly to be found in Padmagupta's work which is historically as valuable or as open to the charge of partiality and exaggeration as any epigraph. The story gained wide acceptance in the 12th and 13th centuries, as references in Chalukya inscriptions and in Abhayatilaka Gani's commentary. It would not be surprising, therefore, if it found mention even in the original version of the Prithviraja Raso. It is not possible in the face of this evidence, to accept the view that the Agnikula myth is a fabrication of perhaps the 15th century.

Although, the details of the story were not accepted as genuine records by the European writers, they generally used it as supplementary evidence in favour of the theory of the foreign origin of the Rajputs. For example, Vincent Smith quoted with apparent approval Crooke's remark that the story represents a rite of purification by fire, the scene of which was southern Rajputana, whereby the impurity of the foreigners was removed and they became pure enough to enter the Hindu caste system. These statements entail a geographical connection between Rajputana and the four dynasties of the Agnikula group. It also implies a ceremony of purification by which foreigners were admitted formally into the traditional Hindu caste system as Kshatriyas.

The *Navasahasanka charita* gives us the earliest recorded version of the Agnikula story.

The Paramaras of Malava were not directly connected with the Abu region until the days of Vakpati Munja, who we are told, led his army into the neighbourhood of Mount Abu and having conquered Mewar and its neighborhood, reached the country of Marwar. These exploits might have brought Mount Abu within the range of the contemporary poet's fancy, but the question of removing

the impurity of the foreigners does not arise in connection with the Vasishtha–Visvamisra quarrel, which provided the occasion for the creation of the mythological ancestor of the Paramara dynasty. Padmagupta's story could, however, hardly be an isolated product of the poet's fertile imagination. Its origin might be traced to an ancient tradition incorporated in the Ramayana, which says that the Sakas, the Pahlavas, the Kambojas and other non-Aryan tribes were created by Vasistha to fight against Visvamisra in connection with the dispute over Kamadhenu. The similarity is quite evident and it was quite natural for Padmagupta to utilize an epic tradition which had acquired some sanctity through the lapse of time.

Possibly the Muslim threat was not believed to be serious for the Rajput kingdoms of central and western India at the time when Padmagupta's *kavya* was being composed. As the first stage of Arab attack after the conquest of Sind was over, the Muslims of Sind were divided and weak. The Turkish phase had only just begun; Sultan Mahmud's raids had not yet affected Rajputana and the Ganges-Jamuna Doab. It was enough that the hero emerging from the fire-pit should defend a Brahmin sage against a Kshatriya; it was not necessary that he should play the role of a defender of the faith against non-believers.

The Raso version of Tod's story echoed the danger of the age of Turkish conquest. The *mlechchhas* who destroyed ancient temples and broke venerated idols might well be compared with daityas who rendered impure the sacrifices of the sages. It was natural, therefore, that the story should take a new turn, investing the hero with the halo of a champion of the orthodox religion. His super-natural birth from a sacrificial fire-pit seemed to give him divine commission for the destruction of the daityas. The Raso story thus appeared to be an excellent mythological interpretation of the struggle of the Rajput ruling clans against the Muslim invaders. It has faint echoes in epigraphic as well as in literary evidence. An inscription of the 14th century says that when the solar and lunar races become extinct, the sage Vatsa created Chahamana to suppress the asuras disturbing his sacrificial rise.

Even in later versions of the Agnikula story, there is no direct reference to any ceremony of purification intended to facilitate foreigners' admission into Hindu society. However, we are probably entitled to draw the conclusion that the dynasties of the Agnikula group were recognized as Kshatriyas, rather late in history and presumably in recognition of their struggle for Hinduism against the Muslim invaders. It is however, difficult to say why the story in any of its versions does not cover the other Rajput clans, which satisfy these two conditions, e.g., the Chandellas, the Kalachuris, and the Gahadavalas. Probably, it was current chiefly in and around Rajputana and related to those Rajput clans which were geographically connected with that region. Mount Abu, as we know, plays an important role in the story. Whatever the implications of the Agnikula story might be, it is essential to study it in the light of the obtainable epigraphic evidence on the origin of each of the four dynasties grouped together in literary tradition. As far as the case of Pratiharas is

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concerned, we have seen that epigraphic testimony is more or less convincing. The connection between the Pratiharas and the Gurjaras (in all probability a foreign tribe) seems to be well known.

In the case of the Chahamanas, on the other hand, there is no such practically vital epigraphic evidence. The Agnikula story is unknown to the Chahamanas inscriptions and literary works connected with the dynasty or in the book *Prithviraja-vijaya*, or in the *Hammiraniahakavya* of Nayachandra Suri. That inscription records the birth of Samanta, the earliest representative of the Chahamanas family on its list, in the Vatsa gotra at Ahichchhatra-pura which has been identified by Ojha with Nagaur in the former Jodhpur state. The connection with the Vatsa is mentioned in other inscriptions also. It is presumably on this ground that the Chahamanas have been described as the descendants of a Brahmin claiming the Vatsa gotra.

The religious association of the Chahamanas has been known also through D.R. Bhandarkar in whose opinion they belonged originally to a foreign tribe known as the Khazaras. Although, it was quite possible for a family of foreign extraction to secure recognition as Brahmins, Bhandarkar's arguments in favour of treating the early Chahamanas as members of a priestly class are not quite realistic. He basically relies upon the reference to the Vatsagotra in the Bijolia stone inscription which, however, is too far away chronologically from the origin of the family. His arguments connecting the Khazaras with the Chahamanas have also been challenged. Based on present knowledge, it is not possible to say whether there is any conclusive evidence in support of the theory of foreign origin in the case of the Chahamanas. Apart from the unclear implications of the Agnikula story, there is hardly anything on record which prevents us from ascribing to them a local origin. They may or may not have been Brahmins or Kshatriyas. They could have been a clan without social distinction to which Brahminical origin was attributed by courtiers after their rise to political power.

Evidences: Epigraphic and Literary

In the case of the Paramaras, the earliest available epigraphic evidence against the theory of foreign origin is practically decisive. The Harsola plates of AD 948, which are at least half a century older than the *Navasahasanka-charita*, state that the Paramara ruler Vappairaja had descended from the family of the Rashtrakuta ruler Akalavarsha. This testimony of the earliest available inscription of the dynasty cannot be set aside by later literary or epigraphic evidence.

Moreover, the connection between the Rashtrakutas and the Paramaras seems to be established by the assumption by Vakpati-Munja of distinctive Rashtrakuta titles. The significance of the use of the 'garuda' symbol on both Rashtrakuta and Paramara should also be noted in this connection. If the Paramaras came to Malava from the Deccan, it is quite likely that it was a case of migration from the south; they could hardly be the descendants of foreigners entering India through the north-western gate.

According to D.R. Bhandarkar, the Chalukyas of Gurjarat were in all likelihood, of Gurjara origin. He founded no epigraphic evidence in support of this assumption, but in his opinion, there can be no doubt that Gurjaraat bore this name only after the Chalukyas conquered and occupied it. If the Chalukyas had not been of Gurjara extraction, it is inconceivable how that province could have been named Gurjaraat when it was known as Lata till their advent.

The rule of the Chalukyas does not appear to be well established. There is ample proof of the fact that Mularaja, the founder of the Chalukyas kingdom, was the son of a Chapotkata princess and taken captive. Hemachandra calls him King of the Chalukya-vamsa. In one of his inscriptions, his father is called Raji and nominated Maharajadhiraja but in Merutunga's chronicle, he is described as a young pilgrim to Somnath who overwhelmed the Chaotkata ruler by his skilful horsemanship. Whether Raji was a ruling prince cannot be ascertained. There is no reference either in epigraphic or literary evidence to the paternal territory of Mularaja who specifically claims to have acquired the Sarasvata manandala by the prowess of his own arms. He may have been connected with a petty ruling family, but there is nothing on record that connects him with any of the foreign tribes.

The theory of foreign origin does not equate with Chandellas of Jeja Bhukti. The story of the union between a young Brahmin widow named Hemavati and Chandrama, resulting in the birth of a son named Chandravarman who established the Chandella kingdom, has rightly been dismissed by Vincent Smith as a 'silly legend', although he has discovered in it an implied admission that the pedigree of the clan required explanation, which was best attained by including it in the group of moon descended Rajputs, and adding respectability by inventing a Brahmin ancestor and the story is found in the Mahoba Khand which is usually treated as a part of the Prithviraja Raso attributed to Chand Bardai. No historical significance can be attributed to this late work of vague authorship and date.

Epigraphic evidence is not that helpful as some may observe. The tradition of the Chandella's descent from the moon is mentioned in the Khajuraho stone inscription of Dhanga dated CE 954. The genealogy begins with the creator of the universe, who had given birth to Atri who begot Chandratreya. In this family was born Nripa Nannuka, the first king of the Chandella dynasty. Variants of this genealogy are found in other inscriptions. Even poetic imagination could not bridge the gulf satisfactorily between the creator of the universe and the first historical ruler of the Chandella dynasty. There is, however, one common point between epigraphic evidence and literary tradition that is descent from the moon is the basis of the story. However, there is no attempt to connect the dynasty with any of the heroes of the well-known Lunar dynasty overvalued through stories and fantasies.

The name of the dynasty shows its established connection with the moon. The earliest inscription of the dynasty gives the name 'Chandratreya'. In other inscriptions, you can find variants such as 'Chandrella', 'Chamdella', 'Chandella' and 'Chandela'.

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In the absence of positive epigraphic or literary evidence, some European writers assumed that the Chandellas were in origin a non-Aryan clan intimately associated with the Gonds and Bhars of central India. Vincent Smith held that the Chandellas were originally Hinduized Gonds, but Russell thought that they sprang from the aboriginals Bhars. This division is irrelevant. The significant thing is the question of evidence on which the aboriginal descent of the Chandellas is based. It is on the whole obvious that the legends on which Vincent Smith and Russell relied cannot be treated as reasonably reliable evidence.

The only more or less concrete factor is the doubt cast upon the respectability of the family by the story of Hemavati which, however, is unknown to epigraphic tradition. However, this doubt can hardly be constructed as an indication of the aboriginal origin of the family. Smith assumed that the Chandellas had no link with the foreign immigrants from the north-west on the ground that they are not covered by the Agnikula story. However, we have seen that the Agnikula story is no conclusive evidence of foreign descent. In any case, we cannot draw the inference that dynasties outside the scope of that story must be of indigenous origin. If the Chandellas were really a clan of impure descent, they might as well have derived their impurity from foreign descent.

