

CHAPTER 9

*The Later Vedic Phase: Transition to the State and Social Orders***Expansion in the Later Vedic Period (c.1000-500 B.C.)**

THE HISTORY of the later Vedic period is based mainly on the Vedic texts which were compiled after the age of the *Rig Veda*. The collections of the Vedic hymns or *mantras* were known as the *Samhitās*. The *Rig Veda Samhitā* is the oldest Vedic text, on the basis of which we have described the early Vedic age. For purposes of recitation, the prayers of the *Rig Veda* were set to tune, and this modified collection was known as the *Sama Veda Samhitā*. In addition to the *Sama Veda*, in post-Rig Vedic times two other collections were composed. These were — the *Yajur Veda Samhitā* and the *Atharva Veda Samhitā*. The *Yajur Veda* contains not only hymns but also rituals which have to accompany their recitation. The rituals reflect the social and political milieu in which they arose. The *Atharva Veda* contains charms and spells to ward off evils and diseases. Its contents throw light on the beliefs and practices of the non-Aryans. The Vedic *Samhitās* were followed by the composition of a series of texts known as the *Brahmaṇas*. These are full of ritualistic formulae and explain the social and religious meaning of rituals.



9.1 Painted Grey Ware

All these later Vedic texts were compiled in the upper Gangetic basin in circa 1000-500 B.C. In the same period and in the same area, digging and exploration have brought to light nearly 700 sites inhabited for the first time. These are called Painted Grey Ware (PGW) sites because they were inhabited by people who used earthen bowls and dishes made of painted grey pottery. They also used iron weapons. With the combined evidence from the later Vedic texts and PGW iron-phase archaeology we can form an idea of

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the life of the people in the first half of the first millennium B.C. in western Uttar Pradesh and adjoining areas of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

The texts show that the Aryans expanded from Punjab over the whole of western Uttar Pradesh covered by the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*. The Bharatas and Purus, the two major tribes, combined and thus formed the Kuru people. In the beginning they lived between the Sarasvati and the Drishadvati just on the fringe of the *doab*. Soon the Kurus occupied Delhi and the upper portion of the *doab*, the area called Kurukshetra or the land of the Kurus. Gradually they coalesced with a people called the Panchalas, who occupied the middle portion of the *doab*. The authority of the Kuru-Panchala people spread over Delhi, and the upper and middle parts of the *doab*. They set up their capital at Hastinapur situated in the district of Meerut. The history of the Kuru tribe is important for the battle of Bharata, which is the main theme of the great epic called the *Mahabharata*. This war is supposed to have been fought around 950 B.C. between, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, although both of them belonged to the Kuru clan. As a result practically the whole of the Kuru clan was wiped out.

Excavations at Hastinapur, datable to the period 900 B.C. to 500 B.C., have revealed settlements and faint beginnings of town life. But they do not at all answer the description of Hastinapur in the *Mahabharata* because the epic was finally compiled much later in about the fourth century A.D. when material life had advanced much. In later Vedic times

people hardly knew the use of burnt bricks. The mud structures that have been discovered at Hastinapur could not be imposing and lasting. From traditions we learn that Hastinapur was flooded, and the remnants of the Kuru clan moved to Kaushambi near Allahabad.

The Panchala kingdom, which covered the modern districts of Bareilly, Badaun and Farukhabad, is famous for its philosopher kings and brahmana theologians mentioned in later Vedic texts.

Towards the end of the later Vedic period, around 600 B.C. the Vedic people spread from the *doab* further east to Koshala in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha in north Bihar. Although Koshala is associated with the story of Rama, it is not mentioned in Vedic literature. In eastern Uttar Pradesh and north Bihar the Vedic people had to contend against a people who used copper implements and the black-and-red earthen pots. In western Uttar Pradesh they possibly came up against the people who used pots of ochre or red colour and copper implements. They possibly also encountered thin habitations of some people using black-and-red ware. It is suggested that at a few places they came against the users of the late Harappan culture, but these people seem to represent a conglomerate culture which cannot be characterised as purely Harappan. Whoever be the opponents of the later Vedic people, evidently they did not occupy any large and compact area, and their number in the upper Gangetic basin does not seem to have been large. The Vedic people succeeded in the second phase of their expansion because

they used iron weapons and horse-drawn chariots.

The PGW-Iron Phase Culture and Later Vedic Economy

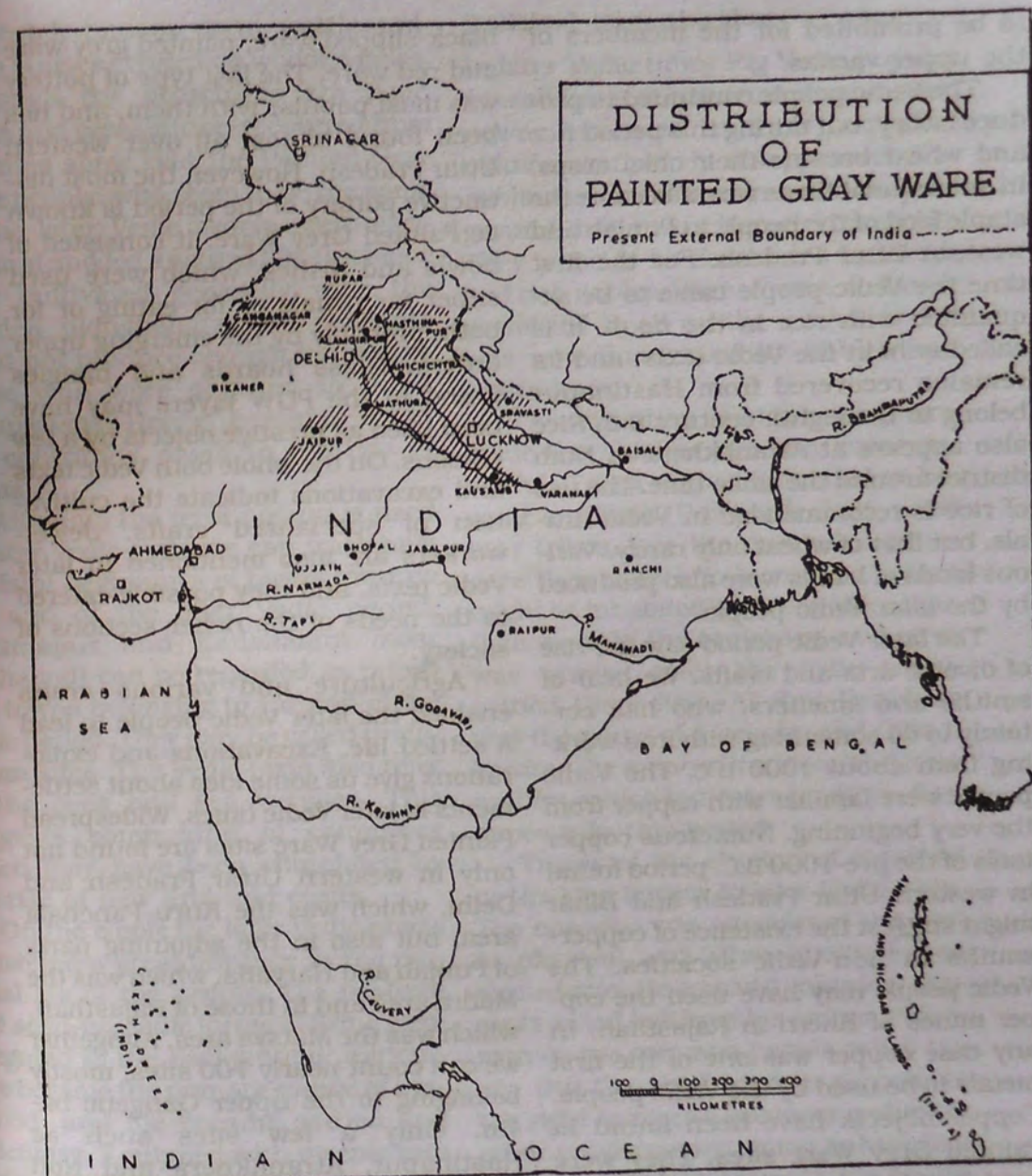
Around 1000 B.C. iron appears in Dharwar district in Karnataka but how it spread from here is not clear. However, from the same time onwards iron was used in the Gandhara area in Pakistan. Iron implements buried with dead bodies have been discovered in good numbers. They have also been found in Baluchistan. At about the same time the use of iron appeared in eastern Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Excavations show that iron weapons such as arrow-heads and spear-heads came to be commonly used in western Uttar Pradesh from about 800 B.C. onwards. With iron weapons the Vedic people may have defeated the few adversaries that may have faced them in the upper portion of the *doab*. The iron axe may have been used to clear the forests in the upper Gangetic basin, although because of rainfall ranging between 35 cm to 65 cm these forests may not have been so thick. Towards the end of the Vedic period knowledge of iron spread in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha. The earliest iron implements discovered in this area belong to the seventh Century B.C., and the metal itself is called *shyama* or *krishna ayas* in the later Vedic texts.

Although very few agricultural tools made of iron have been found, undoubtedly agriculture was the chief means of livelihood of the later Vedic people. Later Vedic texts speak of six, eight, twelve and even twenty-four oxen yoked to the plough. This may



9.2 Iron Objects from PGW layers at Atranjikhhera

be an exaggeration. Ploughing was done with the help of the wooden ploughshare, which would possibly work in the light soil of the upper Gangetic plains. Enough bullocks could not be available because of cattle slaughter in sacrifices. Therefore, agriculture was primitive, but there is no doubt about its wide prevalence. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* speaks at length about the ploughing rituals. According to ancient legends, Janaka, the king of Videha and father of Sita, lent his hand to the plough. In those days even kings and princes did not hesitate to take to manual labour. Balarama, the brother of Krishna, is called Haladhar or wielder of the plough. In later times ploughing came



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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the appropriate base line.

Figure 7 PGW Cultures

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 *urhi* in the Vedic texts, and its remains recovered from Hastinapur belong to the eighth century B.C. Rice also appears at Atranjikhhera in Etah district around the same time. The use of rice is recommended in Vedic rituals, but that of wheat only rarely. Various kinds of lentils were also produced by the later Vedic people.

The later Vedic period saw the rise of diverse arts and crafts. We hear of smiths and smelters, who had certainly to do something with iron working from about 1000 B.C. The Vedic people were familiar with copper from the very beginning. Numerous copper tools of the pre-1000 B.C. period found in western Uttar Pradesh and Bihar might suggest the existence of copper-smiths in non-Vedic societies. The Vedic people may have used the copper mines of Khetri in Rajasthan. In any case copper was one of the first metals to be used by the Vedic people. Copper objects have been found in Painted Grey Ware sites. They were used mainly for war and hunting, and also for ornaments.

Weaving was confined to women but was practised on a wide scale. Leather work, pottery, and carpenter's work made great progress. 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 most distinctive pottery of the period is known as Painted Grey Ware. It consisted of bowls and dishes, which were used either for rituals or for eating or for both, probably by the emerging upper orders. Glass hoards and bangles found in the PGW layers may have been used as prestige objects by a few persons. On the whole both Vedic texts and excavations indicate the cultivation of specialized crafts. Jewel-workers are also mentioned in later Vedic texts, and they possibly catered to the needs of the richer sections of society.

Agriculture and various crafts enabled the later Vedic people to lead a settled life. Excavations and explorations give us some idea about settlements in later Vedic times. Widespread Painted Grey Ware sites are found not only in western Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, which was the Kuru-Panchala area, but also in the adjoining parts of Punjab and Haryana, which was the Madra area and in those of Rajasthan, which was the Matsya area. Altogether we can count nearly 700 sites, mostly belonging to the upper Gangetic basin. Only a few sites such as Hastinapur, Atranjikhhera and Noh have been excavated. Since the thickness of the material remains of habitation ranges from one metre to three metres, it seems that these settlements lasted from one to three centuries. Mostly these were entirely new settlements without having any immediate predecessors. People lived in

mudbrick houses or in wattle-and-daub houses erected on wooden poles. Although the structures are poor, ovens and cereals (rice) recovered from the sites show that the Painted Grey Ware people, who seem to be the same as the later Vedic people, were agricultural and led a settled life. But since they cultivated generally with the wooden ploughshare, the peasants could not produce enough for feeding those who were engaged in other occupations. Hence, peasants could not contribute much to the rise of towns.

Although the term *nagara* is used in later Vedic texts we can trace only the faint beginnings of towns towards the end of the later Vedic period. Hastinapur and Kaushambi (near Allahabad) can be regarded as primitive towns belonging to the end of the Vedic period. They may be called proto-urban sites. The Vedic texts also refer to the seas and sea voyages. This suggests some kind of commerce which may have been stimulated by the rise of new arts and crafts.

On the whole the later Vedic phase registered a great advance in the material life of the people. The pastoral and semi-nomadic forms of living were relegated to the background. Agriculture became the primary source of livelihood, and life became settled and sedentary. Equipped with diverse arts and crafts the Vedic people now settled down permanently in the upper Gangetic plains. The peasants living in the plains produced enough to maintain themselves, and they could also spare a marginal part of their produce for the support of chiefs, princes and priests.

Political Organization

In later Vedic times Rig Vedic popular assemblies lost importance, and royal power increased at their cost. The *vidatha* completely disappeared. The *sabha* and *samiti* continued to hold the ground, but their character changed. They came to be dominated by chiefs and rich nobles. Women were no longer permitted to sit on the *sabha*, and it was now dominated by nobles and brahmanas.

The formation of bigger kingdoms made the chief or the king more powerful. Tribal authority tended to become territorial. Princes or chiefs ruled over tribes, but the dominant tribes gave their names to territories, which might be inhabited by tribes other than their own. In the beginning each area was named after the tribe which settled there first. At first Panchala was the name of a people, and then it became the name of a region. The term *rashtra*, which indicates territory, first appears in this period.

Traces of the election of the chief or the king appear in later Vedic texts. The one who was considered the best in physical and other qualities was elected *raja*. He received voluntary presents called *bali* from his ordinary kinsmen or the common people called the *uts*. But the chief tried to perpetuate the right to receive presents and enjoy other privileges pertaining to his office by making it hereditary in his family; the post generally went to the eldest son. However, this succession was not always smooth. The *Mahabharata* tells us that Duryodhana, the younger cousin of Yudhishtira, usurped power. For the sake of territory the families of the Pandavas and Kauravas

practically destroyed themselves. The Bharata battle shows that kingship knows no kinship.

The king's influence was strengthened by rituals. He performed the *rajasuya* sacrifice, which was supposed to confer supreme power on him. He performed the *ashvamedha*, which meant unquestioned control over an area in which the royal horse ran uninterrupted. He also performed the *vajapeya* or the chariot race, in which the royal chariot was made to win the race against his kinsmen. All these rituals impressed the people with the increasing power and prestige of the king.

During this period collection of taxes and tributes seems to have become common. They were probably deposited with an officer called *sangrihitri*. The epics tell us that at the time of big sacrifices large-scale distributions were made by the princes and all sections of people were fed sumptuously. In the discharge of his duties the king was assisted by the priest, the commander, the chief queen and a few other high functionaries. At the lower level, the administration was possibly carried on by village assemblies, which may have been controlled by the chiefs of the dominant clans. These assemblies also tried local cases. But even in later Vedic times the king did not possess a standing army. Tribal units were mustered in times of war, and according to one ritual for success in war, the king had to eat along with his people (*vis*) from the same plate.

Social Organisation

The later Vedic society came to be divided into four varnas called the

brahmanas, rajanyas or kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. The growth of sacrifices enormously added the power of the brahmanas. In the beginning the brahmanas were one of the sixteen classes of priest but they gradually overshadowed the other priestly groups and emerged as the most important class. The rise in importance of the brahmanas is a peculiar development which is not found in Aryan societies outside India. It appears that non-Aryan elements had some role to play in the formation of the brahmana varna. They conducted rituals and sacrifices for their clients and for themselves, and also officiated at the festivals associated with agricultural operations. They prayed for the success of their patron in war, and in return the king pledged not to do any harm to them. Sometimes the brahmanas came into conflict with the rajanyas, who represented the order of the warrior-nobles, for positions of supremacy. But when the two upper orders had to deal with the lower orders they made up their differences. From the end of the later Vedic period on it began to be emphasised that the two should cooperate to rule over the rest of society.

The vaishyas constituted the common people, and they were assigned to do the producing functions such as agriculture, cattle-breeding, etc. Some of them also worked as artisans. Towards the end of the Vedic period they began to engage in trade. The vaishyas appear to be the only tribute-payers in later Vedic times, and the brahmanas and kshatriyas are represented as living on the tributes collected from the vaishyas. The process

of subjugating the mass of the tribesmen to the position of tribute-payers was long and protracted. We have several rituals prescribed for making the refractory people (*vis* or *vaishya*) submissive to the prince (*raja*) and to his close kinsmen called the rajanyas. This was done with the help of the priests who also fattened at the cost of people or the vaishyas. All the three higher varnas shared one common feature: they were entitled to *upanayana* or investiture with the sacred thread according to the Vedic *mantras*. The fourth varna was deprived of the sacred thread ceremony and the recitation of the *gayatri* mantra and with this began the imposition of disabilities on the shudras.

The prince, who represented the *rajanya* order, tried to assert his power over all the three other varnas. In the *Aitareya Brahmana*, a text of the later Vedic period, in relation to the prince the brahmana is described as a seeker of livelihood and an acceptor of gifts but removable at will. A vaishya is called tribute-paying, meant for being beaten, and to be oppressed at will. The worst position is reserved for the shudras. He is called the servant of another, to be made to work at will by another, and to be beaten at will.

Generally the later Vedic texts draw a line of demarcation between the three higher orders on the one hand, and the shudras on the other. There were, nevertheless, several public rituals connected with the coronation of the king in which the shudras participated, presumably as survivors of the original Aryan society.

of artisans such as *rathakara* or chariot-maker enjoyed a high status, and were entitled to the sacred thread ceremony. Therefore, even in later Vedic times varna distinctions had not advanced very far.

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 stronger. Male ancestors came to be worshipped. Women were generally given a lower position. 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.

The institution of *gotra* appeared in later Vedic times. Literally it means the cow-pen or the place where cattle belonging to the whole clan are kept, but in course of time it signified descent from a common ancestor. People began to practise *gotra* exogamy. No marriage could take place between persons belonging to the same *gotra* or having the same lineage.

Ashramas or four stages of life were not well established in Vedic times. In the post-Vedic texts we hear of four *ashramas*—that of *Brahmachari* or student, *grihastha* or householder, *vanaprastha* or hermit and *sannyasin* or ascetic who completely renounced the worldly life. Only the first three are mentioned in the later Vedic texts; the last or the fourth stage had not been well established in later Vedic times though ascetic life was not unknown. Even in post-Vedic times only the stage of the householder was commonly practised by all the varnas.

Gods, Rituals and Philosophy

In the later Vedic period the upper doab developed to be the cradle of Aryan culture under brahmanical influence. The whole of the Vedic literature seems to have been compiled in this area in the land of the Kuru-Panchalas. The cult of sacrifice central to this culture was accompanied by rituals and formulae.

The two outstanding Rig Vedic gods, Indra and Agni, lost their former importance. On the other hand, Prajapati the creator, came to occupy the supreme position in the later Vedic pantheon. Some of the other minor gods of the Rig Vedic period also came to the forefront. Rudra, the god of animals, became important in later Vedic times, and Vishnu came to be conceived as the preserver and protector of the people who now led a settled life instead of a semi-nomadic life as they did in Rig Vedic times. In addition, some objects began to be worshipped as symbols of divinity; signs of idolatry appear in later Vedic times. As society became divided into social classes, such as brahmanas, rajanyas, vaishyas and shudras, some of the social orders came to have their own deities. Pushan, who was supposed to look after cattle, came to be regarded as the god of the shudras, although in the age of the *Rig Veda* cattle rearing was the primary occupation of the Aryans.

People worshipped gods for the same material reasons in this period as they did in earlier times. However, the mode of worship changed considerably. Prayers continued to be recited, but they ceased to be the dominant part of allocating the gods. Sacrifices

became far more important, and they assumed both public and domestic character. Public sacrifices involved the king and the whole of the community, which was still in many cases identical with the tribe. Private sacrifices were performed by individuals in their houses because in this period the Vedic people led a settled life and maintained regular households. Individuals offered oblations to Agni, and each one of these took the form of a ritual or sacrifice.

Sacrifices involved the killing of animals on a large scale and, especially the destruction of cattle wealth. The guest was known as *goghna* or one who was fed on cattle.

Sacrifices were accompanied by formulae which had to be carefully pronounced by the sacrificer. The sacrificer was known as the *yajamana*, the performer of *yajna*, and much of his success depended on the magical power of words uttered correctly in the sacrifices. Some rituals performed by the Vedic Aryans are common to the Indo-European peoples, but many rituals seem to have been developed on the Indian soil.

These formulae and sacrifices were invented, adopted and elaborated by the priests called the brahmanas. The brahmanas 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 *rajasuya* sacrifice.

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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 *Shatapatha Brahmana* states that in the *ashvamedha*, north, south, east and west all should be given to the priest. If this really happened, then what would remain to the king? This, therefore, merely indicates the desire of the priests to grab as much land as possible. But really considerable transfer of land to priests could not have taken place. There is a reference where land, which was being given to the priests, refused to be transferred to them.

Towards the end of the Vedic period began a strong reaction against priestly domination, against cults and rituals, especially in the land of the Panchalas and Videha where, around 600 B.C., the Upanishads were compiled. These philosophical texts criticized the rituals and laid stress on the value of right belief and knowledge. They emphasised that the knowledge of the self or *atman* should be acquired and the relation of *atman* with Brahma should be properly understood. Brahma emerged as the supreme entity, comparable to the powerful kings of the period. Some of the kshatriya princes in Panchala and Videha also cultivated this type of thinking and created the atmosphere for the reform of the priest-dominated religion. Their teaching promoted the cause of

stability and integration. Emphasis on the changelessness, indestructibility and immortality of *atman* or soul served the cause of stability which was needed for the rising state power headed by the kshatriya raja. Stress on the relation of *atman* with Brahma fostered allegiance to superior authority.

