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**HISTORY OF INDIA FROM
EARLIEST TIMES UP TO c.300 CE**

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SOURCES FOR INTERPRETING EARLY INDIAN HISTORY

STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Sources of Ancient Indian History
 - 1.1.2 Literary Sources
 - 1.1.3 Limitation of Literary Sources
 - 1.1.4 Archaeological Sources
 - 1.1.5 Conclusion
- 1.2 Let us Sum up
- 1.3 Answer to In-Text Questions
- 1.4 Essential Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to:

- identify various sources which help in the reconstruction of ancient Indian history
- explain the importance and limitations of these sources

1.1 SOURCES OF ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

1.1.1 Introduction

The knowledge of India's ancient past can be gathered from literary as well as archaeological sources. Although the art of writing was known as early as the third millennium BCE, our ancient manuscripts are not older than fourth century CE. It was so, not because ancient Indians lacked historical sense but because of the fact that the ancient Indians kept records of only those aspects which they felt were significant. The political events did not find a systematic compilation in a chronological order. In the absence of any proper written literary records, our knowledge of ancient Indian history and culture is from the archaeological sources namely inscriptions, coins, monuments and other material remains. Thus, for a better comprehension of India's past, the evidence from the literary sources has to



be corroborated through cross-checking with the archaeological evidence. We shall now take up the various sources available to us one by one for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history.

1.1.2 Literary Sources

The literature available to us can be classified into two groups namely indigenous literature which for the sake of convenience can be further sub-divided into religious and non-religious and foreign literature of the foreign travellers.

Indigenous literature

Religious Texts

The ancient Indian literature was mostly religious in nature and was not written with the conscious aim of recording events of the past. The socio-religious scriptures can be classified into Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain.

• The Brahmanical Literature

The four Vedas- *Rig, Sama, Yajur* and *Atharva*; the *Brahmanas*; the *Aranyakas*; the *Upanishads*; the two Sanskrit epics namely the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*; the *Puranas* and the *Dharmashastras* constitute the Brahmanical literature. Each Veda has four parts – the *Samhita*, the *Brahmana*, the *Aranyaka* and the *Upanishad*. The Vedic *Samhitas* give an account of the life of Aryans in addition to their philosophy, religion, etc. The *Brahmanas* are the commentaries and prose explanations of the *Samhitas*. They mostly deal with the ritualistic aspects of religion. They give details of sacrificial rituals and their outcome. The *Aranyakas* or the ‘Forest Books’ contains philosophical interpretation of the various sacrificial rituals. The *Upanishads*, too, form a part of the mystical and philosophical literature and are closely associated with the concepts of *Atman* and *Brahman*. While criticizing the rituals, the *Upanishads* laid stress on the value of right belief and knowledge.

It is difficult to give Vedas an exact date as they were transmitted orally from one generation to another and were not committed to writing until very late. Most historians take 1500-1000 BCE as the period of composition of the early Vedic literature and 1000-500 BCE as that of later Vedic texts. Vedic literature has little trace of political history but gives us a good glimpse of culture and civilization in the parts of north-western and northern India during the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE. We must also remember that almost every Vedic text contains interpolations.

Vedanga literature was composed between 600 and 200 BCE in order to assist the understanding of the *Vedas*. Six in number, the *Vedangas* included works on phonetics (*shiksha*), ritual (*kalpa*), grammar (*vyakarana*), etymology (*nirukta*), metrics (*chhanda*), and astronomy (*jyotisha*).



The two Epics –the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – provide significant information on the economic, religious, social and political conditions of their times. The composition of the *Mahabharata* is placed between 400 BCE and 400 CE. It is believed that originally it consisted of 8800 verses but the final compilation increased the verses to 10,000. Its narrative portion consisting of Kaurava-Pandava conflict relates to the Later Vedic period; the descriptive portion to the Post-Vedic period; and the didactic portion to the post-Mauryan and Gupta periods. Similarly, the *Ramayana* was composed between the 5th century BCE and the 3rd century CE and originally consisted of 6,000 verses which were increased to 12,000 and eventually to 24,000. The major *Puranas* also seem to have been finally compiled by c. 400 CE. The *Puranas* are encyclopaedic in content associated with different kind of rituals and practices, and also provide dynastic history up to the beginning of Gupta rule.

• The Buddhist Literature

The religious works of the Jainas and the Buddhists are important sources of history which refer to historical persons and incidents. Early Buddhist literature is generally divided into canonical and non-canonical texts written in *Pali*. The *Pali Tipitikas* consisting of three books – the *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* – fall under the first group. They contain all the basic aspects of Buddhist socio-religious order. *Jatakas* or the stories of Gautam Buddha's previous births form the most important portion of the non-canonical literature. Besides making incidental references to political events in the age of Buddha, the *Jatakas* throw invaluable light on the social and economic conditions of the period between the 5th and 2nd century BCE. *Milindapanha* (2nd century BCE – 1st century CE), the Pali chronicles – the *Dipavamsa* (4th-5th centuries CE) and the *Mahavamsa* (5th century CE) and several other Buddhist works in Sanskrit or mixed Prakrit-Sanskrit such as the *Mahavastu*, the *Lalitvistara*, the *Divyavadana*, Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacarita* etc. are important sources for the reconstruction of socio-religious, political and economic history of their times.

• The Jaina Literature

The sacred books of the Jainas, known as the *Siddhanta* or *Agama* are also of immense value for the study of ancient history. Their final compilation supposedly took place in Vallabhi in Gujarat in the 5th or 6th century CE. The texts written in Prakrit contain information useful for the reconstruction of political history of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the age of Mahavira. The non-canonical Jaina works which are partly in Prakrit and partly in Sanskrit tell us about Jaina Tirthankaras and also about trade and traders in those times. The *Jaina Puranas* (compiled in 8th-9th centuries CE) and the *Parishishtaparvan* by Hemchandra are the part of the Jaina literature providing important historical data on Jaina religion and culture.



Non-Religious Literature

The mass of non-religious literature is comprised of Dharmashastras, biographies, chronicles, works on politics and grammar, classical Sanskrit literature and several scientific works. It is not possible to mention all, so we shall mention only a few under each head.

The *Dharmasutras* compiled in 500-200 BCE and the *Smritis* (circa 200 BCE – 900CE) together with their commentaries are called *Dharmashastras*. These are law books dealing with norms of social behaviour besides personal, civil and criminal law. From them we infer about social practices prevalent in those times.

The *Buddhacharita* and the *Saundarananda* by Ashvaghosha, and *Harshacharita* by Banabhatta, are some of the important biographies of ancient times. Kalhan's *Rajtarangini*, the 12th century historical chronicle of Kashmir is the best example of the earliest historical writing.

Noteworthy works on politics and grammar include Kautilya's *Arthashastra* which provides rich material for the study of ancient Indian polity and economy. Kamandaka's *Nitishastra* and Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* provide information about the *janapadas* or the territorial states of pre-Mauryan times. Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* is a commentary on Panini but also furnishes accounts of post-Mauryan times.

Aryabhata's *Aryabhatiya* and Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita* are important astronomical texts while *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* are renowned works on medicine.

Of the ancient dramas, the *Dutavakya*, *Balacharita*, *Svapna-Vasavadatta* by Bhasa, the *Mudrarakshasa* and *Devichandragupta* by Vishakadatta and the classic works of Kalidasa including both kavyas and dramas such as *Abhijnanshakuntalam*, *Malvika-Agnimitram*, *Raghuvamsha* etc. reflect the social and cultural conditions of the times of which the writers belonged.

Besides the Sanskrit works, we also have some Tamil works constituting the corpus of Sangam literature assigned to the early centuries of the CE. The Sangam literature is a major source of information for the social, economic and political life of the people living in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the early centuries of the CE.

Foreign Literature

The accounts of the foreigners or foreign travellers supplement the indigenous literature. The identification of Prince Sandrokottas (mentioned by Greek writers as a contemporary of Alexander the Great) with Chandragupta Maurya has served as the sheet anchor in ancient Indian chronology. The works of Arrian, Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy and *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* written by an anonymous Greek navigator help us in the study of ancient Indian geography and commerce. The *Indika* of Megasthenes, an ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, gives a descriptive account of the administration, society, and economic activities in the time of the Mauryas. The Greek accounts are not completely



reliable as they are based more on hearsay than on personal experiences of the writer. Also most of the Greek writers were ignorant of the Indian languages which might have affected their impressions and knowledge of our country.

The best known among the Chinese travellers were Fa Xian (Fa-Hien) and Xuan Zang (Hiuen-Tsang) who provide us with useful information regarding the social, religious and economic life during the reign of Chandragupta II and Harsha respectively.

1.1.3 Limitation of Literary Sources

If we had to rely on literary sources alone, our information would have been incomplete. The greatest handicap in the study of the history of ancient India is the absence of a definite chronology. But this gap has been filled by actual remains of this period in the shape of coins, inscriptions and monuments. We do not have continuous written records of the past because some have been destroyed with passage of time. Even the available literary sources, such as court literature, foreign accounts etc. may contain different kinds of biases. It is at this stage that the actual remains of the past come to the rescue of the historians to form a fair and objective assessment of the events that took place.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. Name the authors of the following texts:

- (i) *Buddhacharita* (ii) *Harshacharita* (iii) *Ashtadhyayi* (iv) *Arthashastra*
(v) *Nitishastra* (vi) *Mahabhashya* (vii) *Mudrarakshsa* (viii) *Svapna-Vasavadatta* (ix) *Raghuvamsha*

B. Name any two texts belonging to each of the following:

- (i) Buddhist literature (ii) Jaina literature.

1.1.4 Archaeological Sources

As historical evidence, the archaeological sources take precedence over the literary evidence because, as has already been pointed out, the age and authorship of most of our ancient texts are uncertain. Also, as a result of various additions and interpolations made over a period of time, they have undergone modifications. Besides, the account given in the literary sources is more often coloured with the state of the mind of the author and in order to grasp the real significance of the historical events mentioned in these works, it becomes absolutely essential to give due consideration to the author's point of view while interpreting their statements.

Archaeological evidence helps us in solving chronological problems. We often get valuable proof of date by a careful examination of the stratification of the ruins on ancient sites. Important excavations at a large number of sites including those at Harappa,



Mohenjodaro, Nalanda, Taxila, Sarnath, Arikamedu etc. have contributed largely to our knowledge of the past. Archaeology is our only source of knowledge for the prehistoric period. It enables us to know a great deal about the evolution of Indian civilization and a scientific examination of buildings, monuments, and works of art, throw some light on the social, economic and religious conditions prevailing in ancient times. However archaeological remains do not help us in understanding the realm of the mind. It is difficult to reconstruct social relations, ideas, philosophical traditions, etc. on the basis of archaeological sources.

• Inscriptions

Inscriptions constitute the most reliable source of our knowledge of the ancient Indian history. The study of inscriptions is called Epigraphy. Being engraved on stone slabs, pillars, rocks, copper plates, walls of buildings etc. inscriptions are neither easily perishable nor can they be easily tampered with. Majority of inscriptions are commemorative, dedicatory or donative. They commemorate some particular event, public or private, or record the dedication of some buildings or images, or bear testimony to grants of land. Although the correct and definite dates are not always mentioned, yet the changing character of the script enables us to determine the approximate age of the inscriptions. The script also indicates the language known in those days. They are written in different languages, such as Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu etc. Before the Gupta period most of the inscriptions were written in Prakrit. Two types of scripts were prevalent in writing these inscriptions viz., Brahmi and Kharosthi. Most of the inscriptions were written in Brahmi, while only a few were written in Kharosthi which was derived from Aramaic and similar to the Semitic alphabet.

The series of deciphered Indian inscriptions open with the edicts of the great Mauryan emperor Ashoka. These edicts are royal commands for regulating social, religious and administrative behaviour. The edicts of Ashoka on rocks and pillars not only tell us about his law of piety but also enable us to form an idea of the extent of his empire. From the Ashokan inscriptions we come to know about Ashoka's religious policy (*Dhamma*), administrative system, personal character, advancement and standards of educational system, the ancient language and Ashoka's relations with other countries. Moreover they also throw light on Mauryan art. These written records which are mostly in the Prakrit language, were engraved in Brahmi script barring a few in the north-west which were engraved in Kharoshthi script written from right to left.