Inscriptions of the Gahadavalas are pretty modest as far as proclamations on the origin of the dynasty are concerned. There is no reference at all to its descent from the sun or the moon or from any mythical sage or hero. There are references to its Kshatriya origin in several inscriptions and we are told that the dynasty came to power after the destruction of the solar and lunar dynasties. The genealogy is traced to Yasovigraha who is described simply as 'a noble by his abundant grandeur as it were the sun incarnate'.

Endeavours have been made to treat the Gahadavalas as simply a sect of the Rashtrakutas instead of recognizing them as a separate and independent clan. Here, the available evidence is altogether not credible. Indeed, it might be said that there is really no evidence at all apart from the omission of the Gahadavalas in the lists of the clans in the Rajataranhini, the Kuinarapalacliarita and the Prithviraja Raso. Such negative evidence proves nothing. There is no trace of migration of the Gahadavalas from the south to the north. This difficulty has been sought to be removed by reference to the rule of 'Prince born in the Rashtrakutas lineage' over Kanauj in the 11th century. There is, however, no reliable evidence of any dynastic connection between these princes and the Gahadavalas.

There is at least, one inscription which mentions the two dynasties, that is, the Gahadavalas and the Rashtrakutas, side-by-side without indicating that the former is a sect of the latter. Furthermore, in two of the lists of the 36 royal tribes compiled by Tod, the Gahadavalas are mentioned as 'a separate and single tribe'. In spite of such recognition, Tod says that 'the Gaharwar Rajput is scarcely known to his brothers in Rajasthan, who would not admit his contaminated blood to mix with theirs.' Geographical distance might account for this exclusion of the

Gahadavalas from the compact Rajput society of Rajputana, but there could hardly be any reference to their 'contaminated blood' if they were known to be the descendants of the Rashtrakutas. The Paramaras were treated as guilty of contamination on the ground of their connection with the Rashtrakutas.

Vincent Smith refers to an old Gorakhpur tradition according to which the Gaharwars are inheritors of Raja Nala and migrated to Kasi from Nalapura for Narwar. The association with Kasi shows that the Gaharwar migrants from central India as well as the 'Gahirawars' were intended to be identified with the Gahadavalas, although, the 'Gahirawars' rulers mentioned in the Mahoba Khand are mostly unidentified to sober history. The story of Nala is a crude tradition connecting the Gahadavalas with the ancient Kshatriyas and it has some indirect support in the epigraphic claims to Kshatriya origin. The story of migration from central India seems to be a faint indication of aboriginal origin which might explain Tod's reference to 'contaminated blood'. According to a local legend which was famous among the present Gaharwars of Uttar Pradesh, the Gahadavalas are supposed to be an obscure descendant of Yayati. This has been construed as a hint that the Gahadavalas were originally an insignificant autochthonous tribe, who came into prominence as Kshatriyas only after seizing political power and championing the cause of Brahminism.

The epigraphic records of the Kalachuris (a branch of the Haihayas) connect them with ancient Kshatriyas of the Chandravanshi origin. As the Kalachuris are connected with epigraphic tradition with the Narmada region and as there is no Bardic tradition connecting them either with foreigners or with aboriginal tribes, their claim to Kshatriya origin is less open to suspicion than similar claims of other clans.

Apart from the principal Rajput dynasties of the pre-Muslim period, it is essential to take notice of the three ruling dynasties of the medieval Rajputana: (i) the Guhilots of Mewar (ii) the Rathors of Marwar (iii) the Kachwas of Amber, Jaipur.

The Guhilots were amongst the oldest Rajput ruling dynasties though they did not attain political prominence during the golden age of Rajput ascendancy in northern India. The problem of the origin of this celebrated dynasty has been discussed by several scholars from different points of view. In D.R. Bhandarkar's view, the Guhilots were originally Nagar Brahmins, who were of foreign origin. This theory has so far held the ground, although the orthodox theory of the Solar origin of the Guhilots still commands some support.

Bhandarkar relied mainly upon epigraphic evidence and there was no written record available. The fact that Bappa was a Brahmin is indicated by certain verses in the Chittor and Achalesavara inscriptions and also, more distinctly, by the Mamadeva prasasti. The Chittor inscriptions describe him as a Brahmin coming from Anandapura which Bhandarkar identified with Vadnagar on the basis of miscellaneous evidence such as the Vadnagar prasasti of the reign of Kumarapala,

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the Alina character of AD 649 and AD 656, the tradition current among the Nagar Brahmins and popular stories. The well-known work *Lkalinga-inahatmyu* (composed during the reign of Rana Kumbha) refers to Guhadatta, the founder of the Guhila clan, as belonging to a Brahmin family emigrated from Anandapura. The same work tells us that Vijayaditya, the ancestor of Guhadatta, was the hero of the Nagar race. These two statements show that the Guhilots were known in Rana Kumbha's reign as descendants of Nagar Bramins.

Furthermore, the *gotra* of the Guhilots was Vaijavapa which was one of the *gotras* among the Nagar Brahmins at least as early as the 13th century. The tradition of the Brahmin origin of the Rana's family is, indeed, as old as the Atpur inscription of AD 977 and can be traced up to the 16th and 17th centuries in Abul Fazl's *Aini-Akbari* and Nainsi's *Kinyat*. Against this continuous tradition is to be set the significant expression Raghuvamsa-Kirtipisunah in Naravahana's inscription of AD 971, showing that even before the date of the Atpur inscription the Guhilots had begun to advance the claim of Solar Kashtriya origin. Indeed, there are conflicting traditions about the caste of the Guhilots which raises some difficulties. Yet, it would be difficult to assume an indigenous Kshatriya origin for the Guhilots in view of their historical association with the Gurjara-Pratiharas and geographical association with Rajputana.

The history of Marwar is undisputed in tracing the descant of the Rathor rulers of Marwar and Bikaner from the Gahadavalas of Kanauj. This tradition has some support in epigraphic evidence. A later inscription, dated AD 1686, describes Siha, the founder of Rathor dynasty of Marwar, as 'Kanojiya-Rathoda'. This inscription might, however, be an echo of the Barbic tradition. That tradition has already taken shape, for the *Ain-i-Akbari* describes Siha as a nephew of Jayachandra. In the Bithu inscription, Siha is described simply as 'Rathoda' and there is no hint at all of any relationship between him and the Gahadavalas. It must be admitted, however, that the facts recorded in this inscription are quite consistent with the story.

We should also acknowledge the fact that the Rathors never called themselves Gahadavalas. In fact, the practice of inter-marriage between the Rathors and the Gahadavalas is an important clue to the fact that the two clans differ in origin. The *gotras* of the two clans are different, but this is no positive indication of the differences in origin because it might be due to the adoption of a new priest after the arrival of Siha in Rajputana. In any case, even the acceptance of the Bardic tradition cannot solve the problem of Rathor origin. The origin of the Gahadavalas cannot be precisely determined.

These difficulties have been sought to be removed by the theory that the Rathors were the descendants of the Rashtrakutas of Badaun. The Rashtrakutas principally of Badaun was conquered by Qutbuddin in AD 1202, but the prince of the dynasty probably continued to rule in Kanyakubja-desa for some years more. Siha Rathoda might have been a descendant of this dynasty who migrated to

Rajputana after its downfall. According to Bardic tradition, he came to Marwar in AD 1212. This date is chronologically consistent with the theory of Rashtrakuta origin, but if Shia died in AD 1273, he must have been very young at the time of migration.

In the Bithu inscription, he is called simply 'Rathoda' while his father Seta is called 'Kumara'. Thus, Seta seems to have been the son of a reigning prince, but not a reigning prince himself, and in the days of his son the family seems to have lost even the traditional glamour of royal descent. This is an adequate explanation of the gap of seventy years between the fall of the Rashtrakuta principality of Badaun and the death of Siha in Marwar. The alleged connection between Siha and Jayachandra might have been a mistake caused by the fact that Jayachandra was at the time of Muslim attack actually the sovereign ruler of Kanauj and the overloaded of the feudatory Rashtrakuta family of that place.

This short review of the controversy regarding the origin of the principle Rajput dynasties would show that even scholarly discussions extending over several decades have not provided us with clear conclusions. The main difficulty lies in the fact that the evidence is in most cases more or less conventional; similar traditions find expressions in different forms in different type of sources. This basic uniformity of the available information loses its historical significance to a large extent since it blends fact with fiction. It is unlikely that the discovery of new inscriptions will improve our position, for epigraphic records usually conform to the traditional pattern. The inscriptions of the early medieval period are not objective historical narratives. What they reflect primarily is poetic fancy, supplemented by vague generalizations and stimulated by dynastic interest. We can hardly expect that the composer of any dynastic inscription left the beaten track and recorded the unvarnished truth. We must satisfy ourselves, in the present circumstances, with unsatisfactory conclusions.

Check Your Progress

3. Who was the first king of the Chandella dynasty?
4. Name the four tribes belonging to the Agnikula group.

12.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Pushyabhuti was the founder of the Vardhana dynasty.
2. After the death of his brother Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana (AD 606–647) ascended the throne at the age of sixteen in AD 606.
3. Nripa Nannuka was the first king of the Chandella dynasty.

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4. The four tribes belonging to the Agnikula group are as follows:

- Paramaras
- Chalukyas
- Chahamanas
- Pratiharas

12.5 SUMMARY

- After the decline of the Gupta Empire, the political unity of India got disintegrated once again and anarchy prevailed everywhere in the country.
- The Vardhana dynasty in Thaneshwar (Shrikantha Janapada, near Delhi) came up after the demise of the Gupta Empire. Pushyabhuti was the founder of this dynasty.
- Prabhakara Vardhana was the first powerful king of the Vardhana dynasty. He had two sons, Rajya Vardhana and Harsha Vardhana, and a daughter, Rajyashri. In the last days of Prabhakara Vardhana, the Huns attacked and Rajya Vardhana was sent to face the Huns. During this battle, both Prabhakara Vardhana and Rajya Vardhana expired.
- After the death of his brother Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana (AD 606–647) ascended the throne at the age of sixteen in AD 606. Harsha wanted to hoist his flag of victory over the entire India. He shifted his capital from Thaneshwar to Kannauj for administrative convenience.
- Once Harsha had conquered north India, he turned his attention towards the south. But, he was defeated by Pulakeshin II. According to the Aihole inscription, Harsha's elephantry massacred soldiers, but he still could not win the war.
- Harsha's empire was very vast. He was the undisputed master of north India and the areas from the Himalayas in north to the Vindhya mountain ranges in south, and Kamarupa in east to Saurashtra in west were included in his empire. He was also the last Hindu King of the ancient India.
- Harsha has a high place in Indian History as a ruler, poet and religious king. He was not only brilliant as a ruler and conqueror but also more efficient as an ambassador of peace. His achievements in the cultural field were also immense.
- Harsha was the highest seat of justice and power in the country. He was assisted in the administration by a Council of ministers and regional officials.
- Huen-Tsang has written that there were no criminals as the administration was run with honesty and the mutual relations between the government and people was cordial.

