



INTRODUCTION

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. The invasions of the Arabs and Turks eventually led to the formation of the Delhi Sultanates and the Mughal Empire.

This book - History of India (Beginning to 1707 A.D.) - has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Words further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.



GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES AND INDUS CIVILIZATION

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF INDIA STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Physical Features of India
 - 1.2.1 Topography
- 1.3 Impact of Geography on Indian History
- 1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 1.8 Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Geographical features are man-made or naturally-created features of the earth. Natural geographical features consist of landforms and ecosystems. For instance, terrain types, and other physical factors of the environment are natural geographical features. The varied physical features of the sub-continent of India have led to the formation of different local zones, political and cultural units. On account of the difference in the physical features and natural barriers, India has come to be divided into different political and cultural units. In this unit, you will study these physical features of India, and the impact of geography on Indian history.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the physical features of India
- Define the term topography
- Discuss the impact of geography on Indian history
- Explain the important features of the Peninsular Plateau

1.2 PHYSICAL FEATURES OF INDIA

India is a vast country with different kinds of landforms. It is blessed with every possible physical feature present on the surface of the earth.

India is a combination of the following physical features:

- (i) Mountains
- (ii) Plains
- (iii) Plateau
- (iv) Islands
- (v) Deserts



Different geological modifications have taken place over time which has influenced its relief. Apart from the various geological formations, this large landmass has also been affected by the course of actions, i.e., erosion, deposition and weathering. Due to the geological processes that take place, there is a movement in the earth's plates causing increase in pressure between the plates and the continental rocks present on the top. This further leads to faulting, folding and volcanic activity. The plate movements function differently and are of three types. Some plates come together and form a convergent boundary. On the other hand, some plates move away from each other thus, resulting in a divergent boundary. When two plates merge, there are three outcomes. The plates may either collide, crumble or one plate may slide under the other. Over a million years, tremendous changes have taken place due to such plate movements. The size and position of the continents have changed due to these plate movements. India too has been influenced by such movements and has been evolving throughout the years attaining the present landform features. Peninsular India, also one of the oldest landmasses was previously contained in the Gondwana land. India and the other continents such as South Africa, Australia and South America were all part of the Gondwana land as a single land mass. This landmass was split into a number of pieces by the convectional currents ensuing the Indo-Australian plate to drift towards the north, away from the Gondwana land colliding with the much larger Eurasian plate. Due to this clash encounter, the sedimentary rocks present in the geosynclines known as the Tethys, folded to form the mountainous landforms in Western Asia and the Himalayas. A large basin was created due to the formation of the Himalayas from the Tethys Sea and the sinking of the northern flank of the peninsular plateau. The depression was filled up by sediments that were carried by rivers flowing from the mountainous region from the northern direction and the peninsular plateau from the southern region. The northern plains of India were formed due to extensive alluvial deposits over the years. The Indian landmass has a varied character. The peninsular plateau geologically, comprises of one of ancient landmasses on the surface of the earth and was said to be one of the most stable land blocks. The Northern Plains and the Himalayas were formed more recently. Geologically, the Himalayan Mountains form an unstable zone and it represents a fresh topography consisting of deep valleys, high peaks and fast flowing rivers. The Northern Plains were formed by the alluvium deposited by these flowing rivers. On the other hand, the Peninsular Plateau was made up of igneous and metamorphic rocks forming numerous hills and valleys.

1.2.1 Topography

Topography is the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area. The Indian subcontinent is a unique landform due to the presence of different physical features, which are as follows:

The Himalayan Mountains

- (i) The Northern Plains
 - (ii) The Peninsular Plateau
 - (iii) The Indian Desert
 - (iv) The Coastal Plains
 - (v) The Islands
- #### The Himalayan Mountains

The northern borders of India are lined by the Himalayas, which are geologically young and structurally fold mountains. Located in the region between River Indus and River Brahmaputra, the Himalayan mountain ranges run in a west-east direction. The Himalayas are said to be the most elevated and rugged mountain barrier in the world that covers a distance of 2,400 km in the shape of an arc. Despite its grandeur in size, there is a vast difference in its width. Data reveals the Himalayas to measure around 400 km in Kashmir in comparison to the 150 km in Arunachal Pradesh. The Himalayan mountain ranges have a huge variation in



terms of altitude, where the eastern half is slightly more than the western half. In its longitudinal extent, three parallel ranges exist which are dotted with a number of valleys. The northern most range Himadri is also referred to as the Great Himalayas or Inner Himalayas. Home to the highest peaks, it is also the most continuous range. The average height of these peaks is about 6,000 metres. The core of Great Himalayas is composed of granite and its structural folds are asymmetrical. Since this portion is covered with snow all year round, a number of glaciers are said to descend from this area. Known to be one of the most rugged mountain systems, the Himachal or Lesser Himalaya is situated south of the Himadri mountain range. The Lesser Himalayas is a combination of highly compressed and altered rocks. With an average width of 50 km, the Lesser Himalayas or Himachal has a varying altitude ranging between 3,700 and 4,500 metres. The longest and the most important range of this area is Pir Panjal range. The other prominent ones are the Dhauladhar and the Mahabharat ranges. The prominent Kashmir valley along with the Kangra and the Kullu valleys located in Himachal Pradesh are a part of the Lesser Himalayas. There are many well known hill stations located in this region. The Shiwaliks are the outermost range of the Himalayas and extend over a width of 10-50 km. The altitudinal variation of this range is between 900 and 1100 metres. Unconsolidated sediments that travel by the rivers from its point of origin in the main Himalayan ranges situated towards the extreme north solidified to form these ranges. Apart from thick gravel, these valleys are also formed by the alluvial deposits brought by the rivers passing through these areas. Duns, which are longitudinal valleys, lie in the region between Lesser Himalayas and Shiwaliks. Some of the well-known duns located in this valley are Kotli Dun, Patli Dun and Dehra Dun. Besides these longitudinal divisions, the Himalayan range has also been divided in terms of regions in an east-west direction. The river valleys have set the boundaries for the divisions. For instance, while the Himalayan range that falls in the Indus-Satluj region is sometimes referred to as the Punjab Himalayas whereas moving west to east, it is referred to as Kashmir and Himachal Himalayas. The Himalayan range in the Satluj-Kali region is called Kumaon Himalayas. The Nepal Himalayas have been demarcated by the Kali and Tista rivers and the part that lies between Tista and Dihang rivers is known as the Assam Himalayas. The eastern boundary of the Himalayas is marked by the river Brahmaputra. There is a sharp bend in the Himalayan mountain range when it reaches the Dihang gorge. Moving from the Dihang gorge towards the south, it spreads along the eastern boundary of India. At this location, the Himalayan range is referred to as Purvanchal or the Eastern Hills and Mountains. Composed of strong sandstones, i.e., sedimentary rocks, these hills run through the north-eastern part of India. This region of India is covered with dense forests and these ranges and valleys are mostly parallel to each other in location. The Patkai, Naga, Manipur and Mizo hills form a part of the Purvanchal area.

The Northern Plain

The three rivers Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra and its tributaries mark the Northern Plain. Alluvial deposits form the Northern Plain. The Northern Plains was created due to alluvial deposits that were lying in a large basin at the Himalayan foothills for a million years. An area of approximately 7 lakh sq.km is covered by the Northern Plains. The length of the plain is about 2400 km and the width is about 240 to 320 km. The Northern Plains is said to be a densely populated physiographic division. Due to the fertile soil clubbed with a favourable climate and ample water supply, the region of the Northern Plains is very conducive for agricultural purposes. With the deposition of silt in the rivers of the lower course, they have split into many channels, which are also called tributaries. The Northern Plains is divided into three separate areas. The Punjab Plain is on the western part



of the Northern Plain. One unique feature of the Punjab Plain is that a huge chunk of this plain is in Pakistan. River Indus and its tributaries formed the Punjab Plain.

The tributaries of River Indus comprise the following:

- (i) Jhelum
- (ii) Ravi
- (iii) Chenab
- (iv) Beas
- (v) Satluj

These rivers have their origins in the Himalayas. Most of the Punjab Plain is occupied by doabs. Located between the Ghaggar and Teesta River is the Ganga Plain which spreads across Haryana, Delhi, UP, Bihar, in the north and West Bengal on the east. Assam is home to the Brahmaputra plain and is known to be a flat land bereft of any variations in its relief. This conclusion is incorrect as the Brahmaputra plain has varied relief features. The Northern Plain is abundant with varied relief features and is conveniently divided into four different regions. After descending from the mountains, the rivers deposit pebbles in an 8-16 km area lying opposite to the Shiwaliks slopes. This region which is lying south of the Lower Himalayas and Shiwaliks is called bhabar. The streams present in this area disappear in the bhabar belt. Moving southwards, the streams and rivers that disappeared in the bhabar belt re-emerge to form a wet swampy marsh which is referred to as the Terai region. Older alluvium deposits form the largest part of the Northern Plains. This leads to a terrace-like feature to be developed as these deposits lie above the flood plains. This part of the plain is called Bhangar. The soil found in this region is called Kankar or calcareous deposits. Khadar is the more recent and younger deposits which are found at flood plains. This area gets renewed every year and therefore is very fertile for agriculture. The Peninsular Plateau The Peninsular Plateau is a tableland which comprises of igneous and metamorphic rocks along with crystalline forms. The Peninsular Plateau came into existence with the breaking and drifting of the oldest landmass, the Gondwanaland. The terrain of this area is full of broad and shallow valleys and has a number of wellrounded hills.

This plateau has been divided into two parts, which are as follows:

- (i) Central Highlands
- (ii) Deccan Plateau

The Central Highlands lies north of the River Narmada and covers the Malwa Plateau. On the south, the Central Highlands have the Vindhya Ranges and on the northwest region are bound by the Aravalis. The westward expansion slowly combines with the sandy deserts of Rajasthan. The lope in the plateau is indicated through the flow of rivers that drain this region from the southwest to the northeast. The rivers draining this region are as follows:

- River Chamba
- River Sind
- River Betwa
- River Ken

Moving eastwards, the Peninsular Plateau is known as the Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand. A further expansion towards the east is an area referred to as the Chotanagpur Plateau which is drained by the River Damodar. The Deccan Plateau is a triangular mass



which is situated on the south of River Narmada. On the north, the Deccan Plateau is flanked by the Satpura Ranges. On the east, the Mahadev Hills, Kaimur Hills and the Maikal Range cover the Deccan Plateau. On a map of India, the Deccan Plateau is higher on the western side. Moving along in a west-east direction, the Deccan Plateau starts sloping gently on the eastern side. In the northeast, i.e., Meghalaya and the Karbi-Anglong Plateau, the extension of the Deccan Plateau is visible. The fault in the Chotanagpur Plateau separates it from the rest. Garo, Khasi, and the Jaintia Hills are the main hill ranges present in a west-east direction. The Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats lie opposite in the Deccan Plateau. The Western Ghats, as the name suggests, lies parallel to the western coast. The Western Ghats are also said to be higher than the Eastern Ghats. The average elevation observed in the Western Ghats is 900- 1600 metres as compared to the Eastern Ghats where the elevations are only 600 metres. In comparison to the Western Ghats, the Eastern Ghats is said to be irregular and discontinuous. This area is dissected by a number of rivers that eventually drain into the Bay of Bengal. The area between the Mahanadi Valley and Nilgiris form the Eastern Ghats.

The Indian Desert

The Indian desert is located on the western side of the Aravali Hills. The Indian desert can be described as an undulating sandy area covered with sand dunes. Since this region receives very low rainfall—below 150 mm per year—the climatic conditions varying between arid and semi-arid. The Indian desert also has very less vegetation. Though some small streams emerge during the rainy season, this area is very dry and not suitable for cultivation.

The Coastal Plains

The Peninsular Plateau has two coastal strips. One, which runs on the western side along the Arabian Sea and the other which runs along the eastern side along the Bay of Bengal. The western coast is a narrow plain region which is located between the Western Ghats and Arabian Sea. The Western Coast is divided into three parts, which are as follows:

- (i) Konkan, which is the northern part of the western coast, i.e., MumbaiGoa.
- (ii) Kannad Plain which forms the central part.
- (iii) Malabar Coast or the southern part of the western coast

The plain region located near the Bay of Bengal is a wide and levelled area. The northern part is called Northern Circars, whereas the southern part is referred as the Coromandel Coast. The large rivers present in this area form huge deltas on the coast.

The main rivers of this region are as follows:

- (i) River Mahanadi
- (ii) River Godavari
- (iii) River Krishna
- (iv) River Kaveri

The eastern coast has the famous Chilika Lake which is considered to be an important feature of the eastern coast. The Island The Lakshadweep Islands are a group of island near the Malabar Coast of Kerala. Previously, the Lakshadweep Islands were known as Laccadive, Minicoy and Aminidivi. It was only in 1973 that this island chain was named Lakshadweep. Only a small area of approximately 32 sq km is covered by the Lakshadweep Islands.



Kavaratti Island is the administrative headquarters of Lakshadweep. This area is also known for its varied flora and fauna. There is a bird sanctuary in Pitti Island which is otherwise uninhabited. Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a long chain of islands located in the Bay of Bengal. In comparison to the Lakshadweep Island, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are greater in size. Andaman and Nicobar Islands also have more islands than Lakshadweep which are spread over a vast area. Though many island bodies form the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, they have been broadly divided into two main islands. The northern island is Andaman and the Nicobar Islands form the southern part. The islands of Andaman and Nicobar are known to be summits of a submarine mountain range that lies on the great tectonic suture zone which extends from the eastern Himalayas to the Arakan along the Myanmar border and eventually to the Sumatra and lesser Sundaes. Since these islands are near to the Equator, they have an equatorial climate.

Indian Rivers For convenience, the Indian River system has been categorized as follows:

- The Himalayan Rivers
- The Deccan Rivers
- The Coastal Rivers
- Rivers of the Inland Drainage Basin

The rivers of the Himalayas remain snow-fed throughout the year and they flood during the winter. The rain-fed rivers of the Deccan Plateau are non-perennial and have an uncertain flow. Due to the limitation of catchments area, most of the western coastal rivers are non-perennial.

The rivers of the inland drainage basin are very few and are mostly located in western Rajasthan. Some notable rivers are Sambhar, lost in the desert sands, and the Loni, that drains into the Rann of Kutch.

The Ganga basin is the largest river basin in India and it receives water from an area bounded by the Himalayas in the north and the Vindhyas in the South. The main constituents are the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Ghagra, Gandak and Kosi. While the second largest is the Godavari basin, the third is the Krishna Basin. The Krishna Basin is also the second largest river in peninsular India. The Mahanadi traverses through this basin. The other smaller ones are the Narmada basin and that of the Tapti and Penna. Though they are smaller in size, they are agriculturally very important.

In India, rivers hold great importance in the lives of people. They are considered holy and are looked upon with great faith and reverence. Many of the rivers have a mythological connotation associated with it. During special occasions, people bathe in these rivers as they believe that their sins would be wiped off by its holy water.

With a length of 2500 km, Ganges is the longest river in India. It originates from the Himalayas and empties itself into the Bay of Bengal. After travelling a large distance of 2900 km, the Brahmaputra, which originates in Tibet, also empties into the Bay of Bengal. The rivers of Peninsular India such as the Mahanadi, Godaveri, Krishnam and Kaveri flow into the Bay of Bengal. However, the River Narmada and River Tapi end up in the Arabian Sea.



Check Your Progress

1. Define the term topography.
2. List the physical features of India.
3. What do you understand by Peninsular Plateau?
4. Name the largest river basin in India.

1.3 IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHY ON INDIAN HISTORY

As discussed earlier, India is known for her vast dimensions and the various physical features. From mountains to arid deserts, fertile plains and thick forests. All these natural conditions divided India into different territorial units. The history of India developed in essence as the history of its various regions. In the process of historical evolution these regions acquired cultural features of their own. For instance, regions had their distinct languages, art forms, and even their social customs and practices were different from each other. Thus, great dissymmetry in historical change is witnessed between the regions of India.

In the north, the treacherous mountain terrain did not stop the flow of cultural influence from Southeast Asia and South China. The region also witnessed a few military invasions from the east as also the moderate peaceful penetration by people like the Ahoms, from Arakan into the Assam valley. In the west, the western and north-western mountain chains have not been able to keep out the flow of people. Peaceful travellers, traders and a series of invaders entered India through this barrier during pre-historic and historic times.