The later Vedic period saw certain important changes. We find the beginnings of territorial kingdoms. Wars were fought not only for the possession of cattle but also for that of territory. The famous Mahabharata battle, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, is attributed to this period. The predominantly pastoral society of early Vedic times had become agricultural. The tribal pastoralists came to be transformed into peasants who could maintain their chief with frequent tributes. Chiefs grew at the expense of the tribal peasantry, and handsomely rewarded the priests who supported their patrons against the common people called the vaishyas. The shudras were still a small serving order. The tribal society broke up into a varna-divided society. But varna distinctions could not be carried too far. In spite of the support of the brahmanas, the rajanyas or the kshatriyas could not establish a state system. A state cannot be set up without a regular system of taxes and a professional army, which again depends on taxes. But the existing mode of agriculture did not leave scope for taxes and tributes in sufficient measure.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the following terms and concepts: Ashvamedha, Vajapeya, Sangrihitri, Vis, Upanayana, Gotra, Yajna, Painted Grey Ware.
2. What is meant by the 'Later Vedic Phase'? What are the main sources for the study of this period?
3. How was the material life of the later Vedic people different from that of the Rig Vedic people? Give examples.
4. Describe the political system in the later Vedic period. How was it different from that of the Rig Vedic people?
5. Describe the social organization during the later Vedic age.
6. Trace the expansion of the Vedic people in the later Vedic period.
7. Point out the changes in the religious beliefs and practices in the later Vedic age. Discuss the reasons for the increase in the importance of the brahmanas in society. Describe the main ideas emphasized in the Upanishads.

CHAPTER 10

Jainism and Buddhism

NUMEROUS religious sects arose in the middle Gangetic plains in the second half of the sixth century B.C. We hear of as many as 62 religious sects. Many of these sects were based on regional customs and rituals practised by different people living in north-east India. Of these sects Jainism and Buddhism were the most important, and they emerged as the most potent religious reform movements.

Causes of Origin

In post-Vedic times society was clearly divided into four varnas: brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. Each varna was assigned well-defined functions, although it was emphasised that varna was based on birth and the two higher varnas were given some privileges. The brahmanas, 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 post-Vedic texts we have many 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 taxpayers. However along with the two higher varnas they were placed in the category of *dvija* or the twice-born. A *dvija* was entitled to wearing the sacred thread and studying the Vedas from which the shudras were kept out. The shudras were meant for serving the three higher varnas, and along with women were barred from taking to Vedic studies. They appear 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. The higher the varna the more privileged and purer a person was. The lower the varna of an offender, the more severe was the punishment prescribed for him.

Naturally the varna-divided society seems to have generated tensions. We have no means to find out the reactions of the vaishyas and the shudras. But the kshatriyas, who functioned as rulers, reacted strongly against the ritualistic domination of the brahmanas, and seem to have led a kind of protest movement against the importance attached to birth in the varna system. The kshatriya reaction against the domination of the priestly class called brahmanas, who claimed

various privileges, was one of the causes of the origin of new religions. Vardhamana Mahavira, who founded Jainism, and Gautama Buddha, who founded Buddhism belonged to the kshatriya clan, and both disputed the authority of the brahmanas.

But the real cause of the rise of these new religions lay in the spread of a new agricultural economy in north-eastern India. North-east India, including the regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern and southern

PLATE VI



PUNCH-MARKED SILVER

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

The period saw the rise of a large number of cities in north-eastern India. We may refer, for example, to Kausambi near Allahabad, Kusinagar

Banaras, Vaishali (in the newly created district of the same name in north Bihar), Chirand (in Saran district) and Rajgir (situated at a distance of about 100 km south-east of Patna). Besides others these cities had many artisans and traders, who began to use coins for the first time. The earliest coins belong to the fifth century B.C., and they are called punch-marked coins. They circulated for the first time in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The use of coins naturally facilitated trade and commerce, which added to the importance of the vaishyas. In the brahmanical society the vaishyas ranked third, the first two being brahmanas and kshatriyas. Naturally they looked for some religion which would improve their position. Besides the kshatriyas, the vaishyas extended generous support to both Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. The merchants, called the *setthis*, made handsome gifts to Gautama Buddha and his disciples. There were several reasons for it. First, Jainism and Buddhism in the initial stage did not attach any importance to the existing varna system. Second, they preached the gospel of non-violence, which would put an end to wars between different kingdoms and consequently promote trade and commerce. Third, the brahmanical law books, called the Dharmasutras, decried lending money on interest. A person who lived on interest was condemned by them. Therefore, the vaishyas, who lent money on account of growing trade and commerce, were not held in esteem and were eager to improve their

a strong reaction against various forms of private property. Old-fashioned people did not like the use and accumulation of coins made certainly of silver and copper and possibly of gold. They detested new dwellings and dresses, new systems of transport which amounted to luxury, and they hated war and violence. The new forms of property created social inequalities, and caused misery and suffering to the masses of the people. So the common people yearned to return to primitive life. They wanted to get back to the ascetic ideal which dispensed with the new forms of property and the new style of life. Both Jainism and Buddhism preferred simple, puritan ascetic living. The Buddhist and Jaina monks were asked to forego the good things of life. They were not allowed to touch gold and silver. They were to accept only as much from their patrons as was sufficient to keep body and soul together. They, therefore, rebelled against the material advantages stemming from the new life in the Gangetic basin. In other words, we find the same kind of reaction against the changes in material life in the mid-Ganga plain in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. as we notice against the changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution in modern times. The advent of the Industrial Revolution made many people think of return to the pre-machine age life; similarly people in the past wanted to return to the pre-iron age life.

Vardhamana Mahavira and Jainism

According to the Jainas, the origin of

times. They believe in twenty-four *tirthankaras* or great teachers or leaders of their religion. The first *tirthankara* is believed to be Rishabhadev who was born in Ayodhya. He is said to have laid the foundations for orderly human society. The last, twenty-fourth, *tirthankara*, was Vardhamana Mahavira who was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha. According to the Jaina tradition, most of the early *tirthankaras* were born in the middle Ganga basin and attained *nirvana* in Bihar. The twenty-third *tirthankara* was Parshvanath who was born in Varanasi. He gave up royal life and became an ascetic. Many teachings of Jainism are attributed to him. According to Jaina tradition, he lived two hundred years before Mahavira. Mahavir is said to be the twenty-fourth.

It is difficult to fix the exact dates of birth and death of Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. According to one tradition, Vardhamana Mahavira was born in 540 B.C. in a village called Kundagrama near Vaishali, which is identical with Basarh in the district of Vaishali, in north Bihar. His father Siddhartha was the head of a famous kshatriya clan called Jnatrika and the ruler of his own area. Mahavira's mother was named Trishala, sister of the Lichchhavi chief Chetaka, whose daughter was wedded to Bimbisara. Thus Mahavira's family was connected with the royal family of Magadha.

In the beginning, Mahavira led the life of a householder, but in the search for truth he abandoned the world at the age of 30 and became an ascetic. He would not stay for more than a day in a village and for more than five days in a town. During next twelve years he meditated, practised austerities of various kinds and endured many hardships. In the thirteenth year, when he had reached the age of 42, he attained *kaivalya* (Jnan). Through *kaivalya* he conquered misery and happiness. Because of this conquest he is known as Mahavira or the great hero or *jina*, i.e. the conqueror, and his followers are known as Jainas. He propagated his religion for 30 years, and his mission took him to Koshala, Magadha, Mithila, Champa, etc. He passed away at the age of 72 in 468 B.C. at a place called Pavapuri near modern Rajgir. According to another tradition, he was born in 599 B.C. and passed away in 527 B.C.

Doctrines of Jainism

Jainism taught five doctrines: (i) do not commit violence, (ii) do not speak a lie, (iii) do not steal, (iv) do not acquire property, and (v) observe continence (*brahmacharya*). It is said that only the fifth doctrine was added by Mahavira: the other four were taken over by him from previous teachers. Jainism attached the utmost importance to *ahimsa* or non-injury to living beings. Sometimes it led to absurd results, for Jainas ordered execution of

persons guilty of killing animals. Although Parshva, the predecessor of Mahavira, had asked his followers to cover the upper and lower portions of their body, Mahavira asked them to discard clothes altogether. This implies that Mahavira asked his followers to lead a more austere life. On account of this in later times, Jainism was divided into two sects: *shvetambaras* or those who put on white dress, and *digambaras* or those who keep themselves naked.

Jainism recognized the existence of the gods but placed them lower than the *jina*. It did not condemn the varna system, as Buddhism did. According to Mahavira, a person is born in a high or in a lower varna in consequence of the sins or the virtues acquired by him in the previous birth. Mahavira looks for human values even in a chandala. In his opinion, through pure and meritorious life members of the lower castes can attain liberation. Jainism mainly aims at the attainment of freedom from worldly bonds. No ritual is required for acquiring such liberation. It can be obtained through right knowledge, right faith and right action. These three are considered to be the Three Jewels or *triratna* of Jainism.

Jainism prohibited the practice of war and even agriculture for its followers because both involve the killing of living beings. Eventually the Jainas mainly confined themselves to trade and mercantile activities.

Spread of Jainism

In order to spread the teachings of Jainism, Mahavira organized an order of his followers which admitted both

followers counted 14,000 which is not a large number. Since Jainism did not very clearly mark itself out from the brahmanical religion, it failed to attract the masses. Despite this, Jainism gradually spread into south and west India where the brahmanical religion was weak. According to a late tradition, the spread of Jainism in Karnataka is attributed to Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 B.C.). The emperor became a Jaina, gave up his throne and spent the last years of his life in Karnataka as a Jaina ascetic. But this tradition is not corroborated by any other source. The second cause of the spread of Jainism in south India is said to be the great famine that took place in Magadha 200 years after the death of Mahavira. The famine lasted for twelve years, and in order to protect themselves many a Jaina went to the south under the leadership of Bhadrabahu, but the rest of them stayed back in Magadha under the leadership of Sthalabahu. The emigrant Jainas spread Jainism in south India. At the end of the famine they came back to Magadha, where they developed differences with the local Jainas. Those who came back from the south claimed that even during the famine they had strictly observed the religious rules; on the other hand, they alleged, the Jaina ascetics living in Magadha had violated those rules and had become lax. In order to sort out these differences and to compile the main teachings of Jainism a council was convened in Pataliputra, modern Patna, but the southern Jainas boycotted the council and refused to accept its decisions. From now onwards, the southern

began to be called *digambaras*, and the Magadhans *shvetambaras*. The tradition which refers to drought as the cause belongs to a later period and is considered doubtful. But it is beyond doubt that the Jainas were divided into two sects. However, epigraphic evidence for the spread of Jainism in Karnataka is not earlier than the third century A.D. In subsequent centuries, especially after the fifth century, numerous Jaina monastic establishments called *basadis* sprang up in Karnataka and were granted land by the king for their support.

Jainism spread to Kalinga in Orissa in the fourth century B.C., and in the first century B.C. it enjoyed the patronage of the Kalinga king Kharavela who had defeated the princes of Andhra and Magadha. In the second and first centuries B.C. it also seems to have reached the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. In later centuries Jainism penetrated Malwa, Gujarat and Rajasthan, and even now these areas have a good number of Jainas who are mainly engaged in trade and commerce. Although Jainism did not win as much state patronage as Buddhism did and did not spread very fast in early times, it still retains its hold in the areas where it spread. On the other hand, Buddhism practically disappeared from the Indian subcontinent.

Contribution of Jainism

Jainism made the first serious attempt to mitigate the evils of the varna order and the ritualistic Vedic religion. The early Jainas discarded Sanskrit language mainly patronized by the brahmanas. They adopted

Prakrit language of the common people to preach their doctrines. Their religious literature was written in Ardhamagadhi, and the texts were finally compiled in the sixth century A.D. in Gujarat at a place called Valabhi, a great centre of education. The adoption of Prakrit by the Jainas helped the growth of this language and its literature. Many regional languages developed out of Prakrit languages, particularly Shauraseni, out of which grew the Marathi language. The Jainas composed the earliest important works in Apabhramsha and prepared its first grammar. The Jaina literature contains epics, Puranas, novels and drama. A large portion of the Jaina writing is still in the form of manuscripts, which have not been published and which are found in the Jaina shrines of Gujarat and Rajasthan. In early medieval times the Jainas also made good use of Sanskrit and wrote many texts in it. Last but not the least, they contributed to the growth of Kannada, in which they wrote extensively.

Initially, like the Buddhists, the Jainas were not image worshippers. Later they began to worship Mahavira and also the twenty-three *tirthankaras*. Beautiful and sometimes massive images in stone were sculpted for this purpose, especially in Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Jaina art in ancient times is not as rich as Buddhist art, but Jainism contributed substantially to art and architecture in medieval times.

Gautama Buddha and Buddhism

Gautama Buddha or Siddhartha was

ing to tradition he was born in 563 B.C. in a Shakya kshatriya family in Lumbini in Nepal near Kapilavastu, which is identified with Piprahwa in Basti district and close to the foothills of Nepal. Gautama's father seems to have been the elected ruler of Kapilavastu, and headed the republican clan of the Shakyas. His mother was a princess from the Koshalan dynasty. Thus, like Mahavira, Gautama also belonged to a noble family. Born in a republic, he also inherited some egalitarian sentiments.

Since his early childhood Gautama showed a meditative bent of mind. He was married early, but married life did not interest him. He was moved by the misery which people suffered in the world, and looked for its solution. At the age of 29, like Mahavira again, he left home. He kept on wandering for about seven years and then attained knowledge at the age of 35 at Bodh Gaya under a *pipal* tree. From this time onwards he began to be called the Buddha or the enlightened.

Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermons at Sarnath in Banaras. He undertook long journeys and took his message far and wide. He had a very strong physique, which enabled him to walk 20 to 30 km a day. 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 brahmanas, but defeated them in debates. His missionary activities did not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and the man and woman. Gautama Buddha passed

away at the age of 80 in 483 B.C. at a place called Kusinagar, identical with the village called Kasia in the district of Deoria in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Doctrines of Buddhism

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 the Brahma which raged strongly in his time; he addressed himself to the worldly problems. He said that the world is full of sorrows and people suffer on account of desires. If desires are conquered, nirvana will be attained, that is, man will be free from the cycle of birth and death.

Gautama Buddha recommended an eight-fold path (*ashtangika marga*) for the elimination of human misery. This path is attributed to him in a text of about the third century B.C. It comprised right observation, right determination, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right exercise, right memory and right meditation. If a person follows this eight-fold path he would not depend on the machinations of the priests, and will be able to reach his destination. Gautama taught that a person should avoid the excess of both luxury and austerity. He prescribed the middle path.

The Buddha also laid down a code of conduct for his followers on the same lines as was done by the Jaina teachers. The main items in this social conduct are: (i) do not covet the property of others, (ii) do not commit violence, (iii) do not use intoxicants, (iv) do not speak a lie, and (v) do not engage in corrupt practices. These

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

Special Features of Buddhism and the Causes of Its Spread

Buddhism does not recognize the existence of god and soul (*atman*). This can be taken as a kind of revolution in the history of Indian religions. Since early Buddhism was not enmeshed in the clap-trap of philosophical discussion, it appealed to the common people. It particularly won the support of the lower orders as it attacked the varna system. People were taken into the Buddhist order without any consideration of caste. Women also were admitted to the *sangha* and thus brought on par with men. In comparison with Brahmanism, Buddhism was liberal and democratic.

Buddhism made a special appeal to the people of the non-Vedic areas where it found a virgin soil for conversion. The people of Magadha responded readily to Buddhism because they were looked down upon by the orthodox brahmanas. Magadha was placed outside the pale of the holy Aryavarta, the land of the Aryas, covering modern Uttar Pradesh. The old tradition persists, and the people of north Bihar would not like to be cremated south of the Ganga in Magadha.

The personality of the Buddha and the method adopted by him to preach his religion helped the spread of Buddhism. He tried to fight evil by goodness and hatred by love. He refused to be provoked by slander and abuse. He maintained poise and calm under difficult conditions, and tackled his opponents with wit and presence of

mind. It is said that on one occasion an ignorant person abused him. The Buddha listened on silently, and when the person had stopped abusing, the Buddha asked: "My son, if a person does not accept a present what will happen to it?" His adversary replied: "It remains with the person who has offered it." The Buddha then said: "My son, I do not accept your abuse."

The use of Pali, the language of the people, also contributed to the spread of Buddhism. It facilitated the spread of Buddhist doctrines among the common people. Gautama Buddha also organized the *sangha* or the religious order, whose doors were kept open to everybody, irrespective of caste and sex. The only condition required of the monks was that they would faithfully observe the rules and regulations of the *sangha*. Once they were enrolled as members of the Buddhist Church they had to take the vow of continence, poverty and faith. So there are three main elements in Buddhism: Buddha, *sangha* and *dhamma*. As a result of organized preaching under the auspices of the *sangha*, Buddhism made rapid strides even in the lifetime of the Buddha. The monarchies of Magadha, Koshala and Kaushambi and several republican states and their people adopted this religion.

Two hundred years after the death of the Buddha, the famous Maurya king Ashoka embraced Buddhism. This was an epoch-making event. Through his agents Ashoka spread Buddhism into Central Asia, West Asia and Sri Lanka, and thus transformed it into a world religion. Even today Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Tibet and parts of China and Japan profess

Buddhism. Although Buddhism disappeared from the land of its birth, it continues to hold ground in the countries of South Asia, South-East Asia and East Asia.

Causes of the Decline of Buddhism

By the early twelfth century A.D. Buddhism became practically extinct in India. It had continued to exist in a changed form in Bengal and Bihar till the eleventh century but after that this religion almost completely vanished from the country. What were its causes? We find that in the beginning every religion is inspired by the spirit of reform, but eventually it succumbs to rituals and ceremonies it originally denounced. Buddhism underwent a similar metamorphosis. It became a victim to the evils of Brahmanism against which it had fought in the beginning. To meet the Buddhist challenge the brahmanas reformed their religion. They stressed the need for preserving the cattle wealth and assured women and shudras of admission to heaven. Buddhism, on the other hand, changed for the worse. Gradually the Buddhist monks were cut off from the mainstream of people's life; they gave up Pali, the language of the people, and took to Sanskrit, the language of intellectuals. From the first century A.D. onwards, they practised idol worship on a large scale and received numerous offerings from devotees. The rich offerings supplemented by generous royal grants to the Buddhist monasteries made the life of monks easy. Some of the monasteries such as Nalanda collected revenue from as many as 200 villages. By the seventh century, Buddhist

monasteries had come to be dominated by ease-loving people and became centres of corrupt practices which Gautama Buddha had strictly prohibited. The new form of Buddhism was known as Vajrayana. The enormous wealth of the monasteries with women living in them led to further degeneration. Buddhists came to look upon women as objects of lust. The Buddha is reported to have said to his favourite disciple Ananda: "If women were not admitted into the monasteries Buddhism would have continued for one thousand years, but because this admission has been granted it would last only five hundred years."

The brahmana ruler Pashyamitra Shunga is said to have persecuted the Buddhists. Several instances of persecution occur in the sixth-seventh centuries A.D. The Hun king Mihirakula, who was a worshipper of Shiva, killed hundreds of Buddhists. The Shaivite Shashanka of Gauda cut off the Bodhi tree at Bodhi Gaya, where the Buddha had attained enlightenment. Hsuan Tsang states that 1600 stupas and monasteries were destroyed, and thousands of monks and lay followers killed; this may not be without some truth. The Buddhist reaction can be seen in some pantheons in which Buddhist deities trample Hindu deities. In south India both the Shaivites and Vaishnavites bitterly opposed the Jainas and Buddhists in early medieval times. Such conflicts may have weakened Buddhism.

For their riches the monasteries came to be coveted by the Turkish invaders. They became special targets of the invaders. The Turks killed a large number of Buddhist monks in

Bihar, although some of the monks managed to escape to Nepal and Tibet. In any case by the twelfth century A.D. Buddhism had practically disappeared from the land of its birth.

Importance and Influence of Buddhism

Despite its ultimate disappearance as an organized religion, Buddhism left its abiding mark on the history of India. The Buddhists showed a keen awareness of the problems that faced the people of north-east India in the sixth century B.C. The new iron ploughshare agriculture, trade, and the use of coins enabled the traders and nobles to accumulate wealth, and we hear of people possessing eighty *kotis* of wealth. All this naturally created sharp social and economic inequalities. So Buddhism asked people not to accumulate wealth. According to it poverty breeds hatred, cruelty and violence. To eradicate these evils the Buddha advised that farmers should be provided with grain and other facilities, the traders with wealth, and the labourers with wages. These measures were recommended to remove poverty in this world. Buddhism further taught that if the poor gave alms to the monks, they would be born wealthy in the next world.

The code of conduct prescribed for the monks represents a reaction against the material conditions of north-east India in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. It imposes restrictions on the food, dress and sexual behaviour of the monks. They cannot accept gold and silver and they cannot take to sale and purchase. These rules were relaxed after the death of

the Buddha, but the early rules suggest a return to a kind of primitive communism, a characteristic of the tribal society in which people did not practise trade and advanced agriculture. The code of conduct prescribed for monks partially reflects a revolt against the use of money, private property and luxurious living, which appeared in the sixth century B.C. in north-east India. In those days property and money were regarded as luxuries.

Although Buddhism tried to mitigate the evils resulting from the new material life in the sixth century B.C., it also tried to consolidate the changes in the social and economic life of the people. The rule that debtors were not permitted to be members of the *sangha* naturally helped the moneylenders and richer sections of society from whose clutches the debtors could not be saved. Similarly the rule that slaves could not join the *sangha* helped the slave owners. Thus the rules and teachings of Gautama Buddha took full account of the new changes in the material life and strengthened them ideologically.

Although the Buddhist monks had renounced the world and repeatedly criticized the greedy brahmanas, in several ways they resembled the brahmanas. Both of them did not participate directly in production, and lived on the alms or gifts given by society. Both of them emphasised the virtues of carrying out family obligations, protecting private property and respecting political authority. Both of them supported the social order based on classes; for the monks, however, the *varna* was based on action and

attributes but for the brahmanas it was based on birth.

Undoubtedly the objective of the Buddhist teaching was to secure the salvation of the individual or nirvana. Those who found it difficult to adjust themselves to the break-up of the old tribal society and the rise of gross social inequalities on account of private property were provided with some way of escape, but it was confined to the monks. No escape was provided for the lay followers, who were taught to come to terms with the existing situation.