- The Rajputs represented a new historical force in early medieval India and they dominated the Indian scene for several centuries.
- The Rajput dynasties claimed power from the Kshatriyas Brahmin Pundits, who dominated contemporary society.

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12.6 KEY WORDS

- **Genealogy:** It is the study of family history, including the study of who the ancestors of a particular person were.
- **Dynasty:** It is defined as a series of rulers of a country who all belong to the same family.
- **Espionage:** The act or practice of spying or of using spies to obtain secret information.
- **Treaty:** Formal agreement between two or more states in reference to peace, alliance, commerce or other international relations.

12.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Which dynasty was called the Pushyabhuti dynasty and why?
2. Who killed Rajyavardhana?
3. Describe the importance of the Kannauj and Prayaga assemblies.
4. List the books authored by Harsha.
5. List the epigraphic and literary evidences that help in establishing the dates of the various Rajput rulers.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on Harsha's conquest of north Indian kingdoms.
2. Discuss some of the cultural achievements of Harsha's kingdom.
3. Discuss the main features of Harsha's administration.
4. Describe the background of the emergence of Rajput states.
5. Discuss the theory of the origin of the Rajputs (Agnikula theory).

12.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 13 ADVENT OF ISLAM IN INDIA

NOTES

Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 The Arab Conquest of Sindh
- 13.3 Conquest of Mahmud Gazni and the Spread of Arabic Culture in India
- 13.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
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13.0 INTRODUCTION

Though trade relations existed between Arabia and India from very ancient times and a lot of mutual give and take was there, after the rise of Islam in Arabia the Arabs tried to conquer India through Sind after their conquest of Iran. It is said that the first unsuccessful attempt in this direction was made by the Arabs at the time of Caliph Umar in AD 636, however, it was successful. The first successful attack was carried out in AD 712. However, after the conquest of Sindh, the Arab advance was halted. In the 10th and 11th centuries, small regional kingdoms emerged in north India. Beyond the north-west frontiers of India, in Central Asia, kingdoms and empires were rising to prominence under Islamic influence. During that process, two kingdoms emerged prominent around the two cities of Ghazna and Ghur. The situation in Central Asia brought the rulers of these two kingdoms to India which led to the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate being laid. In this unit, you will study about the numerous foreign invasions that took place in India namely, by the Arabs and the Turks which ultimately led to the establishment of the Muslim rule in India.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the conquest of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim
- Describe the political, social, religious and economic condition of India at the time of the Arab invasion
- Examine the motives behind of Mahmud Ghazni's invasions of India

13.2 THE ARAB CONQUEST OF SINDH

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After the rise of Islam in Arabia the Arabs tried to conquer India through Sind after their conquest of Iran. The first successful attack was carried out in AD 712. The political, social, religious and economic condition at the time in India can be described as follows:

- (i) **Political Conditions:** The political condition of India was very miserable at the time of the Arab invasion. There was no strong central government in the country. After the death of Harshvardhan, the country had become divided into many small kingdoms. These states carried out constant warfare for supremacy, a policy that was followed by the major kingdoms of the time.
 - (a) **Kannauj:** This kingdom was ruled by Yasovarman who constantly quarrelled with his neighbouring states for the expansion of his empire. He was eventually defeated and killed by Lalitaditya of Kashmir. He was a contemporary of king Dahir of Sind.
 - (b) **Kashmir:** At the time of the Arab invasion (AD 712), Kashmir was ruled by the Karkot dynasty. The ruler was Chandrapida. His successor was Lalitaditya who defeated Yasovarman. But in the later ninth century, around AD 855, Avantivarman of the Ulpala dynasty seized power from the Karkotas.
 - (c) **Sind:** It was ruled by a Brahmin named Dahirat during the time of the Arab invasion. It is said that a majority of the population was the follower of Buddhist religion. It was this ruler who had to face the Arab invasion under the leadership of Muhammad-bin-Qasim.
 - (d) **Afghanistan:** It was called Gandhar at the time. At the time of Hiuen-Tsang's visit, the kingdom was being ruled by a Kshatriya dynasty which ruled over it till the end of the ninth century. It is said that the last ruler of this dynasty, Trilochanapala was dethroned by a Brahmin minister of his who seized power.
 - (e) **Nepal:** Just before the Arab invasion of Sind, Nepal became independent of the ruler of Kannauj through the cooperation of Tibet. It was then under the control of Tibet. Though Nepal had close cultural and religious contacts with India it took no interest in the Indian politics at the time of the Arab invasion.
 - (f) **Assam:** Bhaskarvarman proclaimed Assam as an independent kingdom during the reign of Harshavardhan. But soon after, he

was dethroned by a tribal leader Sitstambh. Since Assam was situated very far it had no influence on the general policy of India.

- (g) **Bengal:** After the death of Shashank it was first conquered by Bhaskarvarman and later on by Yasovarman of Kannauj. After his death, disorder was unleashed and taking advantage of the situation their feudal lords proclaimed one of them, Gopal, as the king. He is supposed to be the founder of the Pala dynasty. It ruled in Bengal till the 12th century. It is clear that the condition of this kingdom was not stable when the Arabs invaded India.
- (h) **Malwa:** The Pratihara dynasty was ruling over this kingdom at this time. Its capital was Kannauj. The Rastrakuta ruler Dantidurga is said to have defeated the ruling Pratihara prince. Pratihara rulers came into conflict with the Arabs many times between AD 725 to 740 but the Pratihara ruler Nagabhata defeated them.
- (i) **Vakataka dynasty:** The Vakatakas had been ruling over the Deccan from the fourth century AD onwards. Their power had declined at the time of the Arab invasion.
- (j) **Pallavas:** The Pallavas ruled over southern and lower Deccan. Their capital was Kanchi. At the time of the Arab invasion of Sind, the Pallava ruler was Narsimhavarman II (AD 695-722). He was probably more interested in literature and art and did not evince any interest in the politics of Northern India.
- (k) **Pandayas:** The Pandaya kingdom included modern Trichinopoly, Tinnevely and Madurai. They were in constant conflict with the other kingdoms of south India.
- (l) **Chola Kingdom:** They ruled over the eastern part of Madras and most of Mysore. They were continuously fighting against the Pandayas and the Cheras.
- (m) **Chera kingdom:** They ruled over most of modern Kerala. They kept on fighting against the Pandayas.

Thus, it can be seen that at the time India was divided into many kingdoms. The country lacked political unity and a powerful central government. The Arabs naturally profited from such a miserable state of affairs in India. The Umayyad general Muhammad bin Qasim took advantage of the lack of unity of Indian states and invaded Sindh in 711 A.D. and was successful. The conquest of Sindh was major gain for the Umayyad Caliphate. However, further gains were halted by Hindu kingdoms to the east of Sindh. It was only during the campaigns of Muhammad Ghazni two centuries later that Islamic empires would be able to make further inroads into India.

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13.3 CONQUEST OF MAHMUD GAZNI AND THE SPREAD OF ARABIC CULTURE IN INDIA

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Mahmud Ghazni, also known as Mahmud Ghaznavi, carried out 17 invasions of India between 1000 and 1028 AD. A brief description of which is as follows:

Invasion of the frontier regions

Mahmud Ghaznavi established his control over some cities of the north-western frontier and a few forts in the vicinity of Peshawar for the first time in AD 1000. After making administrative arrangement for them, he went back to Ghazni.

Attack on Peshawar

In 1001 AD, Mahmud invaded Peshawar, an important part of Jaipal's dominions. Jaipal sent a big army of 12000 horses, 30000 infantry and 300 elephants to face 15000 horses of Mahmud but Jaipal was defeated and imprisoned along with a few of his soldiers. He concluded a treaty with Mahmud by which he promised 25 elephants and 25000 Dinars to Mahmud. Due to a feeling of severe humiliation, Jaipal could not survive for long and he committed suicide after giving over the kingdom to his son, Anandpal.

Attack on Mera and Bhatinda

In AD1004 Mahmud attacked Mera and Bhatinda. The ruler Biji Raj defended the fort bravely for 3 days but had to surrender on the fourth day. He had to hand over to Mahmud 280 elephants and enormous wealth. Like Jaipal, he also ended his own life.

Attack on Multan

In 1005-6 AD, Mahmud attacked the ruler of Multan – Abul Fath Daud (who was a follower of the Ismaili sect which Mahmud considered a rival sect). Abu Fath was defeated and gave 20000 gold Dirhams to Mahmud. Mahmud handed over the administration of Multan to the grandson of Jaipal called Sevapala or Sukhpala who embraced Islam and got the name of Naushashah.

Attack on Naushashah of Multan

Naushashah gave up Islam after Mahmud went back and declared himself as an independent ruler with the name of Sukhpala. So Mahmud had to invade Multan again. Sukhapla paid him 40000 Dirhams but Mahmud kept him as a prisoner throughout his (Sukhapala's) life.

Attack on Anandpala

In AD1008, Mahmud attacked the ruler of Lahore, Anandpala. At the latter's behest the rulers of Gwalior, Kalinjar, Kanauj, Ujjain, Delhi and Ajmer formed a

military confederacy. About 30,000 Khokhars of Multan also joined them. According to historian Farishta, a severe battle took place and within a short time the Khokhars murdered about 5,000 Muslims. However, an arrow hit the eye of Anandpal's elephants and he ran away from the battlefield carrying Anandpala with him. With the defeat in this battle, the joint efforts of the Hindushahis failed, Indian people and the rulers were now terrified by Mahmud.

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Attack on Nagarkot

In 1009 AD, Mahmud launched an attack on Nagarkot (Kangra). He plundered enormous wealth from its temples.