In the Indus plain, the region of Punjab, literally the land of five rivers – Satluj, Jhelum, Ravi, Beas and Chenab, have made this region the ‘Bread-Basket’ of the sub-continent. The prosperity of this region coupled with its strategic location has always attracted invaders. As a result, a number of intrusive elements have merged into the existing culture and so Punjab is sometimes also referred to as the ‘melting-pot of cultures’. The lower Indus valley and the delta formed by it constitute Sindh. This region has been historically linked with Gujarat. The prosperity of this region can be measured by the fact that it was in this region that the first urban culture of the sub-continent emerged during the 2nd millennium BC. Thus Harappa, the famous and the first excavated site of the Indus Valley Civilization is situated in the Sahiwal district of Punjab, while Mohan-jo-daro is located in the Larkana district of Sindh, both in present day Pakistan.

The middle Ganga plains correspond to eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This is where the ancient Mahajanapadas of Kosal, Kasi and Magadh were located. It was Magadh which was the seat of the Mauryan imperial power which witnessed the earliest manifestation of the political unity in the country. Magadh remained at the centre of history of this country till the Gupta period or the 5th Century A.D. The lengthy coastline of Gujarat is dotted with several ports, which have been engaged in overseas trade since the 3rd millennium B.C.

The area occupied by the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala constitute the southern extreme of the Indian sub-continent. Geographically, linguistically and culturally, Tamil Nadu has evolved an individuality of its own. At times, interrelated ways of life are attested to in the earliest literature of the land – the Sangam literature. Kerala has a history of spice trade with the west since the post Mauryan times. Relatively isolated by land, its Malabar Coast saw the emergence of a number of flourishing international ports, like Kochi and



Kozikhode. It is therefore, not surprising that Kerala became the first region in the South Asia to witness the direct influence of the sea faring Christians and later of the Arabs.

Check Your Progress

5. Which state is also referred as the 'melting-pot of cultures'?
6. Name the region where the first urban culture of the sub-continent emerged during the 2nd millennium BC

1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Topography is the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area.
2. The Indian subcontinent is a unique landform due to the presence of different physical features, which are as follows:
 - (i) The Himalayan Mountains
 - (ii) The Northern Plains
 - (iii) The Peninsular Plateau
 - (iv) The Indian Desert
 - (v) The Coastal Plains
 - (vi) The Islands
3. The Peninsular Plateau is a tableland which comprises of igneous and metamorphic rocks along with crystalline forms.
4. The Ganga basin is the largest river basin in India.
5. Punjab is referred as the 'melting-pot of cultures'.
6. The first urban culture of the sub-continent emerged during the 2nd millennium BC in the region of Sindh.

1.5 SUMMARY

- India is a vast country with different kinds of landforms.
- It is blessed with every possible physical feature present on the surface of the earth.
- Different geological modifications have taken place over time which has influenced its relief.
- Peninsular India, also one of the oldest landmasses was previously contained in the Gondwana land.
- A large basin was created due to the formation of the Himalayas from the Tethys Sea and the sinking of the northern flank of the peninsular plateau.
- The northern borders of India are lined by the Himalayas, which are geologically young and structurally fold mountains. Located in the region between River Indus and River Brahmaputra, the Himalayan mountain ranges run in a west-east direction.
- The Himalayas are said to be the most elevated and rugged mountain barrier in the world that covers a distance of 2,400 km in the shape of an arc.



- The three rivers Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra and its tributaries mark the Northern Plain. Alluvial deposits form the Northern Plain. The Northern Plains was created due to alluvial deposits that were lying in a large basin at the Himalayan foothills for a million years.
- The Peninsular Plateau is a tableland which comprises of igneous and metamorphic rocks along with crystalline forms.
- The Indian desert is located on the western side of the Aravali Hills. The Indian desert can be described as an undulating sandy area covered with sand dunes.
- The Peninsular Plateau has two coastal strips. One, which runs on the western side along the Arabian Sea and the other which runs along the eastern side along the Bay of Bengal.
- The Lakshadweep Islands are a group of island near the Malabar Coast of Kerala.
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a long chain of islands located in the Bay of Bengal. In comparison to the Lakshadweep Island, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are greater in size.
- The history of India developed in essence as the history of its various regions.
- In the north, the treacherous mountain terrain did not stop the flow of cultural influence from Southeast Asia and South China.
- In the Indus plain, the region of Punjab, literally the land of five rivers – Satluj, Jhelum, Ravi, Beas and Chenab, have made this region the ‘BreadBasket’ of the sub-continent.
- The area occupied by the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala constitute the southern extreme of the Indian sub-continent.
- Geographically, linguistically and culturally, Tamil Nadu has evolved an individuality of its own.

1.6 KEY WORDS

- **Gondwana:** Gondwana, or Gondwanaland, was a supercontinent that existed from the Neoproterozoic until the Carboniferous. It was formed by the accretion of several cratons.
- **Tributary:** A tributary or affluent is a stream or river that flows into a larger stream or main stem river or a lake.
- **Plateau:** A plateau is a flat, elevated landform that rises sharply above the surrounding area on at least one side.
- **Non-perennial river:** A non-perennial river is one that is partially or fully dry for part of the year (perennial means year-round).
- **Melting pot:** A melting pot is a metaphor for a society where many different types of people blend together as one.

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. What are the different major physiographic divisions of India?
2. Write short notes on the following:
 - (i) The Himalayan Mountains
 - (ii) The Northern Plains



(iii) The Peninsular Plateau

3. Name any three divisions of Himalayas on the basis of regions from West to East.
4. Write a short note on the impact of geography on Indian history.
5. In what ways did the geography of India influence the development of civilizations?

Long Answer Question

1. Discuss the main geographical features of India.
2. Describe the formation of India from Gondwana land.
3. Distinguish between the Northern Plains and the Peninsular Plateau.
4. Explain the important features of the Peninsular Plateau.
5. Discuss how Kerala became the first region in the South Asia to witness the direct influence of the sea faring Christians and later of the Arabs.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNITY AND DIVERSITY STRUCTURE

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Languages of India

2.2.1 The Writing Systems

2.2.2 Multilingualism

2.2.3 Language Families in India

2.3 Races in India

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

The earliest form of speech in India was reflected in the texts such as the Rig Veda, the Brahmanas and the Upanishads. They are the oldest preserved treatises from which the Indian literary traditions of verse originated. The earliest literary works were composed to be sung or recited, and were orally transmitted for many generations before being written down. The oldest among the written works are the thousand-odd hymns contained in the Rig Veda dating back to 2,000 BC. These hymns were composed in Vedic Sanskrit. The Vedas tried capturing knowledge that came from the quest for exploring the unknown. India has witnessed immigration on a large scale. Each group entering into the country has come with the specific traits of its own racial group. This has added to the diversity of characteristics observed in our land. In this unit, you will study about the Indian writing systems and modern Indian writing system. This unit will also discuss the different types of races in India.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the Indian writing systems
- Explain the modern Indian writing system
- Define India as a multilingual society
- Identify the different types of races in India

2.2 LANGUAGES OF INDIA

The Indian literary tradition demonstrates that early Indian creative writers interacted very closely with critical thinkers. This resulted in a very rich interpretative tradition. The literary works covered all types of literature—beginning from poetry to epic and from story to drama. The early literary theoreticians could identify various sentiments being reflected in these writings, which have been trend-setters in world literature.



Mother tongues and languages

The concept of 'mother tongue' has been defined in the census as 'the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person's home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants, the deaf and the mute, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded. In case of doubt, the language mainly spoken in the household may be recorded.' There are a large number of mother tongues in India, but not all have been accepted as 'languages' in their own right. The Indian census of 1961 recognized 1,652 different languages in India. The 1991 census recognized 1,576 languages and 1,796 mother tongues. 'The People of India' project of the Anthropological Survey of India reported 325 languages, which are used for in-group communication by the Indian communities. According to the 2001 census, twenty nine languages had more than a million native speakers, sixty had more than 100,000 and 122 had more than 10,000 native speakers. The number of scheduled languages was 22 at the time of presentation of the 2001. The same 22 languages are maintained in 2011 Census also.

There is no unanimity among linguists as to how many of the mother tongues existing in India qualify to be described as independent languages.

2.2.1 The Writing Systems

India has many writing systems. While some of them existed in the past are present even now. A few of them are discussed as follows:

- **The Indus Valley script:** The Indus Valley script was a product of the Indus Valley civilization.

The greater Indus region was home to this civilization, which was the largest of the four ancient urban civilizations. Most of its ruins remain to be fully excavated and studied and nothing was known about this civilization until the 1920s. Most importantly, the ancient Indus script has not yet been deciphered although there have been many claims and counter-claims on this issue. The samples of Indus Valley script are numerous because of the large number of settlements (about a thousand) that spread all over modern Pakistan and parts of India and Afghanistan. However, the main stock of writing samples include 2,000 inscribed brief seals and tablets of six to twenty six symbols each, which are still un-deciphered. There are several competing theories about the language that the Indus script represents.

- **The Brahmi script:** There were many other systems of writing, but none had as far reaching an effect as the Brahmi script. Scholars like George Buhler have held that the script perhaps originated as far back as in the eighth century BC. Some trace the script to the Indus script. Brahmi is a syllabic alphabet. It means that each character carries a consonant plus a neutral vowel 'a', like in Old Persian.

- **The Kharosthi script:** The Kharosthi script is held by some scholars to be of the same time as the Brahmi, while others have dated it back till the third century BC. It originated in northern Pakistan and east Afghanistan. In structure and sequence, Kharosthi and Brahmi are similar, except that Brahmi had long and short vowel signs, while Kharosthi had only one. This script fell out of use by the third or fourth century AD.

Writing systems in modern India

According to a recent survey, there are at least twenty five writing systems in modern India and fourteen major scripts. Out of these, twelve have originated from the Brahmi. Like the Greek alphabets, Brahmi also had local variants and gave rise to many Asian scripts like the



Burmese, Thai, Tibetan, etc. Emperor Ashoka inscribed his laws as well as Lord Buddha's teachings on columns in the Brahmi script.

2.2.2 Multilingualism

India is a large country with a huge population. With so many states and the number of languages spoken in those states, multilingualism is a way of life. It adds depth to our national conscience because it showcases India as a garland of different languages. The flowers of the garland are held together by our national language Hindi, which is the thread of this garland, and our alternate official language English. Official recognition of languages The Indian Constitution, at present, recognizes twenty two languages of India as official languages. These languages find place in the eighth schedule of the Constitution. They also happen to be the major literary languages of India and boast of a voluminous and rich collection of writings in them. The following are the officially recognized Indian languages:

1. Assamese
2. Bangla
3. Bodo
4. Dogri
5. Gujarati
6. Hindi
7. Kashmiri
8. Kannada
9. Konkani
10. Maithili
11. Malayalam
12. Manipuri
13. Marathi
14. Nepali
15. Oriya
16. Punjabi
17. Sanskrit
18. Santhali
19. Sindhi
20. Tamil
21. Telugu
22. Urdu

Originally, only fourteen languages were included in the eighth schedule of the Constitution. Bodo, Dogri, Konkani, Maithili, Manipuri, Nepali, Santhali and Sindhi were recognized later.



2.2.3 Language Families in India

Historians have estimated that there have been great movements of people and races into India. This movement has made it possible for India to be the home for so many different ethnic groups. The movement of people from the European countries and from the Middle East to India brought with it new cultures, which included their languages. A great intermingling of languages has definitely taken place in India over the last many centuries.

The languages spoken in the South Asian region today belong to at least four major language families, i.e., the Indo-European, the Dravidian, the AustroAsiatic and the Sino-Tibetan. The Indo-European is represented only by the IndoAryan languages.

Approximately, one-third of the mother tongues found in India (574 out of 1,796 languages) belong to the Indo-Aryan family of languages and are spoken by 73.30 per cent of Indians. The Dravidian family of languages form the second major linguistic group of the country and are spoken by 24.47 per cent of our countrymen. The Austro-Asiatic family of languages, 65 in number, accounted for Unity and Diversity NOTES Self-Instructional Material 17 a total number of 6.19 million speakers in the country. Less than 1 per cent of the total population of the country speaks the languages belonging to the Sino-Tibetan.

The Indo-Aryan languages

The largest chunk of languages and mother tongues belong to the Indo-Aryan sub-family of the Indo-European family of languages. Among the modern IndoAryan languages, Hindi and Bengali happen to be the most popular languages internationally. Hindi itself has about 49 varieties and is spread over vast tracts of Northern India.

Western Hindi is a Midland Indo-Aryan language and is spoken in the Gangetic plains and in its immediate region. Around this area, the languages spoken are Punjabi, Gujarati and Rajasthani. Eastern Hindi is spoken in the Awadh region.

The Dravidian languages

Among the Dravidian languages, apart from the four internationally known languages spread in many parts of the world, there are twenty-six other languages at present. Out of these, twenty five are spoken in India and one (Brahui) is spoken in Baluchistan on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Spoken by more than 300 million people in south Asia, the antiquity of Dravidian languages is largely due to the rich grammatical and literary tradition of the Tamil language. Even the other three major Dravidian languages, namely, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu, possess independent scripts and literary histories dating back to the pre-Christianity era.

The smaller Dravidian languages include Kolami-Naiki, Parji-Gadaba, Gondi, Konda, Manda-Kui, Kodagu, Toda-Kota and Tulu.

The Austric languages

The Austric family of languages is divided into two branches – Austro-asiatic and Austronesian. The latter was formerly known as Malayo-Polynesian. These languages are spoken in India, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

The Austro-Asiatic branch has three sub-branches, namely, Munda, MonKhmer and Vietnamese-Muong. The Munda sub-branch of the Austro-asiatic branch of language is located in India. The Munda languages in India are spoken in the eastern and southern parts. The well-known Munda languages are Santhali, Mundri, Bhumij, Birhar, Ho, Tri, Korku, Khari, Juang, Savara, etc. The Munda speakers are found mostly in the hills and jungles.



The Tibeto-Burman languages

The Tibeto-Burman family is a part of the Sino-Tibetan languages, which are spread over a large area. This area extends from Tibet in the north to Burma in the south, and from the Ladkh region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the west to the Chinese provinces of Szechuen and Yunnan in the east. Lepcha, Sikkimese, Garo, Bodo, Manipuri and Naga are some of the better known Tibeto-Burman languages.

There are several smaller languages that cannot easily be fit into any of the above four large families. Therefore, languages like Burushaski in the North-West are known as isolated languages. Besides this, there are separate families of languages like Andamanese, which would include quite a few diverse languages spoken in the Andamans. One could possibly also add the six odd languages spoken in the Nicobar Islands.

Check Your Progress

1. Define the concept of 'mother tongue'.
2. How many official languages does India have?
3. Name the two branches of the Austric languages.
4. List some of the better known Tibeto-Burman languages.

2.3 RACES IN INDIA

Several studies and attempts have tried to acknowledge the actual characteristics of the dominant racial groups in India. Several European anthropologists have made attempts to classify the same. Some important ones have been mentioned in the table below. Although no two classifications are the same, some similarities nevertheless can be seen. In terms of feasibility and application, each of the mentioned classification have considerable weight age.

Racial Groups in India

Based on the Guha's classification, which is the most widely used racial classification system, racial distribution chart of the people of India has been made these are as follows:

- **Negritos**
- **Proto-Austroloids**
- **Paleo-mediterraneans** (long head, medium to tall in height, long and narrow face structure, vertical forehead, brow to dark brown skin colour)
- **Alpo-dinerics** (light to medium colour of skin, round head, hook nose and acrocephalic)
- **Orientos** (broad, head, broad face and medium stature)
- **Mediterraneans**
- **Proto-nordics** (pure to near blond, long head, fair skin, delicate nose, prominent chin and blue eyes)



- **Tibeto-Mongoloids**
- **Paleo-Mongoloids**

The above mentioned list describes the list of races found prominently in India. The names in the list are evident that the races have been formed upon intermixing of the major groups. Thus, giving rise to new races or ethnic groups describing features of each of the above and other minority groups or races found in India is out of the scope of this book, but the above diagram gives the reader an idea about the major races prominent in Indian society. In the following paragraphs, you will find briefs regarding the major contributing races of Indian society.