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

With its emphasis on non-violence and the sanctity of animal life, Buddhism boosted the cattle wealth of the country. The earliest Buddhist text *Suttanipata* declares the cattle to be givers of food, beauty and happiness (*annada, vannada, sukhada*), and thus pleads for their protection. This teaching came significantly at a time when the non-Aryans slaughtered animals for food, and the Aryans in the name of religion. The brahmanical insistence on the sacredness of the cow and non-violence was apparently derived from Buddhist teachings.

Buddhism created and developed a new awareness in the field of intellect and culture. It taught the people not to take things for granted but to argue and judge them on merits. To a

certain extent the place of superstition was taken by logic. This promoted rationalism among people. In order to preach the doctrines of the new religion, the Buddhists compiled a new type of literature. They enormously enriched Pali by their writings. The early Pali literature can be divided into three categories. The first contains the sayings and teachings of the Buddha, the second deals with the rules to be observed by members of the *sangha*, and the third presents the philosophical exposition of the *dhamma*.

In the first three centuries of the Christian era, by mixing Pali with Sanskrit the Buddhists created a new language which is called Hybrid Sanskrit. The literary activities of the Buddhist monks continued even in the Middle Ages, and some famous Apabhramsa writings in east India were composed by them. The Buddhist monasteries developed as great centres of learning, and can be called residential universities. Mention may be made of Nalanda and Vikramashila in Bihar, and Valabhi in Gujarat.

Buddhism left its mark on the art of ancient India. The first human statues worshipped in India were probably those of the Buddha. The faithful devotees portrayed the various events in the life of the Buddha in stone. The panels found at Gaya in Bihar and at Sanchi and Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh are illuminating examples of artistic activity. From the first century A.D. onwards the panel images of Gautama Buddha began to be made. The Greek and the Indian sculptors worked together to create a new kind of art. The north-west frontier of India, which is known as the

Gandhara art. The images made in this region betray Indian as well as foreign influence. For the residence of the monks rooms were hewn out of the rocks, and thus began the cave archi-

ecture in the Barabar hills in Gaya and in western India around Nasik. Buddhist art flourished in the Krishna delta in the south and in Mathura in the north.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms and concepts: *Aryavarta*, Varna-divided society, *Dvijā*, *Tirthankara*, *Nirvana*, *Jina*, *Ahimsa*, *Sangha*, *Dhamma*.
2. Discuss the causes of the origin of new religious sects in the sixth century B.C.
3. Describe the main teachings of Jainism. Discuss its impact on Indian society.
4. Describe the main teachings of Buddhism. Discuss its impact on Indian society.
5. Discuss the social and economic background of the rise of Jainism and Buddhism and the social aspects of the two religions.
6. Discuss the reasons for the spread of Buddhism. Describe the organization and the role of the Buddhist *Sangha*.
7. Why did Buddhism decline while Jainism continued to be influential in some parts of India?
8. Why had Magadha become the centre of the new religious movements?
9. Discuss how and in which aspects the impact of Buddhism in India continued even after its decline.
10. Why are Buddhism and Jainism considered as religious reform movements?
11. Describe the contribution of Jainism and Buddhism to Indian literature and art. Compile a list of Jaina and Buddhist literature and pictures of Jaina and Buddhist art as part of a project.
12. On an outline map of India, show the places connected with the life of Mahavira and the Buddha and with Jaina and Buddhist art and architecture.

CHAPTER 11

Territorial States and the First Magadhan Empire

FROM the sixth century B.C. onwards, the widespread use of iron in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar created conditions for the formation of large territorial states. Because of iron weapons the warrior class now played an important part. The new agricultural tools and implements enabled the peasants to produce far more foodgrains than they required for consumption. The extra product could be collected by the princes to meet their military and administrative needs. The surplus could also be made available to the towns which had sprung up in the sixth-fifth century B.C. These material advantages naturally enabled the people to stick to their land, and also to expand at the cost of the neighbouring areas. The rise of large states with towns as their base of operations strengthened the territorial idea. People owed strong allegiance to the *Janapada* or the territory to which they belonged and not to the *jana* or the tribe to which they belonged.

The Mahajanapadas

In the age of the Buddha we find 16 large states called Mahajanapadas. They were mostly situated north of the Vindhyas and extended from the

seem to have been considerably powerful. Beginning from the east we hear of the kingdom of Anga which covered the modern districts of Monghyr and Bhagalpur. It had its capital at Champa, which shows signs of habitation in the sixth century B.C. We find a mud fort of about the fifth century B.C. Eventually the kingdom of Anga was swallowed by its powerful neighbour Magadha.

Magadha embraced the former districts of Patna, Gaya and parts of Shahbad, and grew to be the leading state of the time. North of the Ganga in the division of Tirhut was the state of the Vajjis which included eight clans. But the most powerful were the Lichchhavis with their capital at Vaishali which is identical with the village of Basarh in the district of Vaishali. The Puranas push the antiquity of Vaishali to a much earlier period, but archaeologically Basarh was not settled until the sixth century B.C.

Further west we find the kingdom of Kashi with its capital at Varanasi. Excavations at Rajghat show that the earliest habitations started around 500 B.C., and the city was enclosed by mud embankments about the same time. In the beginning Kashi appears to be the most powerful of the states, but eventually it had to submit to the



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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the appropriate base line.

Kosala embraced the area occupied by eastern Uttar Pradesh and had its capital at Shravasti, which is identical with Sahet-Mahet on the borders of Gorakhpur and Bahraich districts in Uttar Pradesh. Diggings indicate that Sahet-Mahet did not possess any large settlement in the sixth century B.C. But we see the beginnings of a mud fort. Kosala contained an important city called Ayodhya, which is associated with the story in the *Ramayana*. But excavations show that it was not settled on any scale before the fifth century B.C. Kosala also included the tribal republican territory of the Shakyas of Kapilavastu. The capital of Kapilavastu has been identified with Piprahwa in Basti district. Habitation at Piprahwa is not earlier than c. 500 B.C. Lumbini, which lies at a distance of 15 km from Piprahwa in Nepal, served as another capital of the Shakyas. In an Ashokan inscription it is called the birthplace of Gautama Buddha and it was here that he was brought up.

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

Further west lay the kingdom of the Vatsas, along the bank of the Yamuna, with its capital at Kaushambi near Allahabad. The Vatsas were a Kuru clan who had shifted from Hastinapur and settled down at Kaushambi. Kaushambi was chosen

because of its strategic position on the Yamuna. In the fifth century B.C. it had a mud fortification as can be gathered from excavations.

We also hear of the older states of the Kurus and the Panchalas which were situated in western Uttar Pradesh, but they no longer enjoyed the political importance which they had attained in the later Vedic period.

In central Malwa and the adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh lay the state of the Avantis. It was divided into two parts. The northern part had its capital at Ujjain, and the southern part at Mahishmati. Excavations show that both these towns became fairly important from the sixth century B.C. onwards, though eventually Ujjain surpassed Mahishmati. It developed large-scale working in iron and erected strong fortification.

The political history of India from the sixth century B.C. onwards is the history of struggles between these states for supremacy. Ultimately the kingdom of Magadha emerged to be the most powerful and succeeded in founding an empire.

Rise and Growth of the Magadhan Empire

Magadha came into prominence under the leadership of Bimbisara, who belonged to the Haryanka dynasty. He was a contemporary of the Buddha. He started the policy of conquest and aggression which ended with the Kalinga war of Ashoka. Bimbisara acquired Anga and placed it under the viceroyalty of his son Ajatashatru at Champā. He also strengthened his position by marriage alliances. He took

the sister of Parsenajit. The Koshalan bride brought him as dowry a Kashi village, yielding a revenue of 100,000 which suggests that revenues were collected in terms of coins. The marriage bought off the hostility of Koshala and gave him a free hand in dealing with the other states. His second wife Chellana was a Lichchhavi princess from Vaishali who gave birth to Ajatashatru and his third wife was the daughter of the chief of the Madra clan of Punjab. Marriage relations with the different princely families gave enormous diplomatic prestige and paved the way for the expansion of Magadha westward and northward.

Magadha's most serious rival was Avanti with its capital at Ujjain. Its king Chanda Pradyota Mahasena fought Bimbisara, but ultimately the two thought it wise to become friends. Later when Pradyota was attacked by jaundice, at the Avanti king's request Bimbisara sent the royal physician Jivaka to Ujjain. Bimbisara is also said to have received an embassy and a letter from the ruler of Gandhara with which Pradyota had fought unsuccessfully. So through his conquests and diplomacy Bimbisara made Magadha the paramount power in the sixth century B.C. His kingdom is said to have consisted of 80,000 villages, which is a conventional number.

The earliest capital of Magadha was at Rajgir, which was called Girivraja at that time. It was surrounded by five hills, the openings in which were closed by stone-walls on all sides. This made Rajgir impregnable.

According to the Buddhist chronicles, Bimbisara ruled for 52 years, roughly from 544 B.C. to 492

B.C. He was succeeded by his son Ajatashatru (492-460 B.C.). Ajatashatru killed his father and seized the throne for himself. His reign saw the high watermark of the Bimbisara dynasty. He fought two wars and made preparations for the third. Throughout his reign he pursued an aggressive policy of expansion. This provoked against him a combination of Kashi and Koshala. There began a prolonged conflict between Magadha and Koshala. Ultimately Ajatashatru got the best of the war, and the Koshalan king was compelled to purchase peace by giving his daughter in marriage to Ajatashatru and leaving him in sole possession of Kashi.

Ajatashatru was no respecter of relations. Although his mother was a Lichchhavi princess, this did not prevent him from making war against Vaishali. The excuse was that the Lichchhavis were the allies of Koshala. He created dissensions in the ranks of the Lichchhavis and finally destroyed their independence by invading their territory and by defeating them in battle. It took him full 16 years to destroy Vaishali. Eventually he succeeded in doing so because of a war engine which was used to throw stones like catapults. He also possessed a chariot to which a mace was attached, and it facilitated mass killings. The Magadhan empire was thus enlarged with the addition of Kashi and Vaishali.

Ajatashatru faced a stronger rival in the ruler of Avanti. Avanti had defeated the Vatsas of Kaushambi and now threatened an invasion of Magadha. To meet this danger Ajatashatru began the fortification of

Rajgir. The remains of the walls can be seen. However, the invasion did not materialize in his lifetime.

Ajatashatru was succeeded by Udayin (460-444 B.C.) His reign is important because he built the fort upon the confluence of the Ganga and Son at Patna. This was done because Patna lay in the centre of the Magadhan kingdom, which now extended from the Himalayas in the north to the hills of Chotanagpur in the south. Patna's position, as will be seen later, was crucially strategic.

Udayin was succeeded by the dynasty of Shishunagas, who temporarily shifted the capital to Vaishali. Their greatest achievement was the destruction of the power of Avanti with its capital at Ujjain. This brought to an end the 100-year old rivalry between Magadha and Avanti. From now onwards Avanti became a part of the Magadhan empire and continued to be so till the end of the Maurya rule.

The Shishunagas were succeeded by the Nandas, who proved to be the most powerful rulers of Magadha. So great was their power that Alexander, who invaded Punjab at that time, did not dare to move towards the east. The Nandas added to the Magadhan power by conquering Kalinga from where they brought an image of the Jina as a victory trophy. All this took place in the reign of Mahapadma Nanda. He claimed to be *ekarat*, the sole sovereign who destroyed all the other ruling princes. It seems that he acquired not only Kalinga but also Koshala which had probably rebelled against him.

and enormously powerful. It is said that they maintained 200,000 infantry, 60,000 cavalry and 3000 to 6000 war elephants. Such a huge army could be maintained only through an effective taxation system. It was because of these considerations that Alexander did not advance against Nandas.

The later Nandas turned out to be weak and unpopular. Their rule in Magadha was supplanted by that of the Maurya dynasty under which the Magadhan empire reached the apex of glory.

Causes of Magadha's Success

The march of the Magadhan empire during the two centuries preceding the rise of the Mauryas is like the march of the Iranian empire during the same period. The formation of the largest state in India during this period was the work of several enterprising and ambitious rulers such as Bimbisara, Ajatashatru and Mahapadma Nanda. They employed all means, fair and foul, at their disposal to enlarge their kingdoms and to strengthen their states. But this was not the only reason for the expansion of Magadha.

There were some other important factors. Magadha enjoyed an advantageous geographical position in the age of iron, because the richest iron deposits were situated not far away from Rajgir, the earliest capital of Magadha. The ready availability of the rich iron ores in the neighbourhood enabled the Magadhan princes to equip themselves with effective weapons, which were not easily available to their neighbours. Mines are also found in eastern Madhya Pradesh and

were not far from the kingdom of the Avantis with their capital at Ujjain. Around 500 B.C. iron was certainly forged and smelted in Ujjain, and probably the smiths manufactured weapons of good quality. On account of this Avanti proved to be the most serious competitor of Magadha for the supremacy of north India, and Magadha took about a hundred years to subjugate Ujjain.

Magadha enjoyed certain other advantages. The two capitals of Magadha, the first at Rajgir and the second at Pataliputra, were situated at very strategic points. Rajgir was surrounded by a group of five hills, and so it was rendered impregnable in those days when there was no easy means of storming citadels such as cannons which came to be invented much later. It was not easy to destroy forts like Rajgir in those days. In the fifth century B.C. the Magadhan princes shifted their capital from Rajgir to Pataliputra, which occupied a pivotal position commanding communications on all sides. Pataliputra was situated at the confluence of the Ganga, the Gandak and the Son, and a fourth river called the Ghaghra joined the Ganga not far from Pataliputra. In pre-industrial days, when communications were difficult, the army could move north, west, south and east by following the courses of the rivers. Further, the position of Patna itself was rendered invulnerable because of its being surrounded by rivers on almost all sides. While the Son and the Ganga surrounded it on the north and west, the Poonpun surrounded it on the south and east. Pataliputra therefore was a

true water-fort (*Jaladurga*), and it was not easy to capture this town in those days.

Magadha lay at the centre of the middle Gangetic plain. The alluvium, once cleared of the jungles, proved immensely fertile. Because of heavy rainfall the area could be made productive even without irrigation. The country produced varieties of paddy, which are mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. This area was far more productive than the areas to the west of Allahabad. This naturally enabled the peasants to produce considerable surplus, which could be mopped up by the rulers in the form of taxes.

The princes of Magadha also benefited from the rise of towns and use of metal money. On account of trade and commerce in north-east India, the princes could levy tolls on the sale of commodities and accumulate wealth to pay and maintain their army.

Magadha enjoyed a special advantage in military organization. Although the Indian states were well acquainted with the use of horses and chariots, it was Magadha which first used elephants on a large scale in its wars against its neighbours. The eastern part of the country could supply elephants to the princes of Magadha, and we learn from Greek sources that the Nandas maintained 6000 elephants. Elephants could be used in storming fortresses and in marching over marshy and other areas lacking roads and other means of communication.

Finally, we may refer to the unorthodox character of the Magadhan society. It was inhabited by the Kiratas and Magadhas, who were held in low esteem by the orthodox brahmanas.

But it underwent a happy racial admixture on account of the advent of the Vedic people. Since it was recently Vedicised it showed more enthusiasm for expansion than the kingdoms which had been brought under the Vedic influence earlier. On account of all these reasons Magadha succeeded in defeating the other kingdoms and in founding the first empire in India.

EXERCISES

1. Describe the political condition of India in the sixth century B.C. Discuss the significance of the rise of the Mahajanapadas in the history of ancient India.
2. Discuss the reasons for the rise of Magadha as an empire.
3. Trace the expansion of the Magadha empire. Describe the methods adopted by the rulers of Magadha for this.
4. On an outline map of India, show the Mahajanapadas that arose in the sixth century B.C. Indicate the modern names of the places and regions in which they were located.
5. Find out the names of the sites connected with the Mahajanapadas that have been excavated. Try to collect pictures of the excavated sites.

CHAPTER 12

*Iranian and Macedonian Invasions***Iranian Invasion**

In north-east India smaller principalities and republics gradually merged with the Magadhan empire. But the north-west India presented a different picture in the first half of the sixth century B.C. Several small principalities such as those of the Kambojas, Gandharas and Madras fought one another. This area did not have any powerful kingdom like that of Magadha to weld the warring communities into one organized kingdom. The area was also wealthy, and could be easily entered through the passes in the Hindukush.

The Achaemenian rulers of Iran, who expanded their empire at the same time as the Magadhan princes, took advantage of the political disunity on the north-west frontier. The Iranian ruler Darius penetrated into north-west India in 516 B.C. and annexed Punjab, west of the Indus, and Sindh. This area constituted the twentieth province or satrapy of Iran, the total number of satrapies in the Iranian empire being 28. The Indian satrapy included Sindh, the north-west frontier and the part of Punjab that lay to the west of the Indus. It was the most fertile and populous part of the empire. It paid a tribute of 360 talents of gold, which accounted for one-third of

the total revenue of Iran from its Asian provinces. The Indian subjects were also enrolled in the Iranian army. Xerxes, the successor of Darius, employed Indians in the long war against the Greeks. It appears that India continued to be a part of the Iranian empire till Alexander's invasion of India.

Results of the Contact

The Indo-Iranian contact lasted for about 200 years. It gave an impetus to Indo-Iranian trade and commerce. The cultural results were more important. The Iranian scribes brought into India a form of writing which came to be known as the Kharoshthi script. It was written from right to left like the Arabic. Some Ashokan inscriptions in north-west India were written in the third century B.C. in this script, which continued to be used in the country till the third century A.D. Iranian coins are also found in the north-west frontier region which points to the existence of trade with Iran. But it is wrong to think that the punch-marked coins came into use in India as a result of contact with Iran. However, Iranian influence on the Maurya sculpture is clearly perceptible. The monuments of Ashoka's time, especially the bell-shaped capitals, owed something to the Iranian models. Iranian influence

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may also be traced in the preamble of Ashoka's edicts as well as in certain terms used in them. For instance, for the Iranian term *dipti*, the Ashokan scribe used the term *lipi*. Further it seems that through the Iranians the Greeks came to know about the great wealth of India, which whetted their greed and eventually led to Alexander's invasion of India.

Alexander's Invasion

In the fourth century B.C. the Greeks and the Iranians fought for the supremacy of the world. Under the leadership of Alexander of Macedonia, the Greeks finally destroyed the Iranian empire. Alexander conquered not only Asia Minor and Iraq but also Iran. From Iran he marched to India, obviously attracted by its great wealth. Herodotus, who is called father of history, and other Greek writers had painted India as a fabulous land, which tempted Alexander to invade it. Alexander also possessed a strong passion for geographical inquiry and natural history. He had heard that the Caspian Sea continued on the eastern side of India. He was also inspired by the mythical exploits of past conquerors whom he wanted to emulate and surpass.

The political condition of north-west India suited his plans. The area was parcelled out into many independent monarchies and tribal republics which were strongly wedded to the soil and had a fierce love of the principality over which they ruled. Alexander found it easy to conquer these principalities one by one. The rulers of these territories, two were well known, the ruler of Taxila,

and Porus whose kingdom lay between the Jhelum and the Chenab. Together they might have effectively resisted the advance of Alexander. But they could not put up a joint front; the Khyber pass remained unguarded.

After the conquest of Iran, Alexander moved on to Kabul, from where he marched to India through the Khyber pass in 326 B.C. It took him five months to reach the Indus. Ambhi, the ruler of Taxila, readily submitted to the invader, augmented his army and replenished his treasure. When he reached the Jhelum, Alexander met from Porus the first and the strongest resistance. Although Alexander defeated Porus, he was impressed by the bravery and courage of the Indian prince. So he restored his kingdom to him and made him his ally. Then he advanced as far as the Beas river. He wanted to move still further eastward but his army refused to accompany him. The Greek soldiers had grown war-weary and diseased. The hot climate of India and ten years of continuous campaigning had made them terribly homesick. They had also experienced a taste of Indian fighting qualities on the banks of the Indus, which made them desist from further progress. As the Greek historian Arrian tells us: "In the art of war the Indians were far superior to the other nations inhabiting the area at that time." Especially the Greek soldiers were told of a formidable power on the Ganga. Obviously it was the kingdom of Magadha ruled by the Nandas who maintained an army far outnumbering that of Alexander. So despite the repeated appeals of Alexander to advance, the Greek soldiers did not

budge an inch. Alexander lamented: "I am trying to rouse the hearts that are disloyal and crushed with craven fears". The king who had never known defeat at the hands of his enemies had to accept defeat from his own men. He was forced to retreat, and his dream of an eastern empire remained unfulfilled. On his return march Alexander vanquished many small republics until he reached the end of the Indian frontier. He remained in India for 19 months (326–325 B.C.), which were full of fighting. He had barely any time to organize his conquests. Still he made some arrangements. Most conquered states were restored to their rulers who submitted to his authority. But his own territorial possessions were divided into three parts, which were placed under three Greek governors. He also founded a number of cities to maintain his power in this area.

Effects of Alexander's Invasion

Alexander's invasion provided the first occasion when ancient Europe came into close contact with ancient India. It produced important results. The Indian campaign of Alexander was a triumphant success. He added to his empire an Indian province which was much larger than that conquered by Iran, though the Greek possessions in India were soon lost to the Maurya rulers.

The most important outcome of this invasion was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in different fields. Alexander's campaign opened up four distinct routes by land and sea. It paved the way for Greek merchants and

craftsmen, and increased the existing facilities for trade.

Although we hear of some Greeks living on the north-west even before the invasion of Alexander, the invasion led to the establishment of more Greek settlements in this area. The most important of them were the city of Alexandria in the Kabul region, Boukephala on the Jhelum, and Alexandria in Sindh. Although these areas were conquered by the Mauryas, the Greeks continued to live under both Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka.

Alexander was deeply interested in the geography of the mysterious ocean which he saw for the first time at the mouth of the Indus. Therefore he despatched his new fleet under his friend Nearchus to explore the coast and search for harbours from the mouth of the Indus to that of the Euphrates. So Alexander's historians have left valuable geographical accounts. They also have left clearly dated records of Alexander's campaign, which enable us to build Indian chronology for subsequent events on a definite basis. Alexander's historians also give us important information about social and economic conditions. They tell us about the sati system, the sale of girls in market places by poor parents, and the fine breed of oxen in north-west India. Alexander sent from there 200,000 oxen to Macedonia for use in Greece. The art of carpentry was the most flourishing craft in India, and carpenters built chariots, boats and ships.