Attack on Daud, the ruler of Multan

In 1011 AD, Mahmud Ghaznavi again attacked Daud because he had declared himself independent. He was defeated and imprisoned by Mahmud.

Attack on Thaneswar

In 1014 AD, Mahmud attacked Thaneswar, plundered its temples and broke its idols. He brought the fort under his control.

Attack on Trilochanpala

In 1013 AD, Mahmud attacked Nandan, the capital of Anandpala and his successor, Trilochanpala (near the salt mines of Khakda on Jhelums). He was defeated and his kingdom was annexed to Mahmud's empire.

Attack on Kashmir

In 1015 AD, Mahmud proceeded against Bhimpala, the son of Anandpala, in Kashmir. Kashmir was plundered and thousands of persons were taken away as slaves.

Attack on Mathura and Kanauj

In 1018 AD, Mahmud attacked Mathura. At that time it was the most thickly populated and prosperous city of northern India. Mahmud ransacked the city and after despoiling the temples and idols proceeded to Kanauj. The King of Kanauj, Rajpala fled from the city upon hearing about the arrival of Mahmud here also. Mahmud exhibited his barbarism. He took away from this city 2 crore Dirhams, 53000 prisoners and 350 elephants.

Attack on Kalinjar and Gwalior

In protest against the cowardice exhibited by the ruler of Kanauj, king of Kalinjar and his son Vidyadhar entered into a treaty with the king of Gwalior and attacked Kanauj. When Mahmud heard of this development, he attacked Kalinjar and Gwalior and established his control over them.

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Attack on Punjab and its incorporation into the Ghaznavid Empire

In 1021 AD, he attacked those areas of Punjab which were free till that time. Many people were robbed, murdered or forced to embrace Islam. After this, Punjab was fully annexed to the Ghaznavid Empire.

Attack on Kalinjar

In 1022 AD, Mahmud again attacked Kalinjar with the object of acquiring wealth. Laden with enormous wealth he again went back to Ghazni.

Attack on Somnath

Among the invasions of Mahmud Ghaznavi, his invasion of Somnath (Kathiawad) is the most famous. He proceeded from Ghazni at the head of a big army on 17 October, 1024. In January 1025, he reached Anilwara, the capital of Gujarat, from where he proceeded towards the famous Shiva temple of Somnath. Famous historians have described the glory of Somnath on the basis of contemporary accounts saying that more than 1 lakh pilgrims used to assemble every day, one thousand priests used to perform the worship ceremony, thousands of devdasis performed dances and songs. Various kings of India had granted about 1000 villages to the temple. The temple had about fourteen beautiful golden minarets. It is said that Bhimdev, the king of Gujarat ran away without resisting Mahmud. The common people gave resistance for three days. After fierce bloodshed, Mahmud entered the temple. The priests repeatedly sent requests to Mahmud to take away as much wealth as he liked but to spare the Sivalinga but Mahmud paid no heed to this and broke the idol of Siva into pieces. The loot of the temple yielded wealth worth more than 20 lakh Dinars. But on way back he faced resistance by the Jats. He reached his capital Ghazni in 1026.

His last attack against the Jats

In AD1027, Mahmud attacked the Jats inhabiting the area between the Indus River and Multan with the help of a navy. Jats fought bravely but were defeated. After loot and plunders, Mahmud reached Ghazni. He died there in AD 1030. At that time, he was 59 years of age.

Motive behind Mahmud's invasions

- (i) **Acquisition of wealth:** Most historians are of the opinion that the major aim of Mahmud's Indian invasions was the acquisition of wealth with which he aimed to establish an empire in Central Asia. That was the reason behind his making the temples and idols the target of his attack. The temples were the repositories of gold, silver, diamonds and cash money. Famous historians Habib and Zafar are the propagators and supporters of this view. According to Prof. Habib it was not strange that like the Catholic Church of Europe, the Hindu temples also attracted powerful and cruel invaders to do some

unholy act. To call Mahmud's invasions 'Jihad' would be a big mistake. It would be more appropriate to say that he carried out terrible raids on the temples in order to seek their wealth. This fact can be corroborated by the fact that during peacetime no raids on temples were carried out. It was only at the time of the war that the temples were deserted in order to win the sympathy and support of the Muslims and Mahmud took away enormous wealth. Similarly, historian Zafar writes that Mahmud was more a conqueror than a religious propagator. To say that he carried out repeated attacks on India in order to spread Islamic religion would be wrong both historically and psychologically.

Lanepoole also expressed similar views and wrote that if Mahmud could hope to acquire wealth by looting Baghdad, he would have attacked and plundered that famous seat of Caliphate in the same cruel manner as he attacked and looted the Hindu temple of Somnath. Now the most important object of Mahmud's attacks is considered to be his ambition to acquire wealth. Some other objectives are as follows:

- (ii) **Religious motive:** According to contemporary Muslim historians, the object of Mahmud's Indian invasions was the propagation of Islam. According to them, Mahmud had vowed at the beginning of his reign that he would carry out an annual invasion on India to propagate his religion. The court historian of Mahmud, Utbi, has written that Mahmud at first wanted to attack Seistan but later on thought it proper to carry on a Jihad against India. Many historians agree with this and hold that because of this motive, Mahmud carried out seventeen invasions of India, attacked the temples and broke the idols. He forced many non-Muslim people to embrace Islam. It is said that the contemporary Muslim world praised these efforts of Mahmud. The Caliph held a special Durbar to felicitate him. But modern historians Muhammad Habib, Khalik Ahmad Nizami and Zafar have disproved this theory by citing many examples. Prof. Habib writes that the barbaric acts of Mahmud did not help in the propagation of Islam but downgraded it in the eyes of the world. Habib and Nizami, at other places, said that there is no principle in Islamic law which supports or encourages temple destruction. Mahmud attacked India thinking that it would prove his faith towards Islam and he would acquire prestige in the Muslim world. Still, the basic motives behind his invasions were the acquisition of wealth and political motives (see Figure 13.1).
- (iii) **To gain elephants:** Some historians consider that the acquisition of elephants from India was an additional cause behind his Indian invasions. They say that in all his invasions of India after AD 1000 Mahmud made use of elephants. Therefore, it can be surmised that Mahmud attacked India to in order acquire elephants for his army. From India he got both the elephants and the 'Mohave's'.

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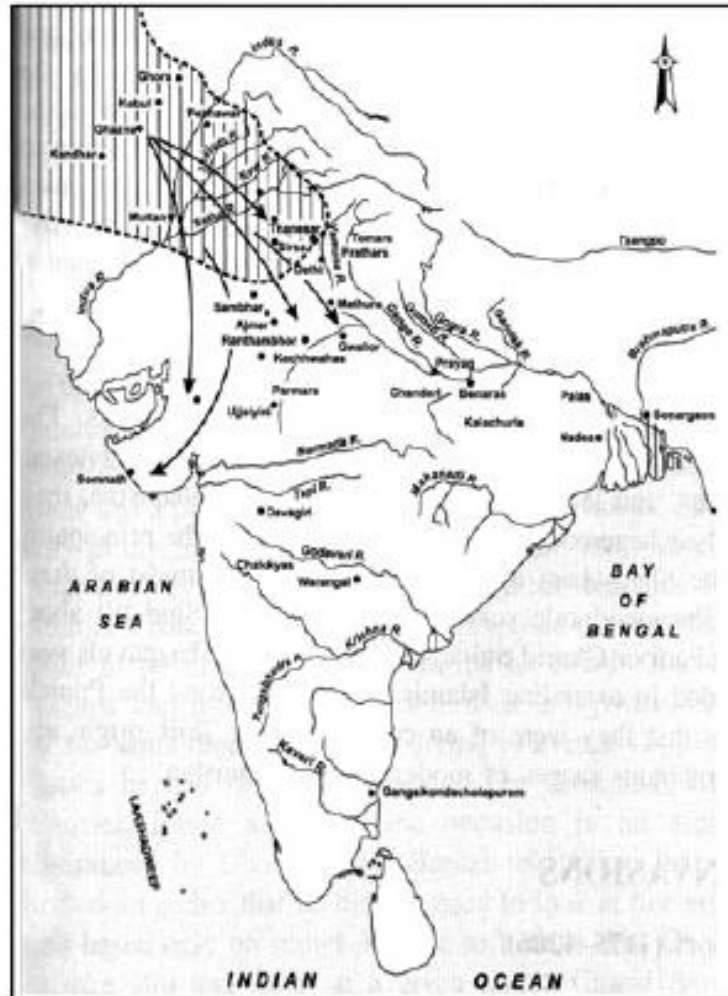


Fig. 13.1 Campaigns of Mahmud Ghaznavi and his Empire

- (iv) **Ambition for prestige:** Another point of view is that Mahmud carried out repeated attacks on India inspired by his desire to acquire prestige. He had come to know of the weakness of Indian rulers during the lifetime of his father. He had full hope of success in India. Many Muslim travellers had been to India before the Indian invasions of Mahmud. From them he had acquired the necessary geographical information which was helpful to him in carrying out his Indian invasions. Like many other conquerors, Mahmud also was desirous of extending his empire and acquiring prestige. He had annexed many parts of western Punjab to his empire with this explicit purpose only.
- (v) **Acquisition of artisans:** Some scholars held that one object of Mahmud's invasions was the acquisition of skilled artisans. He was very fond of constructing beautiful buildings. With this aim he had carried with him many skilled artisans.
- (vi) **Political motives:** Many historians hold that the basic and real motive of Mahmud's invasions was political. Their contention is that his Indian invasions were a mere instrument for the acquisition of wealth. The ultimate objective was the establishment of a Turk-Persian empire in Central Asia. This has been proved undoubtedly that Mahmud's aim was definitely not the establishment of a permanent empire in India. He used to return to Ghazni after every successful invasion. In fact, Mahmud considered it impossible to rule over two empires – that of Ghazni and India. Even a fertile land like Punjab was annexed by him to his Ghaznavid Empire as late as AD 1021–1022.

In essence, it can be said that the nature of Mahmud Gaznavi's Indian invasion was not religious. His purpose was to amass wealth from India to gain assistance for the establishment of a vast and permanent Ghaznavid empire in Ghazni. He did not try to establish an empire in India. He made no permanent administrative arrangement for his conquered territory. In his reign of 27 years, he carried out 17 invasions in India. Thus, he could not literally fulfill his ambition of an annual invasion of India because many a times he got entangled in the wars in Central Asia. From every Indian invasion he got enormous wealth. He invaded areas from Kashmir in the north to Kalinjar in the south and Kanauj in the east to Somnath in the west. He was most vigorously opposed by the Shahi ruler Jaipal. His invasions of Nagarkot, Mathura, Kanauj and Somnath yielded him enormous wealth.