Negritos: It is the oldest race or oldest type of human beings who survived changing times. Studies prove, Negritos were the first inhabitants of South East Asian regions. Some hints or traces of the presence of Negritos can be observed in the hilly regions especially in the hills of South India, Assam, Burma and Bengal.

Proto-Austroloids: They are known to belong to the West. Prominent in chota Nagpur are the tribes of South India and some parts of central India. These are sometimes referred to as the original inhabitants of the country and thus given the name 'Adi-Basis'.

Mongloid: Mongoloid races or Mongoloid element is prevalent in groups of people belonging to Northern as well as North Eastern parts of India especially the Himalayan range. Even Eastern Bengal has seen prevalence of racial groups with Mongoloid elements. Other than this Mongolian features have also been observed in the tribes of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

Other prominent racial elements visible in Indian society is PaleoMediterranean, traces from historical excavations have revealed their early arrival in India. The features or traits similar to Paleo-Mediterraneans have been seen among people of North India.

Check Your Progress

5. Who were the first inhabitants of South East Asian regions?
6. Mention some of the races that are found prominently in India.

2.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The concept of 'mother tongue' has been defined in the census as 'the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person.'
2. The Indian Constitution, at present, recognizes 22 languages of India as official languages.
3. The Austric family of languages is divided into two branches – Austroasiatic and Austronesian. Unity and Diversity NOTES Self-Instructional 20 Material
4. Lepcha, Sikkimese, Garo, Bodo, Manipuri and Naga are some of the better known Tibeto-Burman languages.



5. Negritos were the first inhabitants of South East Asian regions. 6. Some of the races that are found prominently in India are as follows:

- Negritos
- Proto-Austroloids
- Paleo-mediterraneans

2.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The concept of ‘mother tongue’ has been defined in the census as ‘the language spoken in childhood by the person’s mother to the person.

2. The Indian Constitution, at present, recognizes 22 languages of India as official languages.

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4. Lepcha, Sikkimese, Garo, Bodo, Manipuri and Naga are some of the better known Tibeto-Burman languages.

5. Negritos were the first inhabitants of South East Asian regions.

6. Some of the races that are found prominently in India are as follows:

- Negritos
- Proto-Austroloids
- Paleo-mediterraneans

2.5 SUMMARY

- The earliest form of speech in India was reflected in the texts such as the Rig Veda, the Brahmanas and the Upanishads.

- The oldest among the written works are the thousand-odd hymns contained in the Rig Veda dating back to 2,000 BC.

- The concept of ‘mother tongue’ has been defined in the census as ‘the language spoken in childhood by the person’s mother to the person.

- The Indus Valley script was a product of the Indus Valley civilization.

- The greater Indus region was home to this civilization, which was the largest of the four ancient urban civilizations.

- There were many other systems of writing, but none had as far reaching an effect as the Brahmi script. Scholars like George Buhler have held that the script perhaps originated as far back as in the eighth century BC.

- The Kharosthi script is held by some scholars to be of the same time as the Brahmi, while others have dated it back till the third century BC.

- It originated in northern Pakistan and east Afghanistan.

- According to a recent survey, there are at least twenty five writing systems in modern India and fourteen major scripts.



- India is a large country with a huge population. With so many states and the number of languages spoken in those states, multilingualism is a way of life.
- The Indian Constitution, at present, recognizes twenty two languages of India as official languages. • The languages spoken in the South Asian region today belong to at least four major language families, i.e., the Indo-European, the Dravidian, the Austro-Asiatic and the Sino-Tibetan. The Indo-European is represented only by the Indo-Aryan languages.
- Approximately, one-third of the mother tongues found in India (574 out of 1,796 languages) belong to the Indo-Aryan family of languages and are spoken by 73.30 per cent of Indians. Unity and Diversity NOTES Self-Instructional Material 21
- The Dravidian family of languages form the second major linguistic group of the country and are spoken by 24.47 per cent of our countrymen.
- The Austro-Asiatic family of languages, 65 in number, accounted for a total number of 6.19 million speakers in the country.
- Less than 1 per cent of the total population of the country speaks the languages belonging to the Sino-Tibetan.
- Negritos is the oldest race or oldest type of human beings who survived changing times. Studies prove, Negritos were the first inhabitants of South East Asian regions.
- Mongoloid races or Mongoloid element is prevalent in groups of people belonging to Northern as well as North Eastern parts of India especially the Himalayan range.

2.6 KEY WORDS

- **Multilingualism:** Multilingualism is the use of more than one language, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers.
- **Austro-Asiatic:** Austro-Asiatic is a large hypothetical grouping of languages primarily spoken in Southeast Asia and Pacific
- **Negritos:** It is the oldest race or oldest type of human beings who survived changing times.
- **Proto-Australoids:** They are known to belong to the West. Prominent in Chota Nagpur are the tribes of South India and some parts of central India. These are sometimes referred to as the original inhabitants of the country and thus given the name 'Adi-Basis'.
- **Mongoloid:** Mongoloid races or Mongoloid element is prevalent in groups of people belonging to Northern as well as North Eastern parts of India especially the Himalayan range.

2.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the modern Indian writing system.
2. Differentiate between the Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts.
3. What are the different types of races in India?
4. What are the other prominent racial elements visible in Indian society?

Long-Answer Question

1. Describe the Indian writing systems.
2. India is a multilingual society. Discuss
3. Explain the Indus Valley script.



4. Write a detailed note on the Indo-Aryan or Indic languages.
5. Explain the Dravidian language family.

2.8 FURTHER READINGS

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HISTORICAL SOURCES STRUCTURE

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Sources of Ancient Indian History

3.2.1 Literary Sources

3.3 Indus Valley Civilization

3.4 Later Vedic Age

3.4.1 Society

3.4.2 Religion

3.4.3 Economy

3.4.4 Polity

3.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions

3.6 Summary

3.7 Key Words

3.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises

3.9 Further Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Archaeology has contributed a lot to the history of ancient India and its importance cannot be under emphasized. Indian archaeology is a science of recent growth, but it has made wonderful progress during that brief period. The pioneer work was done by the Europeans, but the same is being carried out now by the Indians. Literary and archaeological records are the two main categories that give evidences of ancient Indian history. This unit will deal with these historical sources. This unit will explain the importance of archaeological sources for the study of ancient Indian history, and discuss the literary sources of history. The unit will also describe the Indus Valley and later Vedic Civilization.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the importance of archaeological sources for the study of ancient Indian history
- Discuss the literary sources of history
- Differentiate between primary and secondary literary sources
- Identify the settlement patterns and town planning of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Describe the prominent features of later Vedic Civilization.

3.2 SOURCES OF ANCIENT INDIAN

HISTORY 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 in North-western Frontier Province and the Punjab; Mathura; Varanasi, Sravasti, Kausambi, Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur in UP; Rajgir (ancient Rajagriha), Nalanda, Bodh Gaya, certain parts of Pataliputra in Bihar; Vrisha, Padmavati, Ujjain, Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh; Bairat, Rairh, Sambhar, Karkotnagar in Rajasthan; Langhnaj, Anhilper, Patan, Amreli in Gujarat; Kolhapur, Kondapur in Deccan; Chandravali, Brahmagiri in Mysore; Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda in Andhra; Virampattanam in Madras; Paharpur, Mahasthana, Pundravardhana, Kotivarsha 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 Mohenjo-Daro 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 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 33 inscriptions on the Pillars of the Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty (269 BC to 231BC). 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 instructions 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 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 Rummidei 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 13 lines the UdanaSutra 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 Sohgaury copper plates of the Mauryan period confirms this statement of Fahien. 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 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 IndoBactrian 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 Satraps 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 moneychangers 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, Mohenjo-Daro and Taxila have revealed secrets hitherto unknown and, thus, changed our concept of ancient India. It is 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 testimonial 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.

3.2.1 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 travellers.



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 the cases, did not know Indian language and the pattern of life.

Indigenous literature

The Indigenous literature includes the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas, the Upanishads, the Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharatha), the Brahmasastras, and the Puranas. 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 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 venture into the facts of Indian history.

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 artifact, 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.

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.



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 Kalidasa 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.

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.

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 Ramayana 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 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 Vinaya 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 14 Purvas and further, the first ten Purvas were re-arranged in 12 Angas in the fifth century AD. Now, only 11 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.'

(i) Greek writers: Herodotus in his Histories gives us information about IndoPersian 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.

(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. Define the term epigraphy.
2. What was the material which was commonly used for the writing of inscriptions?
3. What does the Indigenous literature include?

3.3 INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

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 Rakhaldas Bannerjee carried out excavations at Mohenjo-Daro 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 3.1 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. 3.1 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 Mohenjo-Daro was 640 km away from Harappa. The term 'Mohenjo-Daro' 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.

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 Mohenjo-Daro, Chanhudaro, Judeirjo-daro 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.

Dress and Ornaments

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. 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 waistlets.

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.'

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 speciality 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.

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.

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 Mohenjo-Daro.

Architecture

Evidence of town management of this time is found from the remains of Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, 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. The remains of Mohenjo-Daro 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.

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.

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 Mohenjo-Daro 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 Mohenjo-Daro, 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 Mohenjo-Daro. 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.

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.

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 Rig-Veda 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.

Check Your Progress

4. Mention some of the chief towns of the Indus Valley Civilization.
5. What was the chief occupation of the Indus people?

3.4 LATER VEDIC AGE

The Rig Vedic period came to an end in 1000 BC. The period from 1080-600 BC is known as the later Vedic period. During this period the Aryans composed the other three Vedas, i.e., Sam Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. They also composed the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Sutras, the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which are also called Great Epics provide the most reliable account about this period which is also called as the Great Epic Age. Sometime back the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were considered to be fictional rather than of historical works but now their position is quite different and the information derived from them is of most valuable help and gives us a true picture of life and society in that age. The Ramayana is the first literary record of the passing of the Aryans beyond the Vindhya and their penetration by the armed forces into southern India. Mahabharata is the second great Epic. It has eighteen cantos and about 100 slokas or verses. Similarly, like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata is regarded as the creation of the imagination of the poets by the European historians. They say that even though some of the princes mentioned in the Mahabharata might be historic figures, yet the bards and poets have transformed the story in such a way that nothing true is left in it.

Though some imaginary, fanciful creations might have been inserted in the Mahabharata, yet Krishna, Arjuna, etc., were historic figures and Hastinapur and Indraprastha were historic towns. In this way, the story of the Mahabharata and the persons mentioned in it belongs to history. In the excavations, ruins of about 300 Aryans sites have been found containing earthen pottery as well as iron weapons. Aryans spread to the Indo-Gangetic plains from the Punjab.

At the very outset they occupied Delhi and Meerut in the Ganges-Yamuna Doab region. They made Hastinapur (modern Meerut District) as their capital. In about 600 BC Aryans advanced towards the eastern regions of Kosala and Northern Bihar. Their continuous success was due to their superior weapons, good horses and chariots. They used iron weapons and because of these factors, they were able to expand continuously.



As the Aryans advanced to the east and the south, their number decreased in proportion to the original inhabitants of those areas. Now they were surrounded by people who differed from them in religion, culture and customs. There was a great interaction and thus there came a great change in the Aryan institutions. Their social, political and economic organizations became more complex and certain corrupt practices crept into their religion. We can study the civilization of the later Vedic Aryans in the following manner.

3.4.1 Society

The family was an important institution during this period. Each Kula or family consisted of several members. There also existed joint family system and the heads of the family, called Kulpati, either used to be the father or the eldest brother. Marriages, sacrifices and other important duties in the joint family were performed by the head of the family in consultation with his wife. Adoption was resorted to not only in the absence of real children, but also to secure the addition of a specially qualified member to the family. There is a prayer in the Atharva Veda which is offered for the unity and love of the family. Guests were entertained with a warm hospitality.

In the family, we notice the increasing power of the father who could even disinherit his son. In princely families, the right of primogeniture was getting strong. Male ancestors came to be worshipped.

Position of women

The general position of the women changed for the worse. They lost the right to the Upanayana ceremony, and all their sacraments, excluding marriage, were performed without the recitation of the Vedic mantras. As in the earlier period, the marriage of women normally took place after puberty. Polygamy certainly prevailed. Theoretically, the wife was still accorded a very high position. Thus, the Satapatha Brahmana says that she is half her husband and completes him. But there are unerring signs that her status and dignity were lowered a great deal during this period. Thus, many of the religious ceremonies, formerly left to the wife, were now performed by priests. She was not allowed to attend the political assemblies. A submissive wife who would keep her mouth shut and dine after her husband was held up as the ideal. The birth of a daughter was most unwelcome for she was regarded as a source of misery and a son alone was the saviour of a family. The women were taught to dance and sing and play various kinds of musical instruments such as drums, flutes, lyre or harp, cymbals, and lutes. Although some women theologians took part in philosophic discussions and some queens participated in coronation rituals, ordinarily women were thought to be inferior and subordinate to men.

Classes and caste system

Settled life led to a further crystallization of the four-fold division of society. Brahamins claimed both social and political privileges. Kshatriyas constituted the warrior class and came to be looked upon as the protectors of the people and the king was chosen from among them. Vaishyas devoted themselves to trade, agriculture and various crafts as they were the 'tax-paying' class. In this way all work, whether religious or secular, became more and more specialized and hereditary. It was obviously easier for the son of a warrior to be trained in the use of weapons than for the son of a Brahmin who was undergoing training in a Vedic school. The same applied to the children of agriculturists and Vaishyas. The new conquests brought large number of slaves. Work having become more specialized and complicated, it was necessary to absorb these slaves into the service of the community, so they were included in the social system as Sudras whose primary business was to do some kind of unskilled service



required of them. While the Sudras were absorbed in the social system and while some of them accumulated wealth and even mixed occasionally with the members of the three upper castes, they were never allowed to study the scriptures. The rules relating to inter-castemarriage began to be rigid. How far the change of caste was possible, we cannot speculate.

Four ashrams

Besides caste system, the life was divided into certain Ashrams. The first twentyfive years of life was called Bramhacharya stage during which period one was supposed to go to the acharyas and the guru for the sake of education. Next came the Grahastha stage which lasted up to fifty years. During this period a man was allowed to lead a married life and have children. The third stage was Vanprastha. During this period, upto seventy-five years of age, a man devoted himself to the worship of god though he still lived in the family. The last stage, from seventy six to hundred years of life, was called Sanyas. During this period one was to go to the forest to lead the rest of the life in devotion to God.

Decline in morality

The rich and the royal classes had begun to marry several times. They were also addicted to drinking intoxicating liquors and gambling. Dancing girls and prostitutes became a source of great pleasure. Killing an enemy by deceit was a common practice. In this connection, the deceit practised by the Kaurvas to kill the Pandvas is a clear proof. In the Mahabharata there is a mention of the persons who did not pay taxes and were guilty of weighing short measures. Thus, a gradual degradation in the later Vedic period or Epic society was easily visible.

Food and drink

The variety of eatables had amply increased. Chief among them were apuka (cake mixed with ghee, made of rice or barley), adana (a mess of grain cooked with milk or curd or ghee), Karambha (porridge made of grain or barley), Yavagu (barley- gruel), etc. Rice cooked with milk and beans, and fried grains of rice were also known and used. A very large number of milk products were prepared and they were very popular. Chief among these products were amiksha (clotted curds), dahi (sour milk), nava-nita (fresh butter), payasya (mixture of sour milk and hot or old fresh milk), prishadajya (butter mixed of sour milk), phanta (creamy butter), vajilla (mixture of hot fresh milk with sour milk), etc. Meat eating was fairly common. The Satapatha Brahmana prescribes the killing of a great ox or goat in the honour of a guest. Meat was not only eaten on ceremonial occasions but was also used daily. Cow slaughter was looked at with disfavour. Sura, an intoxicating liquor, often finds mention. But it is often condemned as leading to quarrels and seducing men from the path of virtue.

Dress and ornaments

The people wore cotton clothes. Some of them wore silken clothes also. The dress had lost its former simplicity and became a little gaudy. Likewise, ornaments had become costly and were mostly made of gold and silver.

Marriage

There are references which indicate that inter-caste marriages took place in this period. However, they were not regarded as good. There are mentions of polygamy by men and dowry system had also started. The marriages between 'sapinds'(within the same generation) were prohibited to the seven generations from the side of father and five generations from the side of mother.