The post-Mauryan and Gupta inscriptions fall into two categories – official and private. The official inscriptions generally record the royal achievements and are written by court poets. Among such inscriptions, popularly known as the *Prashastis*, the most prominent ones are the *Prashasti* of the emperor Samudra Gupta engraved on the Ashokan pillar at Allahbad, the Hathigumphaprashastiof king Kharavela of Kalinga, the Nasik inscription of king Gautami Balasree, the Girnar inscription of king Rudradaman.



The inscriptions engraved on the copper-plates are available in large numbers. They contain an account of land-grants made by different rulers. These inscriptions describe the area of land granted and also the date of the grant. Some of them also describe the achievements of the rulers who granted lands. These inscriptions, besides many more, of private individuals or local officers, have furnished us with names of various kings, boundaries of their kingdoms and sometimes useful dates and clues to many important events of past.

Private inscriptions are more numerous than the official ones. They are mostly engraved in temples or on images of stones or metals. These have provided us information concerning dates of construction of temples, the development of architecture and sculpture at various places during different times and also the growth of regional languages. Thus, these inscriptions have been of great help in tracing the evolution of art and religion and also in determining the general conditions in any specific period.

The history of Satavahana rulers has been based mostly on their inscriptions.

Certain inscriptions found outside India throw valuable light on the relations of India with foreign countries. Ashokan inscriptions clearly indicate that he sent his religious preachers to Burma, Ceylon, the Himalayan Terai, Egypt, Syria, Macedonia, Greece etc.

• Coins

Next to the inscriptions, coins are another important archaeological source of history of ancient India. Hoards of gold, silver and copper coins have been unearthed in different parts of the country which provide us valuable information regarding Indian history. The study of coins is known as Numismatics. Numismatic evidence, though comparatively less important than its inscriptional counterpart, forms a very authentic source of information on certain periods of ancient India. It can be broadly divided into two distinct periods: pre and post-Mauryan period. Coins in the period prior to the Mauryas are generally of two types: the punch-marked coins and the coins cast in die. These coins were issued both by the monarchical and the republican states, on the one hand, and by private merchants, trade guilds, city corporations and other small private bodies on the other.

The earliest coins, made mostly of silver and, in a much lesser quantity, of copper, were the punch-marked coins, which did not contain any name but figures and symbols only. These coins were made by imprinting symbols on the obverse and reverse by individual punches. We also come across uninscribed cast copper coins and punch-marked coins with symbols. These were made by pouring molten metal in casts bearing the negatives of these designs.

It is not till after the Greek invasion that we come across coins with the names of kings clearly engraved on them. The history of the Bactrian, Parthian and Scythian princes in India has been reconstructed almost solely on the basis of a careful study of the coins issued by them. These coins contained the busts and the names of the rulers. A large number of



coins of the Saka rulers also contained the dates according to the Saka era thereby enabling the historians not only to draw dynastic lists but also to determine the chronology of the ruling powers.

Thereafter, plenty of gold coins of the Kushana and Gupta rulers are also available. The Kushanas continued the tradition of bilingual (Greek and Khroshthi) inscriptions but their coinage also displays Iranian and Indian influence. The number of coins belonging to the post-Gupta period is severely limited. The coins of great emperors like Harsha or ruling dynasties like the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Pratihara, or Palas, not to speak of lesser kings and dynasties, are either unknown or of little significance.

Coins have helped us in finding out the names and dates of various rulers besides helping us indirectly in assessing the economic and religious conditions of the times when they were issued. Some historians have endeavoured to ascertain the economic condition of India at different times by scientifically examining the gold, silver and copper coins issued during the concerned periods. The coins provide us information about personal traits of the rulers and the deities they worshiped. Besides giving us an idea about the extent of the empire of a ruler, coins can enlighten us on the various kinds of art and its development, such as the art of writing, the art of moulding metal etc.

Moreover, coins are also a principal source of our information regarding the various Indian states, both monarchical and republican, that flourished during the ancient period. The history of the Mitra rulers of Panchala, Malavas, and Yaudheya has been almost exclusively reconstructed on the basis of their coins.

Finally, coins in several ways, supplement the information acquired through literature. Many a time, the coins alone have brought to light certain rulers who were not mentioned anywhere in the literature. For example, in our literature, there is a mention of only three or four Greek rulers in India, where as about thirty-three such rulers ruled in India for two centuries.

- **Remains and Monuments**

In addition to coins and inscriptions, we have other archaeological remains in the form of buildings, pottery, statues of stones, etc. which helps us in tracing the history of Indian subcontinent.

Remnants have been found in India even of the pre-historic age. These material remains have proved that humans existed in India even during the palaeolithic age. Baluchistan, north-west India, Ganga-Yamuna Doab, Madhya- Bharat and south India have yielded remnants of the Iron Age, which help us in tracing the social and economic development of the people at different times in different parts of India.



Mehrgarh excavations deserve a special mention since Mehrgarh, located on the bank of the Bolan river in the Kachi plain (Baluchistan), is the only known Neolithic settlement in the Indian subcontinent, attributed to approximately 7000 B.C.E.

The excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro tell us that long before the Aryans, there flourished an advanced civilization in the valley of the Indus. The systematic excavations of the ancient sites like Taxila or the monastic establishments at Sarnath have thrown light upon Buddhist way of life. The stone temples in south India and the brick monasteries in Eastern India still remind us of the great building activities of the past. The Megaliths reveal the way of life of the people in the Deccan from the Iron Age onwards.

The most important aspect of archaeological source is the large number of excavated ruined cities wherein lie a large number of monuments. These excavations can be horizontal, where a large surface area is exposed, or vertical where only a small area is dug vertical to obtain information about stratigraphy.

The following are the important excavated cities and towns of ancient India, Rajgir (ancient Rajagriha), Vaishali, Nalanda, Bodh Gaya, etc., in Bihar, Peshawar (ancient Purushapura), Taxila etc., in North-western Frontier Province and the Punjab; Ujjain, Sanchi etc., in Madhya Pradesh; Bairat, Rairh, Sambhar, etc., in Rajasthan; Langhnaj, Patan, Amreli, etc., in Gujarat; Kolhapur, Kondapur etc., in Deccan; Chandravali, Brahmagiri etc., in Mysore; Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda etc., in Andhra Pradesh; Virampattanam etc. in Tamil Nadu; Mathura; Varanasi, Sravasti, Kausambi, Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur etc., in U.P.; Parihaspur, Avantipur, Martand etc., in Kashmir.

Special mention may be made here of the Harappan civilization of Indus Valley, excavated partly in Mohenjodaro and Chanhu-daro in Sind, and partly in Harappa in the Punjab during the later phase of British rule in India. With extensive excavations in post-independent period, sites have been discovered in a large area consisting North-Western India, Rajasthan and the Deccan.

• **Miscellaneous Finds**

Relics of Indian sculpture and painting, ruins of the Buddhist Stupas and monasteries, images of Buddhist and Hindu gods and many manuscripts written in Indian languages and Indian alphabets have been unearthed at various parts of Central Asia, China, Korea, Mongolia, Japan, Tibet, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Java and Sumatra, etc. Angkor Vat in Cambodia and Borobodur in Java testify the spread of Indian culture to these countries.

A scientific examination of buildings, monuments and works of art, throws much light on the social and religious conditions prevailing in ancient times. The wall paintings of Ajanta and Ellora caves, different statues of Buddha, clay seals and pots of the Indus Valley are but a few examples, which point out the artistic skills of Indians in ancient times and help us in discovering ancient Indian culture. The temples of Deogarh in Jhansi and Bhitargaon



near Kanpur throw light on the artistic activities of the Guptas. The excavations at Sarnath have added to our knowledge regarding Buddhism and Ashoka.

1.1.5 Conclusion

Summing up, it may be said that the archaeological sources provide us valuable information on, political, socio-economic, and religious conditions in ancient India. But each category of sources have their own specific potential as well as limitation. Writing of an objective and comprehensive history involves a careful examination and correct interpretation of all the available source material. Therefore, the attempt should be to corroborate the archaeological evidence with the literary evidence in order to reconstruct a reliable history of our ancient past.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Fill in the blanks

- (i) The study of coins is known as _____
- (ii) _____ generally record the royal achievements and are written by court poets.
- (iii) The earliest coins, made mostly of silver and, in a much lesser quantity, of copper, were the _____ coins.
- (iv) The study of inscriptions is called _____
- (v) _____ located on the bank of the Bolan river in the Kachi plain (Baluchistan), is the only known Neolithic settlement in the Indian subcontinent, attributed to approximately 7000 B.C.E.
- (vi) _____ reveal the way of life of the people in the Deccan from the iron age onwards.

B. Short Notes:

- (i) Literary sources of ancient Indian history including the accounts of foreign historians and travelers
- (ii) Archaeological sources of ancient Indian history

C. Long Question:

- (i) What are the various sources for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history? Discuss each of them briefly.



1.2 LET US SUM UP

- Only an impartial scientific observation without any expectations and prejudices can help in the reliable and objective reconstruction of the past.
- Writing of an objective and comprehensive history involves a careful examination and unbiased interpretation of all the available sources such as the literary sources, the archaeological sources and the account of the foreign travellers.
- Each set of sources have their own specific potential and limitation and therefore need to be corroborated with other sources.

1.3 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

1. (i) Ashvaghosha (ii) Banabhatta (iii) Panini (iv) Kautilya (v) Kamandaka
(vi) Patanjali (vii) Vishakadatta (viii) Bhasa (ix) Kalidasa (x) Kalhana.

B (i) *Dipavamsa, Lalitvistara* (ii) *Agama, Parishishtaparvan*.

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

1. (i) Numismatics (ii) Prashastis (iii) Punch-marked (iv) Epigraphy (v) Mehrgarh
(vi) The Megaliths.

B. Short Notes:

- (i) See section 1.1.2
- (ii) See section 1.1.4

C. Long Question:

- (i) See section 1.2

1.4 ESSENTIAL READINGS

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SURVEY OF PREHISTORIC CULTURES: PALAEOLITHIC, MESOLITHIC AND NEOLITHIC

STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Human Origins in South Asia
- 2.3 Paleolithic Age
 - 2.3.1 Lower Paleolithic Age
 - 2.3.2 Middle Paleolithic Age
 - 2.3.3 Upper Paleolithic Age
 - 2.3.4 Paleolithic Cultures
- 2.4 Mesolithic Age
 - 2.4.1 Mesolithic Tools and Sites
 - 2.4.2 Subsistence Pattern
 - 2.4.3 Rock Art
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Answers to In-Text Questions
- 2.7 Neolithic Age
- 2.8 Essential Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the sites for Human evolution in the Indian Subcontinent
- Explain the chronological growth of Paleolithic cultures
- Explain the main features of Mesolithic cultures



- Recognize the tool-types and the subsistence pattern of Paleolithic and Mesolithic cultures

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we shall read about an epoch which forms the longest stretch of the human past. During this period, you will observe that there was a bio-cultural evolution of humans. They were able to successfully adapt to various physical environments and also move across land masses.

In the past, this age was simply referred to as the Stone Age because stone was the main raw material used by the early humans to make tools. Modern day classification of this Age is Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic.

The Stone Age came to be divided into various '*lithic*' cultures on the basis of the following:

- The typology of Stone tools
- Subsistence strategy employed by the people of the community whether they were hunters, gatherers or food producers
- The existing climatic conditions and prevailing flora and fauna

The Paleolithic and Mesolithic Ages represent the hunting-gathering stage of social evolution.

Remember this period refers to the Pre- Historic Age i.e. of an age when there was no system of writing. Thus, evidence for such period which precedes "recorded" history comes primarily from Archaeological remain and Anthropological studies.

Let us read now more about the Paleolithic and Mesolithic ages.

2.2 HUMAN ORIGINS IN SOUTH ASIA

The humid climate of the Indian subcontinent that results in quick and easy decomposition of organic material led to India's absence from the fossil map of the world for a very long time. While the origin of our species, *Homo sapiens*, in the cradle of Africa is now an indisputable fact, evidence of our early hominid ancestors in India remained elusive. In the 1930s, evidence of an early species – *Ramapithecus* – was discovered from the foothills of the Punjab Siwaliks. Conclusive evidence for direct human origins came in 1984 from Hathnora, near Hoshangabad, in Madhya Pradesh, where the Geological Survey of India team led by Arun Sonakia, uncovered a fossil of a female who had a cranial capacity between 1155 to 1421 cc. This fossil has been identified as an evolved *homo erectus* or a transitional form of *Homo sapiens* (Chakrabarti 2006: 11-12). From the same site the remains of a collar



bone have been excavated, probably belonging to the same female. In 2001 a complete fossilized human baby skull was discovered at Odai in Tamil Nadu.