Historical importance or the effects of Mahmud's invasions

It would not be correct to label Mahmud as a mere plunderer and ignore his role. His invasions had many effects chief amongst which are the following:

- (i) **Political effects:** Though the Muslim empire in India was not founded in the wake of Mahmud's Indian invasions yet it would not be improper to say

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that his invasions opened the way for it. The political condition of India underwent a change with the conquest of Punjab and Multan by Mahmud Ghaznavi. These areas came to be under direct control of the Turks and they could invade the Ganges plain any time after crossing the hills protecting the north western frontier of India. Though for the next 150 years the Turks could not bring this area under their control, it would have to be accepted that Mahmud Ghaznavi's invasions made the task of Muhammad Ghori easier.

- (ii) **Acquisition of wealth:** The effect of Mahmud's invasions on Indian cities and temples was not favourable. Almost every time he left laden with gold, silver, diamonds, etc., and that helped him to maintain a powerful and large standing army. It protected his empire from the Central Arabic powers and helped him to expand it. From Punjab and Multan he got a vast sum of money every year as tax.
- (iii) **Effect on Islam:** Mahmud's invasions definitely led to the spread of Islam in Punjab, Multan and a few other areas of India. Equally, his atrocities also inspired hatred towards Islam. But, later on, this religion was spread gradually by the saints and missionaries who had come with Mahmud. In fact, because of these invasions the Turks came to be the propagators of Islam. Later on, this religion affected Indian policies and society. Zafar writes that the Muslim invaders were accompanied by the Muslim saints as well those who worked for spreading Islam in India.
- (iv) **Destruction of art pieces in India:** Because of the 17 invasions of Mahmud, many beautiful temples, idols and artistic pieces were destroyed. He destroyed prosperous cities like that of Nagarkot, Mathura, Kanauj and Somnath. Many skilled artisans were either done to death or were carried away by him as slaves. This adversely affected the progress of these artistic pieces.
- (v) **Adverse psychological effect on the Rajputs:** Some historians are of the opinion that the morale of the Rajput rulers was weakened because of their continuous defeat at the hand of Mahmud Ghazni and they made no effort to gain back Punjab and Multan. But this view does not seem to be very correct because for the next 150 years the Turks could not establish their empire in India and in the first battle of Tarain in 1191, Muhammad Ghori was defeated by Prithviraj Chauhan. However, there is no doubt that the Rajputs of the period did not give up their traditional rivalries and jealousies and did not try to save Punjab from the clutches of the invaders.
- (vi) **Spread of Indian art in central Asia:** Mahmud took with him many artisans. Through their creations, they not only gave prestige to Mahmud but also enriched Central Asia by contributing Indian culture.
- (vii) **Description of Alberuni:** With Mahmud of Ghazni also came Muhammad bin-Ahmad who is generally known as Alberuni. His work *Kitab-ul-Hind (Tehkikat-e-Hind)* is a valuable source of information about India. In it,

Alberuni had given a critique of Indian social, religious and political condition, Indian philosophy, mathematics, geography and astronomy.

- (viii) **Spread of Persian culture:** After Mahmud's invasion, Lahore gradually became the centre of Persian culture. From Punjab many Persian scholars, missionaries, traders, etc., began to travel to other parts of India. In course of time, Indo-Persian administrative institutions developed in India.
- (ix) **Appointment of Indians to military posts:** Some historians hold that Mahmud and his successor Mansur gave livelihood to many Hindus in the army. It is said that Mansud's army comprised 50 per cent Indians. Some of them like Tilak and Sewand Ram were appointed even at the higher posts.
- (x) **Effect on royal houses:** Mahmud Gaznavi's invasions had a very adverse effect on the royal houses. Many of them were so weakened that they could not retain their hold for long and some were extinguished totally.

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Successors of Mahmud Ghaznavi

The successors of Mahmud Ghaznavi were as follows:

Masud

Mahmud Ghaznavi died in AD 1030. There followed a struggle for succession between his two sons Masud and Muhammad. Mahmud is said to have expressed this wish before his death that Muhammad should rule over Ghazni and his Indian empire while Masud should get Khurasan, Iraq and Iran. After Mahmud's death, his courtiers raised Muhammad to the throne. Masud, who was in Iraq at the time, attacked Ghaznavi, imprisoned and blinded Muhammad. Thus, Masud declared himself the king in AD 1037. Indian historian, Ishwari Prasad, says that Masud was truly like his father, full of ambition, bravery and a crusading spirit. But he was a great drunkard and a corrupt man. The affairs of kingdom were looked after by his able minister Khwaja Ahmad Maimandi. In the very beginning of his reign, his Governor in Lahore – Eriarik declared himself independent. Masud defeated him and kept him prisoner. In his place, Ahmad Niyaltigin was appointed as the governor of Punjab who attacked Benaras successfully and plundered enormous wealth. But one of his associates Qazi Shiraz became jealous of him and instigated the Sultan against Niyaltigin. To punish him, the Sultan sent forces. Niyaltigin was defeated and done to death. In October 1037, Masud invaded India and advanced as far as Hansi as the head of a large army. He looted Sonipat as well and went back carrying enormous booty. But in the absence of Masud of Ghazni, the Turks of the Seljuk Empire invaded Khurasan and on 24 March AD 1040, Masud was defeated by the Seljuk Turks at a place called Dandankan and fled to Lahore.

Muhammad

Masud's army revolted against him and after deposing him raised his blind brother Muhammad to the throne. Masud was imprisoned and murdered in AD 1041.

Muhammad ruled for some time but soon after the son of Masud, called Maudud, took revenge of his father's death. He got his uncle Muhammad murdered and himself became the Sultan with the help of a few of his chiefs.

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Maudud

He ruled from AD 1041 to 1049. Undoubtedly, he succeeded in strengthening his position in Punjab but he could not suppress the Seljuk Turks. The Ghaznavid Empire now remained confined only to Ghazni and Punjab. The Hindu rulers of Delhi seized Hansi and Thanesor from him.

Successors of Maudud

Maudud died in AD 1049. From then to about AD 1186, twelve different Sultans of the Ghaznavid dynasty ruled over their empire. Though the Gaznavids occasionally came and plundered the Gangetic plain and the Rajputana but they were no longer a military threat to India. During this period a struggle started between the Ghaznavid Sultans and the rulers of Gor (Gor was a hilly kingdom between Ghazni and Herat). The last Sultan of the Ghaznavid dynasty, Khusru Malik was defeated by the Gorido ruler Muizzuddin Muhammand bin Sam also known as Muhammad Ghori. Khusru Malik took refuge in the Ghaznavid area of Lahore but here also the Gorids established their control and finally in AD 1192, Muhammad Ghori got Khusru Malik murdered.

Causes of the Downfall of the Ghaznavi Empire

There are many causes of the downfall of the Ghaznavi Empire which are as follows:

- (i) **Lack of foresightedness on the part of Mahmud Ghaznavi:** One significant cause of the downfall of the Ghaznavid Empire was that Mahmud had paid no attention towards the consolidation of administration alongside conquest. British orientalist and archeologist Stanley Lane-Poole has written rightly that Mahmud did not have a creative mind. One does not hear of any institution which Mahmud initiated. He only tried to maintain external security in his empire and never made any plans for organizing and consolidating his empire. That is why he left behind him only an uncoordinated and disorderly empire. As soon as he breathed his last, the empire started disintegrating.
- (ii) **Absence of any law of succession:** There was no definite law of succession in the Ghaznavid Empire. Therefore, after his death, there was constant warfare and intrigues in the reign of his successors. This dealt a blow to the prestige and stability of the empire.
- (iii) **Incompetent successors:** Mahmud Ghazni had established a rigid military dictatorship. This sort of regime can go on only till one capable and powerful

ruler succeeds another. Mahmud's successors were all incapable sovereigns. All of them were lazy and addicted to luxury. Therefore, they could not stop the advance of the Seljuk Turks and their increasing influence.

- (iv) **Increasing power of the Seljuk Turks:** Mahmud's death was followed by the rise of another powerful empire, that of the Seljuks. This empire included Syria, Iran and Trans-Oxiana. This empire came into conflict with the Gaznavids for control over Khurasan. In a famous battle Ghaznavid Maudud was badly defeated and fled for refuge to Lahore. Next Ghaznavi Sultan Bahram became a puppet in the hands of the Seljuks. Actually, it was because of the Seljuks that the Ghaznavid influence became confined only to Ghazni and Punjab.
- (v) **Rise of the kingdom of Ghor:** Ghor was situated between Ghazni and Herat. This small kingdom presented a big danger to the declining empire of Ghaznavi. In 1155, its ruler Alauddin Hussain invaded Ghazni, plundered it and burnt it to ashes. After the shrinking of the Ghaznavid Empire to Ghazni and Punjab only, Ghor became all the more powerful. Muhammad Ghori who had been appointed by his brother as the ruler of Ghazni gradually conquered Punjab and in AD 1192, imprisoned and murdered the Ghaznavid Sultan Khusru Malik.

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Check Your Progress

1. When did Muhammad bin Qasim invade Sindh?
2. What was the major aim behind Mahmud's Indian invasions?
3. Who destroyed the temple of Somnath?
4. State one significant cause of the downfall of the Gaznavid Empire.

13.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Umayyad general Muhammad bin Qasim took advantage of the lack of unity of Indian states and invaded Sindh in 711 A.D. and was successful.
2. The major aim of Mahmud's Indian invasions was the acquisition of wealth with which to establish an empire in Central Asia.
3. Mahmud Ghazni destroyed the temple of Somnath.
4. One significant cause of the downfall of the Gaznavid Empire was that Mahmud had paid no attention towards the consolidation of administration alongside conquest.