By destroying the power of petty states in north-west India, Alexander's invasion paved the way for the expan-

sion of the Maurya empire in that area. According to tradition Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Maurya empire, had seen something of the working of the military machine of Alexander and had acquired some knowledge which helped him in destroying the power of the Nandas.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of: 'satrapy', 'dipi', 'lipi', 'talent'.
2. Describe the effects of Iranian invasion on India.
3. Give an account of Alexander's invasion of India. What were its effects?
4. On an outline map of Eurasia, show the extent of the Achaemenian empire at its greatest extent.
5. On an outline map of Eurasia, show the empire of Alexander and map the kingdoms, countries, rivers and places mentioned in the text.
6. The records of Alexander's campaign enable us to build Indian chronology for subsequent events on a definite basis. Explain the statement and discuss why it is true.

CHAPTER 13

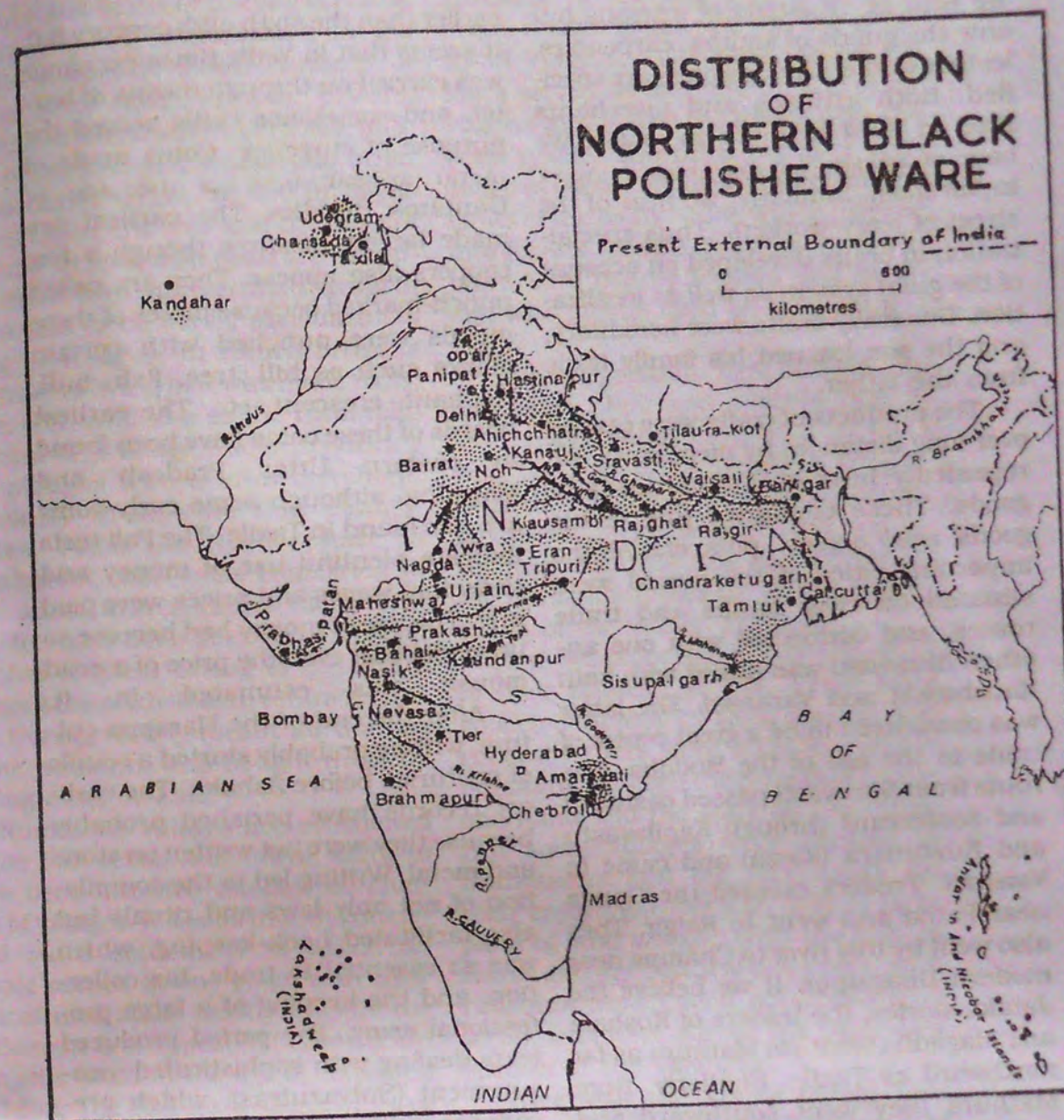
*State and Varna Society in the Age of the Buddha***Material Life**

The picture of material life in north India, especially in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, can be drawn on the basis of the Pali texts and the Sanskrit Sutra literature in combination with archaeological evidence. Archaeologically the sixth century B.C. marks the beginning of the NBPW phase. The abbreviation NBPW stands for Northern Black Polished Ware, which was a very glossy, shining type of pottery. This pottery was made of very fine fabric and apparently served as the tableware of richer people. In association with this pottery are found iron implements, especially those meant for crafts and agriculture. This phase also saw the beginning of metal money. The use of burnt bricks and ringwells appeared in the middle of the NBPW phase, i.e. in the third century B.C.

The NBPW phase marked the beginning of the second urbanization in India. The Harappan towns finally disappeared in about 1400 B.C. After that for about a thousand years we do not find any towns in India. With the appearance of towns in the middle Gangetic basin in the fifth century B.C., a second urbanization began in India. Many towns mentioned in the Pali and Sanskrit texts such as Kaushambi,

Shravasti, Ayodhya, Kapilavastu, Varanasi, Vaishali, Rajgir, Pataliputra, Champa have been excavated, and in each case signs of habitation and mud structures belonging to the advent of the NBPW phase or to its middle have been found. Wooden palisades have been found in Patna, and these possibly belong to pre-Maurya times. Belonging to the seventh-sixth centuries B.C., these are the earliest wooden enclosures in the mid-Ganga plains. Houses were mostly made of mudbrick and wood, which naturally have perished in the moist climate of the middle Gangetic basin. Although seven-storeyed palaces are mentioned in the Pali texts, they have not been discovered anywhere. Structures excavated so far are generally unimpressive, but together with the other material remains they indicate great increase in population when compared with the Painted Grey Ware settlements.

Many towns were seats of government, but whatever be the causes of their origin they eventually turned out to be markets and came to be inhabited by artisans and merchants. At some places there was concentration of artisans; Saddalaputta at Vaishali had 500 potters' shops. Both artisans and merchants were organized into guilds under their respective headmen.



The topographical details within India are based upon Survey of India maps with the permission of the Surveyor General of India.

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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the appropriate base line.

Figure 9 India — NBP Sites

We hear of 18 guilds of artisans but only the guilds of smiths, carpenters, leather workers and painters are specified. Both artisans and merchants lived in fixed localities in towns. We hear of *vessas* or merchants' street in Varanasi. Similarly, we hear of the street of ivory-workers. Thus specialization in crafts developed on account of the guild system as well as localization. Generally crafts were hereditary, and the son learned his family trade from the father.

The products of crafts were carried over long distances by merchants. We repeatedly hear of 500 cartloads of goods. These contained fine textile goods, ivory objects, pots, etc. All the important cities of the period were situated on river banks and trade routes, and connected with one another. Shravasti was linked with both Kaushambi and Varanasi. The latter was considered to be a great centre of trade in the age of the Buddha. The route from Shravasti passed eastward and southward through Kapilavastu and Kushinara (Kasia) and came to Vaishali. Traders crossed the Ganga near Patna and went to Rajgir. They also went by this river to Champa near modern Bhagalpur. If we believe the Jataka stories, the traders of Koshala and Magadha went via Mathura as far northward as Taxila. Similarly, from Mathura they went southward and westward to Ujjain and the Gujarat coast.

Trade was facilitated by the use of money. The terms *nishka* and *satamana* in the Vedic texts are taken to be names of coins, but they seem to have been prestige objects made of metal. Coins actually found are not

earlier than the sixth-fifth century B.C. It seems that in Vedic times exchange was carried on through means of barter, and sometimes cattle served the purpose of currency. Coins made of metal appear first in the age of Gautama Buddha. The earliest are made largely of silver though a few coppers also appear. They are called punch-marked because pieces of these metals were punched with certain marks such as hill, tree, fish, bull, elephant, crescent, etc. The earliest hoards of these coins have been found in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Magadha, although some early coins are also found in Taxila. The Pali texts indicate plentiful use of money and show that wages and prices were paid in it. The use of money had become so universal that even the price of a dead mouse was estimated in it.

After the end of the Harappa culture, writing probably started a couple of centuries before Ashoka. The earliest records have perished probably because they were not written on stone and metal. Writing led to the compilation of not only laws and rituals but also facilitated book-keeping, which was so essential to trade, tax-collection, and the keeping of a large professional army. The period produced texts dealing with sophisticated measurement (*Sulvasutras*), which presuppose writing and which may have helped the demarcation of fields and houses.

Although rural settlements belonging to the NBPW phase have not been excavated, sherds of this ware have been found at more than 400 places in the plains of Bihar and those of eastern and central Uttar Pradesh. We

cannot think of the beginning of crafts, commerce and urbanization in the middle Gangetic basin without a strong rural base. Princes, priests, artisans, traders, administrators, military personnel and numerous other functionaries could not live in towns unless taxes, tributes and tithes were available in sufficient measure to support them. Non-agriculturists living in towns had to be fed by agriculturists living in villages. In return artisans and traders living in towns made tools, cloth, etc., available to the rural folk. We hear of a village trader depositing 500 ploughs with a town merchant. Obviously these were iron ploughshares. From the NBPW phase in Kaushambi, iron tools consisting of axes, adzes, knives, razors, nails, sickles, etc., have been discovered. A good number of them belong to the layers of about the sixth-fourth centuries B.C. and were probably meant for the use of the peasants who bought them by paying cash or kind.

Numerous villages are mentioned in the Pali texts, and towns seem to have been situated amidst the clusters of villages. It seems that the nucleated rural settlement in which all people settled at one place with their agricultural lands mostly outside the settlement first appeared in the middle Gangetic plain in the age of Gautama Buddha. The Pali texts speak of three types of villages. The first category included the typical village inhabited by various castes and communities. Its number seems to have been the largest, and it was headed by a village headman called *bhojaka*. The second included suburban villages which were in the nature of craft villages; for

instance a carpenters' village or chariotmaker's village lay in the vicinity of Varanasi. Obviously these villages served as markets for the other villages and linked the towns with the countryside. The third category consisted of border villages situated on the limits of the countryside which merged into forests. People living in these villages were mainly fowling and hunters, who mostly lived on food gathering.

The village lands were divided into cultivable plots and allotted family-wise. Every family cultivated its plots with the help of its members supplemented by that of agricultural labourers. Fields were fenced and irrigation channels dug collectively by the peasant families under the supervision of the village headman.

The peasants had to pay one-sixth of their produce as tax. Taxes were collected directly by royal agents, and generally there were no intermediate landlords between the peasants on the one hand and the state on the other. But some villages were granted to brahmanas and big merchants for their enjoyment. We also hear of large plots of land worked with the help of slaves and agricultural labourers. Rich peasants were called *gahapatis* (Pali term), who were almost the same as a section of the *vaishyas*.

Rice was the staple cereal produced in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in this period. Various types of paddy and paddy fields are described in the Pali texts. The use of the term for transplantation is found in the Pali and Sanskrit texts of the period, and it seems that large-scale paddy transplantation began in the age of the

Buddha. Paddy transplantation or wet paddy production enormously added to the yield. In addition the peasants also produced barley, pulses, millets, cotton and sugarcane. Agriculture made great advance because of the use of the iron ploughshare and immense fertility of the alluvium soil in the area between Allahabad and Rajmahal.

Technology became central to the process of rural and urban economy. Iron played a crucial role in opening the rainfed forested, hard-soil area of the middle Ganga basin to clearance, cultivation and settlement. The smiths knew how to harden iron tools. Some tools from Rajghat (Varanasi) show that they were made out of the iron ores obtained from Singhbhum and Mayurbhanj. It thus appears that people came to be acquainted with the richest iron mines in the country which was bound to increase the supply of tools for crafts and agriculture.

The picture of economy that emerges from a study of material remains and the Pali texts is much different from the rural economy of later Vedic times in western Uttar Pradesh or the nature of the economy of a few chalcolithic communities found in some parts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. We notice for the first time an advanced food-producing economy spread over the alluvium soil of the middle Gangetic plains and the beginning of urban economy in this area. It was an economy which provided subsistence not only to direct producers but also to many others who were not farmers or artisans. This made possible collection of taxes and maintenance of armies on a long term basis, and created conditions in which large

territorial states could be formed and sustained.

Administrative System

Although we hear of many states in this period, only Koshala and Magadha emerged as powerful. Both of them were full-fledged states ruled by the hereditary monarchs belonging to the kshatriya varna. The Jataka or the stories relating to the previous births of the Buddha tell us that of oppressive kings and their chief priests were expelled by the people and new kings were installed. But occasions of expulsion were as rare as those of election. The king enjoyed the highest official status and special protection of his person and property. He yielded ground only to great religious leaders of the stature of the Buddha. The king was primarily a warlord who led his kingdom from victory to victory. This is well illustrated by the careers of Bimbisara and Ajatashatru.

The kings ruled with the help of officials, both high and low. Higher officials were called *mahamatras*, and they performed various functions such as those of the minister (*mantrin*), commander (*senanayaka*), judge, chief accountant and head of the royal harem. It is likely that a class of officers called *ayuktas* also performed similar functions in some of the states.

Ministers played an important part in administration. Varsakara of Magadha and Dirghacharayana of Koshala were effective and influential ministers. The first succeeded in sowing seeds of dissension in the ranks of Lichchhavis of Vaishali and enabled Ajatashatru to conquer the republic. The second rendered help to the king

of Koshala. It seems that high officers and ministers were largely recruited from the priestly class of the brahmanas. Generally they do not seem to have belonged to the clan of the king. The kin-based polity of Vedic times was now substantially undermined.

In both Koshala and Magadha, despite the use of the punch-marked coins made of silver, some influential brahmanas and *setthis* were paid by the grant of the revenue of villages. In doing so, the king did not have to obtain the consent of the clan, as was the case in later Vedic times, but the beneficiaries were granted only revenue; they were not given any administrative authority.

The rural administration was in the hands of the village headmen. In the beginning the headmen functioned as leaders of the tribal regiments, and so they were called *gramini* which means the leader of the *grama* or a tribal military unit. As life became sedentary and plough cultivation well-established, tribal contingents settled down to agriculture. The *gramini* therefore was transformed into a village headman in pre-Maurya times. The village headmen were known by different titles such as *gramabhojaka*, *gramini* or *gramika*. The title *gramini* prevails in Sri Lanka to this day. Eighty-six thousand *gramikas* are said to have been summoned by Bimbisara. The number may be conventional, but it shows that the village headmen enjoyed considerable importance and had direct links with the kings. The village headmen assessed and collected the taxes from the villagers, and they also maintained law and order in

their locality. Sometimes oppressive headmen were taken to task by the villagers.

Army and Taxation

The real increase in state power is indicated by the formation of a large professional army. At the time of Alexander's invasion, the Nanda ruler of Magadha kept 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 four-horse chariots and about 6000 elephants. The horse-chariots were losing their importance not only in north-east but also in north-west India, where they had been introduced by the Vedic people. Very few elephants were maintained by the rulers of the states in north-west India, though some of them maintained as many horses as the Magadhan king did. The possession of numerous elephants gave an edge to the Magadhan princes.

The large long-service army had to be fed by the state exchequer. We are told that the Nandas possessed enormous wealth which must have enabled them to support the army, but we have no idea of the special measures by which they raised taxes. The fiscal system was established on a firm basis. Warriors and priests, i.e., the kshatriyas and the brahmanas, were exempted from payment of taxes, and the burden fell on the peasants who were mainly vaishyas or *grihapatis*. *Bali*, a voluntary payment made by the tribesmen to their chiefs in Vedic times, became a compulsory payment to be made by the peasants in the age of the Buddha, and officers called *balisadhakas* were appointed to collect it. It seems that one-sixth of the produce was collected as tax by the

king from the peasants. Taxes were assessed and collected by the royal agents with the help of village headmen. The advent of writing may have helped the assessment and collection of taxes. The discovery of many hoards of punch-marked coins suggests that payment was made in both cash and kind. In north-eastern India payment was made in paddy. In addition to these taxes the peasants were subjected to forced labour for royal work. The birth stories of the Buddha speak of cases in which peasants left the country of the king in order to escape the oppressive burden of taxes.

Artisans and traders also had to pay taxes. Artisans were made to work for a day in a month for the king, and the traders had to pay customs on the sale of their commodities. The tolls were collected by officers known as *shaulkika* or *shulkadhyaksha*.

The territorial kings discard the *sabha* and *samiti*. Popular assemblies had practically disappeared in post-Vedic times. Since they were essentially tribal institutions they decayed and disappeared as tribes disintegrated into varnas and lost their identity. Their place was taken by varna and caste groups, and so caste laws and customs were given due weight by the writers of the law-books. However these regulations were mainly confined to social matters. Popular assemblies could succeed only in small kingdoms where members of the tribe could easily be summoned, as may have been the case in the Vedic period. With the emergence of the large states of Koshala and Magadha, it was not possible to hold big assemblies attended by people belonging to different social

classes and different parts of the empire. The sheer difficulty of communication made regular meetings impossible. Further, being tribal, the old assembly could not find place for many non-Vedic tribes who lived in the new kingdoms. The changed circumstances, therefore, were not congenial for the continuance of the old assemblies. Their place was taken by a small body called *parishad* consisting exclusively of the brahmanas. Even in this period assemblies were there, but not in the monarchies. They flourished in the smaller republican states of the Shakyas, Lichchhavis, etc.

The Republican Experiment

The republican system of government existed either in the Indus basin or in the foothills of the Himalayas in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The republics in the Indus basin may have been the remnants of the Vedic tribes although some monarchies may have been followed by republics. In some cases, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar people were possibly inspired by the old ideals of tribal equality which did not give much prominence to the single raja.

In the republics real power lay in the hands of tribal oligarchies. In the republics of Shakyas and Lichchhavis the ruling class belonged to the same clan and the same varna. Although in the case of the Lichchhavis of Vaishali 7707 rajas sat on the assembly held in the moot hall, the brahmanas were not included in this group. In post-Maurya times in the republics of the Malavas and the Kshudrakas, the kshatriyas and the brahmanas were given citizenship, but slaves and hired

labourers were excluded from it. In a state situated on the Beas river in Punjab membership was restricted to those who could supply at least one elephant to the state. This was a typical oligarchy in the Indus basin.

The administrative machinery of the Shakyas and Lichchhavis was simple. It consisted of *Raja*, *Uparaja* (Vice-King), *Senapati* (Commander) and *Bhandagarika* (treasurer). We hear of as many as seven courts in the hierarchical order for trying the same case one after another in the Lichchhavi republic but this seems to be too good to be true.

In any case certain states in the age of the Buddha were not ruled by hereditary kings but by persons who were responsible to the assemblies. Thus although the people living in ancient republics may not have shared political power equally, the republican tradition in the country is as old as the age of the Buddha.

The republics differed from the monarchies in several ways. In the monarchies the king claimed to be the sole recipient of revenue from the peasants, but in the republics this claim was advanced by every tribal oligarch who was known as raja. Each one of the 7707 Lichchhavi rajas maintained his storehouse and apparatus of administration. Again, every monarchy maintained its regular standing army and did not permit any group or groups of people to keep arms within its boundaries. But in a tribal oligarchy each raja was free to maintain his own little army under his *Senapati*, so that each of them could compete with the other. The brahmanas exercised great influence in monarchy, but they

had no place in the early republics, nor did they recognize these states in their law-books. Finally, the main difference between a monarchy and a republic lay in the fact that the latter functioned under the leadership of oligarchic assemblies and not of an individual, as was the case with the former.

The republican tradition became feeble from the Maurya period. Even in pre-Maurya times, monarchies were far stronger and common. Naturally ancient thinkers looked upon kingship as the common and most important form of government. To them the state, government and kingship meant the same thing. Since the state was well established in the age of the Buddha, thinkers began to speculate about its possible origins. The *Digha Nikaya*, one of the oldest Buddhist texts in Pali, points out that in the earliest stage human beings lived happily. Gradually they came to have private property and set up house with their wives. So they began to quarrel over property and women. In order to put an end to this quarrel they elected a chief who would maintain law and order and protect people. In return for protection the people promised to give to the chief a part of the paddy. The chief came to be called king, and this is how kingship or the state originated.

Social Orders and Legislation

The Indian legal and judicial system originated in this period. Formerly people were governed by the tribal law, which did not recognize any class distinction. But by now the tribal community had been clearly divided into four classes — brahmanas, kshatriyas,

vaishyas, and shudras. So the Dharmasutras laid down the duties of each of the four varnas, and the civil and criminal law came to be based on the varna division. The higher the varna the purer it was and the higher was the order of moral conduct expected by civil and criminal law. All kinds of disabilities were imposed on the shudras. They were deprived of religious and legal rights and relegated to the lowest position in society. They could not be invested with *upanayana*. Crimes committed by them against the brahmanas and others were punished severely: on the other hand the crimes committed against the shudras were punished lightly. The lawgivers spread the fiction that the shudras were born from the feet of the creator. So members of the higher varnas, especially the brahmana, shunned the company of the shudra, avoided the food touched by him and refused to enter into marriage relations with him. A shudra could not be appointed to high posts, and more importantly he was specifically asked to serve the twice-born as slave, artisan and agricultural labourer. In this respect even Jainism and Buddhism did not materially change his position. Although he could be admitted to the new religious orders his general position continued to be low. It is said that Gautama Buddha visited the assemblies of the brahmanas, the kshatriyas and the *gahapatis* or householders, but the assembly of the shudras is not mentioned in this connection.

Civil and criminal law was administered

by royal agents, who inflicted rough and ready punishments such as scourging, beheading, tearing out of the tongue, etc. In many cases punishments for criminal offences were governed by the idea of revenge. It meant tooth for tooth and eye for eye.

Although the brahmanical law-books took into account the social status of the different varnas in framing their laws, they did not ignore the customs of the non-Vedic tribal groups which gradually absorbed into the brahmanical social order, which went on expanding as a result of conquests. Some of these indigenous tribals were given fictitious social origins and allowed to be governed by their own customs.