Education

Such a highly developed intellectual life as well as the vast mass of Vedic literature presupposes a well planned system of education. The Upanayana was the religious ceremony by which a boy was initiated into the life of a student and handed over to a guru or preceptor. Henceforth he had to live in the house of the guru and lead the chaste life of a Brahmachari whose principal duties were to study and serve the teacher. The latter included gathering fuel, tending cows and begging alms. The students got free boarding and lodging at his house and in return did personal service to him and paid fees (dakshina) at the completion of their study, though, sometimes, sons of wealthy parents probably gave regular fees. The Aryans themselves had no writing script until much later. It is possible that a script came to be used by about 700 BC since there are references to writing as a normal activity by 500 BC. Judging from the earliest specimens found in India (the stone inscriptions of the emperor Asoka, of the third century BC) the early script may have been influenced by a semantic system of writing. Education was restricted to the upper castes and the teaching of the Vedas was restricted to the Brahmins, although in theory it was open to all dvija castes. Arithmetic, grammar, and prosody were included as subjects of study. Some of the Rig Vedic hymns incorporated ritual dancing and the recitation of dialogues thus constituting the rudiments of a dramatic form. The stories of the bards, from which the epic compositions originated, also lent themselves to dramatic presentations.

3.4.2 Religion

People believed in one Supreme God. The power of the Almighty, the Omniscience of God, is recognized in the Atharva Veda. The idea of supreme God like Prajapati the creator and preserver of the Universe and the conception of Brahma is found in the Atharva Veda. The Atharva Veda suggests the idea of Brahma as the first cause of all existence and of the oneness of man with the world-soul. In this period new Gods like Vishnu, Siva, Ganesh, Parvati, Rama, Krishna, etc., took the place of nature gods like Indra, Varuna, Surya, the Earth, Agni, etc., of the Rig Vedic period. In this context, scholars like R.C. Majumdar define that 'in one Upanishad, Krishna is associated with a school of thought that rejected the purely ritualistic interpretation of sacrifice and considered the practices of virtue to be as effective as providing gifts to priest. In the final hour one should, according to this school, take refuge in these three thoughts. You are the imperishable, the never falling and the very essence of life.

Aim and mode of worship

People worshipped gods for the same material reasons in this period as they did in earlier times. However, the mode of worship changed considerably and prayers continued to be recited, but they ceased to be the dominant mode of placating the gods. Sacrifices became far more important and they assumed both publicity and domesticity which was still in many cases identical with the tribe. Private sacrifices were performed by the individuals in their houses because in this period the Vedic people led a settled life and maintained well established households. Individuals offered oblations to Agni and each one of these took the form of a ritual or sacrifice. Elaborate sacrificial rites undermined the importance of the Rig Vedic gods, some of whom faded into the background. The priests became the chief beneficiaries of the sacrifices and consequently gained power. Cattle were slaughtered at the sacrifices in large numbers. Animal bones with cut marks found in course of excavations at Atranjikhhera are mostly of cattle. Public rituals, therefore, led to the decimation of the cattle wealth whose importance for the developing agricultural economy can hardly be overestimated.



Growth of ritualism

The Brahmins were anxious to make themselves more important and respected in the society. To achieve this objective they concentrated their energies upon developing a complicated and detailed system of rituals (the manners of performing religious rites). Indeed, the priestly class now devoted their whole attention to find out the hidden and mystic meaning of the rites and ceremonies. These ceremonies consist of domestic rites as well as great sacrifices and form a body of rituals, probably the most stupendous and complex which has ever been elaborated by man. The domestic rites embrace the whole course of a man's life from his conception in the mother's womb up to his death, or rather beyond it, as several ceremonies refer to the departed souls.

The Brahmins claimed a monopoly of priestly knowledge and expertise. They invented a large number of rituals some of which were adopted from the non-Aryans. The reason for the invention and elaboration of the rituals is not clear, though mercenary motives cannot be ruled out. We hear that as many as 240,000 cows were given as dakshina or gift to the officiating priest in the Rajsuya sacrifice. In addition to cows, which were usually given as sacrificial gifts, gold, cloth and horses were also given. Sometimes the priests claimed portions of territory as dakshina, but the grant of land as sacrificial fee is not well established in the later Vedic period. The Satapatha Brahmana states that in the Asvamedha Yajna, all should be given to the priest. This, therefore, merely indicates the desire of the priests to grab as much land as possible.

3.4.3 Economy

The Aryans followed a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy. They ploughed their fields by means of a pair of oxen bound to the yoke. In later stages, they used heavy ploughs drawn by six, eight, twelve, and even twenty-four oxen. There are references to artificial waterways which make it certain that the system of irrigation was known to them. Their other chief source of income was cattle-rearing. Rather, it would be much proper to say that in the early stages, the primary occupation of the Rig Vedic Aryans was cattle-rearing because we find a heavy impact of the tribal organization on their early social and political set-up. It was only afterwards that agriculture got priority over cattle-rearing. Cows occupied an important place in it and were used as a means of exchange and value as well. Horses were also greatly valued. Other domesticated animals were sheep, goats, asses, oxen and dogs. Hunting also served a useful economic purpose. They hunted lions, boar, buffaloes, deer, birds and antelopes. They also used nets to capture them.

Another important occupation was weaving, both in cotton and wool, which supplied garments to the people. Other professions were those of priest, carpenter, goldsmith, leather-worker, physician, butcher, dancer, musician, etc. Probably, use of iron was known to them.

Dr R.S. Sharma has expressed the view that sea-trade was not carried out by the Rig Vedic Aryans. They, being constantly busy in wars, were not able to produce so much as would have left sufficient surplus for export. But Dr R.C. Majumdar and B.M. Apte have opined that these people engaged themselves in sea-trade and had trade relations with Babylon and other countries in West Asia. However, all scholars agree that internal trade was carried on both by river and land.

The Aryans had no coins and barter system was pursued for the exchange of commodities. However, the cow had become a unit of value and a medium of exchange. There is reference to one more medium of exchange called nishka which was probably a piece of gold of a fixed weight and was used as a sort of currency.



On the whole, having natural facilities for agriculture and cattle breeding, the Aryans enjoyed a prosperous economic life.

Agriculture

Mostly the people lived in villages, but by now the big cities had also come into existence. Although very few agricultural tools made of iron have been found, there is no doubt that agriculture was the main means of livelihood of the later Vedic people. Ploughing was done with the help of a wooden plough share which possibly worked in the light soil of the upper Gangetic basin. Enough bullocks could not be found because of cattle slaughter in sacrifices. Therefore, agriculture was primitive but there is no doubt about its wide prevalence. The Satapatha Brahmana speaks at length about the ploughing rituals. According to ancient legends, Janakas (the king of Videha and father of Sita) lend his hand at the plough. In those days even kings and princes did not hesitate to take to manual labour. Balarama, the brother of Krishna, is called Haladhara or wielder of the plough. In later times, ploughing came to be prohibited for the members of the upper varnas. The Vedic people continued to produce barley, but during this period rice and wheat became their chief crops. In subsequent times wheat became the staple food of the people in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh. For the first time, the Vedic people came to be acquainted with rice in the Doab. It is called Vrihi in the Vedic texts, and its remains recovered from Hastinapur belong to the eighth century BC. The use of rice is recommended in rituals, but that of wheat is rarely mentioned. Various kinds of lentils were also produced by the later Vedic people. Beans and sesames were also known and the latter assumed ritual importance in course of time. The growing importance of agriculture undermined the earlier pastoral economy which could not feed the increasing population well enough.

Arts and crafts

Simultaneously, with the transition from a pastoral to an agricultural economy, there seemed to have arisen several new arts and crafts. In place of the few occupations in the Rig Veda, many are enumerated in later Vedic literature. Mention may be made of smelter, smith or, carpenter, weaver, leather worker, jeweller, dyer and potter. It is difficult to say how far the smelters and smiths were connected with making objects of iron. Probably they worked mostly with copper, which continued to predominate with iron still being rare. Weaving was practiced on a wide scale but perhaps remained confined mainly to women. Leather work, pottery and carpentry were connected with building activities of which we have some evidence in this period. The later Vedic people were acquainted with four types of pottery: black and red ware, black-slipped ware, painted grey ware and red ware. The last type of pottery was most popular with them and has been found almost all over western Uttar Pradesh. However, the distinctive pottery of the period is known as the Painted Grey Ware. It consisted of bowls and dishes which were used either for rituals or for eating or for both, but by the upper orders. Glass hoards and bangles found in the PGW layers may have been used as luxurious objects by a few persons. The use of metals like tin, lead, silver and gold were known. Gold and silver were used normally for making ornaments and delicate articles like vessels. Medical profession was well established. Many diseases were cured by herbs. Magic spells also were used for the purpose.

Domestication of animals

Being an agriculturist society, the Aryans attached great importance to animals. They were reared both for their milk and agricultural purposes. In fact, cattle rearing received an impetus during this period. We have references which indicate that meadows were carefully looked after so that animals might not face any inconvenience. Large sheds were also created to



accommodate the cattle so that they may be protected against wild animals and extreme cold or hot weather. The cow was regarded as sacred during this period. This was perhaps due to their utility. In the Atharva Veda, death penalty was prescribed for cow slaughter. Elephants were also domesticated by the people. Other domesticated animals were sheep, goats, asses, oxen and dogs.

3.4.4 Polity

The later Vedic period is generally considered to have commenced from the beginning of the first millennium BC. The core region of the Vedic civilization now became the area of western UP, which, according to the literary texts, was now under the control of the Kuru-Panchalas. In this area, the Vedic people seem to have displaced the copper using people whose tools, weapons and pottery types (late Harappan and Ochre Coloured Pottery) indicate that these people flourished in this region between 1700 and 1000 BC. The Aryans, by now, had the knowledge of iron which is evidenced by the discovery of large hoards of iron at Atranjikhhera, in the Etah district of UP. Iron also helped the Aryans to clear the dense forests of the region and start agriculture. This resulted in a new agrarian economy and a settled life. A large number of PGW sites, discovered through the excavations, are considered to have been the Aryan settlements during the later Vedic age.

The most startling feature of this age was the firm assertion of the territorial element. One of the hymns of Atharva Veda mentions that Rashtra or the territory be held by the king and be made firm by the Varuna, the god Brihaspati, Indra and Agni. We also hear of a permanent royal residence of the Kuru-Panchala kings called 'Ashandivat'. Though the tribal element was still important, now equally important was the element of territory.

Atreya Brahmana mentions ten forms of government present in the different parts of the country and explains as to how the concept of government in its territorial dimensions had come into vogue.

Popular assemblies

In later Vedic times, the popular assemblies lost their importance and royal power increased at their cost. The Vidatha completely disappeared. The Sabha and Samiti continued to hold ground, but their character changed. They came to be dominated by princes and rich nobles. Women were no longer permitted to sit on the Sabha, and it was now dominated by nobles and Brahamans. With reference to this A. L. Basham writes, the old tribal assemblies were still from time to time referred to, but their power was waning rapidly and by the end of this period the king's autocracy was in most cases only limited by the power of the Brahmans, the weight of tradition, and the force of public opinion, which was always of some influence in ancient India. However, it did not mean that the king had become authoritarian. The king always attempted to get the cooperation of these assemblies. In the later period, the council of Brahamanas also yielded a good influence over the king.

Larger kingdoms

At this stage, it would be interesting to examine how politically some of the old powerful tribes had lost their importance and some others had conquered new territories and risen to power. The conquered lands were named after the victorious tribes. In this way Panchala, Kosala and Magadha were named after the Panchalas,

Kosalas and Magadhas who settled in them. The capitals of the new kingdoms were named sometimes after their kings, like Mithila after Mithi, Vaisali and Taksasila after Taksha. The Ganga was called Bhagirathi after Raja Bhagiratha. The expansion in the territorial limits of



their different empires had also increased the powers of the kings considerably. The states had expanded both on their territories and powers.

New name instead of tribe

Initially, Aryans used to call a settlement a tribe but later on the region came to be called Janpada. The word Rashtra was also first used in this period, though just for a region and not for the entire nation. As the Aryans gradually expanded, they began to call India by the name of Aryavarta.

Many advisors of the king

With the expansion of the kingdoms, the king distributed his work among his advisors. The official in-charge of collecting tax and gifts was called Sangrahi.

Besides the priest, Senapati and Gramini other officials who helped the king were the Dwarpala, Judge and other administrative persons.

Army and warfare

During this period, the king did not maintain a standing army. In times of need soldiers were collected from different tribes. The king used to time collectively with the tribals so as to secure their sympathy and loyalty. During this time, elephants came to be used in addition to horses and chariots. New weapons like fire-weapons and poisonous weapons came to be used. During the later part of this period the importance of a standing army also came to be recognized and the king started keeping a standing army.

Kingship

With the emergence of the Varna system in the lower Vedic period, the king now belonged to the Kshatriya class. He always worked to secure the support of 'Brahmanas', who constituted the other powerful Varna and it is because of this reason that the king has been mentioned in Atreya Brahmana as the 'protector of Brahmanas' (Brahmananam gopla) and 'the eater of the people' (Vishamallatta).

Atreya Brahmana lists various types of states prevalent in contemporary India, in various regions, which were mainly differentiated or identified on the basis of the nature of kingship. These states are as follows:

- Samrajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'eastern part' where, the king was anointed for 'Overlordship'.
- Bahujya: It was the ruler ship of the 'southern part' where, the king was anointed for 'Paramount rule'.
- Svarajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'western part' where, the king was anointed for 'Self rule'.
- Vairajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'northern part' where, the king was anointed for 'Sovereignty'. It was generally considered that the king, who was consecrated with 'Indra's' great function' was 'Virat', i.e., worthy of Vairajya.
- Rajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'middle region' where the king was anointed for a 'Kingdom'.

Satapahha Brahmana clearly distinguishes 'Samraj' (one who rules the Samrajya) and Raja (One who rules the Rajya) from the other types. It says: 'By offering 'Rajasuya' he becomes



Raja and, by offering 'Vajapeya' he becomes Samraj'. Raja was generally considered inferior to Samraj.

Nature of kingship

Satpatha Brahmana says that the office of kingship is unsuited to Brahmanas but Atreya Brahmana mentions a Brahmana king. We also have references to Shudra, Ayogava, and even non-Aryan kings in the Vedic texts. An Ayogava was member of a mixed caste, a descendent of a Vaisya by a Shudra wife. 'King Marutta Avikshita' has been referred in the Satapatha Brahmana as an 'Ayogava'. In Chandogya Upanishad, 'king Janashruti Pautrayana' has been referred to as a Shudra. The Jatakas refer to kings of various castes.

Kingship was sometimes hereditary and at other instances was settled through the election of a popular choice. The Atreya Brahmana prescribes some formulae to secure kingship for up to three generations. The expression, 'Dashapurushamarajya', which occurs in Satapatha Brahmana indicates kingship for up to 'ten' generations. The element of selection was also not unheard of. The selection was mostly done by the people, but the choice was mainly confined to the members of the royal family.

There are in fact some references of persons who did not belong to the royal house becoming kings as a result of popular choice.

Another important development which took place in the concept of kingship during the later Vedic times was the association of divinity with the king. This was totally unheard of in the Rig Vedic age. Perhaps it was the practice of the coronation ceremonies of the later Vedic age in which various gods were invoked to impart some of their qualities to the king that gave an impetus to the development of this notion. The kings were sometimes even represented as gods.

The Royal Ladies: The king during the Brahmana period was allowed to have four queens. They were as follows:

- Mahishi: According to Satapatha Brahmana, Mahishi was the chief wife and the first one to have married the king.
- Parivrikti: She was the neglected or the discarded wife perhaps because she could not conceive a son.
- Vavata: She was the favourite wife of the king.
- Palagali: She was the daughter of the lowest court official. She was condemned as the Shudra wife. The Atreya Brahmana, however, refers to the 100 wives of Raja Harish Chandra. Many more such examples are also referred to in different texts of the later Vedic period.

Sacrifices of the royal coronation

Now we will shift our attention to one of the most prominent features of the kingship during the later Vedic times, and this was the sacrifices of the royal inauguration. The coronation ceremony involved a number of rituals which are mentioned in the Samhitas. Those who aided in the consecration of the king were called 'Rajakritri' or 'Rajakrit'. According to Satapatha Brahmana, Suta (Minstrel, Chronicler and the Charioteer) and the Gramani (Head of the village) were specified for this duty.