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13.5 SUMMARY

- Though trade relations existed between Arabia and India from very ancient times and a lot of mutual give and take was there, after the rise of Islam in Arabia the Arabs tried to conquer India through Sind after their conquest of Iran.
- The political condition of India was very miserable at the time of the Arab invasion.
- The Arabs naturally profited from such a miserable state of affairs in India. The Umayyad general Muhammad bin Qasim took advantage of the lack of unity of Indian states and invaded Sindh in 711 A.D. and was successful.
- Towards the end of the ninth century, feudal lords of Persian origin ruled over Transoxiana, Khorasan and some parts of Iran.
- Many scholars consider him as the first Sultan-i-Azam. This title is not found inscribed on his coins where he is simply referred to as Amir Mahmud and also, this title was not given to him by the Khalifa.
- Historians do not agree on the motives inspiring Mahmud of Ghazni for his Indian invasions. Some historians describe him as a soldier in the cause of Islam and say that he exhibited his religious fanaticism by breaking the idols of Hindu Gods and forcibly converting the people to Islam.
- Mahmud Ghazni established his control over some cities of the north-western frontier and a few forts in the vicinity of Peshawar for the first time in AD 1000.
- In AD1027, Mahmud attacked the Jats inhabiting the area between the Indus River and Multan with the help of a navy.
- Most historians are of the opinion that the major aim of Mahmud's Indian invasions was the acquisition of wealth with which to establish an empire in Central Asia.
- Though the Muslim empire in India was not founded in the wake of Mahmud's Indian invasions yet it would not be improper to say that his invasions opened the way for it.
- Maudud died in AD 1049. From then to about AD 1186, twelve different Sultans of the Gaznavid dynasty ruled over their empire.

13.6 KEY WORDS

- **Sultan:** Sultan is a position with several historical meanings. Originally, it was an Arabic abstract noun meaning 'strength', 'authority', 'rulership', derived from the verbal noun *sulmah*, meaning 'authority' or 'power'.

- **Devdasis:** They refer to hereditary female dancers in a Hindu temple.
- **Plunder:** It means to steal goods from (a place or person), typically using force and in a time of war or civil disorder.

13.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What were the political conditions in India that the Arabs exploited to invade Sindh in 711 A.D.
2. Write a short note on the various successors of Mahmud Ghaznavi.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss causes of the downfall of the Ghaznavid Empire?
2. Examine the motives behind Mahmud Ghazni's invasions of India.

13.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 14 MUHAMMAD GHORI AND THE TURKISH INVASION

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Structure

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14.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn about the invasions of Muhammad Ghori and the impact it had on the Indian subcontinent.

Muhammad Ghori (who is also known as Muizuddin Muhammad bin Sam) was the younger brother of the ruler of Ghor, Ghiyas-ud-din. He was raised to the throne of Gazni in AD 1173. Still, he remained loyal to his brother and kept good terms with him. Though he ruled over Gazni virtually as an independent ruler till AD 1206, he got his brother's name inscribed on his coins and behaved towards him as a feudatory does towards his lord. He carried on many invasions of India only as his brother's associate and opened the way for the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the first Muslim empire in India.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the invasions of Muhammad Ghori
- Explain the causes behind the success of the Turks
- Examine the socio-cultural condition of India at the time of Ghori's attack

14.2 INVASIONS OF MUHAMMAD GHORI AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONDITIONS IN INDIA

Muhammad Ghori (who is also known as Muizuddin Muhammad bin Sam) was the younger brother of the ruler of Ghor, Ghiyas-ud-din. He was raised to the throne of Ghazni in AD 1173. Still, he remained loyal to his brother and kept good terms with him. Though he ruled over Ghazni virtually as an independent ruler till

AD 1206, he got his brother's name inscribed on his coins and behaved towards him as a feudatory does towards his lord. He carried on many invasions of India only as his brother's associate and opened the way for the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.

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India on the Eve of Invasion of Muhammad Ghori

Shihabuddin Muhammad Ghori was appointed as ruler of Ghazni by his brother Ghiyas-ud-din in AD 1173. Between AD 1175 and 1205, Muhammad Ghori carried out a number of invasions to deal with the enemies of the Ghor kingdom viz., Ghaznavids of Lahore and the rulers of Khwarizam. The political condition of India was as unstable at that time as it had been at the time of the last invasion by Mahmud Ghazni in AD 1027 (about 148 years before). The dominance of Gurjar Pratiharas had come to an end and there was no defector or demure monarch in India. The whole country was divided into many small kingdoms which were engaged in mutual jealousy and conflict. For the sake of convenience of study, we can divide the states of the time into three parts namely,

- (a) Muslim kingdoms
- (b) Rajput kingdoms and other states
- (c) States of southern India

(a) Muslim states of the north

- (i) **Ghaznavid kingdom of Ghazni:** In the north the Gaznavids were ruling over Punjab and their capital was at Lahore. Their hold extended from Peshawar in the northwest to Jammu in the northeast. The Southern boundary of the kingdom was unstable. They had snatched the regions of Hansi and Bhatinda from the Chauhans of Delhi. At the time of Ghori's invasion the rein of this kingdom was in the hands of an incapable and luxury loving ruler Khusru Malik.
- (ii) **Multan:** The chief city of the southern part of the Indus Valley was Multan ruled at that time by Ismailia Shias. At the time of the invasion of Ghori, Carmethian dynasty ruled over his part.
- (iii) **Sind:** The kingdom of Sind was under a local dynasty, the Sumras. They were also Shia Muslims. Any Muslim invader was not likely to experience much trouble in invading and conquering the above mentioned kingdoms because not only were their resources limited but also they lacked popular cooperation. The rulers of these kingdoms were all incapable and luxury loving and for the other people of these areas the success of any Muslim conqueror merely meant the replacement of one Muslim state by the other.

(b) Rajput and the other kingdoms of north

Apart from the three Muslim kingdoms, there were many small Rajput kingdoms in the east and north of India. The following four were more prosperous of the states of north India and there were some others as well.

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- (i) **Chauhans of Delhi and Ajmer:** At the time of Muhammad Ghori's Indian invasions, Delhi and Ajmer were being ruled by the Chauhan ruler Prithviraj III. He was also famous as Rai Pithora. The account of Prithviraj's conquest available in Chand Bardai's *Prithviraj Raso* is not to be wholly believed; still it appears that he had impressed upon his neighbouring kingdoms his bravery and courage. He defeated and humiliated the Chalukya kings of southern India, seized Mahoba from its Chandel ruler Paramdev. The frontier forts of this kingdom were Hansi, Pakpottan and Bhatinda. Prithviraj III had forcibly carried away from the swayamvar, Sanyogita, the daughter of his neighbour king, Jaichand of Kanauj and so Jaichand harboured intense hostility towards him.
- (ii) **Chalukyas of Gujarat and Kathiawad:** The most important kingdom was those of the Chalukyas in western India. Anhilwara (Paatan) was their capital. The most famous king of this dynasty was Jai Singh Siddharaj (AD 1102–1143). He defeated the Paramaras of Malwa and Guhilots of Chittor. After that, the kingdom disintegrated and only Gujarat and Kathiawad were left. At the time of Muhammad Ghori's Indian invasions, the ruler was Kanauj II.
- (iii) **Gahadwalas or Rathors of Kanauj:** The kingdom of Kanauj comprised Kashi, Benaras, Allahabad, Kanauj, Oudh etc. Jaichand was its ruler when Muhammad Ghori invaded India. He had intense enmity with the ruler of Delhi and Ajmer, Prithviraj Chauhan.
- (iv) **Chandelas of Bundelkhand:** In the Chandela kingdom were included Mahoba, Kalinjar, Khajuraho, Jhansi, Ajaygarh, etc. In the last quarter of the century, its ruler was Parmardidev. Prithviraj Chauhan of Ajmer had defeated him and annexed quickly a large part of his kingdom. Apart from the above mentioned four Rajput States, Pala and Sena kingdoms were other States of northern India which deserve to be mentioned.
- (v) **Pala kingdom of North Bengal (Modern Bihar):** At one time the Palas ruled over entire Bengal and Bihar but their power declined in the twelfth century. Later, kings of this dynasty like Kumarpala (1126–1130), Madavpala (1130–1150) were all very weak. Many parts of the kingdom became independent. At the time of Muhammad Ghori's attack, the dominance of the Palas was limited to some parts of Bihar only.
- (vi) **Senas of Bengal:** The Senas are said to have come from South India and settled in Bengal. Originally they were feudatories of the Palas. In the eleventh century they declared themselves independent in eastern Bengal. When Muhammad Ghori attacked India, Lakshman Sena (1170–1206) was ruling over eastern Bengal.

(c) Kingdoms of South India

At the time of Muhammad Ghori's invasions, the Yadavas were ruling over Devgiri, the Kakatiyas in Warrangal and the Hoysalas in Dowlasamudra. In the far south, the Cheras were ruling in Kerala and the Pandyas in Madura. All the kingdoms of

south were mutually jealous of each other. They had no interest in the politics of north India and therefore no influence as well. In brief, then, at the time of Muhammad Ghori's invasion India was divided into many states. Every kingdom was busy extending its area and influence. Despite invasion by the foreign Turks, they did not apply common sense of putting an end to mutual quarrels in which case they might have sent their spies to read the internal situation in the Turkish kingdom. The Rajputs did not do this. The outlook of the ruling Rajputs was so narrow at the time that even at the time of external danger staring at their faces, they felt happiness at defeating their neighbouring king with the help given by the invader. This foolishness of the Rajputs became one of the causes of their downfall.

Social condition of India

The social condition of India was very defective at the time of Ghori's attack. Though in this period, a brave caste was born in the form of the Rajputs but they were often luxury-loving and fond of dance and wine. They were excessively proud by temperament. Exhibiting cunningness in war, according to them, was a very wrong thing. They never wanted to deviate from their self-imposed ideals. Indian society was ridden with untouchability, caste system, sati custom, etc. Brahmins still enjoyed a privileged position. Unity and mutual cooperation were totally lacking in the Indian society.

Religious conditions

Even before Muhammad Ghori, Islam had become popular in Sind, Multan, Lahore, etc. In rest of India, Hinduism prevailed. With the efforts of Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Kumaril Bhatt and Mahadevacharya etc., Hinduism had just been reinvigorated. Other religions were Buddhism and Jainism but both of them were declining. Many orthodox people believed that God will come to their aid at the time of war or danger. In the twelfth century, a progressive and popular movement started in India known as the Lingayats who were the devotees of Shiva. They strongly criticized the caste system and boycotted practices like sacrifice, keeping fasts and going on pilgrimages. In the social sphere, they opposed child marriage and supported widow remarriage. But the influence of this sect was very limited.