2.3 PALEOLITHIC AGE

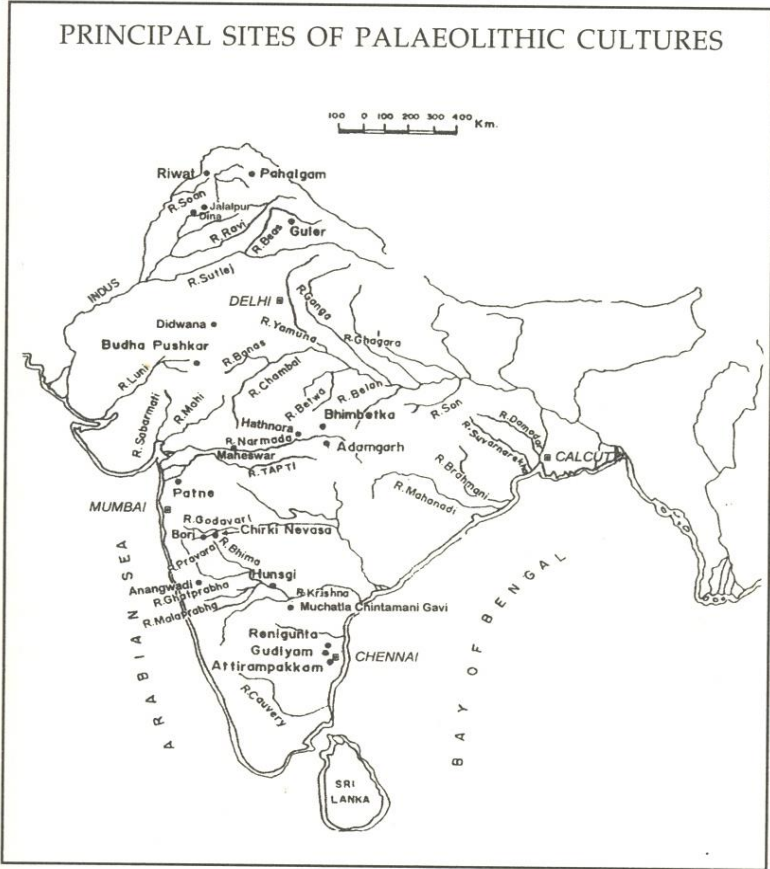
Paleolithic era refers to the 'old Stone Age' (*Palaeo* means old, and *lithic* means stone in Greek) It started approximately around 2.5 million years ago and did not end till about 10,000 years ago. It is believed to be the longest period in human history. The early humans used stone as a means of procuring and processing food and as time went on they began innovating. The Paleolithic cultures belong to the Pleistocene geological era and can be divided into three major sub-cultures on the basis of the shape, size and methods of manufacture of the principal tool types.

The Lower Paleolithic (dates ranging from about 2 mya to 100,000 years ago, in the Indian context) is characterized by pebble and core tools like hand axes, cleavers, chopping tools, and related artefact forms.

The Middle Paleolithic (from about 100,000 to 40,000 years ago) is characterized by smaller, lighter tools based upon flakes struck from cores, which in some cases are carefully shaped and prepared in advance, using techniques such as the Levallois technique.

The Upper Paleolithic (from about 40,000 to 10,000 years ago) is characterized by yet lighter artefacts, and parallel-sided blades and burins.

Robert Bruce Foote established the science of pre-history in India when in 1863 he discovered the first Palaeoliths. Subsequently, in the next two decades many prehistoric sites were reported in the southern peninsula. But it was only in the 1930s when H.de Terra and T.T. Paterson undertook a detailed survey of Kashmir, Potwar and Jammu areas, that the prehistoric research gained importance and a number of archaeologists began focusing their attention on the discovery of new prehistoric sites, construction of cultural sequences and reconstruction of palaeo environments. By the 1960s Indian prehistorians could confidently divide the Paleolithic industries of the Pleistocene (Ice-Age), into Lower, Middle and Upper Paleolithic on the basis of the shape, size and methods of manufacture of the principal artifact types. We shall now take them up one by one.



2.3.1 Lower Paleolithic Age

Bori in Maharashtra is considered to be the earliest Lower Paleolithic site. Lower Paleolithic stone tools have also been found in the Soan valley (now in Pakistan), and several sites in Kashmir and the Thar Desert. These were known as the Soanian industries (while the artifacts found over much of the rest of India were known as Acheulian or 'Madrasian') and were dominated by pebble or core tools and characterized as a predominantly chopper/chopping tools. The Acheulian industries was characterized by bifacially flaked artefacts – hand axes and cleavers – along with denticulates, scrapers, spheroids, and picks amongst other tools. The Acheulian artefacts were made principally on hard and durable quartzites. In the Hunsgi valley of Karnataka, limestone was used; at Lalitpur in Central India, pink granite was chosen while in parts of Maharashtra and Central India basalt was



preferred. Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh, desert area of Didwana in Rajasthan, Chirki-Nevasa in Maharashtra, Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh are some of the important sites which have yielded Lower Paleolithic tools. The caves and rock shelters of Bhimbetka near Bhopal also show features of the Lower Paleolithic age. Majority of Lower Paleolithic artefacts found in all parts of the subcontinent are made of quartzite.

The rivers – Tapti, Godavari, Bhima and Krishna have yielded a large number of Paleolithic sites. The distribution of Paleolithic sites is linked up with ecological variation like erosional features, nature of soils etc. The Tapti trough has deep regur (black soil), and the rest of the area is covered mostly by medium regur. There is scarcity of Paleolithic sites in the upper reaches of Bhima and Krishna. From Malprabha, Ghatprabha and affluents of the Krishna a number of Paleolithic sites have been reported. In Ghatprabha basin in Karnataka, Acheulian handaxes have been found in large numbers. Anagawadi and Bagalkot are two most important sites on the Ghatprabha where both early and Middle Paleolithic tools have been found. The rivers Palar, Penniyar and Kaveri in Tamil Nadu are rich in Paleolithic tools. Attiranmpakkam and Gudiyam (in Tamilnadu) have yielded both Early and Middle Paleolithic artifacts like handaxes, flakes, blades, scrapers etc.

2.3.2 Middle Paleolithic Age

The Middle Paleolithic industries are characterized by smaller and lighter tools based upon flakes struck from cores, which in some cases are carefully shaped and prepared in advance. There was an increase in the Levallois and discoidal core techniques. In most regions, quartzites continued to be used, and in such cases, Lower Paleolithic elements continued into the Middle Paleolithic.

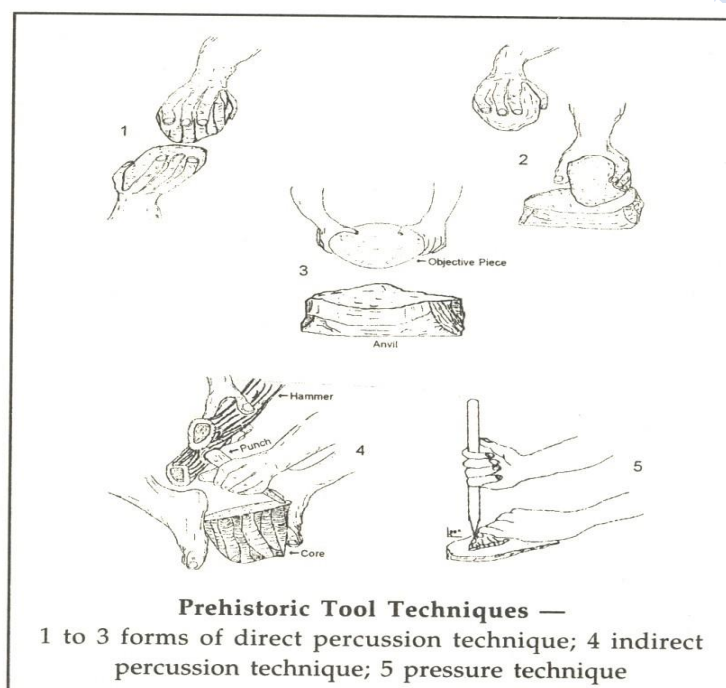
However, fine-grained siliceous rocks such as chert and jasper, were now preferred for tool-making, and raw material was often transported over several kilometers. Middle Paleolithic hominids largely continued to occupy areas inhabited during the Lower Paleolithic. But, in some parts of India such as Tamil Nadu, rock shelters began to be occupied for the first time. The artifacts of Middle Paleolithic age are found at several places on the river Narmada, and also at several sites, south of the Tungabhadra river. The Belan valley (UP), which lies at the foothills of the Vindhyas, is rich in stone tools and animal fossils including cattle and deer. These remains relate both to the Lower and Middle Stone Age.

The Wagaon and Kadamali rivers in Mewar are rich in Middle Paleolithic sites. A variety of scrapers, borers and points have been discovered in this area. Middle Paleolithic artefacts have been reported from Chirki near Nevasa and Bhandarpur near Orsind Valley. At Bhimbetka, the tools representing the Acheulian tradition were replaced at a later stage by the Middle Paleolithic culture. By and large open-air sites along streams on hill slopes, stable dune surfaces and rock-shelters continued to be used as is evident from the finds from Sanghao cave in Modern Pakistan, Luni river basin in Rajasthan, the sand dunes of Didwana, the Chambal, Narmada, Son and Kortallayar river valleys, the plateaus of Eastern Indian and



the Hunsgi valley in the south. Dates for this period range from around 1, 50,000 to 30,000 before present (BP), a period characterized in general by aridity.

Perhaps the most remarkable group of Middle Paleolithic sites in the subcontinent are those in the Rohri hills of upper Sind. The industry is based upon the large nodules of chert that cap this group of the flattopped limestone hills. These vast expanses of chert were extensively exploited in Middle and Upper Paleolithic times and again in Chalcolithic period; but they appear to have been largely neglected during the Lower Paleolithic and again during the Mesolithic, probably for climatic reasons. Extensive spreads of quartzite boulders, cobbles and pebbles in the Potwar region in the northern Punjab were used by Middle and Upper Paleolithic tool makers.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)

2.3.3 Upper Paleolithic Age

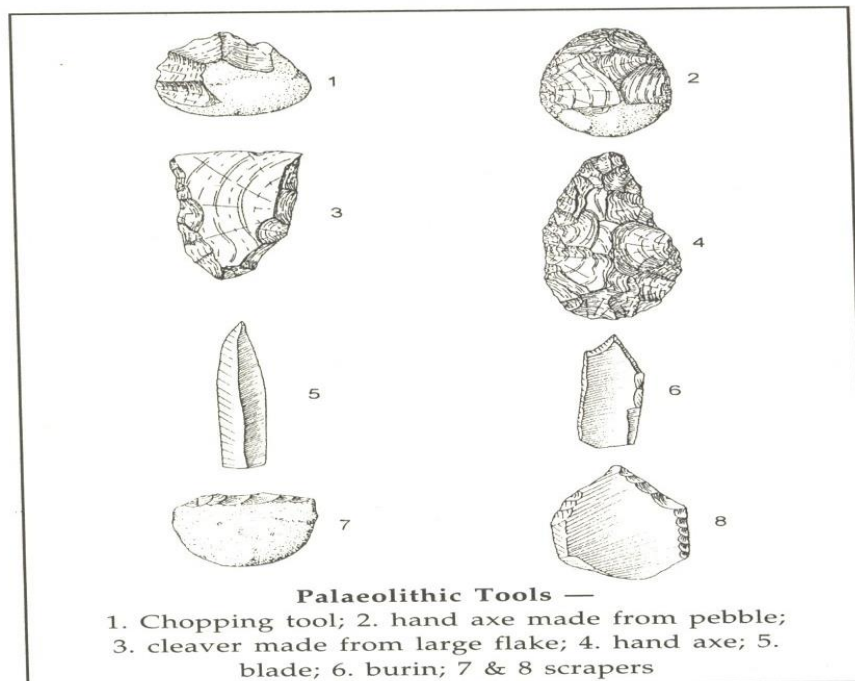
Towards the end of the Pleistocene, around 30,000 years ago, there was a distinct change in tool types and technology, which could be related to either changes in hunting methods, or to a more general shift in the utilization of resources, or a response to environmental change. The technique of making parallel-sided blades from a carefully prepared core, is an essential basic element of all Upper Paleolithic industries of the subcontinent, which were contemporary with the final arid phase. Artifact types include a wide range of scrapers, backed blades, points, choppers and burins, and regional variability in



blade technology and assemblage structure may now be clearly identified. For the first time, bone tools appear in limestone caves of Kurnool.