The principal sacrifices conducted for the royal inauguration were 'Vajapeya', 'Rajasuya', Punar-abhisheka and Aindra-MahabhiSheka. Let us discuss three sacrifices in some detail.



The purpose of Vajapeya (the drink of strength) and the Rajasuya was to become the ruler of a Samrajya and a Rajya respectively. The purpose of conducting Punar-abhisheka (Renewed consecration) was to become eligible for all sorts of royal dignity while the Aindra-Mahabhisheka (closely associated with this was 'Ashvamedha' sacrifice) was conducted with the ambition of becoming an 'Ekarat'. The detailed ceremony of the Vajapeya sacrifice has been mentioned in the Satapatha Brahmana. It included a race of seventeen chariots in which the royal sacrifice was allowed to win. After this, the sacrifice, along with his wife, was made to mount on a pole having a ring and then pay homage to the earth. After the sacrifice descended from the pole, he was made to sit on the throne on which a goat-skin was spread. The royal sacrifice was then coroneted by the address of the 'Adhvaryu priest'. The Rajasuya Sacrifice was a long sacrifice which started on the first day of the 'Phalguna' and was carried on for two years.

The whole process has been described in detail in the Satapatha Brahmana. The main features of this sacrifice were as follows:

- (i) The Ratninam havimshi: This included giving presents to the Mahishi and other important officials (called Ratnins).
- (ii) The Abhishechaniya or the besprinkling ceremony.
- (iii) The Digvyasthapana: It was the symbolic walk of the king towards various directions to indicate his universal rule.
- (iv) Treading upon a tiger skin- It was believed that by doing so the candidate gained the strength and swiftness of a tiger.
- (v) Narration of the story of 'Sunehshepa' by the Holy priest.
- (vi) Mimic cow raid against a relative or a dramatized fight with a member of the ruling family.
- (vii) Ceremony of enthronement
- (viii) A game of dice in which the king was deliberately made to triumph.

One essential feature of the Rajasuya sacrifice was 'Abhisheka' or the besprinkling ceremony. It included, inter-alia, offerings to various deities with water (Abhishechaniya Apah) from seventeen sources. The two important types of Abhishekas were Punar-Abhisheka and Aindra-MahabhiSheka: PunarAbhisheka has been explained in some details in the Aitareya Brahmana. Here the king was made to ascend to the 'asandi' (Throne) made of 'Udumbara' wood with 'Munja' grass as the interwoven part. Then the besprinkling was done. The king then got down from the throne and made obeisance to the holy power. 'Janmejaya' the son of Kuru king 'Parikshit' was consecrated with 'punarabhisheka. Aindra-MahabhiSheka consisted of five ceremonies. First of these five ceremonies was the oath which was administered to the king elected by the priest. Then the enthronement (Arohana) took place. After enthronement came the proclamation (Utkroshana). Here, the king was proclaimed as 'Vishvasya bhutasya adhipati' (sovereign lord of all beings), Vishamatta (devourer of the folk) this term alludes to his power of taxation, Amitranam hanta (Supreme commander to slay enemies), 'rohmonomgopala (Protector of Brahmanas) and Dharmasya gapta (duty bound to preserve the laws and provide a better administration to the people). After the proclamation, the next ceremony was to address the formula (Abhimantra) after which came the last ceremony, the anointment (Abhishechana).



Ashvamedha sacrifice

Ashvamedha sacrifice was a ceremony closely associated with the AindraMahabhisheka. Atreya Brahmana says that those kings who performed AindraMahabhisheka were represented as conquering the world and offering a horse in sacrifice. Both Aitareya and Satapatha Brahmana give a long list of kings who performed it. System of taxation For the first time in the later Vedic polity we find a rudimentary organization of collecting tributes or taxes. During Rig Vedic times the king received Bali, i.e., voluntary offerings made to the God or a prince, and so he was known as 'Balihrit' or the tribute giving prince. This concept of voluntary tribute receded during the later Vedic times when a new development took place. This was the coercive and forcible collection of taxes from the clansmen and this is indicated by the term Vishamatta 'eater of the peasants' used in the later texts for the king. Bhoja, another term used in the later Vedic texts indicates a tribute-enjoying aspect of the king. These forcible exactions may have started because of 'the increase in the surplus, an important result of regular agriculture.

There is no clear indication as to what was the rate of taxation during the later Vedic times. The Satapatha Brahmana says that the 'Vaishya' secretly stores the property and the 'Kshatriya' asks the former to deliver it whenever the Kshatriyas want it. This statement does indicate the use of coercive methods to procure tribute.

There is a mention of an official Bhgadugha who distributed or disbursed the shares of the collected tribute among the people. He was associated with Pushan, the god of herdsmen, who got converted into agriculturists afterwards. It seems that these shares were given primarily to the peasants in ceremonial feasts.

Administrative structure

New social developments and increased availability of the surplus produce necessitated a more organized administrative machinery. There is, however, no indication of well defined compartments of administration but a number of persons who were given the status of Ratnins and had a number of positive functions to perform. The Ratnins do not seem to have performed the duties pertaining to law and order and justice rather they were associated with a rudimentary civil administrative system.

Though a number of later Vedic texts have given comprehensive lists of Ratnins, but the most widely accepted one is the one given in the Satapatha Brahmana. The list mentions 12 Ratnins each of whose houses was visited by the king during the 'Ratnavimsi' ceremony of the Rajasuya sacrifice. The Ratnins according to Satapatha Brahmana include:

1. Senani - Commander of the army
2. Purohita - Representative of the priestly class
3. Rajanya - Representative of the warrior class
4. Mahishi - The chief queen
5. Suta - Charioteer and wheel maker
6. Gramani - Head of the people living in a village
7. Kshattr - Chamberlain or distributor
8. Samgahritri - Treasurer (According to K.P. Jaysawal) and charioteer of an inferior kind (according to R.S. Sharma).



9. Bhagadugha - Distributor of shares. (R.S. Sharma opines that Bhagadugha, because of his association with Pushan, the god of cattle, may have been a distributor of cattle and cereals.)
10. Akshavapa - Literally means, the thrower of the dice. (According to R.S. Sharma, he may have been the distributor of land for sowing, which, he says, was distributed by the lots drawn through the throwing of the dice.)
11. Govikartana - Literally means 'the killer of the cows' He may have been the chief huntsman, and also, the keeper of games and forest.
12. Palagala - Considered as last of the king's Ratnins, who seems to have functioned as a messenger. He was, perhaps, a non-Aryan belonging to an aboriginal tribe.

It seems, possibly, that these Ratnins constituted the inner coterie of the king and had some specific or general functions to perform. Only two of these Ratnins, Senani and Rajanya seem to have military functions. As we have already pointed out, there is no evidence of a well defined administrative structure and it is not beyond doubt that one official had more than one function to perform. Gramani, it seems, continued with the function of guiding a group of people to the battlefield but he perhaps, also took up the function of the general supervision of the people living in the villages.

Some prominent artisanal functions like, chariot making, metal working and carpentry were associated with Suta, Takshanand Rathakara. The last two have been included in the list of Ratnins given in the Maitrayani Samhita. A prominent function of the distribution of food, cattle, booty and land during the last phase of later Vedic age was perhaps associated with the officials like Bhagadugha, Kshattr and Akshavapa. Govikartana was responsible for keeping the forest areas and the animals therein in good condition and also for arranging the hunting expeditions of the king.

Military administration

During most part of the later Vedic age there does not seem to be an indication of a standing army, but the inclusion of Senani (the commander of force). In the list of Ratnins, of the Satapatha Brahmana which was written during the later stages of the later Vedic period, it is indicated that by this time the concept of keeping a standing force had come into being. However, it seems that the army was confined to the kinsmen at the beginning and later it started to include the members of Kshatriya Varna who were not a part of the royal kin. This is indicated by the inclusion of 'Rajanya' in the list of Ratnins who seems to have represented the warrior class in the king's inner circle of officials.

Check Your Progress

6. What were the principal sacrifices conducted for the royal inauguration?
7. Name the three Vedas that were composed by the Aryans during the later Vedic Age.



3.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. 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 inscriptions. The study of inscriptions is called epigraphy.
2. Copper was the material which was commonly used for the writing of inscriptions.
3. The Indigenous literature includes the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas, the Upanishads, the Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharatha), the Brahmasastras, and the Puranas.
4. Some of the chief towns of the Indus Valley Civilization are as follows:
 - Eastern Punjab
 - Western Punjab
 - Sindhu
 - North-Western Border
 - Baluchistan
5. The chief occupation of the Indus people was agriculture. Crops such as wheat, barley, corn and cotton, were cultivated here.
6. The principal sacrifices conducted for the royal inauguration were 'Vajapeya', 'Rajasuya', Punar-abhisheka and Aindra-Mahabhisheka.
7. During the later Vedic Age the Aryans composed the other three Vedas, i.e., Sam Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda.

3.6 SUMMARY

- In archaeology, excavation is the exposure, processing and recording of archaeological remains.
- In ancient times, the rulers engraved important messages for people on rocks, pillars, stone walls, clay tablets and copper plates
- 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 inscriptions.
- Copper was the material which was commonly used for the writing of inscriptions.
- 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 literary source for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history may be classified as (i) indigenous literature and (ii) accounts of the foreign travellers.
- 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.
- The Indigenous literature includes the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas, the Upanishads, the Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharatha), the Brahmasastras, and the Puranas.
- 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 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.
- One of the most remarkable features of the Indus Valley Civilization was meticulous town planning. This is especially evident in the city of MohenjoDaro.
- The religious beliefs of the Indus Valley civilization had a lot in common with modern Hinduism.
- The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were art lovers and capable of making beautiful and attractive idols.
- The Rig Vedic period came to an end in 1000 BC. The period from 1080- 600 BC is known as the later Vedic period.
- As the territorial element gained prominence in the political organization of the later Vedic times, the nature and composition of the Sabha and Samiti underwent a change.

3.7 KEY WORDS

- Samrajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'eastern part' where, the king was anointed for 'Overlordship'.
- Bahujya: It was the ruler ship of the 'southern part' where, the king was anointed for 'Paramount rule'.
- Svarajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'western part' where, the king was anointed for 'Self rule'.
- Vairajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'northern part' where, the king was anointed for 'Sovereignty'. It was generally considered that the king, who was consecrated with 'Indra's' great function' was 'Virat', i.e., worthy of Vairajya.
- Rajya: It was the ruler ship of the 'middle region' where the king was anointed for a 'Kingdom'.
- Archaeology: Archaeology is the study of human activity through the recovery and analysis of material culture.
- Numismatics: Numismatics is the study or collection of currency, including coins, tokens, paper money, and related objects.

3.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Differentiate between primary and secondary literary sources.
2. What are archaeological sources?
3. What was the contribution of coins and inscriptions towards the ancient Indian historical reconstruction?
4. How was the Indus Valley civilization destroyed?
5. Write a short note on the settlement patterns and town planning of the Indus Valley Civilization.

Long-Answer Question

1. Discuss the literary sources of history.



2. Explain the importance of archaeological sources for the study of ancient Indian history.
3. Describe the position of women in the later Vedic period.
4. Discuss the religious belief of people in the later Vedic period.
5. Agriculture was the main means of livelihood of the later Vedic people. Discuss.

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RISE OF NEW RELIGIOUS AND ASOKA'S CONTRIBUTION

RISE OF BUDDHISM AND JAINISM STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Jainism
- 4.3 Buddhism
- 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

4.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt that literary and archaeological records are the two main categories that give evidences of ancient Indian history. The unit explained the importance of archaeological sources for the study of ancient Indian history, and discussed the literary sources of history. The previous unit also described the Indus Valley and later Vedic Civilization.

In this unit, you will learn about the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. Jainism had left an indelible impact on the social and cultural development of India, the place of its origin. Just as revolutionary as Jainism, Buddhism also became a religion that had great impact on the Indian people, society and culture. This unit will define the basic principles of Jainism and Buddhism. This unit will also explain the causes responsible for the rise of Jainism and Buddhism.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Define the basic principles of Jainism
- Identify the main teachings of Buddhism
- Explain the causes responsible for the rise of Jainism and Buddhism

4.2 JAINISM

The general belief among the common people is that the founder of Jainism is Mahavira. However, Jainas believe that their religion is the product of teachings of 24 Tirthankaras (a saviour who has succeeded in crossing over life's stream of rebirths and has made a path for others to follow). There is no detailed information available about the first 22 Tirthankaras. The Jainas hold that their religion is as old as the Rig Veda and their first Tirthankara Rishabha was the father of Bharata, the first Vedic Chakravartin king of India. Rishabha was followed by 23 Tirthankaras. Very little is known about these Tirthankaras except the last two.

The 23rd Tirthankara was Parsavanath, who was a historical figure. Parsavanath probably lived in eight century BC, and probably died 250 years before the death of Mahavira. He was



a Kshatriya and the son of king Ashvasena of Vanaras. For thirty years, he led the life of an ordinary householder and then became an ascetic. He meditated for 84 days continuously and attained the highest knowledge. The next seventy years of his life were spent in spreading the highest knowledge to the people. His main four principles were as follows:

1. Non-injury to life
2. Truthfulness
3. Non-stealing
4. Non-possession

Parsava's teachings were not that rigid as that of his successor, Mahavira. He permitted his followers to lead a married life and allowed them to wear clothes to cover their body.

Early life of Mahavira

The real founder of Jainism was its 24th Tirthankara, Vardhamana Mahavira. His childhood name was Vardhamana. According to one tradition, Mahavira was born in Kundagrama about 540 BC. He was the son of Siddhartha, who was the chief of a Kshatriya clan called Jnatikas. His mother Trishala was the sister of Chetaka, an eminent Licchavi prince of Vaishali. Vardhamana was given education in all branches of knowledge, was married to Yasoda and had a daughter called Priyadrasana. After the death of his parents, he renounced the worldly life and became a monk at the age of 30. He left worldly life with the permission of his elder brother Nandivardhana and became an ascetic.

Life of Asceticism

For twelve years, Mahavira roamed about as a naked monk doing all types of penances. During this period, he fully subdued his senses. He was attacked and ridiculed; however, he never lost his patience, nor indulged in feelings of hatred and revenge against his enemies. Within these twelve years of penance, meditation and severe asceticism, he prepared himself for the attainment of highest spiritual knowledge.

During this period, he met an ascetic called Gosala Makkhaliputta at Nalanda. For six years, Makkhaliputta lived with Mahavira practising severe asceticism after which he separated himself from Mahavira and set up a new religious order called Ajivikas.

In the 13th year on the 10th Vaisakh, Mahavira acquired the ultimate spiritual knowledge (Kevalya) under a sala tree on the bank of river Rijupalika near the village Jrimbikagrama, whose identification is uncertain. Mahavira now possessed the four infinities, which were as follows:

1. Infinite knowledge
2. Infinite power
3. Infinite perception
4. Infinite joy

Thus, he became a 'Jina' (a conqueror) or Mahavira (a great hero) at the age of 42 and began his career as a religious reformer. Since then, he entered upon a new stage of life. He became a religious teacher and the head of a sect called Nirgranthas (free from all bonds) or 'Jains'.

Later he met the king of Magadha, Ajatashatru, and is said to have converted him. However, the Buddhists say that the king of Magadha followed Buddhism and not Jainism. Mahavira did not have many followers because of the rigorous form of life he recommended to his followers. He asked his followers to remain naked, and said that the noblest act in the life of a Jaina was death by starvation. It is known from Kalpasutra that he spent his time at Champa, Mithila, Sravasti, Vaishali, etc., and after 30 years of preaching, he died at Pawa near



Rajagriha. We do not know the exact date of passing away of Mahavira. However, Professor Jacobi and some other eminent historians have proved that his death occurred probably in 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 10 Purvas (Jains's sacred texts) in 12 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 12 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.

Check Your Progress

1. Who was the real founder of Jainism?
2. What are the two main sects of Jainism?



4.3 BUDDHISM

Another great religious reformation movement of sixth century BC was Buddhism, which gave the biggest challenge to Brahmanism. Gautama Buddha, a contemporary of Mahavira, was the founder of Buddhism. He was the son of Suddhodan, the chief of the kshetrya clan of Shakyas and the raja of Kapilavastu in the Nepal terai. His mother was Mahamaya. Gautama was born in 563 BC.