Cultural conditions

Rajput rulers patronized and encouraged architecture, dancing, music and literature etc. During this period many works were composed in Sanskrit and regional languages. The capital of Paramara's Ujjain, and Vikramshil and Vikrampur etc., were important centres of education. Buddhist monasteries were also performing a useful function in this direction. Many of the Rajput kings themselves composed literary pieces. King Bhoj of Dhar was a great scholar. The famous Chalukyan minister, Bhima was not only a patron of scholars but also a great writer himself. The Jain scholars of the period also made important contributions. Most famous amongst them was Hemchandra who composed in Apabhramsh language apart from Sanskrit. After the Brahmins rose to power, Sanskrit took the place of Apabhramsh and Prakrit

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among higher classes. Despite this, such languages which were very close to the popular language remained prevalent and work were composed in them. Among them, popular languages like Rajasthani, Brij, Bangla, Marathi, Hindi language etc., of northern India developed. The Rajput kings got many temples, swimming pools and water reservoirs for the purpose of irrigation. In South India also there was the period of flowering of Indian civilization and culture. In the Chola period many temples were constructed in the Dravidian style. The Kailashnath temple of Kanchipuram is its best example. After the decline of the Cholas, the Chalukyas and the Hoysolas continued the task of construction of temples.

Many temples were constructed during this period in Dharwar district and in Helevid, the capital of the Hoysalas. The most beautiful among them is the Hoysaleswar temple. It is the best example of the Chalukyan style. In this period, apart from statues of gods and goddesses, Yakshas and Yakshinis such as 'chitrapatas' were also constructed in the temples in which various aspects of life like love, war, music, dance, hunting etc. are portrayed. They exhibit the deep relationship existing between the social and religious life during that period. For the common people the temple was not only a place of worship but also a centre of social and cultural life. In south India, many works were composed in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada languages. The period between the later half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth, also referred to as the age of Kamban, was the golden age of Tamil language. The Ramayan composed by Kamban is a classic piece of Tamil language. In this period, the literary form of Kannada language came into prominence. The Chalukyas and the Hoysalas extended their patronage to the Kannada literature also along with Telugu literature. A scholar, Nannaiya Begaa began translating the Mahabharata into Telugu in the time of the Chalukyas. The work was completed by Tikkana in the thirteenth century.

Indian Invasions of Muhammad Ghori

Muhammad Ghori launched his first attack on India in AD 1175. Passing through the Gomal Pass, he came as far as Multan and Uchh and brought these two areas under his control.

Unsuccessful attempt to reduce Gujarat

In AD 1178, he invaded India a second time through the Rajputana desert in Gujarat. But the ruler of Gujarat (Mulraj II or Bhimdeva I) defeated him badly near mount Abu and he fled for his life. After this, the defeated Ghori came to the conclusion that it was essential to have Punjab as the base for the conquest of India.

Conquest of Peshawar, Lahore, Deval and Sialkot

In AD 1179, Muhammad Ghori began his efforts to end the dominance of the Gaznavids in Punjab. At that time, the Ghaznavid ruler of the Punjab was Malik Khusru. Muhammad defeated the luxury loving and incapable ruler very easily and in AD 1179–1180 established his control over Peshawar. Now, his target was Lahore. After a number of military campaigns, he finally occupied Lahore and Sialkot as

well. By AD 1190, the whole of Punjab had been made a part of the Ghor Empire and Ghori began to make preparations for attacking Delhi and the Doab.

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First battle of Tarain (AD 1191)

After his conquest of Punjab the frontiers of Ghori's empire had reached up to Delhi and Ajmer ruled by Prithviraj Chauhan or Prithviraj III. Like Muhammad Ghori, Prithviraj was also an expansionist. He had brought under his control not only the smaller states of the Rajputana but also the Chandela king of Mahoba. The first battles between the two adversaries were fought for the ownership of Tabarhind or Bhatinda. Prithviraj was supported by many Rajputs but Jaichand kept aloof. Muhammad Ghori's army suffered a defeat in the battle of Tarain near Thanesar. Muhammad Ghori's life was saved by a Khilji horseman. Prithviraj next advanced towards Bhatinda and after a siege of about 13 months brought it under his control.

Prithviraj became rather contented with this conquest and did not make any further efforts to drive out the Gaznavids from Punjab completely. Shahabuddin ascribes this defeat of his to the carelessness of his Afghan, Khilji and Khurasani leaders. He humiliated many of them and imprisoned them. It is said that for one whole year Muhammad Ghori made preparations to wipe out the blot caused by his defeat in the first battle of Tarain.

Second battle of Tarain

Muhammad Ghori launched another attack on Prithviraj Chauhan in AD 1192 to avenge his defeat in the first battle of Tarain. This time he is said to have with him about 120,000 soldiers most of were armed cavalymen and 10,000 were horse-men carrying bows and arrows with them. Prithviraj Chauhan sent an appeal for help to all Rajput kings. This time all the other Rajput kings also joined Prithviraj with the exception of Jaichand. Prithviraj's army is said to have comprised about 30,000 soldiers and 300 elephants, soldiers comprising horse-men as well. The Turkish army this time was much more organized. Muhammad Ghori divided his army into 5 parts, four flanks to attack the Rajputs and one kept in reserve. (See Figure 10.3) Minhaj-us-Siraj wrote, 'Sultan stationed his army according to a well laid out plan. This strategy led to the defeat of the Kafirs. Allah made us victorious and enemy forces ran away.' Many Indian soldiers were killed in this battle. The Turkish army occupied the forts of Hansi, Sursuti and Samana and also conquered Ajmer. Prithviraj Chauhan was captured near Sursuti or Sirsa and was murdered either immediately or sometime after.

The Second Battle of Tarain is very significant historically because it gave a new turn to Indian history. Delhi and Rajasthan came under the occupation of the Turks after this battle. This conquest made the determination of Ghori to establish his empire in India almost definite. The power of the Chauhans having been broken, the predominance of the Turks increased rapidly. Because of this victory, the military phase of the Turkish conquest ended and the way was now opened for the administrative organization of the Delhi Sultanate. Muhammad Ghori went back

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after this victory leaving the Indian possession in charge of his faithful slave, Qutubuddin Aibak. Subsequently, a central organization was established which went on till a long time. Between AD 1192 and 1206, the Gangetic – Jumna Doab was occupied by the Turks and, soon after, they conquered Bengal and Bihar as well. After establishing their hold in the Doab, the Turks had first to deal with the king of Kannauj, Jaichand. Within the next two years Qutubuddin Aibak conquered Meerut, Baran and Koil (Aligarh) as well. Subsequently, the Turks consolidated their southern frontiers by conquering Bayana and Gwalior. Then Aibak took away from the Chandelas their territories of Kalinjar, Mahoba and Khajuraho. He also defeated Bhim-II-the ruler of Gujarat and Anhilwara and plundered many cities. At the time when Aibak was busy effecting the conquest of Central India, another general of Ghori Khliyasruddin Bakhtiyar Khilji (AD 1197) conquered Chunar and attacked Uddandpur, the Capital of Bihar. The ruler Indravarman surrendered and accepted his sovereignty without giving any fight. Aibak ordered Khilji to carry on the administration of the area. Then Khilji conquered Bengal from Lakshman Sen. Muhammad Ghori inherited the empire. Ghori, after the death of his brother (AD 1202), attacked the Shah of Khwarizam but he had to face defeat (AD 1203). Hearing the news of Ghori's defeat, the Khokhars of Punjab revolted against him but the rebellion was suppressed by him with the help of Qutubuddin Aibak.

From here, Ghori proceeded to Lahore and after establishing the administrative arrangement in Punjab sent Aibak for the Delhi region and himself proceeded towards Ghazni. On his way to Ghazni, when he was offering his evening prayer on the bank of Indus at a place called Damyak, Ghori was suddenly attacked by a few persons and killed. These people included the Khokhars and the Shias among them. Thus, on 10 March 1206, Muhammad Ghori's life ended. After his death, his Central Asian Empire was usurped by the Shah of Khwarizam. His military chiefs established the Muslim empire in India. After him, for about 50 years the Mamluk Sultans remained busy in consolidating the Muslim empire in India. That empire progressed for about 150 years, though the royal dynasties changed.

Causes of the Success of the Turks

The failure of the Indian states ruled by the Rajputs to withstand the Turkish onslaught has assumed historical significance. In a short span of fifteen years (AD 1192–1206), the major states of northern India surrendered before the Turkish army. The failure is explained due to many causes which are put together under the four heads of political, social, religious and military. We will discuss some of the major factors here.

Political causes

- (i) **Political division and natural conflict and disunity:** Before the invasion of the Turks, India was divided into many states. Their rulers constantly fought against one another for the extension of their empire and the prestige of their dynasty. This resulted in an intense jealousy against each other. Due to this mutual jealousy, they could not combine against the Turks and because

of their mutual conflict they became hollow from inside. The Rajputs considered it as humiliating to accept the suzerainty of any other dynasty than their own. In AD 1192, Jaichand of Kanauj did not give any help to Prithviraj against Ghori. The mutual jealousy and disunity amongst the Indians raised the morale of Shahabuddin in the same manner as the German states were defeated by Napoleon.

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- (ii) **Wrong criteria of choosing the rulers and administrative officials:** In India, the succession was hereditary. A person related to the ruling family only could become a king howsoever incapable he might be and a person unrelated to the ruling dynasty could not become the ruler how so ever capable he might be. According to the Islamic law the choosing of a ruler was necessary. Anybody could become a ruler if he was capable. Thus, under the Turks only those persons could enjoy power who were either capable themselves or enjoyed the loyalty of the faithful followers. These Turkish rulers invaded India. Under the Rajputs, even the basis of selection of the administrative officials was wrong. Only Rajputs or the Brahmins were appointed to high posts in the administration and in the army and that too on the basis of hereditary succession. This bred indifference among the common people towards the administration and led to the appointment of incapable persons on administrative posts on the basis of hereditary success. As against this, Turks considered all the Muslims equal without any difference on the basis of birth or caste and gave them equal opportunities. Therefore, the Turkish Sultan got the cooperation of everybody as well as suitable officials for various posts.
- (iii) **Neglect of popular welfare activities:** Rajput rulers spent a major portion of their income not on popular welfare but on the maintenance of the army and meeting their administrative expenditure. This cut them off from their people and the public naturally remained unconcerned towards the impending danger to the state at the time of foreign invasions.
- (iv) **Feudal system:** Rajput states were influenced by the feudal system. Under every ruler, there were certain areas which were under the vanquished rulers who always thought of declaring their independence. Besides, there were such officials who considered their land as their hereditary possession. They gradually assumed many administrative functions under themselves. Feudal system led to the weakening of the power of the king. He gradually became dependent on those feudal lords who had their independent armies. The armies furnished by different feudal lords did not have uniformity and after the defeat they went back to their respective areas. Since the Rajput kings did not establish diplomatic relations with the foreign countries, neither they nor their feudatories could learn the latest war strategy or tactics.