The age of the Buddha is important because ancient Indian polity, economy and society really took shape in this period. Agriculture based on the use of iron tools in alluvial area gave rise to an advanced food-producing economy, particularly in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. It was possible to collect taxes from the peasants, and on the basis of regular taxes and tributes large states could be founded. In order to continue this system, the varna order was devised, and the functions of each varna were clearly laid down. According to this system, rulers and fighters were called kshatriyas, priests and teachers were called brahmanas, peasants and taxpayers were called vaishyas, and those who served all these classes as labourers were called shudras.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms and concepts: NBPW phase, *bhojaka*, punch-marked coins, *gramika*, *gahapati*, *mahamatras*, *balisadhaka*.
2. Describe the developments that took place in the technology and economy in this period. Point out the important changes that these developments marked in Indian society.
3. Describe the varna system in the post-Vedic period. What was the position of the shudras in that system?
4. Discuss the factors that led to urbanization in the period from the sixth to fourth century B.C. Why is urbanization in this period called the second urbanization in India?
5. Describe the system of administration in the monarchical states during the age of the Buddha.
6. Describe the system of government in the republican states during the age of the Buddha.
7. Discuss the main features of the political system that emerged during the age of the Buddha. How were these systems markedly different from the political system of the Vedic age?
8. On an outline map of India, mark the towns and cities that emerged during this period. Also show the trade routes during this period.

CHAPTER 14

*The Age of the Mauryas***Chandragupta Maurya**

THE MAURYA dynasty was founded by Chandragupta Maurya, who seems to have belonged to some ordinary family. According to the brahmanical tradition he was born of Mura, a shudra woman in the court of the Nandas. But an earlier Buddhist tradition speaks of the existence of a kshatriya clan called Mauryas living in the region of Gorakhpur adjoining the Nepalese terai. In all likelihood, Chandragupta was a member of this clan. He took advantage of the growing weakness and unpopularity of the Nandas in the last days of their rule. With the help of Chanakya, who is known as Kautilya, he overthrew the Nandas and established the rule of the Maurya dynasty. The machinations of Chanakya against Chandragupta's enemies are described in detail in the *Mudrarakshasa*, a drama written by Vishakhadatta in the ninth century. Several plays have been based on it in modern times.

Justin, a Greek writer, says that Chandragupta overran the whole of India with an army of 600,000. This may or may not be true. But Chandragupta liberated north-western India from the thralldom of Seleucus, who ruled over the area west of the Indus. In the war with the Greek

viceroy, Chandragupta seems to have come out victorious. Eventually peace was concluded between the two, and in return for 500 elephants Seleucus gave him eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus. Chandragupta thus built up a vast empire which included not only Bihar and good portions of Orissa and Bengal but also western and north-western India, and the Deccan. Leaving Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of north-eastern India the Mauryas ruled over the whole of the subcontinent. In the north-west they held sway over certain areas which were not included even in the British empire.

Imperial Organization

The Mauryas organized a very elaborate system of administration. We know about it from the account of Megasthenes and the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. Megasthenes was a Greek ambassador sent by Seleucus to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He lived in the Maurya capital of Pataliputra and wrote an account not only of the administration of the city of Pataliputra but also of the Maurya empire as a whole. The account of Megasthenes does not survive in full, but quotations occur in the works of several subsequent Greek writers.

THE AGE OF THE MAURYAS

These fragments have been collected and published in the form of a book called *Indika*, which throws valuable light on the administration, society and economy of Maurya times.

The account of Megasthenes can be supplemented by the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. Although the *Arthashastra* was finally compiled a few centuries after the Maurya rule, some of its books contain material that is genuine and gives authentic information about the Maurya administration and economy. On the basis of these two sources we can draw a picture of the administrative system of Chandragupta Maurya.

Chandragupta Maurya was evidently an autocrat who concentrated all power in his hands. If we believe in a statement of the *Arthashastra*, the king had set a high ideal. He stated that in the happiness of his subjects lay his happiness and in their troubles lay his troubles. But we do not know how far the king acted up to these norms. According to Megasthenes the king was assisted by a council whose members were noted for wisdom. There is nothing to show that their advice was binding on him, but the high officers were chosen from the councillors.

The empire was divided into a number of provinces, and each province was placed under a prince who was a scion of the royal dynasty. The provinces were divided into still smaller units, and arrangements were made for both rural and urban administration. Excavations show that a large number of towns belonged to Pataliputra, Maurya Kaushambi, Ujjain and Taxila from the resources.

most important cities. The administration of Pataliputra, which was the capital of the Mauryas, was carried on by six committees, each committee consisting of five members. These committees were entrusted with sanitation, care of foreigners, registration of birth and death, regulation of weights and measures and similar other functions. Various types of weights belonging to Maurya times have been found at several places in Bihar.

In addition to all this the central government maintained about two dozen departments of the state, which controlled social and economic activities at least in the areas which were near the capital. The most striking feature of Chandragupta's administration is the maintenance of a huge army. According to the account of a Roman writer called Pliny, Chandragupta maintained 600,000 foot-soldiers, 30,000 cavalry and 9000 elephants. Another source tells us that the Mauryas maintained 8000 chariots. In addition to this it seems that the Mauryas also maintained a navy. The administration of the armed forces, according to Megasthenes, was carried on by a board of 30 officers divided into six committees, each committee consisting of five members. It seems that the six wings of the armed forces — the army, the cavalry, the elephants, the chariots, the navy and the transport — were each assigned to the care of a separate committee. The Mauryas' military strength was almost three times that of the Nandas. This happened apparently on account of much larger empire and far more

How did Chandragupta Maurya manage to meet the expenses of such a huge army? If we rely on the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya it would appear that the state controlled almost all the economic activities in the realm. The state brought new land under cultivation with the help of cultivators and shudra labourers. The virgin land which was opened to cultivation yielded handsome income to the state in the form of revenue collected from the newly settled peasants. It seems that taxes collected from the peasants varied from one-fourth to one-sixth of the produce. Those who were provided with irrigation facilities by the state had to pay for it. In addition to this in times of emergency peasants were compelled to raise more crops. Tolls were also levied on commodities brought to town for sale, and they were collected at the gate. Moreover, the state enjoyed a monopoly in mining, sale of liquor, manufacture of arms, etc. This naturally brought money to the royal exchequer. Chandragupta thus established a well-organised administrative system and gave it a sound financial base.

Ashoka (273-232 B.C.)

Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by Bindusara, whose reign is important for continued links with the Greek princes. His son, Ashoka, is the greatest of the Maurya rulers. According to Buddhist tradition he was so cruel in his early life that he killed his 99 brothers to get the throne. But since the statement is based on a legend, it may well be wrong. His biography, prepared by Buddhist writers, is so full of fiction that it cannot be taken seriously.

Ashokan Inscriptions

The history of Ashoka is reconstructed on the basis of his inscriptions. These inscriptions, numbering 39, are classified into Major Rock Edicts, Minor Rock Edicts, Separate Rock Edicts, Major Pillar Edicts and Minor Pillar Edicts. The name of Ashoka occurs only in copies of Minor Rock Edict I found at three places in Karnataka and at one in Madhya Pradesh. All the other inscriptions mention only *devanampiya piyadasa*, dear to gods, and leave out the word Ashoka. The Ashokan inscriptions are found in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Altogether they appear at 47 places, and their total versions number 182. They were generally placed on ancient highways. Composed in Prakrit, they were written in Brahmi script in the greater part of the sub-continent. But in its north-western part they appeared in Aramaic language and Kharoshthi script, and in Afghanistan they were written in both Aramaic and Greek scripts and languages. He is the first Indian king to speak directly to the people through his inscriptions which carry royal orders. The inscriptions throw light on the career of Ashoka, his external and domestic policies, and the extent of his empire.

Impact of the Kalinga War

The ideology of Buddhism guided Ashoka's state policy at home and abroad. After his accession to the throne, Ashoka fought only one major war called the Kalinga War. According to him, 100,000 people were killed in this war, several lakhs perished, and 150,000 were taken prisoners. These

numbers are exaggerated, because the number 'a hundred thousand' is used as a cliché in Ashokan inscriptions. At any rate it seems that the king was moved by the massacre in this war. The war brought to the brahmana priests and the Buddhist monks great suffering, which caused Ashoka much grief and remorse. So he abandoned the policy of physical occupation in favour of a policy of cultural conquest. In other words, *bherighosha* was replaced with *dhammaghosha*. We quote below the words of Ashoka from his Thirteenth Major Rock Edict:

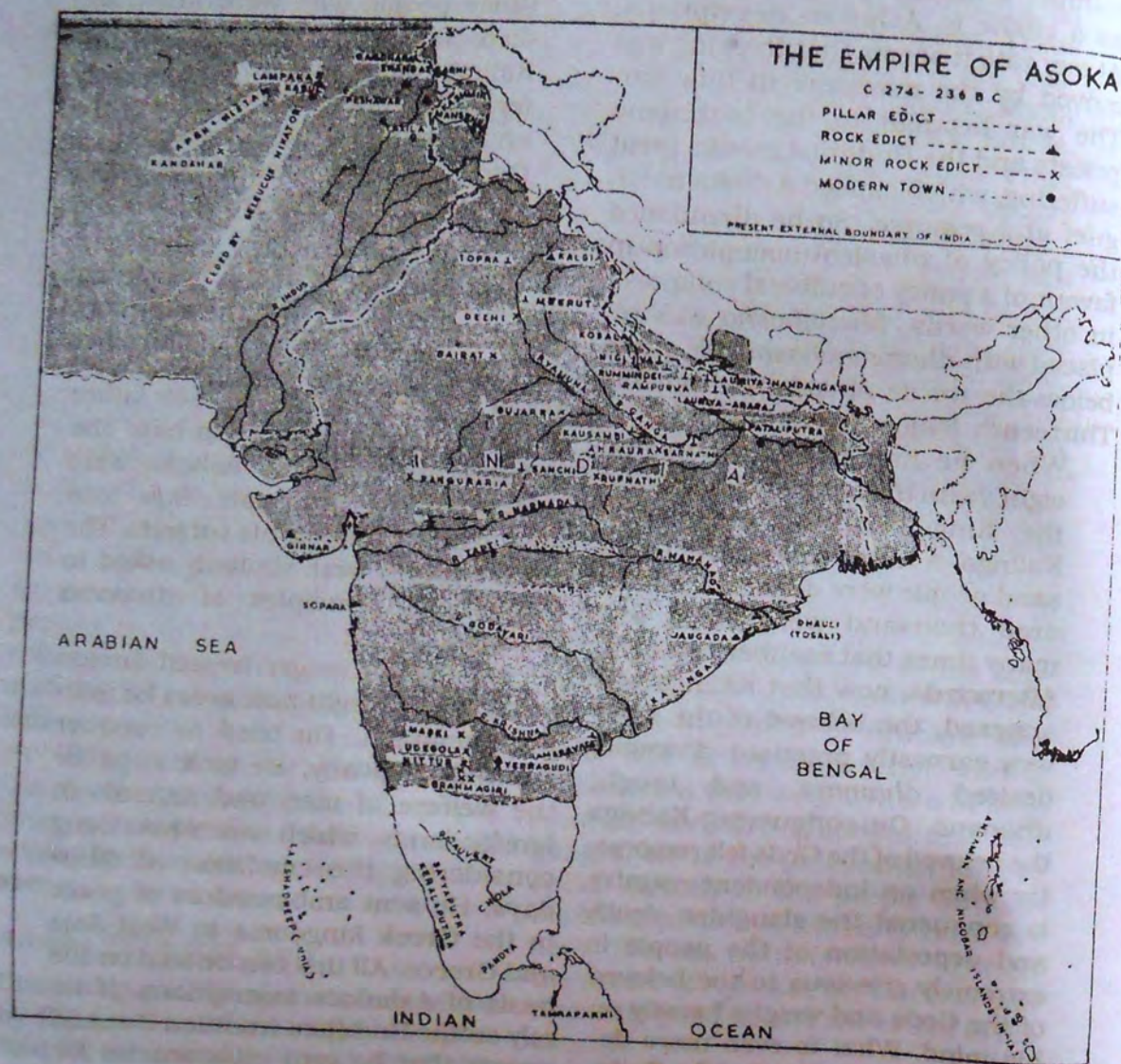
When he had been consecrated eight years the beloved of the Gods, the King Piyadassi, conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Afterwards, now that Kalinga was annexed, the beloved of the Gods very earnestly practised *dhamma*, desired *dhamma*, and taught *dhamma*. On conquering Kalinga the beloved of the Gods felt remorse, for when an independent country is conquered the slaughter, death and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to the beloved of the Gods and weighs heavily on his mind. What is even more deplorable to the beloved of the Gods, is that those who dwell there, whether brahmanas, *shramanas*, or those of other sects, or householders who show obedience to their teachers and behave well and devotedly towards their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, slaves, and servants all suffer violence, and separation from

their loved ones ... Today if a hundredth or a thousandth part of those people who were killed or died or were deported when Kalinga was annexed were to suffer similarly, it would weigh heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods ... The Beloved of the Gods considers victory by *dhamma* to be the foremost victory...

Ashoka now made an ideological appeal towards the tribal people and the frontier kingdoms. The subjects of the independent states in Kalinga were asked to obey the king as their father and to repose confidence in him. The officials appointed by Ashoka were instructed to propagate this idea among all sections of his subjects. The tribal peoples were similarly asked to follow the principles of *dhamma* (dharma).

Ashoka no longer treated foreign dominions as legitimate areas for military conquest. He tried to conquer them ideologically. He took steps for the welfare of men and animals in foreign lands, which was a new thing considering the condition of those days. He sent ambassadors of peace to the Greek kingdoms in West Asia and Greece. All this can be said on the basis of Ashoka's inscriptions. If we rely on the Buddhist tradition it would appear that he sent missionaries for the propagation of Buddhism to Sri Lanka and Central Asia. As an enlightened ruler Ashoka tried to enlarge his area of political influence through propaganda.

It would be wrong to think that the Kalinga war made Ashoka an extreme pacifist. He did not pursue the policy of peace for the sake of peace under



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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the appropriate base line.

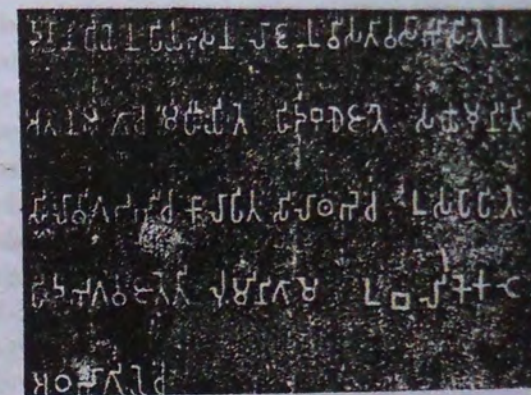
Figure 10 Empire of Ashoka

all conditions. On the other hand he adopted a practical policy of consolidating his empire. He retained Kalinga after its conquest and incorporated it into his empire. There is also nothing to show that he disbanded the huge army maintained from the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Although he repeatedly asked the tribal people to follow the policy of dharma, he threatened them if they violated the established rules of social order and righteousness (dharma). Within the empire he appointed a class of officers known as the *rajukas*, who were vested with the authority of not only rewarding people but also punishing them, wherever necessary. The policy of Ashoka to consolidate the empire through dharma bore fruit. The Kandhar inscription speaks of the success of his policy with the hunters and fishermen, who gave up killing animals and possibly took to a settled agricultural life.

Internal Policy and Buddhism

Ashoka was converted to Buddhism as a result of the Kalinga war. According to tradition he became a monk, made huge gifts to the Buddhists and undertook pilgrimages to the Buddhist shrines. The fact of his visiting the Buddhist shrines is also suggested by the *dhamma ystras* mentioned in his inscriptions.

According to tradition the third Buddhist council (*Sangiti*) was held by Ashoka and missionaries were sent not only to south India but also to Sri Lanka, Burma and other countries to convert the people there. Brahmi inscriptions of the second and first centuries B.C. have been found in Sri Lanka.



14.1 Rumindei Pillar Inscription of Ashoka

The inscription is in Brahmi script. The language of the inscription is Prakrit.

The Nagari rendering and English translation of the inscription are given below :

1. देवानपियेन पियदसिन लाजिन वीसति—वसाभिसितेन
2. अतन आगाच महीषिते हिद बुधे जाते सकय—मुनीति
3. सिला—विगड—भीचा कालापित सिला—धभे च उसपापिते
4. हिद भगवं जाते ति लुमिनी-गामे उदलिके कटे
5. अठ—भागिये च

[When king Devanampriya Priyadarsin had been anointed twenty years, he came himself and worshipped (this spot), because the Buddha Sakyamuni was born here.

(He) both caused to be made a stone bearing wall and caused a stone pillar to be set up (in order to show) that the Blessed One was born here.

The village of Lumbini was exempted from *bali* (tribute) and the *bhaga* (the royal share of the produce) was reduced to one-eighth.]

Ashoka set a very high ideal for himself, and this was the ideal of paternal kingship. He repeatedly asked his officials to tell the subjects that the king looked upon them as his children. As agents of the king, the officials were also asked to take care of the people. Ashoka appointed *dhammamahamatras* for propagating dharma among various social groups

including women. He also appointed *rajukas* for the administration of justice in his empire.

He disapproved of rituals, especially those observed by women. He forbade killing certain birds and animals, and completely prohibited the slaughter of animals in the capital. He interdicted gay social functions in which people indulged in revelleries.

But Ashoka's dharma was not a narrow dharma. It cannot be regarded as a sectarian faith. Its broad objective was to preserve the social order. It ordained that people should obey their parents, pay respect to the brahmanas and Buddhist monks, and show mercy to slaves and servants. These instructions can be found in both the Buddhist and brahmanical faiths.

Ashoka taught people to live and let live. He emphasised compassion towards animals and proper behaviour towards relatives. His teachings were meant to strengthen the institution of family and the existing social classes. He held that if the people behaved well they would attain heaven. He never said that they would attain nirvana, which was the goal of Buddhist teachings. Ashoka's teachings were thus intended to maintain the existing social order on the basis of tolerance. He does not seem to have preached any sectarian faith.

Ashoka's Place in History

It is said that the pacific policy of Ashoka ruined the Maurya empire, but this is not true. On the contrary Ashoka has a number of achievements to his credit. He was certainly a great

missionary ruler in the history of the ancient world. He worked with great zeal and devotion to his mission and achieved a lot, both at home and abroad.

Ashoka brought about the political unification of the country. He bound it further by one dharma, one language and practically one script called Brahmi which was used in most of his inscriptions. In unifying the country he respected such scripts as Brahmi, Kharoshthi, Aramaic and Greek. Evidently he also accommodated such languages as Greek, Prakrit and Sanskrit and various religious sects. Ashoka followed a tolerant religious policy. He did not try to foist his Buddhist faith on his subjects. On the other hand he made gifts to non-Buddhist and even anti-Buddhist sects.

Ashoka was fired with zeal for missionary activities. He deputed officials in the far-flung parts of the empire. This helped the cause of administration and also promoted cultural contacts between the developed Gangetic basin and the backward distant provinces. The material culture, typical of the heart of the empire, spread to Kalinga and the lower Deccan and northern Bengal.

Above all Ashoka is important in history for his policy of peace, non-aggression and cultural conquest. He had no model in early Indian history for pursuing such a policy; nor did such an example exist in any country except Egypt where Akhnaton had pursued a pacific policy in the fourteenth century B.C. But it is obvious that Ashoka was not aware of his Egyptian predecessor. Although

Kautilya advised the king to be always intent on physical conquest, Ashoka followed just the reverse policy. He asked his successors to give up the policy of conquest and aggression, which had been followed by the Magadhan princes till the Kalinga war. He counselled them to adopt a policy of peace, which was badly needed after a period of aggressive wars lasting for two centuries. Ashoka consistently stuck to his policy. Although he possessed sufficient resources and certainly maintained a huge army, he did

not wage any war after the conquest of Kalinga. In this sense Ashoka was certainly far ahead of his day and generation.

However, Ashoka's policy did not make any lasting impression on his viceroys and vassals, who declared themselves independent in their respective areas after the retirement of the king in 232 B.C. Similarly, the policy could not convert his neighbours, who swooped on the north-western frontier of his empire within 30 years of Ashoka's exit from power in 232 B.C.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms and concepts: *Dhamma*, *Rajuka*, *Bherighosha*, *Shramanas*, *Dhammaghosha*, *Dhammamahamatra*.
2. How did Chandragupta establish the rule of the Maurya dynasty?
3. What was the impact of the Kalinga war?
4. Describe the administrative system of the Mauryan empire.
5. How did Ashoka promote Buddhism? Discuss his concept of *dhamma*.
6. Describe the technological progress made in the Mauryan period.
7. Make an assessment of emperor Ashoka.
8. What are the main sources of the history of the Mauryas? Write a note on each of the sources.
9. On a outline map of India, indicate the extent of Ashoka's empire and mark the places mentioned in the text.
10. Discuss the significance of the political changes that the establishment of the Maurya empire marked in India.

CHAPTER 15

*Significance of the Maurya Rule***State Control**

THE brahmanical law-books again and again stressed that the king should be guided by the laws laid down in the Dharmashastras and by the customs prevalent in the country. Kautilya advises the king to promulgate dharma when the social order based on the varnas and ashramas (stages in life) perishes. The king is called by him *dharmapravartaka* or promulgator of the social order. That the royal orders were superior to other orders was asserted by Ashoka in his inscriptions. Ashoka promulgated dharma and appointed officials to inculcate and enforce its essentials throughout the country.

Assertion of royal absolutism was a natural culmination of the policy of military conquest adopted by the princes of Magadha. Anga, Vaishali, Kashi, Koshala, Avanti, Kalinga, etc. were annexed to the Magadhan empire one by one. The military control over these areas eventually turned into coercive control of all aspects of life of the people. Magadha possessed the requisite power of sword to enforce its overall control.

In order to control all spheres of life the state had to maintain a vast bureaucracy. In no other period of ancient history we hear of so many

officers as in Maurya times.

The administrative mechanism was backed by an elaborate system of espionage. Various types of spies collected intelligence about foreign enemies and kept an eye on numerous officers. They also helped the collection of money from credulous people through deliberate resort to superstitious practices.