The Jatakas contain the Buddhist traditions about the birth of Buddha. They tell us that Buddha's life did not begin with his birth in the Lumbini Garden. On the other hand, Buddha was the product of an infinitely long evolution through various form of life. Before he descended into this world, he lived in the Tusita heaven. He was then a Bodhisattava and his name was Sumedha. He was greatly touched by Buddha Dipankar, the Buddha of the previous world, and wanted to become like him. He therefore left Tusita heaven and decided to be reborn through Mahamaya.

Jatakas tell us that before the birth of Buddha, Mahamaya had a dream of white elephant with six tusks entering into her body. The astrologers were called to interpret the dream and they told Suddhodan that according to this dream, his wife would give birth to a very great man, a prophet or an emperor. In 563 BC, when she was returning from her father's house to Kapilavastu, Mahamaya gave birth to Buddha under a sala tree in the village of Lumbini. Later on in 250 BC, Ashoka set up a commemorative pillar there and in the inscription he stated 'Here, Buddha was born, the sage of the Sakyas '(Hida Budhe jate sakya muniti)'. However, unfortunately after seven days, Buddha's mother Mahamaya died and his stepmother and aunt, Prajapati Gautami, then brought up Siddhartha (It was Buddha's childhood name).

From his childhood days, Siddhartha exhibited signs of a contemplative frame of mind. The royal pleasure and amusements failed to attract his mind. He was married at an early age to a beautiful girl Yasodhara, the daughter of a Shakya noble. However, the pleasures of the palace did not bind him to the worldly life. He led a happy married life for some time and even got a son Rahul from his union with his wife. A few incidents, which Buddhists call four great signs, occurred and they exercised tremendous influence on the future of Gautama. One evening, his charioteer Channa drove him in the city and he came across an old man. Next, he saw a man suffering from disease; however, it was the sight of a dead man, which touched the deepest chord of Gautam's heart. The fourth sign was that of a mendicant, who had renounced the world and was moving about in search of truth.

Great renunciation

At last, Gautama decided to find out the cause of all suffering and wanted to know the truth. His hatred towards the world was intensified and he realized the hollowness of worldly pleasure. After the birth of his son, Rahul, he made up his mind and decided to leave his palace and his family. One night, accompanied by charioteer Channa and his favourite horse Kanthaka, he left home at the age of 29. This is called Maha-Bhinishkramana or the great renunciation; thereafter, Gautama became a wandering ascetic looking for the supreme truth.

Enlightenment

For six continuous years, he lived as a homeless ascetic and sought instructions from Alara Kalama. His next teacher was Udraka Ramaputra. His new teachers failed to satisfy him. He spent some time in the caves near Rajagriha, the capital of Magadh. From Rajagriha, he went



to the forest of Uruvela and spent a few years in self-mortification. He then meditated with five ascetics named Kondana, Vappa, Bhadiya, Mahanama and Assagi.

Gautama practised continuous fasting until he was reduced to a mere skeleton. He then realized that mere suffering and sacrifice could not lead to truth. He thought that he had wasted six years. The five disciples also left him alone. At last one day he sat under a Pipal tree (Asvattha) on the banks of River Niranjana (the modern Phalgu) at Gaya and took a vow, 'I will not leave this place till I attain the peace of mind, which I have been trying for all these years.' Finally, Gautama attained supreme knowledge and insight. He found out the truth and the means of salvation from human sufferings. He got the highest knowledge or bodhi. Gautama thus became the Buddha, 'the enlightened one' or Tathagata.

The turning of the wheel of law

After attaining supreme knowledge, Buddha decided to impart the knowledge to the common people. From Gaya he went to Saranath near Banaras and he gave his first sermon to his five disciples in the deer park. These five disciples were once his comrades when he was doing penance and fasting. They hated Buddha because he had left the path of suffering. They are known as the five elders. This first sermon by which, he started converting people to his faith is known as turning of the wheel of law or 'dharma chakra Pravartana', which formed the nucleus of all Buddhist teachings.

For the next 45 years, he preached his gospel and message of salvation to the common people. He visited different parts of the country, spoke to the people in their local languages and illustrated his teachings. He made large conversions at Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha. He also converted his father, his son and other relatives at Kapilavastu. Kings like Prasenjit of Kosala, Bimbisara and Ajatashatru of Magadha became his followers. He died in 483 BC at Kushinagar in the district of Gorakhpur at the age of 80. Thus, Buddha attained Parinirvana. After his death, his remains were divided into eight parts and distributed among his followers who were spread in different parts of the country. Stupas or mounds were built on these remains to preserve them.

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 (janahu) 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 labourers 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.

Teachings of Buddha and Indian Society Gautama Buddha took his message far and wide. He kept on wandering, preaching and meditating continuously for 40 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 as follows:

- (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

3. Who was the founder of Buddhism?
4. What was the cause of the origin of Buddhism?

4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The real founder of Jainism was its 24th Tirthankara, Vardhamana Mahavira. His childhood name was Vardhamana.
2. The two main sects of Jainism are Svetambaras and Digambaras.
3. Gautama Buddha, a contemporary of Mahavira, was the founder of Buddhism.
4. 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.

4.5 SUMMARY

- The real founder of Jainism was its 24th Tirthankara, Vardhamana Mahavira. His childhood name was Vardhamana.



- According to one tradition, Mahavira was born in Kundagrama about 540 BC. He was the son of Siddhartha, who was the chief of a Kshatriya clan called Jnatrikas.
- For twelve years, Mahavira roamed about as a naked monk doing all types of penances. During this period, he fully subdued his senses.
- In the 13th year on the 10th Vaisakh, Mahavira acquired the ultimate spiritual knowledge (Kevalya) under a sala tree on the bank of river Rijupalika near the village Jrimbikagrama, whose identification is uncertain.
- Jainism has two main sects: (a) Svetambaras and (b) Digambaras.
- At first, Jainism was more popular than Buddhism. During his own life time, Mahavira had made it popular in Kosala, Magadha, Anga and Mithila.
- Another great religious reformation movement of sixth century BC was Buddhism, which gave the biggest challenge to Brahmanism. Gautama Buddha, a contemporary of Mahavira, was the founder of Buddhism.
- The Jatakas contain the Buddhist traditions about the birth of Buddha.
- Gautama practised continuous fasting until he was reduced to a mere skeleton. He then realized that mere suffering and sacrifice could not lead to truth.
- Finally, Gautama attained supreme knowledge and insight. He found out the truth and the means of salvation from human sufferings. He got the highest knowledge or bodhi.
- After attaining supreme knowledge, Buddha decided to impart the knowledge to the common people.
- For the next 45 years, he preached his gospel and message of salvation to the common people.
- Gautama Buddha took his message far and wide. He kept on wandering, preaching and meditating continuously for 40 years, resting only in the rainy season every year.
- 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.

4.6 KEY WORDS

- **Asceticism:** Asceticism is a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals.
- **Jainism:** Jainism is a non-theistic religion founded in India in the 6th century BC by the Jina Vardhamana Mahavira as a reaction against the teachings of orthodox Brahmanism, and still practised there. The Jain religion teaches salvation by perfection through successive lives, and non-injury to living creatures, and is noted for its ascetics.
- **Buddhism:** Buddhism is a widespread Asian religion or philosophy, founded by Siddhartha Gautama in NE India in the 5th century BC.

4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Differentiate between Svetambaras and Digambaras.



2. What are the basic principles of Jainism?
3. What are the main teachings of Buddhism?

Long-Answer Question

1. Discuss the main beliefs of Jainism.
2. Explain the causes responsible for the rise of Jainism.
3. Describe the three main beliefs of Buddhism.

4.8 FURTHER READINGS

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PROGRESS AND DECLINE STRUCTURE

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Doctrine of Jainism

5.2.1 Rise, Spread and Decline of Jainism

5.3 Doctrine of Buddhism

5.3.1 Rise and Fall of Buddhism

5.4 Ashoka

5.4.1 The Edicts of King Ashoka

5.4.2 Ashoka's Dhamma

5.4.3 The Foreign Policy after Kalinga

5.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions

5.6 Summary

5.7 Key Words

5.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises

5.9 Further Readings

5.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about the basic principles of Jainism and Buddhism. In this unit, you will deal with the doctrine of Jainism along with Buddhism. Jainism had left an indelible impact on the social and cultural development of India, the place of its origin. Just as revolutionary as Jainism, Buddhism also became a religion that had great impact on the Indian people, society and culture. Buddha realized the truth by following a life of purity and discipline and asked his followers to follow the same path. His teachings were simple and he explained them in simple ordinary man's language illustrating them with common tales. He never tried to establish a new religion, but he propounded a new way of life free from dogmas and rituals. This unit will also discuss about the great king Ashoka. He 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.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the causes of rise of Jainism
- Mention the principal reason for the rapid spread of Buddhism
- List the factors responsible for the decline of Buddhism and Jainism
- Discuss about the great king Ashoka
- Define the concept of 'Dhamma'



5.2 DOCTRINE OF JAINISM

The religious texts written in Pali language do not recognize Mahavira as the originator of a new religion, but as a reformer. Mahavira accepted most of the religious doctrines of Parsavanath though he made some alterations and additions. Parsavanath emphasized self-control and penance and advised his followers to observe the following four principles:

1. Satya (truth)
2. Ahimsa (non-violence)
3. Aparigraha (non-possession of property)
4. Astheya (not to receive anything, which is not freely given)

To these Mahavira added one more, i.e., brahmacharya (celibacy). The Jain philosophy shows a close affinity to Hindu Samkhya Darshana (or Samkhya philosophy). They ignored the idea of God, accepted that the world is full of sorrows and believed in the theories of Karma (action) and transmigration of souls. According to Mahavira, salvation can be achieved by freeing the soul from earthly bondage. This can be achieved by means of right faith, right knowledge and right action. These are called Ratnatreya or three jewels of Jain religion.

Mahavira advocated a dualistic philosophy, according to which man has two-fold nature, earthly and spiritual or Ajiva (matter) and Jiva (soul). While Ajiva is destructible, Jiva is indestructible and salvation is possible through the progress of Jiva.

Jain philosophy states that if one desires to attain Nirvana or salvation, it is necessary for him to destroy Karma. One can do so gradually by avoiding evil Karmas. For this, one must observe the five principles, namely:

1. Satya
2. Ahimsa
3. Aprigraha
4. Astheya
5. Brahmacharya

Through this process, one could attain final liberation of the soul.

Mahavira rejected the existence of god and authority of Vedas

Mahavira did not believe in the supreme creator or God. He believed that no deity has created, maintains or destroys the world; however, it functions only according to universal law of development and decay. He advocated a holy ethical code, rigorous asceticism, and extreme penance for the attainment of highest spiritual state. He regarded the highest state of the soul as God. He believed man is the architect of its own destiny and could attain salvation by leading a life of purity, virtue and renunciation.

He also rejected the infallibility of the Vedas and objected to the Vedic rituals and Brahminical supremacy. He denounced the caste system.

Principle of non-injury



The Jain philosophy believes that not only man and animals, but plants also possess souls (Jiva) endowed with various degree of consciousness. Jains believe that the plants possess life and feel pain and thus lay great emphasis on the doctrine of Ahimsa or non-injury to any kind of living beings. The vow of non-violence (Ahimsa) was practiced to the point of irrationality. Even an unconscious killing of an insect while walking was against Jain morals. The Jains would not drink water without straining it for fear of killing an insect. They also wore muslin mask over the mouth to save any life floating in the air. They had forbidden not only the practice of war, but also of agriculture, as both involve the killing of living beings.

Commenting on this extreme form of non-injury, eminent historian V. Smith said, ‘The strange doctrine affirming the existence of Jivas in objects commonly called inanimate extends the Jain idea of Ahimsa far beyond the Brahminical and Buddhist notions.’

Jain sects

The main sects of Jainism are Svetambaras and Digambaras. The Svetambaras wear white robes, whereas the Digambaras use no clothes. The Svetambaras are the followers of the 23rd Tirthankara Parsavanath, while the Digambaras are followers of the 24th Tirthankara Mahavira.

Religious texts

Original texts of Jains were called Purvas and were 14 in number. In the third century BC, a Jain council was held at Pataliputra and arranged these Purvas in 12 parts, and named them Angas. The last Anga was lost and a Jain council held at Balabhi in the fifth century AD rearranged the remaining 11 Angas. These books were written in Prakrit language. However, the Digambara sect of Jainism did not recognize the Angas and constituted its own sacred texts.

5.2.1 Rise, Spread and Decline of Jainism

There were several causes, which led to the rise, spread and decline of Jainism. The main ones are as follows:

Causes of rise of Jainism

During the time of Mahavira, there arose a discontent amongst the common people against the traditional Vedic religion, as a number of weaknesses and shortcomings had crept in the latter. The Vedic religion or Hinduism had become quite ritualistic and the caste system had become predominant. Therefore, the people were disgusted and started working hard to save the society and culture from these evils. At that time, Jainism came as an alternative to the Vedic religion. It tried to clean the society and religion by introducing a number of reforms. Therefore, common people showed interest in adopting its principles.

Secondly, it has also proved to be closer to the more popular religion Hinduism and with the passage of time, the Jains also adored Jain Tirthankaras in temples and by the middle ages, their worship was very near to the Hindus with offering of flowers, incense, lamps, etc. Thus, Jainism proved more accommodating to Hinduism and did not offer any serious hostility.

Thirdly, Jainism possesses a tolerant spirit of accommodation with other religions, which helped in its progress and was responsible for its rise. Apart from it, the charismatic personality of Mahavira, simple philosophy of the religion, acceptance of common spoken language of that time as the medium of propagation and patronization of influential rulers were the major factors responsible for the rise of Jainism.



Spread of Jainism

Like Buddhism, Jainism never spread all over India or beyond its boundaries, yet it became a popular religion at that time, and still exists in many parts of the country. During the life time of Mahavira, it spread in Magadha, Vaisali and its nearby areas, but later, the chief activity of Jainism was shifted to Gujarat, Malwa, Rajputana and Karnataka where they are still an influential Jain community. The members of this community have also played an important role in the early literary development of South India.

Causes of the decline of Jainism

Various factors were responsible for the dramatic decline of Jainism in India. After the demise of Mahavira, Gautama Buddha emerged as a great socio-religious reformer of that period. The teachings of Buddha were simpler and people friendly. Therefore, Buddhism posed a great challenge for the existence of Jainism.

Secondly, Jainism was divided into two sects, i.e., Svetambaras and Digambaras, which weakened the religion from its core.

Thirdly, the most important cause of its decline was the great revival of Hinduism. Under the Guptas, Cholas, Chalukyas and Rajput kings, Hinduism got the much needed attention and patronization of the ruling class. Reforms came in Hinduism and it became the most popular religion in India. That was the main reason due to which Jainism was confined to some pockets of India.

Apart from it, the absence of popular religious preachers after the demise of Mahavira, absence of protection by the later rulers and its hard principles led to the decline of Jainism. Jainism could not occupy the position of a main religion in India or outside India. However, it has contributed enormously in the field of art, architecture, literature and philosophy and has made valuable contributions to the Indian culture.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the Jain philosophy?
2. State the five principles, according to the Jain philosophy.

5.4 ASHOKA

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 98 brothers except Tishya. The story is that Ashoka killed all his 99 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 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. However, 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 Dharm Ashoka 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.

5.4.1 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 the 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 Rajtarangini. Kalhan mentions a number of stupas and viharas built by Ashoka.

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.

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).

5.4.2 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.

5.4.3 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.

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 Honour 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 north-western territories of the Mauryan Empire (modern-day Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan) became the Indo-Greek Kingdom.

In 1992, Ashoka was ranked 53 on Michael H. Hart's list of the most influential figures in history. 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.

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 Progress and Decline NOTES Self-Instructional Material 83 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 24 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.

Check Your Progress

6. What do you understand by the term 'Dhamma'?
7. What was the language used for inscription by Ashoka?
8. What is the Ashoka Chakra?

5.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The Jain philosophy shows a close affinity to Hindu Samkhya Darshana (or Samkhya philosophy). They ignored the idea of God, accepted that the world is full of sorrows and believed in the theories of Karma (action) and transmigration of souls.
2. According to the Jain philosophy there are five principles. They are as follows:
 - Satya
 - Ahimsa
 - Aprigraha
 - Astheya
 - Brahmacharya
3. According to the eight-fold path, the first step is the proper vision leading to the realization that the world is full of sorrow, the basis of life is sorrow and sorrow can end by controlling desires.
4. The key feature of the universal law of dharma is 'as a man acts so shall he be', i.e., man gets the reward of its own action.
5. The two sects of Buddhism are Hinayana and Mahayana.