Social causes

- (i) **Caste system:** Due to the caste system, Indian society was divided into many castes and subcastes. Practices like untouchability and inequality had

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really weakened the society. One particular section of the society had to constantly suffer the hatred of other sections. Untouchability rendered the task of division of labour in the army also impossible. It forced one single person to do all the jobs from actual fighting to filling water. The feeling of racial superiority engraved in the Rajputs made them brave and self-confident on the one hand but also made them quarrelsome, insolent and proud on the other. These factors aided in the defeat of their self-imposed dignity. Rajputs very often cared only to die in the battlefield which was admirable from the point of view of a war strategy.

- (ii) **Other social evils:** During the Rajput period, evil social practices like drinking, polygamy, gambling, inferior social position of women, Sati, Jauhar, female infanticide, etc., had considerably weakened the society. They adversely affected the capacity and character of the official and ruling class.
- (iii) **Exploitation of landless farmers:** During the Rajput period, many landowners exploited the agriculturist's peasants and labourers. This exploited class could not be expected to fight to the best of their capacity against the foreign invaders for the defence of the country or state.
- (iv) **Separatist tendencies:** The society of Rajput period having boycotted foreign contact and considering itself as the best civilization in the whole world opened the way for its cultural decline as well. The account of Alberuni who had come to India during the period of Mahmud Ghazni was clear proof that Indians during this period had become very separatist and narrow minded. He wrote that the Hindus believed firmly that there was no country like theirs and no scriptures like theirs; their ancestors were not so narrow minded as the contemporary generation was. He wrote that if they travelled and met others, their view would change. This separatist tendency dealt a blow to the progress of knowledge and science.
- (v) **Defective basis of social division:** During the Rajput period, division of work was not according to aptitude and capability but on the basis of family and caste and so the defence of the country was the sole work of the Kshatriyas. As war was considered the special function of one particular class only, a majority of population became indifferent to it. This resulted in the lack of general feeling of nationalism and so the Turks had to fight not against Indians but only a few ruling dynasties rendering their task of conquest easy.

Religious causes

- (i) **Religious enthusiasm of the Turks:** Many historians ascribe the defeat of the Rajputs and the victory of the Turks to the religious enthusiasm of the Muslims which according to these historians gave them a new vigour and spirit. But historians like Habib and Nizami do not agree with this view and say that it would be a historical mistake to search in the religious enthusiasm of the Muslims the cause of their success. The religious spirit of the Arab conquerors was not an inspiring factor for them anymore. It was a temporary

rather than a permanent feature or the inspiring motive of their military campaigns. About this, it can be said that many a time the leaders encouraged the soldiers by playing upon their religious sentiments though they generally did not have that religious enthusiasm which the initial Arab invaders possessed.

- (ii) **The qualities of the followers of Islam:** Sir Jadunath Sirkar says that Muslims were successful because Islam had imbued some good qualities in them viz., equality and social unity, fatalism born out of complete reliance on the will of Allah and abstinence from drinking. These qualities aided to some extent the success of the Muslims and the defeat of the Rajputs.
- (iii) **Ahimsa and simplicity of nature:** Some historians like Elphinston say that the Turks were by nature war like whereas Indians were by nature non-violent and simple minded. Therefore, the Turks defeated them easily. But Prof. Habib says that the argument that Indians were defeated because they were peace loving and hated war does not appear to be correct historically because in the time of the Rajput's Buddhism and Jainism had declined and in Hindu religion it was the duty of the Kshatriyas to fight. Therefore, the opinion of Elphinston does not appear to be correct. Actually, Rajputs were also war loving. The history of India during the Rajput period is a history of continuous struggles.
- (iv) **Religious diversities and fatalistic attitude:** The Turks had a common religion – Islam. India was religiously divided into many religious sects so India did not have that religious and cultural unity which Islam had given to Turks. Indian religions had enjoined the theory of reward or retribution for one's acts and their fatalistic philosophy had made the Indians habituated to tolerate the miseries. This attitude of fatalism leads to many Hindu chiefs just not offering any resistance to the Turks. This also made the task of the Turks easier.

Military Causes

- (i) **Absence of any permanent standing army or feudal basis of the army:** According to the modern historians, the causes of the defeat of the Rajputs are of military character. The development had weakened the military organization of the Rajput army. The basis of their army was feudal. The various feudal contingents who together formed the Indian army made it heterogeneous whose nature or loyalty was not uniform. On the other hand, the Turks had developed a well-organized army. They recruited their soldiers at one place, trained them together, one lord disbursing the pay to all of them or the Sultan assigned an Iqta to a general to manage the army. That army was loyal only to one commander or one Sultan.
- (ii) **Defective war strategy:** Undoubtedly, many of the Rajput kings (Jaipal, Bhima, Ganaj, Bhoja, Paramara, and Prithviraj Chauhan III) were no less brave than the Turks but their war tactics were backward as compared to the Turks. Habib and Nizami have written correctly that from the point of

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view of force, war tactics, Indian army was not aware of the development in the war strategy, taking place in the Central Asia. Mahmud Ghazni as well as Muhammad Ghori kept before them the ideal of crusade because of which the Rajputs came to be inferior commanders in their comparison. There was a difference between the organization of the armies on the battlefield and the principles of their warfare. The Turks used to divide their armies into many divisions and brought them against the enemy in turns. The Rajputs thrust their entire army in the battlefield together. Many a times the reserve army of the Turks launched a fresh assault against tired Rajput army. They encircled the Rajputs killing them in large numbers.

- (iii) **Use of cavalry and use of bows and arrows by the Turks:** The basic principle of the military organization of the Turks was mobility. That was an age of horses and the greatest demand of the time was a mobile cavalry. Turkish army was greatly adept at bowmanship. Turkish horses were of a superior breed as compared to the Indian horses. Rajput army was slow and depended more upon the elephants. The Turks made an easy prey of elephants with their bows and arrows. Very often, the wounded elephants ran back trampling their own army under their feet. No doubt, even the Turks made use of the elephants in the battlefield but they used them only in the last phase of the war for the face conflict.
- (iv) **Neglect of frontier security by the Rajputs:** The Turks invaded India from north-west frontier side. The Rajputs had paid no attention towards the north western frontier so it was not easy for the Turks to establish control over the fertile land of Punjab. After the occupation of Punjab, they could easily occupy other areas because if an enemy checked at the frontier itself his morale becomes low. The Rajputs neither built forts nor did they make adequate arrangement for the security of the frontier. They themselves never invaded any country outside the natural frontiers of India. They did not give importance to the fact that offense is the best defence.
- (v) **Idealist attitude of the Rajputs on the battlefield:** The Rajputs considered it a great cowardly act to run away from the battlefield even in the event of defeat. For them war was a sport. Unlike the Turks whose strategy was to extricate as many of their soldiers to safety as possible, the Rajputs considered it a great quality to fight till the last. This consistently weakened their military power. The last soldier of the Rajput army used to die on the battlefield. Following just hollow ideals, the Rajputs considered it against their pride to attack any wounded, unarmed or fleeing enemy. The Rajputs remained struck to these ideals whereas the Turks gained victory over them. Briefly then, it can be said many political, social, religious and military factors helped in the victory of the Turks and the defeat of the Rajputs. However, the military superiority of the Turks, their superior war strategy, mobile cavalry, skill in archery and new technique of warfare in Central Asia viz., scientific division of the army, keeping a part of the army

in reserve, sudden attack on the enemy in order to encircle the enemy pretending to run away themselves were some of the factors which played a role in the defeat of the Rajputs.

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Check Your Progress

1. Who was Muhammad Ghori?
2. When did Muhammad Ghori launch his first attack on India?
3. Why is the Second Battle of Tarain significant?
4. What is the basic principle of the military organization of the Turks?

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14.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Muhammad Ghori (who is also known as Muizuddin Muhammad bin Sam) was the younger brother of the ruler of Ghor, Ghiyas-ud-din. He was raised to the throne of Ghazni in AD 1173.
2. Muhammad Ghori launched his first attack on India in AD 1175.
3. The Second Battle of Tarain is very significant historically because it gave a new turn to Indian history. Delhi and Rajasthan came under the occupation of the Turks after this battle. This conquest made the determination of Ghori to establish his empire in India almost definite.
4. The basic principle of the military organization of the Turks was mobility.

14.4 SUMMARY

- Muhammad Ghori (who is also known as Muizuddin Muhammad bin Sam) was the younger brother of the ruler of Ghor, Ghiyas-ud-din. He was raised to the throne of Ghazni in AD 1173.
- Muhammad Ghori launched his first attack on India in AD 1175. Passing through the Gomal Pass, he came as far as Multan and Uchh and brought these two areas under his control.
- The failure of the Indian states ruled by the Rajputs to withstand the Turkish onslaught has assumed historical significance. In a short span of fifteen years (AD 1192–1206), the major states of northern India surrendered before the Turkish army.
- Due to the caste system, Indian society was divided into many castes and subcastes. Practices like untouchability and inequality had really weakened the society.

NOTES

- The Turks invaded India from north-west frontier side. The Rajputs had paid no attention towards the north western frontier so it was not easy for the Turks to establish control over the fertile land of Punjab.
- The Rajputs considered it a great cowardly act to run away from the battlefield even in the event of defeat. For them war was a sport. Unlike the Turks whose strategy was to extricate as many of their soldiers to safety as possible, the Rajputs considered it a great quality to fight till the last.

14.5 KEY WORDS

- **Feudatory:** It means to owe feudal allegiance to another.
- **Monarch:** It means a sovereign head of state, especially a king, queen, or emperor.
- **Hereditary:** It means a title, office, or right that is conferred by or based on inheritance.

14.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the first battle of Tarain (AD 1191).
2. Discuss the importance of the second battle of Tarain.
3. Describe the various Indian invasions of Muhammad Ghori

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the situation of India on the eve of invasion of Muhammad Ghori.
2. Examine the causes of the success of the Turks.

14.7 FURTHER READINGS

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