Important functionaries were called *tirthas*. It seems that most functionaries were paid in cash. The highest functionaries were minister (*mantrin*), high priest (*purohita*), commander-in-chief (*senapati*) and crown-prince (*yuvaraja*), who were paid generously. They received as much as 48 thousand *panas* (*pana* being a silver coin equal to three-fourths of a *tola*). In sharp contrast to them the lowest officers were given 60 *panas* in consolidated pay although some employees were given as little as 10 or 20 *panas*. Therefore, it would seem that there were enormous gaps between the highest and the lowest category of government servants.

Economic Regulations

If we rely on the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya it would appear that the state appointed 27 superintendents (*adhyakshas*) mostly to regulate the

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAURYA RULE

economic activities of the state. They controlled and regulated agriculture, trade and commerce, weights and measures, crafts such as weaving and spinning, mining and so on. The state also provided irrigation facilities and regulated water supply for the benefit of agriculturists. Megasthenes informs us that in the Maurya empire the officials measured the land as in Egypt and inspected the channels through which water was distributed into smaller channels.

According to the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, a striking social development of the Maurya period was the employment of slaves in agricultural operations. Megasthenes states that he did not notice any slaves in India. But there is no doubt that domestic slaves were found in India from Vedic times onwards. It seems that in the Maurya period slaves were engaged in agricultural work on a large scale. The state maintained farms, on which numerous slaves and hired labourers were employed. 150,000 war-captives brought by Ashoka from Kalinga to Pataliputra may have been engaged in agriculture, but the number one and a half lakhs seems to be exaggerated. However, ancient Indian society was not a slave society. What the slaves did in Greece and Rome was done by the shudras in India. The shudras were regarded as the collective property of the three higher varnas. They were compelled to serve them as slaves, artisans, agricultural labourers, and domestic servants.

Several reasons suggest that royal control worked over a very large area, at least in the core of the empire. This was because of the strategic position

of Pataliputra, from where royal agents could sail up and down the four directions. Besides this, the royal road ran from Pataliputra to Nepal through Vaishali and Champaran. We also hear of a road at the foothills of the Himalayas. It passed from Vaishali through Champaran to Kapilavastu, Kalsi (in Dehradun district), Hazra and eventually to Peshawar. Megasthenes speaks of a road connecting north-western India with Patna. Roads also linked Patna with Sasaram and from there they went to Mirzapur and central India. The capital was also connected with Kalinga by a route through eastern Madhya Pradesh, and Kalinga in its turn was linked with Andhra and Karnataka. All this facilitated transport in which horses may have played an important part. In the northern plains the Ganga and other rivers were routes of communication.

The Ashokan inscriptions appear on important highways. The stone pillars were made in Chunar near Varanasi from where they were transported to north and south India. The Maurya control over the settled parts of the country may have matched that of the Mughals and perhaps of the East India Company. Medieval transport improved due to more settlements on the highways and the use of stirruped horses. The company used the gun which was reinforced by steam navigation from early 1830s onwards.

The Maurya rulers did not have to deal with a large population. All told their army did not exceed 650,000 men. If ten per cent of the population was recruited, the total population in the Gangetic plains may not have been more than six and a half million.

Ashokan inscriptions show that royal writ ran all over the country except the extreme east and south. Nine Ashokan inscriptions have been found in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka but rigid state control may not have proved effective much beyond the middle Gangetic zone owing to difficulty in the means of communication.

The Maurya period constitutes a landmark in the system of taxation in ancient India. Kautilya names many taxes to be collected from peasants, artisans and traders. This required a strong and efficient machinery for assessment, collection and storage. The Mauryas attached greater importance to assessment than to storage and depositing. The *samaharta* was the highest officer in charge of assessment and the *sannidhata* was the chief custodian of the state treasury and store-house. (The harm done to the state by the first is thought to be more serious than the harm caused by the second.) In fact, an elaborate machinery for assessment first appears in the Maurya period. The list of taxes mentioned in the *Arthashastra* is impressive, and if these were really collected very little would be left to the people to live on.

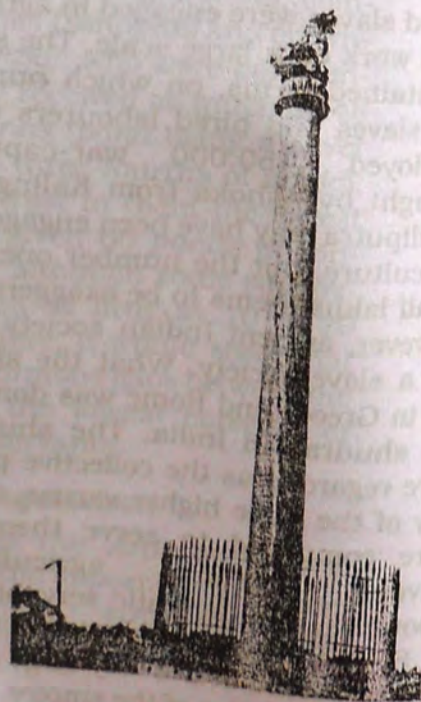
We have epigraphic evidence for the existence of rural store-houses, which shows that taxes were also collected in kind and these granaries were meant for helping local people in times of famine, drought, etc.

It seems that the punch-marked silver coins, which carry the symbols of the peacock, and the hill and crescent, formed the imperial currency of the Mauryas. They have been discovered in large numbers. Without doubt

they helped the collection of taxes and payment of officers in cash. Further, because of its uniformity, the currency must have facilitated marked change in a wider area.

Art and Architecture

The Mauryas made a remarkable contribution to art and architecture. They introduced stone masonry on a wide scale. Megasthenes states that the Maurya palace at Pataliputra was as splendid as that in the capital of Iran. Fragments of stone pillars and stumps, indicating the existence of a 80-pillared hall, have been discovered at Kumrahar on the outskirts of modern Patna. Although these remains do not recall the magnificence mentioned by Megasthenes, they certainly attest



15.1 Ashokan Pillar, Lauriya-Nandangarh

the high technical skill attained by the Maurya artisans in polishing the stone pillars, which are as shining as Northern Black Polished Ware. It must have been a difficult task to carry the huge blocks of stone from the quarries and to polish and embellish them when they were placed erect. All this seems to be a great feat of engineering. Each pillar is made of a single piece of buff coloured sandstone. Only their capitals, which are beautiful pieces of sculpture in the form of lions or bulls, are joined with the pillars on the top. These polished pillars were set up throughout the country, which shows that technical knowledge involved in their polishing and transport had spread far and wide. The Maurya artisans also started the practice of hewing out caves from rocks for monks to live in. The earliest examples are the Barabar caves at a distance of 30 km from Gaya. Later this kind of cave architecture spread to western and southern India.

Spread of Material Culture and State System

On the one hand the Mauryas created for the first time a well-organized state machinery, which operated in the heart of the empire. On the other hand their conquest opened the doors for trading and missionary activities. It seems that the contacts established by administrators, traders, and Jaina and Buddhist monks led to the spread of the material culture of the Gangetic basin to the areas situated on the periphery of the empire. The new material culture in the Gangetic basin was based on an intensive use of iron, prevalence of writing, plenty of

punch-marked coins, abundance of beautiful pottery called Northern Black Polished Ware, introduction of burnt bricks and ring wells, and above all on the rise of towns in north-eastern India. A Greek writer called Arrian states that it is not possible to record with accuracy the number of cities on account of their multiplicity. Thus the Maurya period witnessed rapid development of material culture in the Gangetic plains. On account of easy access to the rich iron ores of south Bihar, people used more and more of



15.2 Bull Capital, Rampurva

iron implements. This period shows socketed axes, sickles and ploughshare. The spoked wheel also came to be used. Although arms and weapons were the monopoly of the Maurya state, the use of the other iron tools was not restricted to any class. Their use and manufacture must have spread from the Gangetic basin to the distant parts of the empire. In the Maurya period burnt bricks were used for the first time in north-eastern India. The Maurya constructions made of burnt bricks have been found in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Houses were made of both bricks and timber which was available in plenty because of



15.3 Terracotta Figurine of the Maurya Period

thick vegetation in ancient times. Megasthenes speaks of the wooden structure at the Maurya capital Pataliputra. Excavations show that logs of wood were also used as an important line of defence against floods and foreign invasion. The use of burnt bricks spread in the outlying provinces of the empire. Because of moist climate and heavy rainfall it was not possible to have lasting and large structures made of mud or mud-bricks as we find in the dry zones. Therefore, the diffusion of the use of burnt bricks proved to be a great boon. Eventually, it led to the flowering of towns in the different parts of the empire. Similarly, the ring wells which appeared first under the Mauryas in the Gangetic plains spread beyond the heart of the empire. Since ring wells would supply water to people for domestic use it was no longer imperative to found settlements on the banks of rivers. They also served as soakpits in congested settlements.

The elements of the middle Gangetic material culture seem to have been transferred with modification to northern Bengal, Kalinga, Andhra and Karnataka. Of course the local cultures of these regions were also developing independently. In Bangladesh, where we find the Mahasthana inscription in Bogra district in Maurya Brahmi, we find NBPW at Bangarh in Dinajpur district. NBPW sherds have also been found at some places, such as Chandraketurgarh in the 24 Parganas, in West Bengal. Gangetic associations can be attributed to settlements at Sisupalgarh in Orissa. The settlement of Sisupalgarh is ascribed to Maurya times in the third century B.C., and it contains



15.4 A View of the Lomasrishi Caves, Barabar Hills

NBPW and iron implements and punch-marked coins. Since Sisupalgarh is situated near Dhauli and Jaugada, where Ashokan inscriptions have been found on the ancient highway passing along the eastern coast of India, material culture may have reached this area as a result of contact with Magadha. This contact may have started in the fourth century B.C., when the Nandas are said to have conquered Kalinga. But it deepened after the conquest of Kalinga in the third century B.C. Possibly as a measure of pacification after the Kalinga war, Ashoka promoted some settlements in Orissa, which had been incor-

porated into his empire.

Although we find iron weapons and implements at several places in Andhra and Karnataka in the Maurya period, the advance of iron technology was the contribution of the megalith builders, who are noted for various kinds of large stone burials including those of a round form. But some of these places have Ashokan inscriptions as well as sherds of NBPW belonging to the third century B.C. For example, Ashokan inscriptions have been found at Amaravati and other sites in Andhra and at several places in Karnataka. It, therefore, appears that from the eastern coast



15.5 Ringed Soak-wells found at Ropar

ingredients of the material culture percolated through Maurya contacts into the lower Deccan plateau.

The art of making steel may have spread through Maurya contacts in some parts of the country. Steel objects belonging to about 200 B.C. or to an earlier date have been found in the middle Gangetic plains. The spread of steel may have led to jungle clearance and the use of better methods of cultivation in Kalinga; this could create conditions for the rise of the Cheti kingdom in that region. Although the Satavahanas rose to power in the Deccan in the first century B.C., yet in some ways their empire was a

projection of the Maurya empire. They adopted some of the administrative units of the Mauryas. Their state followed the Maurya pattern in several respects.

It seems that stimulus to state formation in peninsular India came from the Mauryas not only in the case of the Chetis and the Satavahanas but also in the case of the Cheras (Keralaputras), Cholas and the Pandyas. According to Ashokan inscriptions, all the three last peoples together with the Satyaputras and the people of Tamraparni or Sri Lanka lived on the borders of the Maurya empire. They were, therefore, familiar

with the Maurya state. The Pandyas were known to Megasthenes who visited the Maurya capital. Ashoka called himself 'dear to the gods', a title which was translated into Tamil and adopted by the chiefs mentioned in the Sangam texts.

The existence of inscriptions, occasional NBPW potsherds and punch-marked coins in parts of Bangladesh, Orissa, Andhra and Karnataka from near about 300 B.C. shows that in the Maurya period attempts were made to spread elements of the middle Gangetic basin culture in distant areas. The process seems to be in accord with the instructions of Kautilya. Kautilya advised that new settlements should be founded with the help of cultivators, who were apparently vaishyas, and with that of shudra labourers who should be drafted from overpopulated areas. In order to bring the virgin soil under cultivation, the new peasants were allowed remission in tax and supplied with cattle, seeds and money. The state followed this policy in the hope that it would get back what it had given. Such settlements were necessary in those areas where people were not acquainted with the use of the iron ploughshare. This policy led to the opening of large areas to cultivation and settlement.

How far the Maurya towns facilitated the diffusion of the material culture of the Gangetic plains into the tribal belt of central India, extending from Chotanagpur in the east to the Vindhya in the west, cannot be said. But it is quite clear that Ashoka maintained intimate contacts with the tribal people, who were exhibited to observe

dharma. Their contact with the *dhammamahamatras* appointed by Ashoka must have enabled them to imbibe rudiments of higher culture prevalent in the Gangetic basin. In this sense Ashoka launched a deliberate and systematic policy of acculturation. He states that as a result of the diffusion of *dhamma* men would mingle with gods. This implies that tribal and other people would take to the habits of a settled, taxpaying, peasant society and develop respect for paternal power, royal authority and for monks, priests and officers who helped enforce his authority. His policy succeeded. Ashoka claims that hunters and fishermen had given up killing and practised *dhamma*. This means that they had taken to a sedentary agricultural life.

Causes of the Fall of the Maurya Empire

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

Brahmanical Reaction

The brahmanical reaction began as a result of the policy of Ashoka. There is no doubt that Ashoka adopted a tolerant policy and asked the people to respect even the brahmanas. But he prohibited killing of animals and birds, and derided superfluous rituals performed by women. This naturally affected the income of the brahmanas. The anti-sacrifice attitude

of Buddhism and of Ashoka naturally brought loss to the brahmanas, who lived on the gifts made to them in various kinds of sacrifices. Hence in spite of the tolerant policy of Ashoka, the brahmanas developed some kind of antipathy to him. Obviously they were not satisfied with his tolerant policy. They really wanted a policy that would favour them and uphold the existing interests and privileges. Some of the new kingdoms that arose on the ruins of the Maurya empire, were ruled by the brahmanas. The Shungas and the Kanvas, who ruled in Madhya Pradesh and further east on the remnants of the Maurya empire, were brahmanas. Similarly the Satavahanas, who founded a lasting kingdom in the western Deccan and Andhra, claimed to be brahmanas. These brahmana dynasties performed Vedic sacrifices, which were neglected by Ashoka.

Financial Crisis

The enormous expenditure on the army and payment to bureaucracy created a financial crisis for the Maurya empire. As far as we know, in ancient times the Mauryas maintained the largest army and the largest regiment of officers. Despite all kinds of taxes imposed on the people, it was difficult to maintain this huge superstructure. It seems that Ashoka made large grants to the Buddhist monks which left the royal treasury empty. In order to meet expenses in the last stage they had to melt the images made of gold.

Oppressive Rule

Oppressive rule in the provinces was an important cause of the break-up

of the empire. In the reign of Bindusara the citizens of Taxila bitterly complained against the misrule of wicked bureaucrats (*dushtamatyas*). Their grievance was redressed by the appointment of Ashoka. But when Ashoka became emperor, a similar complaint was lodged by the same city. The Kalinga edicts show that Ashoka felt very much concerned about oppression in the provinces and, therefore, asked the *mahamatras* not to torture townsmen without due cause. For this purpose he introduced rotation of officers in Tosali (in Kalinga), Ujjain and Taxila. He himself spent 256 nights on a pilgrimage tour which may have helped administrative supervision. But all this failed to stop oppression in the outlying provinces, and after his retirement Taxila took the earliest opportunity to throw off the imperial yoke.

New Knowledge in the Outlying Areas

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

Neglect of the North-West Frontier and the Great Wall of China

Since Ashoka was mostly preoccupied with missionary activities at home and abroad, he could not pay attention to the safeguarding of the passage on the north-western frontier. This had become necessary in view of the movement of tribes in Central Asia in the third century B.C. The Scythians were in a state of constant flux. A nomadic people mainly relying on the use of horse, they posed serious dangers to the settled empires in China and India. The Chinese ruler Shih Huang Ti (247-210 B.C.) constructed the Great Wall of China in about 220 B.C. to shield his empire against the attacks of the Scythians. Such measures were not taken by Ashoka. Naturally when the Scythians made a push towards India they forced the Parthians, the

Shakas and the Greeks to move towards India. The Greeks had set up a kingdom in north Afghanistan which was known as Bactria. They were the first to invade India in 206 B.C. This was followed by a series of invasions which continued till the beginning of the Christian era.

The Maurya empire was finally destroyed by Pushyamitra Shunga in 185 B.C. Although a brahmana, he was a general of the last Maurya king called Brihadratha. He is said to have killed Brihadratha in public and forcibly usurped the throne of Pataliputra. The Shungas ruled in Pataliputra and central India and they performed several Vedic sacrifices in order to mark the revival of the brahmanical way of life. It is said that they persecuted the Buddhists. They were succeeded by the Kanvas who were also brahmanas.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms and concepts: *dharmapravartaka*, *tirthas*, *pana*, *samaharta*, *sannidhata*.
2. Describe the economic measures adopted by the Maurya rulers.
3. Describe the developments in material culture during the Maurya period. How did the Maurya empire help the spread of material culture to different parts of the country?
4. Why did Maurya rulers maintain a vast bureaucracy?
5. Describe the Maurya contribution to Indian art and architecture.
6. In what ways did the Maurya emperors encourage trade and commerce?
7. Discuss the causes of the decline of the Maurya empire.
8. Assess the significance of the Maurya empire in the history of India.
9. On an outline map of India, mark the places where Ashokan inscriptions have been found.

CHAPTER 16

Central Asian Contacts and Their Results

THE PERIOD which began in about 200 B.C. did not witness a large empire like that of the Mauryas, but it is notable for intimate and widespread contacts between Central Asia and India. In eastern India, central India and the Deccan, the Mauryas were succeeded by a number of native rulers such as the Shungas, the Kanvas and the Satavahanas. In north-western India they were succeeded by a number of ruling dynasties from Central Asia. Of them the Kushans became the most famous.

The Indo-Greeks

A series of invasions began in about 200 B.C. The first to cross the Hindukush were the Greeks, who ruled Bactria, lying south of the Oxus river in the area covered by north Afghanistan. The invaders came one after another, but some of them ruled at one and the same time. One important cause of invasions was the weakness of the Seleucid empire, which had been established in Bactria and the adjoining areas of Iran called Parthia. On account of growing pressure from the Scythian tribes, the later Greek rulers were unable to hold their power in this area. With the construction of the Chinese Wall the Scythians were now pushed back from the Chinese

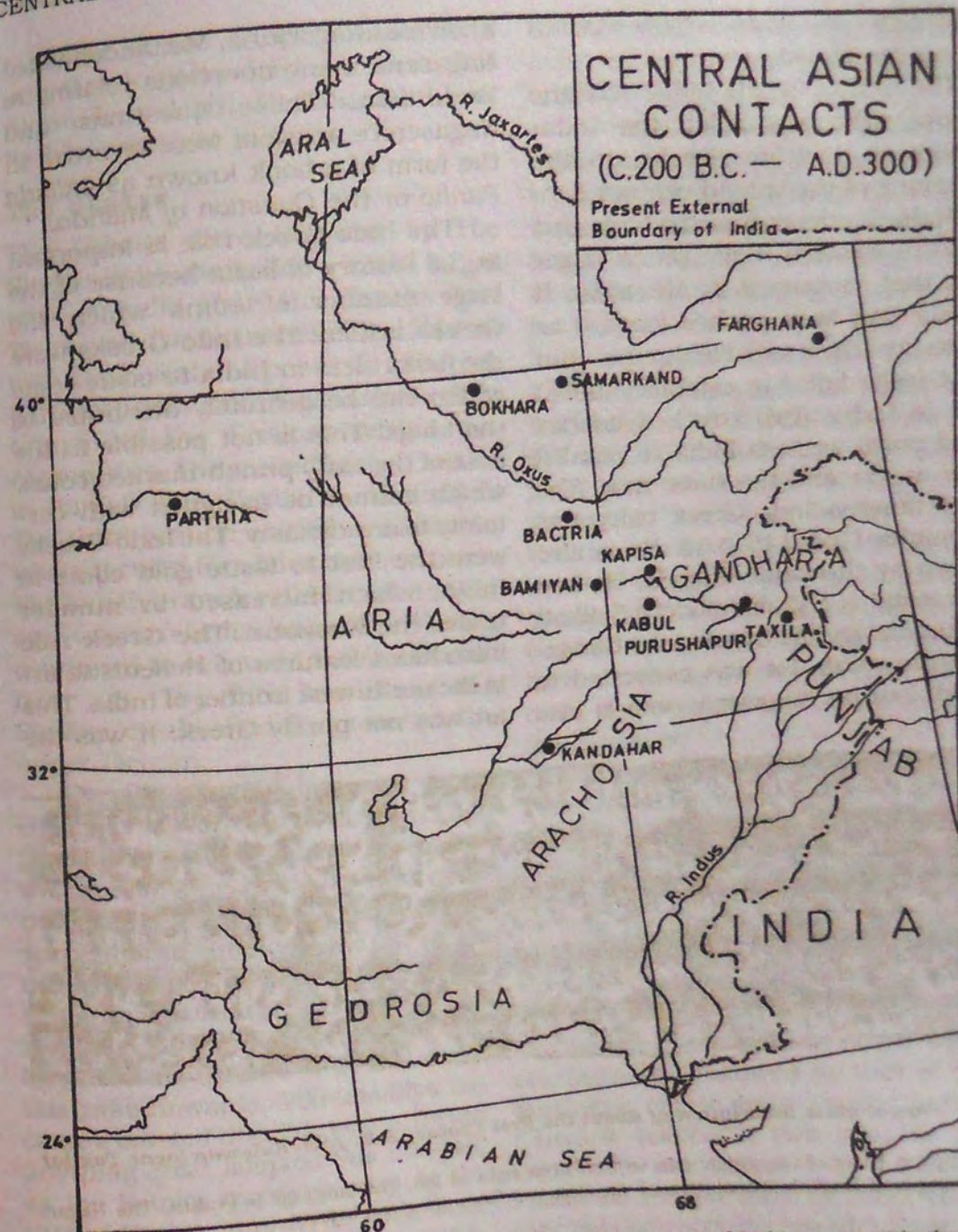
border. So they turned their attention towards the neighbouring Greeks and Parthians. Pushed by the Scythian tribes, the Bactrian Greeks were forced to invade India. The successors of Ashoka were too weak to stem the tide



16.1 Indo-Greek Coins

CENTRAL ASIAN CONTACTS AND THEIR RESULTS

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The topographical details within India are based upon Survey of India maps with the permission of the Surveyor General of India. © Government of India Copyright, 1986

The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the appropriate base line.