6. The word 'dhamma' was derived from the Sanskrit word 'dharma. 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.'

7. The language used for inscription was the then current spoken form called Prakrit. 8. 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).

5.6 SUMMARY

- The religious texts written in Pali language do not recognize Mahavira as the originator of a new religion, but as a reformer.
- Mahavira accepted most of the religious doctrines of Parsavanath though he made some alterations and additions.
- The Jain philosophy believes that not only man and animals, but plants also possess souls (Jiva) endowed with various degree of consciousness.
- During the time of Mahavira, there arose a discontent amongst the common people against the traditional Vedic religion, as a number of weaknesses and shortcomings had crept in the latter.
- Like Buddhism, Jainism never spread all over India or beyond its boundaries, yet it became a popular religion at that time, and still exists in many parts of the country.
- Various factors were responsible for the dramatic decline of Jainism in India. After the demise of Mahavira, Gautama Buddha emerged as a great socioreligious reformer of that period.
- The teachings of Buddha were simpler and people friendly.
- Buddha pointed out various paths by which one could attain Nirvana or salvation from the cycle of birth and death.
- Buddha prescribed the noble eight-fold paths (the eight spokes of the wheel of law symbolize the eight-fold path) or the 'Astangamarga', which every Buddhist is to follow in order to get deliverance from sufferings.
- One of the cardinal believes of Buddha was Ahimsa. He held that violence and cruelty against animate beings was a sin.
- Buddhist religious texts were written in Pali and are collectively known as Tripitika (three baskets). The first part is Vinayapitaka, which lays down rules for the guidance of the monks and the general management of the Buddhist place of worship.
- After the demise of Buddha, Buddhism was sharply divided into two sects, namely Hinayana and Mahayana.
- Buddhism started as a protest movement against the complex system of Hinduism.
- 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.
- 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.



- Though Ashoka is known as the greatest king of India, historians learned about him only in the nineteenth century.
- The word ‘dhamma’ was derived from the Sanskrit word ‘dharma.’ Ashoka followed the principles of Buddhism—that of truth, charity, kindness, purity and goodness.
- Ashoka was an able administrator, an intelligent human being and a devout Buddhist.

5.7 KEY WORDS

- **Ahimsa:** Ahimsa means ‘not to injure’ and ‘compassion’ and refers to a key virtue in Indian religions.
- **Karma:** Karma is the sum of a person’s actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences.
- **Hinduism:** Hinduism is an Indian religion and dharma, or a way of life, widely practised in the Indian subcontinent.
- **Edict:** Edict is an official order or proclamation issued by a person in authority.
- **Chakra:** 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.

5.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What were the causes for the dramatic decline of Jainism in India?
2. What are the four noble truths of Buddhism?
3. Mention the principal reason for the rapid spread of Buddhism.
4. Differentiate between Hinayana and Mahayana.
5. List the factors responsible for the decline of Buddhism.
6. What was the purpose of following the policy of Dhamma?

Long-Answer Question

1. Explain the principle of non-injury.
2. Discuss the causes of rise of Jainism.
3. Describe the concept of eight-fold path in Buddhism.
4. Discuss the various causes responsible for the spectacular rise of Buddhism in India and abroad.
5. Write a detailed note on the battle of Kalinga.

5.9 FURTHER READINGS

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF GUPTAS - PUSHYABHUSI DYNASTY (VARDHA DYNASTY)

THE GUPTA PERIOD STRUCTURE

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Early Guptas
 - 6.2.1 Samudragupta: Career and Achievements
- 6.3 Administration of the Guptas
 - 6.3.1 Social and Economic Conditions Under the Guptas
- 6.4 The Golden Age
- 6.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.6 Summary
- 6.7 Key Words
- 6.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.9 Further Readings

6.0 INTRODUCTION

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 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.

In this unit, you will learn about the early Guptas, their administrative system and the Golden age.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the Gupta administrative system
- Discuss the social and economic conditions of the Gupta Empire
- Identify the demerits of the Gupta administration system
- Discuss the various achievements of the Gupta golden age

6.2 EARLY GUPTAS

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 a more powerful ruler than his predecessors. He may have given extension to his patrimony, gained greater authority and thus assumed a higher title.

I Tsing, 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 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.'

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 Bhagvat 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, infact, received their touch during this period. The Smritis of Vyas, 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.

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 Kumara Gupta 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 Kumara Gupta 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.

Chandragupta I

After Ghatotkach, his son Chandragupta I (AD 319–324) became king of this dynasty. He 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 Lichchhavis, who were very powerful during that time. He strengthened his position by establishing matrimonial relationship with the Lichchhavis and expanded his empire from Awadha and Magadha to Prayaga in the coastal areas of the Ganges. Chandragupta married Lichchhavi 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 Lichchhavi kingdom which she inherited from her father. As a result, the entire Lichchhavi kingdom came under the control of Chandragupta I.

6.2.1 Samudragupta: Career and Achievements

After Chandragupta, 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 Vindhyas was called Aryavarta. It is known that Samudragupta launched victorious expeditions twice over Aryavarta. In his first expedition, he vanquished the following kings:

- **Acyuta:** The first king Samudragupta defeated in Aryavarta was Acyuta. 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 letters before 'ga' has been destroyed but the letter 'ga' is readable. Perhaps he might have been the ruler Ganapatinaga.
- **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:

- (1) **Rudradeva:** King Rudradeva was king Rudrasena I of Kaushambi.
- (2) **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.
- (3) **Nagadatta:** He was a king of Mathura and belonged to the Naga dynasty.



(4) **Chandraverma:** There is a dispute regarding this entry. Some consider him the king of Pusakarana while others consider him the king of Eastern Punjab.

(5) **Ganapatinaga:** He was a ruler of Vidisha and belonged to the Naga dynasty.

(6) **Balaverma:** He was a predecessor of king Bhaskarverma of Kamrupa.

(7) **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.

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 one hand, these kings were independent while on the other, they accepted the suzerainty of Samudragupta. Samudragupta's 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 and Karttripur.

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

Check Your Progress

1. Who was the first independent ruler of the Gupta dynasty?
2. What was the main event of the age of Chandragupta?
3. Mention some of the foreign states conquered by Samudragupta.

6.3 ADMINISTRATION OF THE GUPTAS

The Gupta administrative system was based on earlier historical tradition to which several amendments had been made to adapt it to the contemporary situation. Gupta administration



featured elements of the administrative systems of the Mauryas, the Satvahanas, the Scythians and the Kushanas. According to Chinese accounts, 'The Gupta administrative system was always appreciable because it was liberal and in public interest. And the kings could not have been unrestrained and autocratic in spite of having limitless power.' Undoubtedly, the Gupta governance was of high quality. The fifth century Chinese monk Fa Hien writes about this period, 'The people were happy and prosperous. The people had to give neither account of small things in their houses nor attendance before any justices or kings.'

Features of Gupta Administration

The Gupta government had the following two bases:

Monarchy: The nature of the Gupta administration was monarchical, with the emperor as the supreme authority. In the Prayaga Edict, Samudragupta has been referred to as a king who lived on earth like god.

Feudal system: The Gupta Empire was vast and, therefore, ruling over it was very difficult without decentralization. Hence, the feudal system was introduced.

Central government

King: The king was the axis of the central government because it was a monarchy. The king was the highest official in the government, army, justice and other aspects of administration. According to the Prayaga edict, 'It is the duty of the king to provide good governance. An ideal king is one who has the firm resolve to provide his people from the core of his heart all comfort and happiness.' Officials were appointed and sacked by the king. There was no such concept that the king had the right to be autocratic on account of having a divine character. In spite of having a divine character, serving in the battlefield and obtaining suitable education were essential for the king. The king took up numerous titles such as Maharajadhiraja, Parameshwara Paramamdaivat and Rajadhiraja.

Council of ministers: There was a council of ministers to advise and assist the king in administrative affairs. As a basis for governance, Kautilya's concept that the discharge of royal functions should be done with mutual co-operation and goodwill was recognized. Therefore, it was expedient for the king to appoint a council of ministers to get co-operation and proper advice. Ministers were appointed on the basis of their qualifications. However, this position later became hereditary. Names of some prominent ministers have come down to us. They include Mahadandanayaka, Mahapratihara, Mahasandhivigrahika, Bhandagaridhikrita, Mahapaksapatalika and Dandapashika. Although the king took their advice, he was not bound to accept it.

Provincial administration

The Gupta Empire was very vast. Direct control of such a vast empire was not possible. Hence, it was divided into several provinces. Provinces were known as bhukti, bhoga and pradesha. Such a division of the government was an indication of administrative intelligence and wisdom. Provincial rulers were appointed by the king. They were known as uparika maharaja. They generally belonged to the royal family. Their duties were maintenance of peace, law and order in the empire, public interest, and obeying the emperor.

Visaya (district) administration



The province was divided into visayas (districts). The head official of the visaya was called visayapati. He was appointed by the king or uparika. Other officials of the province included sarthavaha, prathamakulika, prathama kayastha and pustapala.

Town administration

There were several towns in a province. The chief of the town was known as nagarapati. He was appointed by the visayapati. Each town had a council, the functions of which were to collect tax, take care of the public health and run the town administration.

Village administration

The village was the smallest unit of administration. The area of a village was fixed. The head of the village was called gramapati or mahattar. A grama panchayat was indeed a small democracy. People in the grama panchayat performed acts of simple officials. Sub-committees were constituted in the panchayats if there was more work. There were separate committees for the management of irrigation, agriculture, religion, etc.

Judicial system

The judicial system was highly competent. It is evident from Narada Smriti that there were four types of judicial courts – (1) royal (2) puga (3) guild and (4) family. According to Fa Hien, 'The punishment during the Gupta age was not severe. Capital punishment or punishment by amputation was rarely carried out.' He adds that there were few crimes and criminals were only given medium or high economic punishment. The decision of the king was final. However, according to Kalidasa and Visakhadatta, punishments were very severe.

Military organization

A big and strong army was necessary for the defense of such a vast empire. The government of the Gupta kings was based on military power. The army had four parts – infantry, chariot, cavalry and elephants. The smallest unit of infantry was called chamuya. The chief of the army was known as mahasenapati or mahabaladhikrita. 'The highest official of the army was the senapati (general). Mahadandanayaka, ranabhandagarika, mandashvapati were under him. No discrimination was made in the military service in respect of any specific caste. The army was under the control of the king. Provinces had some army and they helped the king in the time of need.' There was an armoury to store weapons.

Revenue system

The main source of income was land-tax. The share of produce, which was given to the king or state, was called bhaga. There were five kinds of tax that made up the income of the state: (1) controlled tax such as land-tax, (2) periodical tax, (3) economic penalty (4) income from the state's wealth and (5) income from the subjugated feudal. It is evident from Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha that the ideal of the tax-collection of the Gupta king was people's welfare. One-sixth of the produce was levied as land-tax. The Guptas' empire was an ideal Hindu state, and they adopted the ancient system to run it. During this time, state tax was not a kind of punishment.

Demerits of the Gupta administration system

The Gupta administration was extremely competent. Its organization in the centre and provinces was very able. The Gupta emperors expanded their empire and established a very high quality of balanced and appreciable administration in the conquered regions, the parallel of which can hardly be found.



However, it suffered from a few demerits as well. It was, above all, a feudal system. Feudal rulers became autocratic. As the provincial rulers were conferred more powers, this proved to be disastrous for the Gupta empire in the course of time.

6.3.1 Social and Economic Conditions Under the Guptas

The Gupta period is known as the golden age of Indian history because of its political, social, economic and religious conditions, arts, literature and cultural life, prosperity and fame.

Able and talented kings

There were several kings of great competence, both from military and strategic points of view, during this period. They increased the prosperity of the nation by protecting it from internal and external dangers.

Political unity

After the decline of the Mauryas, India was divided into small states which the Guptas again organized under one umbrella and protected from foreign aggression.

Economic prosperity

Internal peace, good governance, safety, security and successful administration provided an impetus to local and foreign trade. Consequently, the Gupta age witnessed great progress in trade and commerce.

Religious tolerance

Although the Gupta Kings were followers of Vaishnavism, they were tolerant of other religions, including Brahminism, Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhist monasteries near Hindu temples were a common sight.

Art, literature and science

The Gupta period marked immense development in the field of literature. The Gupta emperors encouraged poets, playwrights and philosophers such as Kalidasa, Bharavi, Shudraka, Vishakhadatta, Vasubandhu, Dandin, Harisena and Varahamihir. The arts of this period were not only limited to royal palaces but they also had close links to daily life.

In science, some of the notable achievements of this age were in the fields of astronomy and mathematics.

Social Conditions

Let us discuss the social conditions of the Gupta Empire.

Joint family system

In the Gupta age, it was the joint family system that prevailed. A separate and nuclear family system was inconceivable. The family was managed by a patriarch who was shown profound respect. All the members of the family obeyed his orders and all family traditions were maintained by him. The father was the owner of all property but it was also shared by the sons and the brothers.

Position of women

The position of women had deteriorated during the Gupta age. Women had to live under various restrictions throughout their lives. In childhood, they had to obey their father, in youth their husband and in old age their sons. They had no individual liberty. Girls were



married off at an early age and could rarely attain any higher education. They had no choice when it came to their marriage. According to the law of Manu, a father had to get his daughter married before maturity and if he failed to do so, he shall go to hell. Women were barred from attaining Vedic injunctions or religious education. This, however, does not mean that women were completely uneducated. Many women were experts in dancing, painting and playing musical instruments. They also understood verse. Very importantly, remarriage of widows was allowed. Chandragupta himself married his brother's widow Dhruvswamini. The sati system prevailed, but in a mild form. Sculptural representations assert that the purdah system was not in vogue, but it is believed that women of noble families used veils when they went out.

Caste system

During the Gupta age, the caste system had become the very foundation of society. The Shudras were looked down upon by members of the upper castes. The Gupta period was an age of revival of Hinduism and Brahminism. It was an age of manifold rites and rituals, customs and ceremonies. The Brahmins occupied a respectful place in the society and art and literature flourished. The Brahmins were split into different categories on the basis of the study of the Vedas. A Brahmin who studied the Rig veda was called Rigvedin and others were called Yajurvedin, Samavedin and Atharvavedin. Vaishyas had also organized themselves into different sections. **As they were prosperous and wealthy, they commanded respect.**

Slavery

Slavery was common in Gupta society. Slaves included prisoners of war, bankrupts and gamblers who had lost their freedom. Their servitude, however, was not permanent.

Food and drinks

Vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals were popular. Fa Hien writes that the people did not consume alcohol, onions, meat and garlic and it was believed that only the untouchables ate such things and reared poultry and pigs. But Fa Hien's accounts cannot be completely relied on. His observations are most likely limited to Buddhist society. According to the literature of the age, people consumed fish, meat and alcohol and according to the smritis, only women were restricted from their consumption, especially those whose husbands were not residing at home. The smritis particularly allowed meat for sick persons. In southern India, especially in aristocratic families, a variety of meat dishes were known to have been prepared. People also chewed betel leaves after meals.

Religious Conditions

Let us discuss the religious conditions of the Gupta Empire.

Literary and archaeological sources depict the spirit of religious tolerance under the Guptas. State services were open for all irrespective of their religious beliefs. The Buddhists and the Jains were provided with all the facilities that were provided to the Brahmins.

The religious tolerance of Samudragupta can be gleaned from the fact that he readily conceded to the request of Meghavarna, the king of Ceylon, for the construction of a monastery at Bodhgaya. Even economic assistance was given to members of other faiths. The monastery of Nalanda was set up by Kumaragupta. Donating charity was very common.

A number of religious texts were written or rewritten in the Gupta period, including smritis and puranas. The oral epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata were written down.



Chief religions

The following were the chief religions of the Gupta Empire.