Although aridity restricted settlement in the interior dunes of Rajasthan, elsewhere Upper Paleolithic sites are abundant. Tools were made on a wide range of raw materials and were for the most part on long thin blades. Evidence for long distance transport of fine grained chert and chalcedony is widespread, testifying to the vast distances traversed by, or interaction between Upper Paleolithic communities. The Upper Paleolithic industries are generally, characterized by parallel sided blades and burins and other lighter artifacts.

The presence of Upper Paleolithic artifacts has been reported in the Thar regions (though they are more sparsely distributed than those of the Middle Paleolithic), at Sanghao caves in the North West Frontier Province and in the Potwar plateau of the northern Punjab (both in Pakistan), from parts of South India, central Gujarat and north-western Kathiawar. An Upper Paleolithic blade and burin industry from a group of sites near Renigunta in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh was also found.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)

2.3.4 Paleolithic Cultures

The faunal remains of the Paleolithic period suggest that the people were primarily in a hunting and gathering stage. The Paleolithic people subsisted on animals such as ox, bison, nilgai, chinkara, gazelle, black buck antelope, sambar, spotted deer, wild bear, a variety of



birds, and tortoises and fishes and on honey and plant food like fruits, roots, seeds and leaves. Hunting is reflected as the main subsistence pursuit in the Rock paintings and carvings found at Bhimbetka. The earliest paintings at Bhimbetka belong to Upper Paleolithic when people lived in small groups.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) _____ established the science of pre-history in India when in 1863 he discovered the first Palaeoliths.
- (ii) The Paleolithic cultures belong to the _____ geological era.
- (iii) The _____ industries was characterized by bi facially flaked artifacts – hand axes and cleavers – along with denticulates, scrapers, spheroids, and picks amongst other tools.
- (iv) _____ is characterized by hand axes, cleavers, chopping tools, and related artifact forms.
- (v) _____ industries are generally, characterized by parallel sided blades and burins and other lighter artifacts.
- (vi) The faunal remains of the Paleolithic period suggest that the people were primarily in a _____ stage.

2.4 MESOLITHIC AGE

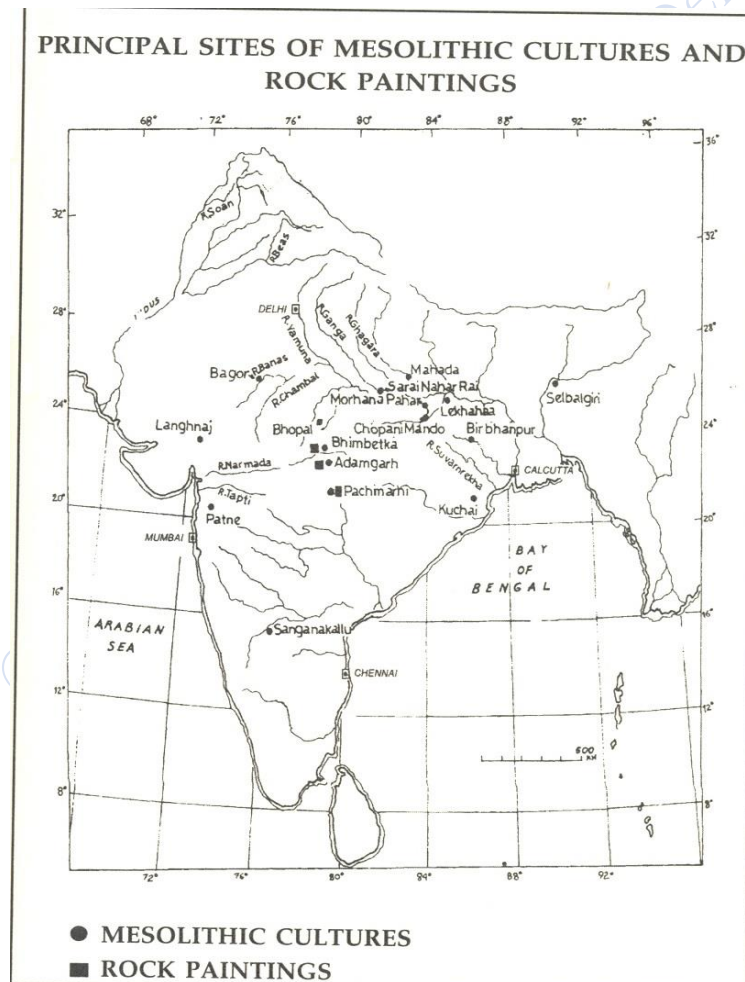
The Mesolithic and other stone industries of the Holocene (c.9000 BCE) in the subcontinent represent a further contribution of the developmental process of the Paleolithic. Changes in climate (which became warm and rainy) resulted in changes in flora and fauna. The hunter-gatherer communities spread rapidly over India. Microlithic industries associated with what appear to be the cultures of hunting people, fishermen, pastoralists or people practicing some form of agriculture, have been found widely throughout the subcontinent.

2.4.1 Mesolithic Tools and Sites

Microliths or small stone tools (their length ranging from 1 to 8 cm) comprised the primary Mesolithic tools owing to a shift in the pattern of hunting: from big game hunting to small game hunting, and to fishing and fowling. These microliths were made on blades and bladelets and include burins, lunates, crescents, triangles, points, trapeze etc. which were subsequently hafted onto bone or wooden handles to form composite tools. Mesolithic sites



abound in Rajasthan (Bagor, Tilwara, etc.), Uttar Pradesh (Sarai Nahar Rai, Morhana Pahar, Lekhahia etc.) Central India (Bimbetka, Adamgarh etc.) eastern India (Kuchai in Orissa, Birbhanpur in west Bengal, Sebalgiri-2 in Garo hills of Meghalaya etc.) and also south of the river Krishna (Sangankallu, Renigunta etc.) There is a rich concentration of microlithic sites in the Narmada, Mahi and Sabarmati valley of Gujarat. The primary excavated site is Langhanaj which has revealed three cultural phases, the phase I producing microliths, burials and animal bones. Pottery appears in later phases at the sites of Lekhahia and Baghai Khor. Faunal remains of cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo, pig, boar, bison, elephant, deer, jackal, wolf and a number of aquatic animals have been found. Since the Mesolithic age marked a transitional phase between the Paleolithic age and the Neolithic age, the first tentative steps towards domestication occurred. At Bagor (Rajasthan), bones of domesticated sheep and goat, are dated to around the 5th Century B.C.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)



2.4.2 Subsistence Pattern

The primary excavated site is Langhanaj which has revealed three cultural phases, the phase I producing microliths, burials and animal bones. Pottery appears in later phases at the sites of Lekhahia and Baghai Khor. Faunal remains of cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo, pig, boar, bison, elephant, deer, jackal, wolf and a number of aquatic animals have been found. Since the Mesolithic age marked a transitional phase between the Paleolithic age and the Neolithic age, the first tentative steps towards domestication occurred. At Bagor (Rajasthan), bones of domesticated sheep and goat, are dated to around the 5th Century B.C. While hunting was the chief food resource provider, Mesolithic people also collected wild roots, tubers, fruits, honey etc. which constituted important elements in the overall dietary pattern.

2.4.3 Rock Art

We can have an idea about the social life and economic activities of the Mesolithic people from the art and paintings found at sites like Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, Pratapgarh and Mirzapur. Mesolithic rock paintings depict people hunting game, gathering plant resources, trapping animals, eating together, dancing and playing instruments. Animals are the most frequent subjects. Other subjects include animal headed human figures; squares and oblongs partly filled in with hatched designs which may represent huts or enclosures and what appears to be pictures of unusual events, such as the chariots waylaid by men armed with spears and bows and arrows at Morhana Pahar group of rock shelters near Mirzapur. The colours and brown painted net traps for fishing, and for hunting small game, highlight the richness of material culture of which no trace survives in the archaeological record.



Rock Paintings at Bhimbetka

(Source: <http://www.mid-day.com/articles/around-24-heritage-sites-in-rs-30000/15033041>)



The Mesolithic culture paved the way for the Neolithic, where pastoralism and agriculture supplemented hunting-gathering as the prevalent mode of subsistence. In the Indian context, there emerges a broad overlap in the chronology of the so-called Mesolithic cultures and the earliest agricultural settlements now coming to light in the Indus basin. But, by and large the Mesolithic culture continued to be important roughly from 9000 to 4000 B.C.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. State True or False:

- (i) The Mesolithic tools were primarily handaxes, cleavers, choppers and chopping tools.
- (ii) Mesolithic rock paintings depict people hunting game, gathering plant resources, trapping animals, eating together, dancing and playing instruments.
- (iii) There is a rich concentration of microlithic sites in the Narmada, Mahi and Sabarmati valley of Gujarat.
- (iv) Sites like Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, Pratapgarh and Mirzapur are rich in Mesolithic art and paintings.
- (v) The Mesolithic culture paved the way for the Paleolithic culture.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

- The Paleolithic and Mesolithic Ages represent the hunting-gathering stage of social evolution.
- The Paleolithic cultures belong to the Pleistocene geological era and can be divided into three major groups, Lower, Middle and Upper Paleolithic, on the basis of the shape, size and methods of manufacture of the principal artifact types
- The Mesolithic Age started around 8000 BCE and is characterized by the production of microliths and small stone tools such as blades, cores, points, triangles and lunates.
- The pre- historic art gives us an insight into the social, economic and cultural life of the people in the contemporary period.



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Short notes:

- (i) Lower Paleolithic
- (ii) Middle Paleolithic
- (iii) Upper Paleolithic
- (iv) Tools and Sites of Mesolithic Period

B. Short Questions:

- (i) Describe briefly about some of the important sites of the Upper Paleolithic industries in different parts of the subcontinent.

C. Long Question:

- (i) Describe the main features of Paleolithic and Mesolithic cultures in the Indian Sub-continent.

2.6 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answer to In-Text Questions-1

- A. (i) Robert Bruce Foote (ii) Pleistocene (iii) Acheulian (iv) The Lower Paleolithic (v) The Upper Paleolithic (vi) Hunting and Gathering.

Answer to In-Text Questions-2

- A. (i) False (ii) True (iii) True (iv) True (v) False.

Answer to In-Text Questions-3

A. Short Notes:

- (i) See Section 2.3.1
- (ii) See Section 2.3.2
- (iii) See Section 2.3.3
- (iv) See Section 2.4.1

B. Short Questions:

- (i) See Section 2.3.3



C. Long Questions:

- (i) See Section 2.3 and 2.4

2.7 NEOLITHIC AGE

STRUCTURE

2.7.0 Objectives

2.7.1 Introduction

2.7.2 Significance of Food Production and Characteristic Traits of the 'Neolithic'.

- The Idea of the Neolithic and 'Neolithic Revolution'

2.7.3 Review of Onset of Agriculture in India – Shift from Diffusionist Paradigm to Independent Developments Leading To Food Production in Different Parts of the Country.

2.7.4 Regional Distribution of Neolithic Cultures

- North-West India
- North India
- Central India
- Mid-Gangetic Basin
- Eastern India
- North Eastern India
- South India

2.7.5 Conclusion

2.7.6 Let Us Sum Up

2.7.7 Essential Readings

2.7.0 Objectives

After studying this section you will be able to:



- explain the characteristic traits of the “Neolithic”
- trace the developments leading to food production in different parts of India
- explain the patterns of agriculture in the Indian subcontinent
- identify the regional distribution of Neolithic cultures

2.7.1 Introduction

The concluding phase of the Stone Age, the Neolithic Age, which followed the Mesolithic, heralded the beginning of food production. It is today generally agreed that it was a combination of the three factors i.e. climatic changes at the beginning of the Holocene, increasing population density and evolving cultural and technological strategies of human groups that ushered in the transformation towards agriculture and animal domestication.

2.7.2. Characteristic Traits of the ‘Neolithic’.

Unlike the lighter and sharper tools of the Palaeolithic or Mesolithic, the Neolithic tool kit was composed of heavy ground tools – pestles, mortars, grinders and pounders – as also axes and sickles which have a characteristic sheen on them, the result of harvesting wild or domesticated plants and grasses.