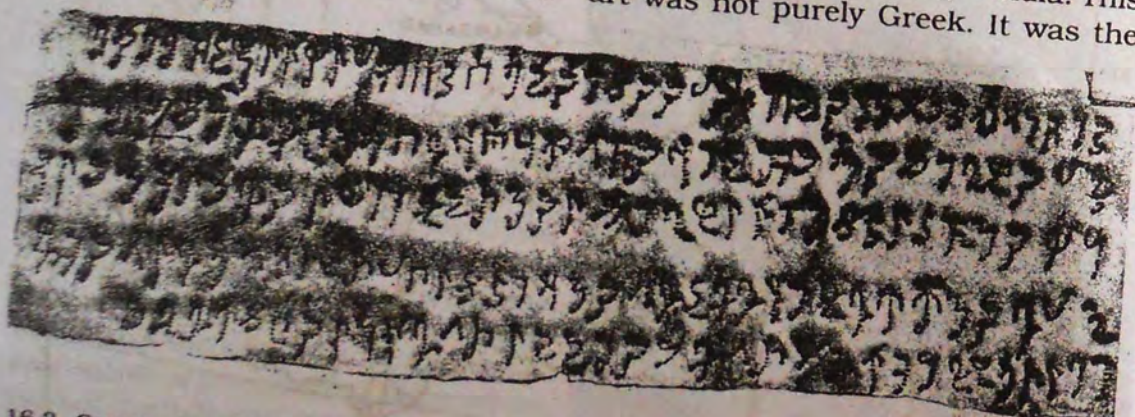
Figure 11 Central Asian Contacts

of foreign invasions which started during the period.

The first to invade India were the Greeks, who are called the Indo-Greeks or Bactrian Greeks. In the beginning of the second century B.C., the Indo-Greeks occupied a large part of north-western India, much larger than that conquered by Alexander. It is said that they pushed forward as far as Ayodhya and Pataliputra. But the Greeks failed to establish united rule in India. Two Greek dynasties ruled north-western India on parallel lines at one and the same time. The most famous Indo-Greek ruler was Menander (165-145 B.C.). He is also known by the name Milinda. He had his capital at Sakala (modern Sialkot) in Punjab; and he invaded the Ganga-Yamuna doab. He was converted to Buddhism by Nagasena, who is also

known as Nagarjuna. Menander asked Nagasena many questions relating to Buddhism. These questions and Nagasena's answers were recorded in the form of a book known as *Milinda Panho* or the *Question of Milinda*.

The Indo-Greek rule is important in the history of India because of the large number of coins which the Greeks issued. The Indo-Greeks were the first rulers in India to issue coins which can be definitely attributed to the kings. This is not possible in the case of the early punch-marked coins, which cannot be assigned with certainty to any dynasty. The Indo-Greeks were the first to issue gold coins in India, which increased in number under the Kushans. The Greek rule introduced features of Hellenistic art in the north-west frontier of India. This art was not purely Greek. It was the



16.2 Copper-plate Inscription of about the first Century A.D. from Kulawan (near Taxila)

Its script is Kharoshthi which was written from right to left. The language is Prakrit. The Nagari rendering and English translation of the first two lines are given below.

सवत्सरये। 100 20 10 4 अजस श्रवणस मसस दिवसे त्रेविशे 20 1 1 1 इमेण कुणेण चन्द्रभि
उअसिअ धंसस ग्रहवतिस चित भद्रवलस भय छडशिलए शरिर प्रस्तिवेति गहयु।

[Twenty-third day of the month of Sravana in the year 134 of Azas (?) — on this day the lay worshipper Chandrabhi, who is the daughter of Grihapati Dharma and wife of Bhadravala, installs the relics of the Buddha at Chhatrasilaka.]

outcome of the Greek contact with non-Greek conquered peoples after Alexander's death. Gandhara art was its best example in India.

The Shakas

The Greeks were followed by the Shakas, who controlled a much larger part of India than the Greeks did. There were five branches of the Shakas with their seats of power in different parts of India and Afghanistan. One branch of the Shakas settled in Afghanistan. The second branch settled in Punjab with Taxila as its capital. The third branch settled in Mathura, where it ruled for about two centuries. The fourth branch established its hold over western India, where the Shakas continued to rule until the fourth century A.D. The fifth branch of the Shakas established its power in the upper Deccan.

The Shakas did not meet much effective resistance from the rulers and peoples of India. In about 57-58 B.C. we hear of king of Ujjain who effectively fought against the Shakas and succeeded in driving them out in his time. He called himself Vikramaditya, and an era called the Vikrama Samvat is reckoned from the event of his victory over the Shakas in 57 B.C. From this time onwards, Vikramaditya became a coveted title. Whoever achieved anything great adopted this title just as the Roman emperors adopted the title of Caesar in order to emphasize their great power. As a result of this practice we have as many as 14 Vikramadityas in Indian history. Chandragupta II was the most famous Vikramaditya. The title continued to be fashionable with the Indian kings

till the twelfth century A.D., and it was especially prevalent in western India and the western Deccan.

Although the Shakas established their rule in different parts of the country, only those who ruled in western India held power for any considerable length of time, for about four centuries or so. They benefited from the sea-borne trade in Gujarat and issued large number of silver coins. The most famous Shaka ruler in India was Rudradaman I (A.D. 130-150). He ruled not only over Sindh, but also over a good part of Gujarat, Konkan, the Narmada valley, Malwa and Kathiawar. He is famous in history because of the repairs he undertook to improve the Sudarshana lake in the semi-arid zone of Kathiawar. This lake had been in use for irrigation for a long time, and was as old as the time of the Mauryas.

Rudradaman was a great lover of Sanskrit. Although a foreigner settled in India, he issued the first-ever long inscription in chaste Sanskrit. All the earlier longer inscriptions that we have in this country were composed in Prakrit.

The Parthians

The Shaka domination in north-western India was followed by that of the Parthians, and in many ancient Indian Sanskrit texts the two peoples are together mentioned as Shaka-Pahlavas. In fact both of them ruled over this country on parallel lines for some time. Originally the Parthians lived in Iran from where they moved to India. In comparison with the Greeks and the Shakas they occupied only a small portion of north-western

India in the first century. The most famous Parthian king was Gondophernes, in whose reign St. Thomas is said to have come to India for the propagation of Christianity. In course of time, the Parthians, like the Shakas before them, became an integral part of Indian polity and society.

The Kushans

The Parthians were followed by the Kushans, who are also called Yuechis or Tocharians. The Kushans were one of the five clans into which the Yuechi tribe was divided. A nomadic people from the steppes of north Central Asia living in the neighbourhood of China, the Kushans first occupied Bactria or north Afghanistan where they displaced the Shakas. Gradually they moved to the Kabul valley and seized Gandhara by crossing the Hindukush, replacing the rule of the Greeks and Parthians in these areas. Finally they set up their authority over the lower Indus basin and the greater part of the Gangetic basin. Their empire extended from the Oxus to the Ganga, from Khorasan in Central Asia to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. A good part of Central Asia now included in the Commonwealth of Independent States (in former USSR), a portion of Iran, a portion of Afghanistan, almost the whole of Pakistan, and almost the whole of northern India were brought under one rule by the Kushans. This created a unique opportunity for the commingling of peoples and cultures, and the process gave rise to a new type of culture which embraced nine modern countries.

We come across two successive dynasties of the Kushans. The first dynasty was founded by a house of chiefs

who were called Kadphises and who ruled for 28 years from about A.D. 50. It had two kings. The first was Kadphises I, who issued coins south of the Hindukush. He minted coppers in imitation of Roman coins. The second king was Kadphises II, who issued a large number of gold money and spread his kingdom east of the Indus.

The house of Kadphises was succeeded by that of Kanishka. Its kings extended the Kushan power over upper India and the lower Indus basin. The early Kushan kings issued numerous gold coins with higher degree of metallic purity than is found in the Gupta gold coins. Although the gold coins of the Kushans are found mainly west of the Indus, their inscriptions are distributed not only in north-western India and Sindh but also in Mathura, Shravasti, Kaushambi and Varanasi. Hence, besides the Ganga-Yamuna *doab* they had set up their authority in the greater part of the middle Gangetic basin. Kushan coins, inscriptions, constructions and pieces of sculpture found in Mathura show that it was their second capital in India, the first being Purushapura or Peshawar, where Kanishka erected a monastery and a huge stupa or relic-tower which excited the wonder of foreign travellers.

Kanishka was the most famous Kushan ruler. Although outside the borders of India he seems to have suffered defeat at the hands of the Chinese, he is known to history because of two reasons. First, he started an era in A.D. 78, which is now known as the Shaka era and is used by the Government of India. Secondly, Kanishka extended his wholehearted

patronage to Buddhism. He held a Buddhist council in Kashmir, where the doctrines of the Mahayana form of Buddhism were finalized. Kanishka was also a great patron of art and Sanskrit literature.

The successors of Kanishka continued to rule in north-western India till about A.D. 230, and some of them bore typical Indian names such as Vasudeva.

The Kushan empire in Afghanistan and in the area west of the Indus was supplanted in the mid-third century A.D. by the Sassanian power, which arose in Iran. But Kushan principalities continued to exist in India for about a century. The Kushan authority seems to have lingered in the Kabul valley, Kapisa, Bactria, Khorezm and Sogdiana (identical with Bokhara and Samarkand in Central Asia) in the third-fourth centuries. Many Kushan coins, inscriptions and terracottas have been found in these areas. Especially at a place called Toprak-Kala in Khorezm, which lies south of the Aral Sea, on the Oxus, a huge Kushan palace of the third-fourth centuries has been unearthed. It housed an administrative archives containing inscriptions and documents written in

Aramaic script and Khorezmain language.

Impact of Central Asian Contacts

Structures and Pottery

The Shaka-Kushan phase registered a distinct advance in building activities. Excavations have revealed several layers of construction, sometimes more than half a dozen at various sites in north India. In them we find the use of burnt bricks for flooring and that of tiles for both flooring and roofing. But the use of *surkhi* and tiles may not have been adopted from outside. The period is also marked by the construction of brick-walls. Its typical pottery is red ware, both plain and polished, with medium to fine fabric. The distinctive pots are sprinklers and spouted channels. They remind us of red pottery with thin fabric found in the same period in Kushan layers in Central Asia. Red pottery techniques were widely known in Central Asia and they are found even in regions like Farghana which were on the peripheries of the Kushan cultural zone.

Better Cavalry

The Shakas and Kushans added new ingredients to Indian culture and enriched it immensely. They settled in India for good and completely identified themselves with its culture. Since they did not have their script, written language, or any organized religion, they adopted these components of culture from India. They became an integral part of Indian society to which they contributed considerably. They introduced better cavalry and the use of the riding horse on a large scale.



16.3 Kanishka's Coin

They made common the use of reins and saddles, which appear in the Buddhist sculptures of the second and third centuries A.D. The Shakas and the Kushans were excellent horsemen. Their passionate love for horsemanship is attested by numerous equestrian terracotta figures of Kushan times discovered from Begram in Afghanistan. Some of these foreign horsemen were heavily armoured, and fought with spears and lances. Possibly they also used some kind of a toe stirrup made of rope which facilitated their movements. The Shakas and Kushans introduced turban, tunic, trousers, and heavy long coat. Even now the Afghans and Punjabis wear turbans, and the *sherwani* is a successor of the long coat. The Central Asians also brought in cap, helmet and boots which were used by warriors. Because of these advantages they made a clean sweep of their opponents in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Later, when this military technology spread in the country, the dependent princes turned them to good use against their former conquerors.

Trade and Agriculture

The coming of the Central Asian people established intimate contacts between Central Asia and India. As a result India received a good deal of gold from the Altai mountains in Central Asia. Gold also may have been received by it through trade with the Roman empire. The Kushans controlled the Silk Route, which started from China and passed through their empire in Central Asia and Afghanistan to Iran, and Western Asia which formed part of the

Roman empire in the eastern Mediterranean zone. This route was a source of great income to the Kushans, and they built a large prosperous empire because of the tolls levied from the traders. It is significant that the Kushans were the first rulers in India to issue gold coins on a wide scale.

The Kushans also promoted agriculture. The earliest archaeological traces of large-scale irrigation in Pakistan, Afghanistan and western Central Asia belong to the Kushan period.

Polity

The Central Asian conquerors imposed their rule on numerous petty native princes. This led to the development of a feudatory organization. The Kushans adopted the pompous title of 'king of kings', which indicates their supremacy over numerous small princes who paid tributes.

The Shakas and the Kushans strengthened the idea of the divine origin of kingship. Ashoka was called 'dear to the gods', but the Kushan kings were called sons of god. This title was adopted by the Kushans from the Chinese, who called their king the son of heaven. It was used in India naturally to legitimize the royal authority. The Hindu law-giver Manu asks the people to respect the king even if he is a child, because he is a great god ruling in the form of a human being.

The Kushans also introduced the satrap system of government. The empire was divided into numerous satrapies, and each satrapy was placed under the rule of a satrap. Some curious practices such as hereditary dual rule, two kings ruling in

the same kingdom at one and the same time, were introduced. We find that father and son ruled jointly at one and the same time. Thus it appears that there was less of centralization under these rulers.

The Greeks also introduced the practice of military governorship. They appointed their governors called *strategos*. Military governors were necessary to maintain the power of the new rulers over the conquered people.

New Elements in Indian Society

The Greeks, the Shakas, the Parthians and the Kushans ultimately lost their identity in India. They became completely Indianized in course of time.



16.4 Pillar of Heliodorus near Vidisha

Since most of them came as conquerors they were absorbed in Indian society as a warrior class, that is, as the *kshatriyas*. Their placement in the brahmanical society was explained in a curious way. The law-giver Manu stated that the Shakas and the Parthians were the *kshatriyas* who had deviated from their duties and fallen in status. In other words, they came to be considered as second-class *kshatriyas*. In no other period of ancient Indian history were foreigners assimilated into Indian society on such a large scale as they were in the post-Maurya times.

Religious Developments

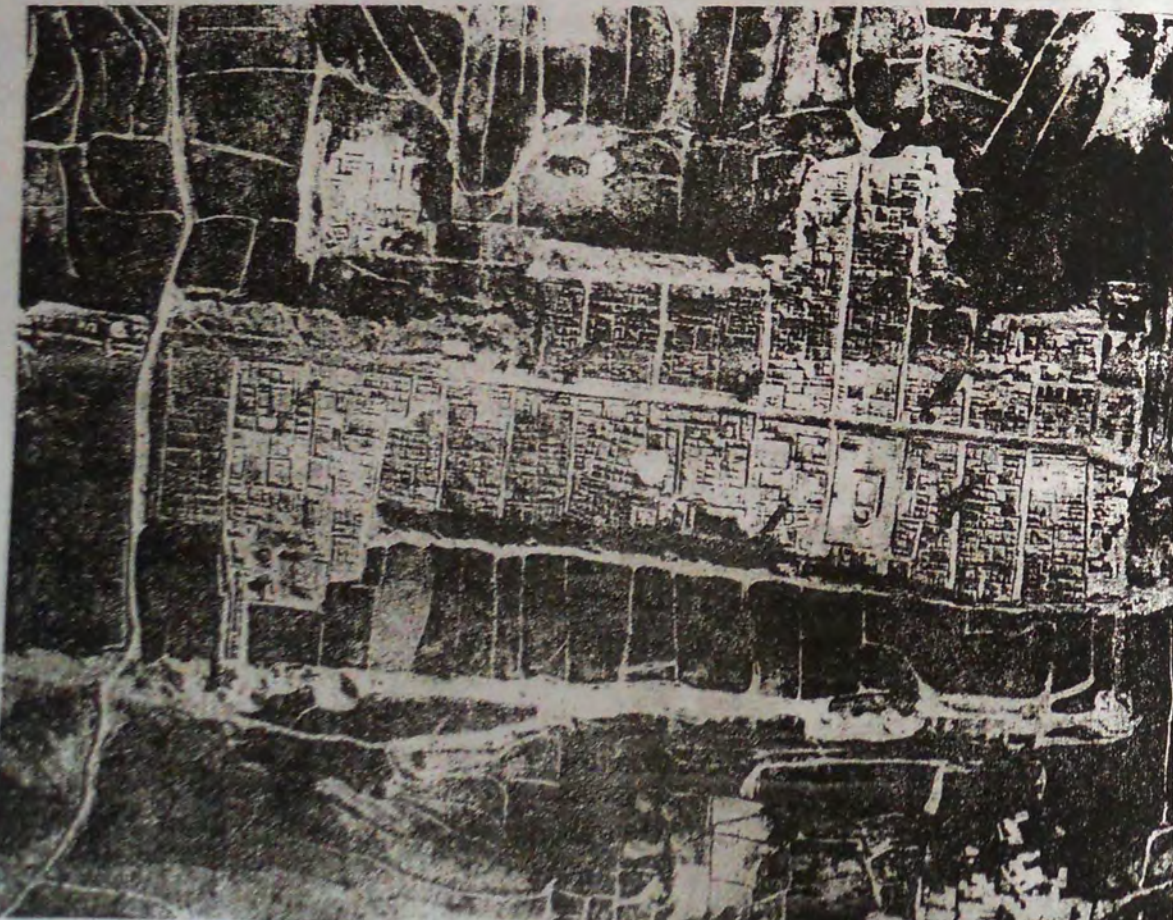
Some of the foreign rulers were converted to Vaishnavism, which means the worship of Vishnu, the god of protection and preservation. The Greek ambassador called Heliodorus set up a pillar in honour of Vasudeva near Vidisa (headquarters of Vidisa district) in Madhya Pradesh around the middle of the second century B.C.

A few other rulers adopted Buddhism. The famous Greek ruler Menander became a Buddhist. The questions and the answers that he exchanged with the Buddhist teacher Nagasena, also called Nagarjuna, constitute a good source for the intellectual history of the post-Maurya period. The Kushan rulers worshipped both Shiva and the Buddha, and the images of these two gods appeared on the Kushan coins. Several Kushan rulers were worshippers of Vishnu. This was certainly the case with the Kushan ruler Vasudeva, whose very name is a synonym for Krishna, who was worshipped as an incarnation of Vishnu.

The Origin of Mahayana Buddhism

Indian religions underwent changes in post-Maurya times partly due to a big leap in trade and artisanal activity and partly due to the large influx of people from Central Asia. Buddhism was especially affected. The monks and nuns could not afford to lose the cash donations from the growing body of traders and artisans concentrated in towns. Large numbers of coins have been found in the monastic areas of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh. Further, the Buddhists welcomed foreigners who were non-vegetarians. All this meant laxity in the day-to-day living of the nuns and monks who led

a sparse life. They now accepted gold and silver, took to non-vegetarian food and wore elaborate robes. Discipline became so slack that some renunciates even deserted the religious order or the Sangha and resumed the householder's life. This new form of Buddhism came to be called the Mahayana or the Great Wheel. In the old puritan Buddhism certain things associated with the Buddha were worshipped as his symbols. These were replaced with his images with the opening of the Christian era. Image worship in Buddhism seems to have led to this practice in brahmanism on a large scale. With the



rise of the Mahayana the old puritan school of Buddhism came to be known as the Hinayana or the Lesser Wheel. Fortunately for the Mahayana, Kanishka became its great patron. He convened a council in Kashmir. The members of the council composed 100,000 words, which thoroughly explained the three *pitakas* or collections of Buddhist literature. Kanishka got these commentaries engraved on sheets of red copper, enclosed them in a stone receptacle and raised a stupa over it. If this tradition is correct, the discovery of the stupa with its copper inscriptions could shed new light on Buddhist texts and teachings. Kanishka set up many other stupas to perpetuate the memory of the Buddha.

Gandhara and Mathura Schools of Art

The foreign princes became enthusiastic patrons of Indian art and literature, and they showed the zeal characteristic of new converts. The Kushan empire brought together masons and other artisans trained in different schools and countries. This gave rise to several schools of art: Central Asian, Gandhara and Mathura. Pieces of sculpture from Central Asia show synthesis of both local and Indian elements under the influence of Buddhism.

Indian craftsmen came into contact with the Central Asians, Greeks and Romans, especially in the north-western frontier of India in Gandhara. This gave rise to a new kind of art in which images of the Buddha were made in the Graeco-Roman style. The hair of the Buddha was fashioned in the Graeco-Roman style.

also spread to Mathura although it was primarily a centre of indigenous art. Mathura produced beautiful images of the Buddha, but it is also famous for the headless erect statue of Kanishka whose name is inscribed on its lower part. It also produced several stone images of Vardhamana Mahavira. Its pre-Gupta sculpture and inscriptions ignore Krishna, although Mathura is considered his birthplace and scene of early life. The Mathura school of art flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era, and its products made of red sandstone are found even outside Mathura. At



present the Mathura Museum possesses the largest collection of sculptures of Kushan times in India.

During the same period we notice beautiful works of art at several places south of the Vindhyas. Beautiful Buddhist caves were constructed out of rocks in Maharashtra. In Andhra Pradesh, Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati became great centres of Buddhist art, and the stories connected with the Buddha came to be portrayed in numerous panels. The earliest panels dealing with Buddhism are found at Gaya, Sanchi and Bharhut, and belong to the second century B.C. But we notice further development in sculpture in the early centuries of the Christian era.