Buddhism: Asanga, Vasubandhu and Kumarjiya were well-known preachers and philosophers of Buddhism. Although Buddhism declined and paved way for a revival in Brahminism, it continued flourishing in Punjab, Kashmir and modern-day Afghanistan. The artistic remains at Sarnath, Paharpur, Ajanta and Nagarjunikonda reveal that the Gupta period was a golden age of Buddhist art. In Bodhgaya, a monastery was made for Chinese pilgrims. In Western Maharashtra, at places like Bhaja, Kuda, Mahar, Bedsa and Junnar, many Buddhist monasteries were built under the patronage of merchants and guilds. Ajanta and Ellora were important Buddhist centres. Ayodhya and Kanchi were full of Buddhist monasteries and stupas.

Jainism: Bengal, Mathura, Vallabhi, Pundravardhana, Udayagiri and Kanchi were important Jain centres. In the south, the Kadambas, Pallavas and Paradya rulers patronized Jainism. In the year 453, a meeting was held to revise the Jain books. Although there was a rivalry between Jainism and Saivism, there was no religious persecution in any form.

Hinduism: The revival of Brahmanism had begun during the Sunga period. The Guptas continued that trend. From inscriptions, we learn that the Guptas constructed many temples and made liberal grants to religious institutions. The Guptas also performed Vedic rites and rituals, although those were probably not popular among the masses. The Guptas also revived the Asvamedha sacrifice.

Vaishnavism had also become very popular, because people believed that Lord Vishnu was an incarnation of the almighty and he had taken birth in the form of various avatars to protect the people from demons.

Shaivism: While the Gupta, Pallava and Ganga rulers patronized Vaishnavism, the Bharsivas, Vakatakas and the rulers of the Nala dynasty extended their patronization to Saivism. Prithvisen and Saba, important officers of the Guptas, were ardent followers of Saivism. Siva was worshipped in different forms.

The majority of the Siva images of the Gupta period combine the phallic with the human form.

Hindu renaissance

Prior to the Guptas, during the Kushana and Mauryan rule, Buddhism flourished in India. Emperors like Asoka and Kanishka spread Buddhism throughout India and also abroad. It was only after the Sungas came to power that Hinduism saw a revival which progressed further under the Guptas.

The Gupta rulers were unfaltering believers of Hinduism and they had profound faith in Vedic scriptures. Brahmins gained importance in society. On account of the great progress of Hinduism, the Gupta age came to be termed as an age of Hindu Renaissance. The Gupta age not only saw a revival of Hinduism, but also that of Sanskrit. Sanskrit was made the state language and the rulers adopted it for their coins. The great literary works of this age are all in Sanskrit.

Economic Conditions

The country had greatly prospered during the Gupta period. The Guptas were benevolent monarchs and established peace and order in the country. Without peace, a country can never



prosper. Agriculture, trade and commerce greatly flourished under the encouragement of the Guptas.

Agriculture

During the Gupta period, agriculture was the basis of economic life. Agricultural land was not owned by the state but by individual families. Many kinds of crops were grown. Peasants received state assistance when needed. The Sudarshan Lake in Gujarat was repaired by Skandagupta to aid agriculture and irrigation. Scientific methods of improving agricultural produces were encouraged.

Trade and Industry

Trade

Agriculture and different professions gave an impetus to trade. There was brisk internal trade during the Gupta period. Fa Hien's description reveals that traders were given full freedom and could easily move from one place to another. Trade relations existed with foreign countries and internal trade was made possible by good transportation and road networks and also sea routes. Ujjain, Banaras, Vaishali, Gaya, Prayaga, Pataliputra and Mathura were important centres of trade. According to Fa Hien, roads on the trade network were safe and free of any incidents. Merchants mainly carried their goods on bullock carts. Rivers such as the Ganges, Krishna, Godaveri and Brahmaputra were also utilized for trade networks. Most of the trade was carried out for commodities such as clothes, wheat, spices, salt, diamonds and precious stones.

Trade through rivers was cheap and comfortable. This period saw the flourish of the ship-building industry. Important ports include Tamralipti in Bengal and Tondai in the south. There are even records of Roman merchants arriving in India for trade in precious stones, clothes, perfumes, spices, drugs, coconut and ivory. Copper, tin, lead, dates and horses were important items of import.

Check Your Progress

4. What were the two main features of the Gupta administration?
5. What was the main source of income in the Gupta Empire?
6. Mention the chief religions of the Gupta Empire.

6.4 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.

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

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 Bhitaraogaon, 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.

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.

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).

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.

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 *Natya Shastra* (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.

Check Your Progress

7. What were the most famous paintings of the Gupta period?
8. What is the *Natya Shastra*?

6.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Chandragupta I was the first independent ruler of the Gupta dynasty.
2. The main event of the age of Chandragupta was to enter into marital alliance with the Lichchhavis, who were very powerful during that time. He strengthened his position by establishing matrimonial relationship with the Lichchhavis and expanded his empire from Awadha and Magadha to Prayaga in the coastal areas of the Ganges.



3. Some of the foreign states, such as Daivaputra, Shahi, Shanushahi, Shaka, Murunda, Saimhal, etc., were conquered by Samudragupta.
4. The Gupta government had the following two bases:
 - Monarchy: The nature of the Gupta administration was monarchical, with the emperor as the supreme authority. In the Prayaga Edict, Samudragupta has been referred to as a king who lived on earth like god.
 - Feudal system: The Gupta Empire was vast and, therefore, ruling over it was very difficult without decentralization. Hence, the feudal system was introduced.
5. The main source of income in the Gupta Empire was land-tax.
6. The following were the chief religions of the Gupta Empire:
 - Buddhism
 - Jainism
 - Hinduism
 - Shaivism
7. The most famous paintings of the Gupta period were the caves of Ajanta (Maharashtra) and Bagh (Madhya Pradesh).
8. The Natya Shastra is an ancient Indian treatise on the performing arts, comprising theatre, dance and music.

6.6 SUMMARY

- 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.
- The sources of information for the Gupta period comprise both literary and archaeological. These are found all over the country from Bengal to Kathiawar.
- 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.
- After Ghatotkach, his son Chandragupta I (AD 319–324) became king of this dynasty. He was the first independent ruler of this dynasty as the previous Gupta rulers were feudatories/vassals.
- The main event of the age of Chandragupta was to enter into marital alliance with the Lichhavis, who were very powerful during that time.
- After Chandragupta, 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.
- 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.



- The Gupta administrative system was based on earlier historical tradition to which several amendments had been made to adapt it to the contemporary situation.
- The king was the axis of the central government because it was a monarchy. The king was the highest official in the government, army, justice and other aspects of administration.
- The judicial system was highly competent. It is evident from Narada Smriti that there were four types of judicial courts – (1) royal (2) puga (3) guild and (4) family.
- The position of women had deteriorated during the Gupta age. Women had to live under various restrictions throughout their lives.
- Slavery was common in Gupta society. Slaves included prisoners of war, bankrupts and gamblers who had lost their freedom. Their servitude, however, was not permanent.
- 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.

6.7 KEY WORDS

- **Monarchy:** A monarchy is a form of government in which a group, generally a family representing a dynasty, embodies the country's national identity and its head, the monarch, exercises the role of sovereignty.
- **Slavery:** Slavery is the system by which people are owned by other people as slaves.
- **Shaivism:** Shaivism is one of the major traditions within Hinduism that reveres Shiva as the Supreme Being.

6.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Chandragupta I
2. Identify the demerits of the Gupta administration system.
3. What was the position of women during the Gupta age?
4. What were the economic conditions of the Gupta Empire?
5. What made the Gupta period the Golden age of Indian history?

Long-Answer Question

1. Explain the Gupta administrative system.
2. Discuss the social conditions of the Gupta Empire.
3. Explain the religious conditions of the Gupta Empire.
4. Discuss the various achievements of the Gupta golden age?
5. Write a detailed essay on the achievements of Samudragupta.



6.9 FURTHER READINGS

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DECLINE OF GUPTAS AND RISE OF HARSHAVARDHANA STRUCTURE

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Decline of the Gupta Empire
- 7.3 Harshavardhana
 - 7.3.1 Rise of Harshavardhana
- 7.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.8 Further Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

The Gupta dynasty had the distinction of providing to the country a galaxy of great kings. Comparatively, they stayed longer at the top. They trained their successors well in the art and science of maintaining a huge empire, peace and fighting wars; and kept the inevitable at bay. They avoided the pitfalls such as neglect of training the successors, single-track approach in polity, dominance of ideology to the neglect of other vital interests, concentration of power at the top, state monopoly in trade, top heavy and expensive bureaucracy and neglect of the war machine. On the political front, however, there is nothing to distinguish the Gupta monarchs from those who preceded and succeeded them. They did not discard the ancient belief that the local power in the interest of total unity should be eradicated and institutions should be developed to train leadership and to encourage the people to participate in decision-making at higher levels. It appears that the people had no direct role in administration and politics. They seem to have been mute witnesses to the succession or elimination of kings and to matters of peace and war. Over the time, the dynasty suffered loss of vitality, vigour and authority. And, as the succession conflicts, internal challenge and external pressure developed, there followed the squeezing of the empire territorially to nothingness and with it, its grandeur too obscured.

In this unit, you will identify the causes of disintegration of the Gupta Empire. You will also list the factors responsible for the rise of Harshavardhana.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

3After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the social reasons for the fall of the Gupta Empire
- List the factors responsible for the rise of Harshavardhana
- Identify the cultural achievements of Harsha
- Describe the Harsha's administrative system

7.2 DECLINE OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

The causes of disintegration of the Gupta Empire are as follows:



- **Internal dissensions:** The post-Skandagupta period was characterized by internal dissensions within the reigning family. Though the records are silent on the course of events, it is in view of the available information assumed that the dissensions created factions, generated divided loyalties, weakened the political system, rendered the central authority weak and lowered the prestige of the emperor. The death of Samundragupta was tantamount to the removing of the cornerstone of the edifice.
- **Confused succession:** In the present state of knowledge, scholars have not been able to fix among the later Guptas the order of succession and duration of the reigns of several kings whose names have been revealed by the coins and inscription. Some appear to have ascended the throne only to be removed later. The stress and strain under which the political system and administration must have operated is imaginable. It must have caused severe weakness to the system.
- **Short reigns and quick successions:** The later Guptas present a spectacle of short reigns and quick successions. The reigning heads must have been unable to consolidate their position and make their authority felt. Especially, in view of the situation that a king was the pivot around whom everything moved, and that his personality influenced the policy and administration, short reigns and quick success of kings must have wrecked the system in several directions.
- **Centrifugal tendencies:** Factionalism was thus dominant and its impact was percolative. Once the central authority developed infirmities, local chiefs asserted their strengths. Thus, Budhagupta, though acknowledged as the paramount authority, had to make an awkward compromise to maintain the apparent in installing a successor of Bhatarka to the royal status in Malwa. It could never have been to his pleasure. The other provincial heads too made their offices hereditary. Some among them assumed royal titles. The emperor in his high position must have felt his empire crumbling and imagined the inviolable. The centrifugal forces thus demolished the empire steadily.
- **Inability of the reigning heads:** None among the later Guptas had the ability to check the rot that the system had developed from within. The crowned heads failed to stand up to the challenge and arrest the forces of decline. They were mute witnesses to the tragic spectacle.
- **Lack of political comprehension and mental vigour:** The later Gupta kings lacked these qualities substantially. Budhagupta, Baladitya and the others had hardly any leadership qualities. They were unable to play their rightful role. The case of Baladaliya is highly illustrative in this connection. On coming to know that an attack by Mihirakula, the Hun was imminent, he summoned his ministers and as narrated by Hiuen Tsang, told them: 'I hear that these thieves are coming and I cannot fight with them (their troops;) by the permission of my ministers I will conceal my poor person among the bushes of the morass.' The story may or may not be correct, but it is obvious that the later Guptas did not have the qualities to sustain their authority and integrity of the empire. Their political thinking and military ability was not in agreement with the requirement of their high office.
- **Depredations caused by Toramana and Mihirakula:** The Guptas, unlike the Mauryas neglected the defense of the north-western region. They did not maintain effective control over the mountain passes and the plains of the Punjab. Thus, the Huns came down to the plains unhindered. They caused devastation in the region and had to be fought back on the plains. Later, the region fell to the depredations of Toramana and Mihirakula for the same reason. The wars they engendered and the devastation they caused weakened the central authority and the political system. The depredations caused by Toramana and his son



Mihirakula exhausted the nerve of the empire even though both of them were ultimately defeated. Yet it humiliated royalty and frustrated the common man. It must have torn apart the prestige of the great empire in a tragic way. The western part of the empire was most subjected to the barbaric vandalism.

• **Economic disruption:** The depredations caused by Toramana and Mihirakula must have disrupted the economic activity, destroyed security and arrested social mobility. The scarcity of gold coins brought in circulation by Budhagupta and his later debasement of the gold coins indicates that the economic prosperity had suffered a severe dent. The western part of the country had been rendered unsafe.

• **Challenge and rebellions:** The disruption and insecurity was rendered worse by the challenge the rebels threw to the emperor. Harisena (AD 475– 510), the Vakataka ruler was the first to unfurl his standard of rebellion. He occupied Malwa and Gujarat. Yasodharman, a local chief of Malwa, established independent authority and carried raids all around and wrecked the empire. Others followed the course. It is difficult to say which of the several causes were more significant than the rest that brought about the end of the empire. It is clear, however, that the story commenced with the internal dissensions. The crowned heads did not show the ability to meet the challenge. The adverse effect of the raids of Toramana and Mihirakula on the course of events cannot be denied. It is, however, obvious that the decline was not sudden. It followed its natural course

Check Your Progress

1. What were the causes of disintegration of the Gupta Empire?
2. When did the Gupta Empire fall?

7.3 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.

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.



7.3.1 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 throne, he vowed to destroy Gaur and kill Shashanka.

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 command 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'.

Harsha's achievements

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...Subela....Astagiri.... 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.

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.

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 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.

Social and economic condition under his rule

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-Budhhists 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.'

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 skilfully 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). Grama 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 (landtax). 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. Onesixth 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.

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.

Check Your Progress

3. Who was the founder of the Vardhana dynasty?
4. Who was the first powerful king of the Vardhana dynasty?

7.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The causes of disintegration of the Gupta Empire were as follows:

- Internal dissensions
- Confused succession
- Short reigns and quick successions

2. The Gupta Empire ended in 550 CE, when it disintegrated into regional kingdoms after a series of weak rulers and invasions from the east, west, and north.



3. Pushyabhuti was the founder of the Vardhana dynasty.
4. Prabhakara Vardhana was the first powerful king of the Vardhana dynasty.

7.5 SUMMARY

- The Gupta dynasty had the distinction of providing to the country a galaxy of great kings. Comparatively, they stayed longer at the top.
- They trained their successors well in the art and science of maintaining a huge empire, peace and fighting wars; and kept the inevitable at bay.
- The death of Samundragupta was tantamount to the removing of the cornerstone of the edifice.
- The later Guptas present a spectacle of short reigns and quick successions. The reigning heads must have been unable to consolidate their position and make their authority felt.
- None among the later Guptas had the ability to check the rot that the system had developed from within.
- The Guptas, unlike the Mauryas neglected the defense of the north-western region.
- After the decline of the Gupta Empire, the political unity of India was once again disintegrated. Anarchy prevailed everywhere in the country.
- After the death of his brother Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana (AD 606– 647) ascended the throne at the age of sixteen in AD 606.
- Harshacharita, written by Banabhatta, mentions that Harsha marched with a powerful army to take his revenge against Shashanka.
- 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 first example of the cultural achievements of Harsha was organizing the Kannauj Assembly.
- 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.'

7.6 KEY WORDS

- Factionalism: Factionalism refers to arguments or disputes between two or more small groups from within a larger group.
- Chaitya: A chaitya, chaitya hall, chaitya-griha, or caitya refers to a shrine, sanctuary, temple or prayer hall in Indian religions.
- Stupa: A stupa is a mound-like or hemispherical structure containing relics that is used as a place of meditation.

7.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What led to the decline of the Gupta Empire?
2. List the factors responsible for the rise of Harshavardhana



- . 3. Write a short note on Harsha's conquests.
4. What was the literary interest of Harsha?
5. What was Harsha's religious belief?

Long-Answer Question

1. Discuss the social reasons for the fall of the Gupta Empire.
2. Explain the relation of Harsha with China.
3. Discuss the cultural achievements of Harsha.
4. Describe the Harsha's administrative system.
5. Harsha's characteristic had the mixture of the qualities of Ashoka and Samudragupta. Elaborate.

7.8 FURTHER READINGS

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