While the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic humans were mobile hunter-gatherers, the Neolithic populations all over the world used their tools for agriculture and the domestication of animals. Sedentary life is another feature that distinguishes the Neolithic period. Somewhere between 10,000 and 3,500 years ago, people all over the world, without any apparent connection, began settling down in agricultural communities and gave rise to villages, towns and then cities.

The use of pottery and the wheel and the subsequent invention of crafts like spinning, weaving and bead-making also serve to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Neolithic phase. Most Neolithic cultures start as aceramic or pre-pottery Neolithic. However, soon enough, sherds of hand-made pottery are found, often followed by wheel-thrown pottery. The technological breakthrough of the wheel enabled developments like locomotion and spinning.

• The idea of the Neolithic and ‘Neolithic Revolution’

The term Neolithic was coined by the Danish prehistorian Thomsen in the 1860s to distinguish the ground tool usage of the sedentary Neolithic people from the markedly different and lighter stone tools used by the mobile hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic age. It was a consideration of the fundamental, subsistence altering developments that made the prehistorian Gordon V. Childe designate this phase as the ‘Neolithic Revolution’. However, his critics were quick to point out that the term ‘revolution’ is synonymous with sudden or abrupt change, often accompanied by bloodshed and that the Neolithic was a gradual unfolding of developments, the culmination of the Stone Age. While the significant socio-



economic impact of the Neolithic cannot be denied, it is today generally viewed as a 'transformation' or 'evolution' rather than a 'revolution'.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. Write short notes:

- (i) Characteristic traits of the 'Neolithic'
- (ii) Gordon Childe's Hypothesis

2.7.3 Review of Onset of Agriculture in India – Shift from Diffusionist Paradigm to Independent Developments Leading To Food Production in Different Parts of the Country.

India was, for a long time, seen as having borrowed the idea of food production from its western neighbour, Mesopotamia, via the Iranian plateau. Modern research on the subject, especially since the 1970s, has discredited this viewpoint. It is now generally believed that agriculture in India was an independent, indigenous development rather than an import from outside. It has been proved for three of the main staples of the subcontinent – the discovery of wheat and barley in Mehrgarh, Pakistan grown almost contemporaneously with the Fertile Crescent sites cancels the possibility of diffusion into India. Similarly, the discovery of rice domestication from Lahuradeva and Koldihawa in Uttar Pradesh and millet from sites in South India has put a question mark on the diffusion of these two crops from South China and South Africa respectively.

The occurrence of food production in India was spread over a few millennia – from the 8th millennium BCE to circa 1000 BCE. A Neolithic celt was discovered as early as 1842 by Le Mesurier in the Raichur district of Karnataka, and later by John Lubbock in 1867 in the Brahmaputra valley of Upper Assam. Today, as a result of vast explorations and excavations, the distribution and nature of the Neolithic in the subcontinent has been brought to light. Many scholars argue for as many as six different geographical regions, each with its own distinctive features and chronological time-span. These regions are, (i) Northwestern i.e. Baluchistan and its adjoining area in Pakistan (7th to mid - 4th millennium BCE), (ii) Northern i.e. Kashmir Valley (2500-1500 BCE), (iii) Central India, i.e., Vindhyan region, south of Allahabad (4000 BCE-1200 BCE), (iv) Mid-Gangetic basin, i.e., eastern U.P. and Bihar (2000 BCE–1500 BCE), (v) Eastern India, i.e., Bengal, Orissa and Assam, (vi) Peninsular or South India, i.e., Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu (2500 BCE–1500 BCE).

An overview of the above time frame will indicate that the Neolithic phase in India did not develop everywhere at the same time nor did it end simultaneously. In fact, there were many Neolithic cultures which were coexisting with the copper using, urban Harappan Civilization (2600-1900 BCE). These cultures, besides having different time frames, exhibit some regional variations too. For example, in the northeast region, Neolithic tools have been



found but there is no evidence so far of plant cultivation. Similarly, while most of the Neolithic cultures evolved out of the preceding Mesolithic cultures, no such evidence is reported from the Kashmir Valley. Bone tools have only been recovered from sites in Kashmir and from Chirand in Bihar and in terms of cereal consumption, while wheat and barley predominate in Mehrgarh in Pakistan, it is rice from Central India and millet and ragi cultivation from the South Indian Neolithic sites (Jain 2006: 78-79).

The corpus of evidence gathered so far suggests that while each region responded to its specific geographical setting, the tapestry that finally emerged had distinct parallels. This was the rise and growth of agriculture and the beginning of settled village life. In the next part, we shall try to understand the dynamics and nature of this massive change in human lifeway across the length and breadth of the country

2.7.4 Regional Distribution of Neolithic Cultures

- **North-West India**

Comprising the province of Baluchistan and the Indus plains in Pakistan, this area represents the earliest evidence of the Neolithic Culture in the subcontinent, indicated by the growth of farming and animal husbandry. Basically, an inhospitable mountainous region, with a climate of extremes, Baluchistan has nevertheless revealed many traces of early settlements in its valley pockets. The important sites are Mehrgarh in the Kachhi plain, Kili Gul Muhammad in the Quetta Valley, Rana Ghundai in the Loralai valley and Anjira in the Surab valley.

The Indus plains provide a sharp contrast in the archaeological setting from that of Baluchistan. The lifeline of the area, the Indus is a highly unstable river, which flows through a wide alluvial flood plain. Neolithic sites start appearing in the North-West Frontier Province – Gumla, Rehman Dheri, Tarakai Qila and Sarai Khola; Jalilpur in Punjab.

- **Mehrgarh**

The earliest evidence of agricultural life based on wheat, barley, cattle, sheep and goat in the subcontinent comes from the site of Mehrgarh on the bank of the Bolan river in the Kachhi plain of Baluchistan. Its convenient chronological point is circa 7000 BCE. For the next two to three millennia the evidence of this type of agriculture seems to be limited to Baluchistan, although by the end of this period it is found spread all over its major areas (Chakrabarti 1999: 117).

Mehrgarh is essential for any discussion on the Neolithic, not only because it has yielded the earliest evidence for this phenomenon in South Asia but also because the interdisciplinary and scientific approach to the excavations and the regular publication of the results have provided us with a very clear picture of the Neolithic way of life there.

Excavations at the site began in 1974 under the leadership of J.F. Jarrige and continued into the 1980s and later. These have revealed an uninterrupted continuity in the



growth and consolidation of village life in the area. Spread over about 200 hectares of land, this imposing site bears evidence of occupation in different periods, having been given separate numbers, such as MR 1, MR 2, MR 3 etc. In all, there are seven periods of which only the first three, I-III, are regarded as Neolithic. The time frame for each of these is as follows: Period I from 7000-5500 BCE; Period II, from 5500-4500 BCE; and Period III, from 4500-3500 BCE.

The earliest level of occupation, Period I, marks the transition from nomadic pastoralism to agriculture. It was an aceramic level with stone tools consisting of polished axes, chisels, querns and microliths and bone tools comprising awls, needles etc. The Neolithic character of the site is reflected in bones of cattle, sheep and goat, indicating their domestication as also the bones of water buffalo, which is the earliest instance of the domestication of this animal in the subcontinent. Evidence of plant domestication comes from the charred seeds of wheat and barley as also Indian jujube (ber) and dates. The beginning of sedentism can be gleaned from foundations of mud-brick houses and small cell-like compartments which might have been used for storage of grains. But perhaps the most surprising piece of information concerns long distance trade and craft production. As part of grave goods were found, turquoise beads, probably from the Nishapur mines of Iran; shell bangles, with the seashell being from the Arabian Sea coast and beads of lapis lazuli, procured from the Badakshan region of Afghanistan. This clearly demonstrates that the Neolithic people of Mehrgarh, Period I, were not an isolated community but engaged in exchange activities with other contemporary cultures.

Period II is characterized by an intensification and diversification of the economic base. Some coarse handmade pottery is found in the lower levels which becomes plentiful in the later part of the period. Towards the end, wheelmade and painted, as well as basket marked sherds are found having parallels with Kili Gul Muhammad I in the Quetta Valley. Houses became larger and one structure on the site has been termed a 'granary'. The stone industry continued, with the addition of 'sickle' like tools, substantiating the agricultural basis of the economy. Charred cotton seeds indicating cotton plantation and perhaps, spinning and weaving; ivory-making, presumably from an elephant tusk bearing groove marks; terracotta human figurines; a steatite workshop and beads of lapis lazuli and turquoise, all testify craft production, trade and the core Neolithic stage of human evolution.

Period III at Mehrgarh, spanning from 4500 to 3500 BCE, represents the final stage of the Neolithic phase. Surplus production was achieved through a consolidation of agriculture and animal rearing activities. Vast quantities of pottery have been found, many of which bear painted motifs, which particularly in the later stages of this period, resemble those of Kili Gul Muhammad II and III. The continuity in the long distance trading pattern can be assessed from the beads of lapis lazuli, turquoise and fragments of conch shell. Copper objects found on the surface and traces of the metal found in crucibles suggest that the Neolithic people of Mehrgarh were familiar with copper smelting. A picture of continuous growth of village life



also emerges from a number of collective graves that appear in this period and indicate an increase in population.

- **Kili Gul Muhammad**

The site of Kili Gul Muhammad in the Quetta Valley was excavated from 1949-51 by the American Archaeological Mission headed by W.A. Fairervis, Jr. The first three levels of occupation are ascribed to the Neolithic period. Beginning as an aceramic site around 5500 BCE or earlier, its inhabitants lived in wattle-and-daub and/or mud houses. Animal remains of cattle, sheep, goat, and horse/wild ass have been found and the tool kit comprises microliths, a few ground tools, bone points and spatula. The transition from Period II to Period III can be discerned from the evolution of a crude, handmade and basket-marked pottery to a fine wheelmade black-on-red ware with simple geometric designs.

- **Rana Ghundai**

Situated in the Anambar valley, Rana Ghundai lies in the ecological transitional zone between the Baluchi hills and the Indus plains. The Rana Ghundai sequence was established, after brief excavations, by Brigadier E.J. Ross in 1946. Periods I-III belong to the Neolithic phase and lasted from 4500 to 3100 BCE. The remains of Period I attest the presence of 'a semi-nomadic community' and consist of handmade plain pottery, bones of domesticated animals like ox, sheep, goat and maybe a wild ass. A mixed tool kit, of stone and bone, comprised of microlithic chips and blades and bone points and eyed needles. Developments in pottery fabric, shapes and designs continued as the Neolithic became a well-established phenomenon here, a way of life.

- **Gumla**

The site of Gumla in the Gomal valley began as a small, one-acre encampment. Period I is aceramic and shows microliths, domesticated cattle bone, and large shallow pits used for cooking/roasting. Period II has a wide range of painted wheelmade pottery, microlithic tools, a limited amount of copper and bronze and terracotta bangles, gamesmen, toycarts and cattle and female figurines (Chakrabarti 1999: 138).