16.7 Sculpture from Mathura

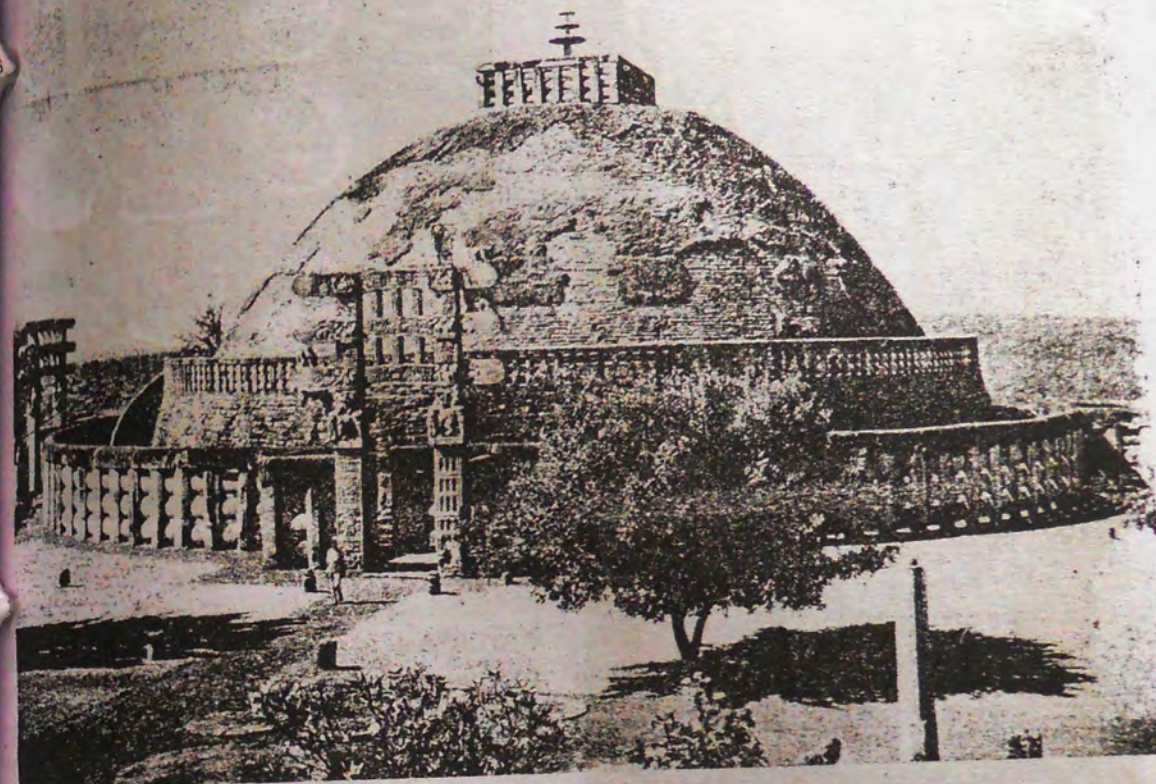
Literature and Learning

The foreign princes patronized and cultivated Sanskrit literature. The earliest specimen of *kavya* style is found in the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman in Kathiawar in about A.D. 150. From now onwards inscriptions began to be composed in classical Sanskrit, although the use of Prakrit in composing inscriptions continued till the fourth century A.D., and even later.

It seems that some of the great creative writers such as Ashvaghosha enjoyed the patronage of the Kushans. Ashvaghosha wrote the *Buddhacharita*, which is a biography of the Buddha. He also composed the *Saundarananda*, which is a fine example of Sanskrit *kavya*.

The progress of Mahayana Buddhism led to the composition of numerous *avadanas*. Most of these texts were composed in what is known as the Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit. Their one objective was to preach the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism to the people. Some of the important books of this genre were the *Mahavastu* and the *Divyavadana*.

The Greeks contributed to the development of the Indian theatre by introducing the use of the curtain. Since the curtain was borrowed from the Greeks it came to be known as *yavanika*. This word was derived from the term *yavana*, which was a Sanskritized form of Ionian, a branch of the Greeks known to the ancient Indians. In the beginning, the term *yavana* was used to refer to the Greeks but at a later stage it came to be used for all kinds of foreigners.



16.8 Sanchi Stupa — A view of the Gateway

The best example of secular literature appears in the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana. Attributed to the third century A.D., it is the earliest work on erotics dealing with sex and love-making. It gives us a picture of the life of a city-bred person or *nagaraka* who lived in a period of thriving urbanism.

Science and Technology

In post-Maurya times Indian astronomy and astrology profited from contact with the Greeks. We notice many Greek terms about the movement of planets in Sanskrit texts. Indian astrology came to be influenced by Greek ideas, and from the Greek term *horoscope* was derived the term

horashastra used for astrology in Sanskrit. The Greek coins, which were properly shaped and stamped, were a great improvement on punch-marked coins. The Greek term *drachma* came to be known as *dramma*. In return the Greek rulers used the Brahmi script and represented some Indian motifs on their coins. Dogs, cattle, spices and ivory pieces were exported by the Greeks, but whether they learnt any craft from India is not clear.

However, the Indians did not owe anything striking to the Greeks in medicine, botany and chemistry. These three subjects were dealt with by Greek writers like Hippocrates and Sushruta. The *Charakasamhita* contains names of



16.9 A Panel from Bharhut

numerous plants and herbs from which drugs are to be prepared for the use of patients. The processes laid down for the pounding and mixing of the plants give us an insight into the developed knowledge of chemistry in ancient India. For the cure of ailments the ancient Indian physician relied chiefly on plants, for which the Sanskrit word is *oshadhi*, and as a result medicine itself came to be known as *aushadhi*.

In the field of technology also the Indians seem to have benefited from



16.10 Silver Coins

contact with the Central Asian. Kanishka is represented as wearing trousers and long boots. Possibly the practice of making leather shoes began in India during this period. In any case the Kushan copper coins in India were imitations of the Roman coins. Similarly gold coins in India were struck by the Kushans in imitation of Roman gold coins. We hear of two embassies being exchanged between the Indian kings and the Roman kings. Embassies were sent from India to the court of the Roman emperor Augustus in A.D. 27-28 and also to the Roman emperor Trajan in A.D. 110-20. Thus the contacts of Rome with ancient India may have introduced new practices in technology. Working in glass during this period was especially influenced by foreign ideals and practices. In no other period in ancient India did glass-making make such progress as it did during this period.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the reasons for the invasions by the Indo-Greeks, Parthians, Shakas and Kushans.
2. Prepare a chart to show the chronology of the Indo-Greeks, the Parthians, the Shakas and the Kushans. Indicate the areas ruled by them.
3. Discuss the impact of the Central Asian contacts on India's political system, society, and science and technology.
4. Describe the development of Mahayana Buddhism.
5. Describe the developments in art and literature during the period 200 B.C.-A.D. 300, with examples. Describe the characteristic features of the Gandhara and Mathura schools of art.
6. On an outline map of India, show the areas which came under the rule of the Indo-Greek, Parthian, Shaka and Kushan kings. Also prepare a list of the names of places mentioned in the text and show them in the map.
7. Take up a group project to show how Indian culture was enriched during this period.

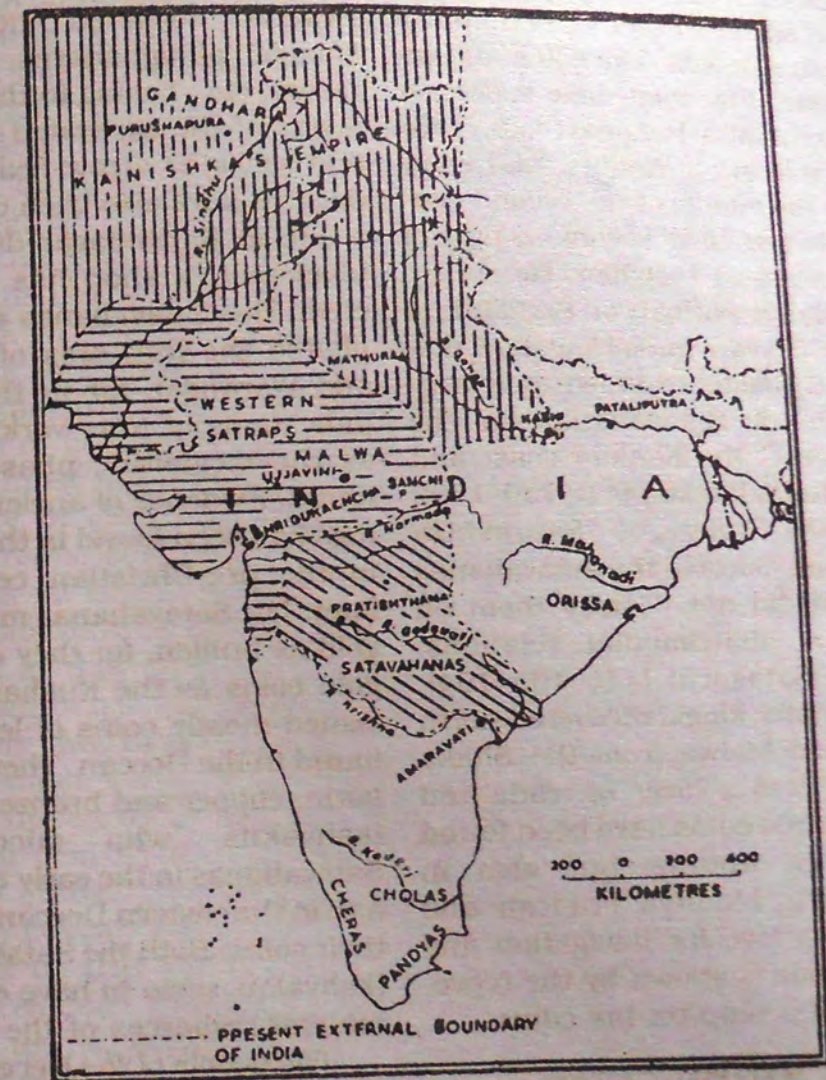
CHAPTER 17

*The Age of the Satavahanas***Political History**

THE MOST important of the native successors of the Mauryas in the north were the Shungas followed by the Kanvas. In the Deccan and in central India, the Satavahanas succeeded the Mauryas although after a gap of about 100 years. The Satavahanas are considered to be identical with the Andhras who are mentioned in the Puranas. The Puranas speak only of the Andhra rule and not of the Satavahana rule. On the other hand the name Andhra does not occur in Satavahana inscriptions. Pre-Satavahana settlements are attested by the finds of red ware, black-and-red ware and russet-coated painted ware at many sites in the Deccan. Most of these are associated with the iron-using megalith builders who were stimulated to new activity by contacts with the material culture from the north. The use of ironshare, paddy transplantation and the coming of urbanism, writing, etc. created conditions for state formation under the Satavahanas. According to some Puranas, altogether the Andhras ruled for 300 years and this period is assigned to the rule of the Satavahana dynasty. The earliest inscriptions of the Satavahanas belong to the first century B.C., when they defeated the

Kanvas and established their power in parts of central India. The early Satavahana kings appeared not in Andhra, but in north Maharashtra where their earliest coins and inscriptions have been found. They set up their power in the upper Godavari valley, which at present produces rich and diverse crops in Maharashtra.

Gradually the Satavahanas extended their power over Karnataka and Andhra. Their greatest competitors were the Shakas, who had established their power in the upper Deccan and western India. At one stage the Satavahanas were dispossessed of their dominions by the Shakas in Maharashtra and western India. The fortunes of the family were restored by Gautamiputra Satakarni (A.D. 106-130). He called himself the only brahmana. He defeated the Shakas and destroyed many kshatriya rulers. He claims to have destroyed the Kshaharata lineage to which his adversary Nahapana belonged. This claim is true, because more than 8,000 silver coins of Nahapana, found near Nasik, bear marks of being re-struck by the Satavahana king. He also occupied Malwa and Kathiawar which lay under the control of the Shakas. It seems that the empire of Gautamiputra Satakarni extended



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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles from the appropriate base line.

from Malwa in the north to Karnataka in the south. Possibly he also enjoyed general authority over Andhra.

The successors of Gautamiputra ruled till A.D. 220. The coins and inscriptions of his immediate successor Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (A.D. 130-154) are found in Andhra, and show that by the middle of the second century this area had become a part of the Satavahana kingdom. He set up his capital at Paithan or Pratishthan on the Godavari in Aurangabad district. The Shakas resumed their conflict with the Satavahanas for the possession of the Konkan coast and Malwa. Rudradaman I (A.D. 130-150), the Shaka ruler of Saurashtra (Kathiawar), defeated the Satavahanas twice, but did not destroy them on account of matrimonial relations. Yajna Sri Satakarni (A.D. 165-194), one of the later kings, recovered north Konkan and Malwa from the Shaka rulers. He was a lover of trade and navigation. His coins have been found not only in Andhra but also in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. His love for navigation and overseas trade is shown by the representation of a ship on his coins.

Aspects of Material Culture

The material culture of the Deccan under the Satavahanas was a fusion of local elements and northern ingredients. The megalith builders of the Deccan were fairly acquainted with the use of iron and agriculture. Although before circa 200 B.C. we find some hoes made of iron, the number of such tools increased substantially in the first two centuries of the Christian era. We do not notice much change in the

form of the hoes from the megalithic to the Satavahana phase. Only hoes were now fully and properly socketed. Besides socketed hoes, sickles, spades, ploughshares, axes, adzes, razors, etc., belong to the Satavahana layers of the excavated sites. Tanged and socketed arrow-heads as well as daggers have also been discovered. At a site in Karimnagar district even a blacksmith's shop has been discovered. The Satavahanas may have exploited the iron ores of Karimnagar and Warangal, for in these districts indications of iron workings as early as the megalithic phase have been found. Evidence of ancient gold workings has been found in the Kolar fields in the pre-Christian centuries and later. The Satavahanas may have used gold as bullion, for they did not issue gold coins as the Kushans did. They issued mostly coins of lead, which is found in the Deccan. They also issued potin, copper and bronze money. The Ikshvaku, who succeeded the Satavahanas in the early third century A.D. in the eastern Deccan, also issued their coins. Both the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus seem to have exploited the mineral resources of the Deccan.

The people of the Deccan knew the art of paddy transplantation, and in the first two centuries the area between the Krishna and the Godavari, especially at the mouths of the two rivers, formed a great rice bowl. The people of the Deccan also produced cotton. In foreign accounts, Andhra is considered to be famous for its cotton products. Thus, a good portion of the Deccan developed a very advanced rural economy. According to Pliny, the Andhra Kingdom maintained an army

of 100,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry and 1000 elephants. This presupposes a large rural population, and apparently the peasants produced enough to support this military strength.

Through contacts with the north, the people of the Deccan learnt the use of coins, burnt bricks, ring-wells, art of writing, etc. These components of material life had become quite important in the Deccan a couple of centuries later. In Peddabankur (200 B.C.-A.D. 200) in Karimnagar district, we find regular use of fire-baked bricks, and use of flat, perforated roof tiles. All this must have contributed to the longevity of constructions. What is further remarkable is the fact that as many as 22 brick wells belonging to the second century A.D. have been discovered at that site. Naturally these facilitated dense habitations, and we find there covered drains underground to lead waste water into soakage pits. Towns appeared in Maharashtra by the first century B.C., when we find several crafts. They emerged in the eastern Deccan a century later. Pliny informs us that the Andhra country in the eastern Deccan included 30 walled towns, besides numerous villages. Several towns of the second and third centuries in this area are known from inscriptions and excavations. Increasing trade is indicated by numerous Roman and Satavahana coins. They appeared about a century later in the eastern Deccan, in the Godavari-Krishna area.

Social Organization

The Satavahanas originally seem to have been a tribal people. But they were brahmanized, and their

most famous king Gautamiputra Satakarni claims to have established the four-fold varna system which had fallen into disorder. He boasts that he put an end to the intermixture between the people of different social orders. Such a confusion was probably caused by the Shaka infiltration and by the thin and superficial brahmanization of the tribes living in the Deccan. The absorption of the Shakas in brahmanical society as kshatriyas was facilitated by intermarriage between the Shakas and the Satavahanas. Similarly, the indigenous tribal people were more and more acculturated by the Buddhist monks, who were induced by land grants to settle in the western Deccan. It is suggested that traders also supported the Buddhist monks, for the earliest caves seem to have been located on the trade routes. The Satavahanas were also the first rulers to make land grants to the brahmanas, although we have more instances of grants being made to Buddhist monks.

According to the Dharmashastras, it was the function of the kshatriyas to rule, but the Satavahana rulers called themselves brahmanas. Gautamiputra boasts that he was the true brahmana. Since the Andhras are identified with the early Satavahanas, probably they were a local tribe who were converted to brahmanism. The orthodox brahmanas of the north looked upon the Andhras as a mixed caste. This shows that Andhras were, a tribal people who were brought within the fold of brahmanical society as a mixed caste.

Increasing craft and commerce in this period brought many merchants

and artisans to the forefront. Merchants took pride in naming themselves after the towns to which they belonged. Both artisans and merchants made generous donations to the Buddhist cause. They set up small memorial tablets. Among the artisans the *gandhikas* or the perfumers are repeatedly mentioned as donors. At a later stage the term *gandhika* became so general as to connote all kinds of shopkeepers. The modern title Gandhi is derived from this ancient term.

The most interesting detail about the Satavahanas relates to their family structure. In Aryan society in north India, father enjoyed greater importance than mother, and the north-Indian princes whom we have considered so far seem to have belonged to a patriarchal society. But the Satavahanas show traces of a matrilineal social structure. It was customary for their king to be named after his mother. Such names as Gautamiputra and Vashishthiputra indicate that in their society mother enjoyed a great deal of importance. At present in peninsular India the son's name includes a part of the father's name, and there is no place for mother in it; this shows patriarchal influence. Queens made important religious gifts in their own right, and some of them acted as regents. But basically the Satavahana ruling family was patriarchal because succession to the throne passed to the male member.

Pattern of Administration

The Satavahana rulers strove for the royal ideal set forth in the *Dharmashastras*. The king was represented as the upholder of dharma.

To him were assigned a few divine attributes. The Satavahana king is represented as possessing the qualities of mythical heroes such as Rama, Bhima, Keshava, Arjuna, etc. He is compared in prowess and lustre to these legendary figures and to supernatural forces. This was evidently meant to attribute divinity to the Satavahana king.

The Satavahanas retained some of the administrative units found in Ashokan times. Their district was called *ahara*, as it was known in the time of Ashoka. Their officials were known as *amatyas* and *mahamatras*, as they were known in Maurya times.

But we notice certain military and feudal traits in the administration of the Satavahanas. It is significant that the *senapati* was appointed provincial governor. Since the tribal people in the Deccan were not thoroughly brahmanized and reconciled to the new rule, it was necessary to keep them under strong military control. The administration in the rural areas was placed in the hands of *gaulamika*, who was the head of a military regiment consisting of nine chariots, nine elephants, 25 horses and 45 foot-soldiers. The head of the army platoon was therefore posted in the countryside to maintain peace and order.

The military character of the Satavahana rule is also evident from the common use of such terms as *kataka* and *skandhavaras* in their inscriptions. These were military camps and settlements which served as administrative centres so long as the king was there. Thus coercion played a key role in the Satavahana administration.

The Satavahanas started the practice of granting tax-free villages to brahmanas and Buddhist monks. The cultivated fields and villages granted to them were declared free from molestation by royal policemen and soldiers, and all kinds of royal officers. These areas therefore became small independent islands within the Satavahana kingdom. Possibly the Buddhist monks also preached peace and rules of good conduct among the people they lived with, and taught them to respect political authority and social order. The brahmanas, of course, helped enforce the rules of the varna system which made society stable.

The Satavahana kingdom had three grades of feudatories. The highest grade was formed by the king who was called *raja* and who had the right to strike coins. The second grade was formed by the *mahabhoja*, and the third grade by the *senapati*. It seems that these feudatories and landed beneficiaries enjoyed some authority in their respective localities.

Religion

The Satavahana rulers were brahmanas, and they represented the march of triumphant brahmanism. From the very beginning kings and queens performed the Vedic sacrifices such as the *ashvamedha* *vajapeya*, etc. They also worshipped a large number of Vaishnava gods such as Krishna, Vasudeva and others. They paid liberal sacrificial fees to the brahmanas.

However, the Satavahana rulers promoted Buddhism by granting land to the monks. In their kingdom the

Mahayana form of Buddhism commanded considerable following, especially in the artisan class. Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh became important seats of Buddhist culture under the Satavahanas and more so under their successors, the Ikshvakus. Similarly, Buddhism flourished in the Nasik and Junar areas in the western Deccan in Maharashtra, where it seems to have been supported by the traders.



17.1 Chaitya at Karle

Architecture

In the Satavahana phase many *chaityas* (sacred shrines) and monasteries were cut out of the solid rock in the north-western Deccan or Maharashtra with great skill and patience. In fact the process had started about a century earlier in about 200 B.C. The two common religious constructions were the Buddhist temple which was called *chaitya* and the monastery which was called *vihara*. The *chaitya* was a large hall with a number of columns, and the *vihara* consisted of a central hall entered by



17.2 Sculpture depicting the worship of Buddha's Footprints — Amaravati

a doorway from a verandah in front. The most famous *chaitya* is that of Karle in the western Deccan. It is about 40 metres long, 15 metres wide and 15 metres high. It is a most impressive specimen of massive rock architecture.

The *viharas* or monasteries were excavated near the *chaityas* for the residence of monks in the rainy season. At Nasik we have three *viharas*. Since they carry the inscriptions of Nahapana and Gautamiputra, it seems that they belong to the first-second centuries A.D.

Rock-cut architecture is also to be found in Andhra in the Krishna-Godavari region, but the region is really famous for independent Buddhist structures, mostly in the form of stupas. The most famous of them are Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The stupa was a large round structure erected over some relic of the Buddha. The Amaravati stupa began in about 200 B.C. but was completely reconstructed in the second half of the second century A.D. Its dome measured 53 metres across the base, and it seems to have been 33 metres in



17.3 Scene depicting Buddha's Sermon — Nagarjunakonda

height. The Amaravati stupa is full of sculptures which depict the various scenes from the life of the Buddha.

Nagarjunakonda prospered most in the second-third centuries under the patronage of the Ikshvakus, the successors of the Satavahanas. It contains not only Buddhist monuments but also the earliest brahmanical brick temples. Nearly two dozen monasteries can be counted here. Together with its stupas and *mahachaityas* it appears to be the richest in structure in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Language

The official language of the Satavahanas was Prakrit. All inscriptions were composed in this language and written in the Brahmi script, as was the case in Ashokan times. Some Satavahana kings may have composed Prakrit books. One Prakrit text called *Gathasattasai* or the *Gathasaptasati* is attributed to a Satavahana king called Hala. It consisted of 700 verses, all written in Prakrit, but it seems to have been finally re-touched much later, possibly after the sixth century A.D.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms and concepts: *matrilineal*, *gandhika*, *chaitya*, *vihara*, *stupa*, *Prakrit*.
2. Who were the Satavahanas? Give an account of their political history.
3. Were the Satavahanas the true successors of the Mauryas in the Deccan? Discuss.
4. Describe the system of administration under the Satavahanas.
5. Describe the development of art and architecture under the Satavahanas.
6. Describe the social organization during the age of the Satavahanas. Discuss its special features.
7. Give an account of religion in the Satavahana territories.
8. On an outline map of India, show the territories under Satavahana rule. Also show contemporary kingdoms in other parts of India.