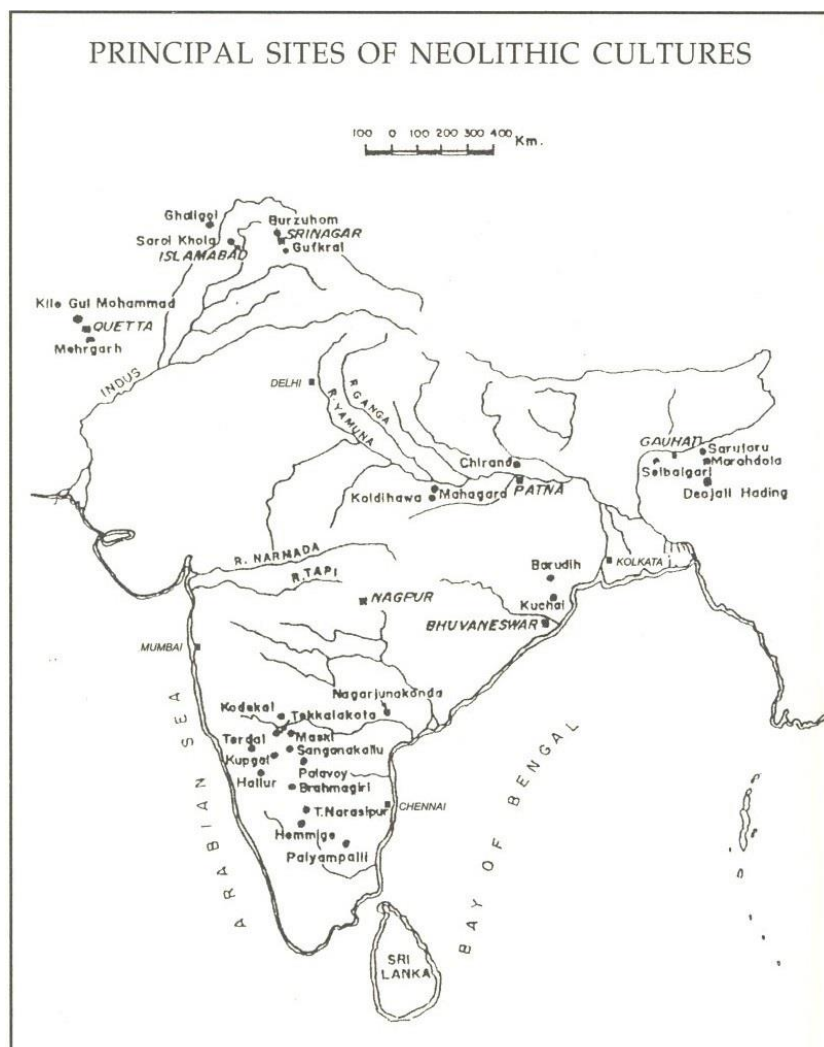
- **Rehman Dheri**

A large site, spread over more than 20 hectares, Rehman Dheri shows a clear transition from the Neolithic to the KotDijian and finally the Indus civilization phase. The site is fortified right from the beginning, with a 1.2 m wide mud and mud brick wall. Remains of wheat, barley, fish and domesticated cattle, sheep and goat give us clues as regards their diet. Pottery was used from the very first settlement at the site and most of the pottery specimens are of KotDijian forms and designs. The calibrated date range of Rehman Dheri is circa 3400-2100 BCE.



- **Amri**

A prominent pre-Harappan site in Sind, Amri is located at the edge of a cultivated alluvial plain, 2 km of the right bank of the Indus. Period I begins with a typical handmade red/beige pottery with geometrical designs painted in black and often with red fillings. People lived in mud-brick houses and domesticated remains of cattle, sheep, goat and donkey have been found. Pieces of copper, shell, terracotta bangles, sling stone and parallel-sided blades are other archaeological remnants collected from the site. The Neolithic period of occupation, starting in the early to mid - fourth millennium BCE was followed by an intermediate phase and finally the Indus civilization phase.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)



North India

Evidence for the north Indian Neolithic cultures comes mainly from the Kashmir Valley and is represented by a large number of sites above the flood plains of River Jhelum. The three principal sites of the area are: Burzahom, northeast of Srinagar; Gufkral, southeast of Srinagar and Kanishkapura or modern Kanispur, in the Baramulla district. All three are multi-cultural sites, where prolific Neolithic remains are followed by evidence of megalithic and historical periods. An important feature of the northern Neolithic is the absence of a preceding microlithic/mesolithic phase and the development of this phenomenon occurred between 3500-1500 BCE.

• Gufkral

Literally meaning, the 'cave of the potter', the site of Gufkral, started as an aceramic Neolithic site, probably around 3000 BCE and matured into a fullfledged Neolithic site. From Period IA were discovered large dwelling pits surrounded by storage pits and hearths and with post-holes around the mouths of the pits and hearths. Remains of domesticated sheep and goat as well as barley, wheat and lentil along with wild sheep, goat and cattle, deer, ibex, wolf and bear indicate the transition from a hunting-gathering to a food producing economy. Polished stone tools, including a large quern, bone/horn tools, steatite beads and a terracotta ball make up the rest of the archaeological repertoire. Periods IB and IC witnessed an intensification of the Neolithic – handmade crude grey ware followed by wheelmade pottery, abundance of stone querns, pounders, double-holed harvesters etc along with domesticated sheep, goat, cattle, dog and pig.

• Burzahom

The Neolithic people of Burzahom, beginning with Period I around 2700 BCE, lived in circular or oval-shaped lakeside pit dwellings and subsisted on a hunting and fishing economy, being familiar also with agriculture. The sides of the dwelling pits were plastered with mud and both ladders and steps were used to get inside the large pits. Storage pits containing animal bones, stone and bone tools have been found close to the dwelling pits. The site has yielded mostly coarse and handmade grey, buff and red pottery. The bone industry at Burzahom is most developed of all the Neolithic cultures of India and comprises harpoons, needles, arrowheads, spear-joints, daggers etc. Another distinctive feature is the burials – graves, both of humans and animals, especially dogs, have been found. Sketchy evidence for ritual practice can be gathered from stone slabs depicting hunting scenes, or another representation of the sun and a dog. Two finds from Period II, dated around second millennium BCE show contact with the Indus plains – a pot with carnelian and agate beads and another pot which bears the KotDijian 'horned deity' motif.

• Kanishkapura

Kanishkapura or modern Kanispur, a prolific Neolithic and historical site in the Baramulla district of Kashmir, was excavated by B.R. Mani in 1988-89. The Neolithic



remains were excavated in KNP-1 and KNP-2 areas and begin with an aceramic Neolithic layer from which a polished stone celt was found. The consolidation of Neolithic activities can be inferred from the ceramic Neolithic level or Period II. Four successive floor levels along with post-holes were excavated at KNP-1 and are part of rectangular houses, which probably had thatched roofs. The tool kit comprises five bone points and six polished stone celts. Pottery, both handmade as well as wheel-turned has been found and fine grey ware of medium to thick fabric, coarse grey ware, red ware and plain and burnished black ware are the important types. Consumption of emmer wheat mingled with barley has been recorded as also domesticated sheep and goat. The new evidence of radiocarbon dates puts Period I around the middle of the fourth millennium BCE and Period II to the late fourth millennium BCE.

Central India

The focus of the Central Indian Neolithic is, broadly speaking, the Vindhyan and Kaimur hill ranges of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh i.e. the area, having as its periphery River Ganges in the north and River Son in the south. The important Neolithic sites are Koldihawa and Mahagara in Allahabad district, Sinduria in Mirzapur district and Kunjun in the Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh. Lahuradewa in Sant Kabir Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh provides the oldest evidence of pottery going back to c. 7000 BCE. The dating of the Neolithic horizon for this area remains problematic – some suggesting the beginning of the Neolithic culture at Koldihawa to circa 7000 BCE, while others assign it to a time range of 4000–2500 BCE or 3500-1250 BCE.

• Koldihawa

Situated in the Belan valley of Uttar Pradesh, Koldihawa has a rich prehistoric sequence down to the Mesolithic phase. The site's claim to fame is that it provides earliest evidence of rice cultivation (*oryza sativa*) going back to c. 6,500 BCE– 'Domesticated rice comes from the earliest, metal-free level of Koldihawa and occurs in a context of wattle-and-daub houses, polished stone celts, microliths and three types of handmade pottery – cord marked and incised ware, plain red ware with ochre slip on both sides and a crude black-and-red ware. Rice also occurs as husks embedded in the clay of the pottery' (Chakrabarti 1999: 205-207). The overlap of the microlithic and the Neolithic is testified by the presence of blades, flakes, lunates as well as polished and ground axes, celts, querns and pestles. Evidence of animal husbandry comes from the bones of cattle, sheep, goat and deer and fishing can be gleaned from the bones of turtles and fish. G.R. Sharma has dated rice cultivation at Koldihawa to around 5500 BCE. Other scholars like F.R. Allchin and D.K. Chakrabarti feel that these dates need to be re-examined on the basis of fresh evidence. But consensus seems to be growing that rice cultivation was an indigenous, post – "Ice-Age" phenomenon that occurred independently in Central India.



- **Mahagara**

Situated on the opposite bank of Belan river, Mahagara too yielded evidence of rice cultivation (*oryza sativa*) along with Koldihawa. The site of Mahagara has yielded some bone implements along with a tool kit of Mesolithic and Neolithic tools made of materials such as chalcedony, agate, quartz and basalt. This site has also reported a cattle pen, which indicates the domestication of cattle. It is also the site of the finding of horse bones. The pottery used by the Neolithic folk was handmade and poorly fired; with straw and rice husk being used as tempering agents. The principal pottery type is the corded or cord-impressed ware though sometimes incised designs are also seen.

- **Mid-Gangetic Basin**

Covering the areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the mid-Gangetic basin encapsulates the Ganges in its expansive, midstream flow, carrying along with it, the drainage of its tributaries like the Saryu and the Ghaghra. Predictably then, most of the Neolithic sites dotting the area are found on banks of rivers and streams – Narhan, on the banks of River Saryu; Imlidih, on Kuwana stream; Sohagaura, on the banks of River Rapti; Chirand, on the banks of River Ghaghra; besides other sites like Teradih and Senuwar. Chirand, considered to be the representative site of the area has revealed a cultural assemblage going back to the Neolithic phase, dated from 2100 to 1400 BCE.

- **Chirand**

The one kilometer long mound of Chirand lies at the confluence of the Sarayu and the Ganga and according to D.K.Chakrabarti, the beginning of occupation at the site may even be earlier than the middle of the third millennium BCE. From Period I or the Neolithic deposits of Chirand have been recovered coarse earthenware, comprising red, grey and black handmade wares, some with post-firing painting and graffiti. Terracotta objects including figurines of humped bull, birds, snakes and bangles, beads, sling balls etc. have been found.

People lived in circular and semi-circular wattle-and-daub huts with post-holes and hearths. For subsistence, they relied on plant cultivation and animal domestication. Among the crops are rice, wheat, barley, moong and lentil – which may indicate the raising of two crops a year, winter and autumn. Animal remains include a wide range from domesticated cattle to elephants and rhinoceros.

Chirand is the only other site in the country, besides Burzahom in Kashmir that has given a substantial range of bone and antler objects such as needles, scrapers, borers and arrowheads. Bone ornaments like pendants, bangles and earrings have also been discovered. Stone tools consist of microliths, Neolithic axes and other implements, such as stone pestles and querns. Evidence of beads made of agate, carnelian, jasper, steatite, faience etc. and also the rich terracotta, bone and antler assemblage mentioned above suggest a movement towards craft production and possibly, exchange of commodities.



• **Eastern India**

Eastern India comprises the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha and the Neolithic here caps a rich prehistoric past. Important sites include Kuchai and GolbaiSasan in Odisha; Pandu RajarDhibi, Bharatpur and Mahisdal in West Bengal; and Barudih in Jharkhand. Since no rigorous excavations have been undertaken, only a tentative picture of the Neolithic way of life can be hinted at and dating too remains a problem.

• **Kuchai**

The existence of a Neolithic level at Kuchai near Mayurbhanj in Odisha was established on the basis of polished stone tools like celts and axes. At Kuchai the deposit was about 40 to 45 cm thick and limited excavations encountered a gritty red handmade ware associated with Neolithic tools including mace-heads, pounders, and grinding stones (Chakrabarti 2006: 258).

• **GolbaiSasan**

The site of GolbaiSasan situated on the left bank of River Mandakini was excavated between 1990-92. Period I at the site is Neolithic and shows a range of dull red and grey handmade pottery with cord or tortoise shell impressions in association with a few worked pieces of bone and traces of floors and post-holes (Chakrabarti 1999: 239).

• **Pandu RajarDhibi**

Pandu RajarDhibi in the Ajay Valley was the first site to clearly demonstrate the Neolithic base of later developments like the Chalcolithic. Excavations at the site link Period I of occupation to the Neolithic phase. This is characterized by a handmade grey ware with rice husk impressions, painted red pottery, some sherds of black-and-red ware, ground stone tools, microliths and bone tools. The coexistence of microliths and ground stone tools and bone tools reveals the emergence of the Neolithic from an underlying Mesolithic matrix.

• **Barudih**

The state of Jharkhand basically lies furlled in the contours of the Chhotanagpur plateau. The first archaeologically identifiable village level in the plateau is represented at Barudih in Singhbhum district. Archaeologists have obtained from the same level, microliths, Neolithic celts, iron slag and implements and a range of wheelmade pottery among which black-and-red ware seems to be prominent. The earliest calibrated time range for the site is 1401-837 BCE (Chakrabarti 1999: 243).

• **North-Eastern India**

The entire northeastern region has yielded a rich haul of polished Neolithic tools but no consolidated picture of a Neolithic level has yet emerged. The spread of the Neolithic is considered by some to be an import from South East Asia on account of the use of shouldered axes and also cord-impressed pottery, which has close affinity with the pottery from China



and South East Asia. On the basis of this link, D. P Agrawal has dated the Neolithic cultures of northeastern India between 2500-1500 BCE (Agrawal 2002:201).

The important sites of the region are DaojaliHading and Sarutaru in Assam, Napchik in Manipur and Pynthorlangtein in Meghalaya.

- **Daojali Hading**

Situated in the North Kachhar hills of Assam, DaojaliHading revealed a 45 cm thick occupation deposit. The site has yielded Neolithic stone and fossil wood axes, adzes, hoes, chisels, grinding slabs, querns, mullers, handmade grey to dull red cord marked pottery as well as dull red stamped pottery and plain red pottery. No domesticated cereals have been recovered but the presence of mullers and querns in the artifactual repertoire establishes the practice of agricultural activity.

- **Napchik**

Napchik, located on a hillslope in Manipur, has yielded an early thermo-luminiscent date of 1650 ± 350 BCE, based on an analysis of its handmade cord-marked ware. The Neolithic character of the site is further established by the presence of handmade tripod vessels, stone choppers, scrapers, grinding stones, polished celts etc. (Chakrabarti 2006: 261)

- **South India**

The South Indian Neolithic culture, spread over the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, has given us the largest number of Neolithic settlements, because of the easy availability of stone. The geographical terrain of this culture is that part of the Deccan plateau bound by River Bhima in the north and River Kaveri in the south, with a major concentration of sites being in the Raichur and Shorapur Doabs. Besides the profusion of sites, what makes the South Indian Neolithic remarkable is the issue of ashmounds and the location of settlements on the flat-topped or castellated granite hills or plateaux of the region. Ash mounds are vast mounds of burnt cattle dung ash accumulated as a result of periodical burnings and F.R Allchin in 1960 suggested a West Asian origin for these (Jain 2006:92-94).

However today, their growth and development is viewed in the context of earlier indigenous Stone Age traditions.

Some of the important Neolithic sites of the region are: Sangankallu, Hallur, Tekkalakota, Brahmagiri, Maski, T.Narsipur and Piklihal in Karnataka; Utnur, Palavoy, Kodekal and Budihal in Andhra Pradesh; and Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu. The chronological bracket for these sites ranges from about 2400 to 1000 BCE.

The location of Neolithic settlements near hills or plateaux seems to have been motivated by access to perennial water in the form of streams or rivers, plentiful game, pasture for grazing animals and raw materials like stone and wood. Both campsites and habitation sites have been discovered where people lived in circular wattle-and-daub huts.



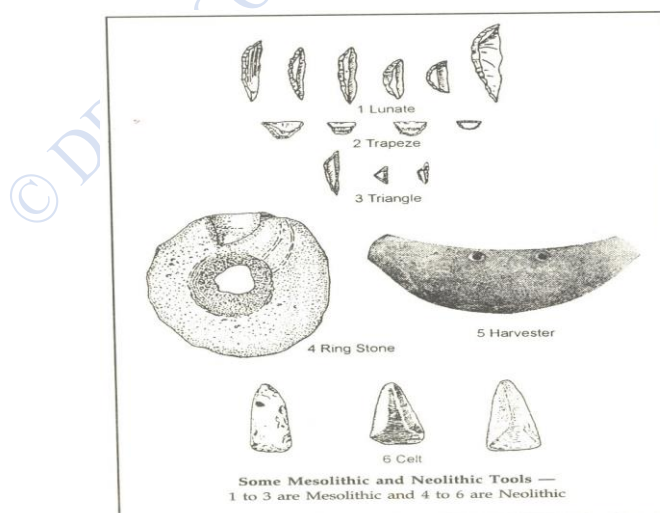
Hearths and storage areas have been found in practically all the huts. Subsistence was primarily on a mixed economy – rudimentary farming and animal husbandry. Charred grains of millet, barley, horse gram, black gram and green gram have been found and scholars were earlier of the opinion that millet might have been introduced in south India from South Africa. But recent research negates this hypothesis and favours an indigenous growth of these crops. Fish bones and charred and split animal bones show that fishing and hunting contributed substantially to dietary requirements.

• Sangankallu

Sangankallu presents a picture of a long occupation, beginning with the Palaeolithic phase. Palaeoliths are followed by a microlithic industry of quartz flakes, cores and lunates. The classic Neolithic industry of polished stone tools features next in the sequence but not before a sterile dark brown soil was formed at the site suggesting a time-gap between the Neolithic and the earlier microlithic levels (Chakrabarti 1999: 236). Coarse grey, red pottery was discovered which was either handmade or produced on a slow wheel. Storage pits have given remains of charred grains and bones of domesticated animals like cattle, sheep and goat.

• Piklihal

The site of Piklihal is essentially an ashmound situated in District Raichur in Karnataka. The Neolithic people who occupied the site were cattle herders who had domesticated animals like cattle, sheep, goat etc. A mobile group, they set up seasonal camps surrounded by cow pens made with wooden posts and stakes in which they gathered dung. When it was time to move, the entire camping ground was set afire and cleared for the next session of camping.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)



2.7.5 Conclusion

An overview of the expanse and variety of Neolithic cultures in the subcontinent helps us to understand the larger and local dynamics, which shaped this phenomenon. While profuse microlithic remains precede the Neolithic at some sites, others give a silent testimony and reveal only a full-blown Neolithic phase. Yet, all across the country between the fifth and first millennium BCE, people were moving towards a 'Neolithic' way of life – settled hutments, practice of agriculture and animal husbandry, pottery and beginning of craft production. But the story of human cultural evolution did not stop here, for this was just the base on which, a large-scale civilization was to arise.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Give names of two Neolithic sites in each of the following regions:

(i) North-West India (ii) North India (iii) Central India (iv) Mid-Gangetic Basin (v) Eastern India (vi) North-Eastern India (vii) South India.

B. Long Question:

(i) Write an essay on the characteristic features of Neolithic culture and the independent developments that led to the beginnings of food production in India. Also, briefly discuss the diffusionist paradigm of food production.

2.7.6 Let Us Sum Up

- The Neolithic Age, which followed the Mesolithic, heralded the beginning of food production.
- The Neolithic tool kit was composed of heavy ground tools – pestles, mortars, grinders and pounders – as also axes and sickles which have a characteristic sheen on them.
- Neolithic people relied on agriculture or food production and the domestication of animals for their dietary needs
- The Neolithic phase in India did not develop everywhere at the same time nor did it end simultaneously.
- Yet, all across the country between the fifth and first millennium BCE, people were moving towards a 'Neolithic' way of life – settled hutments, practice of agriculture and animal husbandry, pottery and beginning of craft production.



ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. Short Notes:

- (i) See Section 2.6.2
- (ii) Sub-Section 2.6.2

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

- A. (i) Mehrgarh, Gumla; (ii) Burzahom, Kanishkapura; (iii) Koldihawa, Sinduria; (iv) Chirand, Imlidih; (v) Kuchai, Pandu RajarDhibi; (vi) DaojaliHading, Napchik; (vii) Brahmagiri, Utnur.

B. Long Question:

- (i) See Section 2.6.3

2.8 ESSENTIAL READINGS

- Agrawal, D.P. (1982) *The Archaeology of India*. London and Malmo: Curzon Press (All chapters)
- Allchin, Bridget and Raymond Allchin. (1997). *Origin of a Civilization: The Prehistory and Early Archaeology of South Asia*. New Delhi: Viking. (Chapter 3-5)
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- Singh, Upinder. (2013). *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th century*. New Delhi: Pearson. (Chapters 2 and 3)



UNIT III

HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION: EARLY URBANISM, TOWN PLANNING, ECONOMY, CULTURAL PATTERNS AND DECLINE

STRUCTURE

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Character of the Indus civilization
 - 3.2.1 Main Features
- 3.3 Background and Origin
- 3.4 Chronology
- 3.5 Geographical Distribution
- 3.6 Settlement pattern
- 3.7 Subsistence Pattern
- 3.8 Artisanal Production and Trade
 - 3.8.1 Artisanal Production
 - 3.8.2 Trade
- 3.9 Religious Beliefs
- 3.10 Decline and Devolution
- 3.11 Conclusion
- 3.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.13 Answers to In-Text Questions
- 3.14 Essential Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit you will be able to:

- explain the origins, rise and character of the Harappan Civilization, its chronology and its geographical extent



- explain the settlement pattern of the Harappan Civilization
- ascertain the material characteristics of the Harappan Civilization such as town planning, craft production and subsistence pattern- agriculture, trade, etc.
- discuss the as yet tentatively identified forms of social, cultural and religious life
- examine the theories related to the origin and decline of the Harappan Civilization

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The name 'Indus civilization' evokes the urban, literate culture of the 3rd and early 2nd millennia BCE that flourished in the area around the Indus river and its tributaries. Its first known cities, Harappa on the banks of a dried up bed of the Ravi river, an Indus tributary, and Mohenjodaro, 570 kilometres downstream, in the vicinity of the Indus river itself. Geographically, however, this civilization (also called the Harappan civilization after Harappa, its first known site) included much more than the Indus zone; it was a combination of riverine lowlands that stretched to the east and southeast, highland areas to the north, and the coastal belt towards the southwest and southeast of the Indus system.

3.2 CHARACTER OF THE INDUS CIVILIZATION : NOT IMPORTANT FROM EXAMINATION POINT OF VIEW BUT COVERED FOR GENERAL UNDERSTANDING

Before looking at its various features, it is necessary to be clear about the character of the Indus civilization in order to understand what set it apart from other contemporaneous cultures in the Indian subcontinent and from the Bronze Age civilizations of West Asia and Egypt. The Indus phenomenon is called a civilization because it incorporated within itself the social configurations and organizational devices that characterize such a cultural form. It was the only literate subcontinental segment of its time. More than 4000 Indus inscriptions have been found, and even though they remain undeciphered, the script was used for mercantile purposes (as suggested by the seals and sealings), personal identification (in the form of shallow inscriptions on bangles, bronze implements etc.) and possibly for civic purposes (underlined by the remains of a massive inscribed board at Dholavira). The civilization's essence was a settlement pattern in which cities and towns were particularly prominent. That such urban centres contained monumental structures whose construction required large outlays of labour and resources, and were marked by heterogeneous economic activities, are other conspicuous indicators. Earlier, Mohenjodaro and Harappa had alone stood out as the civilization's large cities. Today we know of many more whose dimensions qualify them for a similar status. These are fairly spread out – Ganweriwala in Cholistan, Dholavira in Kutch



and Rakhigarhi in Haryana are such centres – and symbolize the creation of aggregates of population on a scale previously unknown. The largest variety and quantity of jewellery, statuary and seals, are found in urban centres and indicate that craft production was, in the main, geared to the demands of city dwellers. Further, the characters of planning, the necessity of written transactions, and the existence of a settlement hierarchy in which urban and rural settlements of various sizes and types were functionally connected in important ways all indicate administrative organization on a scale that was unprecedented in relation to other protohistoric subcontinental cultures. Many of these are archaeological indicators of a state society as well. Whether there were several states or a unified empire in Harappan times remains unclear. Urban settlements may have functioned as city-states since their layout and character suggests the presence of local aristocracies, merchants and craftspeople.

3.2.1 Main Features

The Indus civilization, while sharing many general features with the contemporary Bronze Age cultures such as the Sumerian civilization of Mesopotamia and Old Kingdom Egypt, had its own distinct identity. For one thing, with a geographical spread of more than a million square kilometers, this was the largest urban culture of its time. Unlike Mesopotamia and Egypt, there were no grand religious shrines nor were magnificent palaces and funerary complexes constructed for the rulers. Instead, its hallmark was a system of civic amenities for its citizens rarely seen in other parts of the then civilized world – roomy houses with bathrooms, a network of serviceable roads and lanes, an elaborate system of drainage and a unique water supply system. Dholavira's network of dams, water reservoirs and underground drains and Mohenjodaro's cylindrical wells, one for every third house, epitomize the degree of comfort that towns people enjoyed in relation to contemporary Mesopotamians and Egyptians who had to make do with fetching water, bucket by bucket, from the nearby rivers.

3.3 BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN

Indus settlements mainly, though not exclusively, flourished in the part of the Indian subcontinent, which lies west of the Delhi-Aravalli-Cambay geographical axis. Several segments of that zone had seen the birth and development of agricultural communities, between 7000 BCE and the genesis of urban centres in the first part of the third millennium BCE. The subsistence pattern that is widely seen at Harappan sites – a combination of wheat and barley cultivation and domesticated animal species in which cattle was most preferred – goes back to Mehrgarh in the Kachhi plain of Baluchistan which has also yielded the earliest evidence of agricultural life in South Asia (7000 BCE). From the 5th millennium BCE onwards, this pattern is found spread all over the major areas of Baluchistan, from the Zhob-Loralai region in the northeast to Las Bela towards the south.

At the same time, a majority of classic Indus sites are in riverine lowlands and the manner in which settlements and subsistence patterns had evolved in those areas, over a span



of more than a thousand years prior to the efflorescence of the Harappan civilization, is central to understanding its evolution. In several lowland areas, there was a long period of antecedence. At the beginning of the fourth millennium BCE, the Cholistan tract saw a well-defined phase of occupation, known as the 'Hakra ware' culture, named after the river around which its distinctive ceramic assemblage was first discovered. Although the largest concentration of sites is around the Hakra river, its spread included Jalipur in Multan and Kunal in Haryana. Most of the sites seem to be small camps with a few permanently established settlements of substantial size (such as Lathwala in Cholistan, with an area of 26.3 hectares). The Hakra horizon is the first culture of the lowlands, which utilized both the desert and the riverine environments, using a variety of stone and copper tools. There are also occasional manufactured goods in raw materials that were not locally available, as is indicated by Jalilpur's repertoire of semi-precious stone, coral and gold beads. Towards the western fringe of the Indus lowlands, the fourth millennium BCE witnessed the birth of another culture, known as the Amri culture (after the type site of Amri) which dominated the Kirthar piedmont and Kohistan. What is most significant is that some Amri sites are marked by an 'acro-sanctum/lower town' division, a settlement plan that can be witnessed subsequently, in a highly developed and sophisticated form, in the layout of Indus cites. The spatial exclusiveness of the 'acro-sanctum' is emphasized by a highly elevated, conically shaped hill with encircling, terraced stone walls and remnants of ramps/stairways. The general habitation area, which was lower town, possibly contained domestic structures.

The immediate backdrop to the Indus civilization is formed by the next phase, known as the KotDiji culture, when elements of a common culture ethos can be seen across the Indus-Hakra plains and the Indo-Gangetic divide. There are several planned and fortified settlements; the construction of habitational areas aligned around a grid of north-south and east-west streets at Harappa, and the use of mud bricks in the Indus ratio of 1:2:4, along with a drainage system based on soakage pits in streets at Kunal are especially noteworthy. There is also an extensive but partly standardized repertoire of ceramic designs and forms (some of which are carried over into the Indus civilization), miscellaneous crafts and a sophisticated metallurgy that includes the manufacture of silver tiaras and 'armlets' as also disc-shaped gold beads (typical of the Indus civilization), wide transport and exchange of raw materials, square stamp seals with designs, the presence of at least two signs of Indus writing at Padri and Dholavira (both in Gujarat) and ritual beliefs embodied in a range of terracotta cattle and female figurines. Considered in totality, the term 'early Harappan' is appropriate for this phase since a number of features related to the mature Harappan period (a designation used for the classic urban, civilizational form) are already present. Several of these features also evoke the presence of commercial and other elite social groups. When one considers the intensification of craft specialization, dependent on extensive networks through which the required raw materials were procured, or the necessity of irrigation for agriculture in the Indus flood plain, without the risk of crop failure, for which a degree of planning and



management was essential, the emergence and the character of the controlling or ruling elites becomes clear.

On the whole, there is little doubt that the Indus civilization had indigenous roots and that its cultural precursors were the Chalcolithic cultures of the northwest that flourished in the fourth and third millennia BCE. Contrary to the views of some early scholars, Indus cities were not created either through the dissemination of the 'idea' of civilization or by migration of population groups from West Asia.

3.4 CHRONOLOGY

It is unlikely that civilizational efflorescence was a simultaneous process in all parts of the Harappan distribution area. By 2600 BCE, this civilization was in existence, as it had clear contacts, at that point of time, with Mesopotamia. It appears increasingly probable that it matured first in lower Sind, Cholistan and presumably, the Kutch region, which was linked by a river to the Cholistan area. Cities like Harappa, Kalibangan and Banawali came up a little later. The end was also staggered in time. Urban decline at Mohenjodaro had set by 2200 BCE and by 2100 BCE it had ceased to exist as a city. However, the civilization continued after 2000 BCE in other areas and at some sites survived till 1800 BCE.

3.5 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Indus settlements (over 1000 in number) are spread over a wide swathe or strip of northwest India and Pakistan and their distribution illuminates the various ways in which this varied geographical areas was exploited. In the lower Indus basin of Larkana, Mohenjodaro dominated the flood plain, agriculturally the richest part of Sind. Larkana is also marked by lake depressions, such as the Manchhar, where fishing settlements existed. Towards the west, there were clusters of sites in the foothills of the Kirthar mountain range and the Kohistan. There, agriculture must have depended on spring water and rains. Routes linking up with Baluchistan also passed through this area. In upper Sind, the Sukkur-Rorhi hills saw settlements of workmen in and around flint quarries, the raw material from which Harappan blades were manufactured. The course of the Indus river in the third millennium BCE was more southeasterly and it flowed into the Arabian sea in the vicinity of the Rann of Kutch. The Indus river adopted its present course only between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries AD.

As one moves west, Baluchistan is reached where Harappan settlements are found in a variety of terrain – across the northern, mountain rim, on the flat Kacchi plain, in the district of Las Bela towards the south and along the coastal country known as the Makran. In the latter area, the fortified sites of Sutkagendor and Sotka-koh were important in terms of the Indus civilization's sea trade with the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. Both were suitable landing places for maritime traffic and from these points, convenient routes linked up with



the interior. In other parts of Baluchistan, Indus sites are found in areas that are still agriculturally viable and lie on arterial routes. PathaniDamb, for instance, was near the Mula pass, from where a route went across the Kirthar range while Naushahro was in the general vicinity of the Bolan, through which a major route led to Afghanistan. Such routes were important because through them, Baluchistan's metalliferous ores (copper and lead) and semi-precious stone (lapis lazuli and turquoise) could be procured by the resource-poor Indus valley. The northernmost site of the Indus civilization, Shortughai, is in northeast Afghanistan. Shortughai provided access to Badakshan's lapis lazuli and possibly to the tin and gold resources of Central Asia.

To the northeast of Sind is the Pakistan province of Punjab. A large part of the province is comprised of *doabs* or tracts lying between two rivers. Of these, the Bari *doab* (or land between the Ravi and an old bed of the Beas) sites are noteworthy, especially the sprawling city of Harappa. There are no settlements in the interfluvies of the Jhelum and the Indus or that of the Jhelum and Chenab. South of the Sutlej river, is Bahawalpur. Part of it is made up of the desert trace of Cholistan, through which the Hakra river flowed. The largest cluster (174) of Indus settlements is found here. Geographically, this tract connects the Indus plains with Rajasthan, which has vast copper deposits. There were several exclusive, industrial sites (79 of them) in Cholistan, marked by kilns, devoted to large-scale craft production that included the melting and smelting of copper.

East of the Sutlej is the alluvial terrain of the Indo-Gangetic divide, a transitional area between the Indus and the Ganga river systems, made up of the Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Ghaggar river course in Rajasthan. A large part of the riverine and stream drainage from the Siwalik ridge between the Sutlej and Yamuna used to converge into the Ghaggar, the Indian name for the river known as the Hakra in Pakistan. There were several provincial urban centres in this region such as Kalibangan and Banawali although Rakhigarhi (in the Hissar district of Haryana) was the largest city and is said to be as large as Harappa. Classic Indus sites are also found in the Yamuna-Ganga *doab*, with preponderance in its most northerly portion around Saharanpur.

Finally, the spread of the Indus civilization included the quadrilateral of roughly 119,000 square kilometers between the Rann of Kutch and the Gulf of Cambay. Dholavira was the city *par excellence* of the Rann, with its vast expanse of tidal mud flats and dead creeks. Further east, the great mass of Kathiawad, now known as Saurashtra, is formed of Deccan lava and on its eastern edge flourished the port town of Lothal. The mainland of Gujarat is alluvial, formed by the Sabarmati, Mahi and minor parallel streams, actively prograding into the Gulf of Cambay. Here, Bhagatruv, on the estuary of the Kim river, forms the southernmost extension of the Indus civilization.



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) Harappan civilization is also known as the _____civilization.
- (ii) The Harappan civilization is a _____Age civilization.
- (iii) The civilization's essence was a _____ in which cities and towns were particularly prominent.
- (iv) The fortified sites of Sutkagendor and Sotka-koh in the _____ were important in terms of the Indus civilization's sea trade with the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia.
- (v) _____ is the Indian name for the river known as the Hakra in Pakistan.
- (vi) _____ in the Kachhi plain of Baluchistan has yielded the earliest evidence of agricultural life.

B. Name two sites where Harappan settlements have been found in each of the following areas:

- (i) Sind (ii) Baluchistan (iii) Gujarat (iv) Haryana.

3.6 SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The settlement pattern was a multi-tiered one with urban and rural sites that were markedly varied in terms of size and function. There were cities of monumental dimensions like Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Dholavira that stand out on account of their size (more than 100 hectares each) and the character of their excavated remains. Rakhigarhi in Hissar district of Haryana is the largest city of Harappan Civilization spread over an area of 550 hectares. Its material remains have been used for a genetic analysis based on DNA study of the Harappan people. While the older premise that such cities were based on a gridiron system of planning has been shown by recent research to be invalid, there is impressive evidence of centralized planning. City space was divided into public and residential sectors. At Harappa and Mohenjodaro, the separation of the largely (though not exclusively) public administrative sector from the residential part of the city took the form of two separate mounds. Dholavira's city plan was more intricate. At its fully developed stage, it had three parts made up of the



citadel which was divided into a 'castle' and a 'bailey' area, the middle town and the lower town, all interlinked and within an elaborate system of fortification.

The character of some of the structure is also worth considering. Mohenjodaro's citadel, for instance, was constructed on a gigantic artificial platform (400 x 100m) made of a mud brick retaining wall (over 6m thick) enclosing a filling of sand and silt. This platform, after being enlarged twice, attained a final height of 7 metres and provided a foundation on which further platforms were built in order to elevate important structures such as the Great Bath and the granary, so that the highest buildings were about 20 metres above the surrounding plains and could be seen on the horizons for miles around. Another architectural marvel is Dholavira's system of water management, crucial in an area, which is prone to frequent droughts. Rain water in the catchment areas of the two seasonal streams – Manhar and Mansar – was dammed and diverted to the large reservoirs within the city walls. Apparently, there were 16 water reservoirs within the city walls, covering as much as 36 percent of the walled area. Brick masonry walls protected them, although reservoirs were also made by cutting into the bedrock. Furthermore, drains in the 'castle-bailey' area carried rainwater to a receptacle for later use.

The intermediate tier of the urban hierarchy was made up of sites that in several features recall the layout of the monumental cities of the civilization but are smaller in size. Kalibangan, Lothal, KotDiji, Banawali and Amri are some of them and they can be considered as provincial centres. Kalibangan, like Mohenjodaro and Harappa, comprised of two fortified mounds – the smaller western one contained several mud brick platforms with fire altars on one of them. Most of the houses on the eastern mound had fire-altars of a similar type. Lothal was also a fortified town with its entire eastern sector being taken up by a dockyard (219x13m in size) which was connected with the river through an inlet channel. In its vicinity was the 'acropolis' where the remains of a storehouse, in which clay sealings, some with impressions of cords and other materials on them, were discovered. Lothal's urban morphology also suggests that there is no necessary relationship between the size of a city and its overall planning. Mohenjodaro was at least 25 times the size of Lothal but the latter shares with it the presence of two separate areas, burnt brick houses, and regularly aligned streets and drains. In fact, its paved streets and lanes are unrivalled in the Indus context. The third tier of the Indus settlement hierarchy is made up of small, urban sites. These show some evidence of planning but no internal sub-divisions. Notwithstanding their size and structurally unprepossessing character, they had urban functions. Allahadino in Sind is one such site, which had a diameter of only 100 metres but was an important metal crafting centre. Similarly, Kuntasi in Gujarat is a small Harappan fortified settlement where semi-precious stones and copper were processed.

Finally, urban centres were supported by and functionally connected with rural hinterlands of sedentary villages and temporary / semi-nomadic settlements. While the latter are generally small with thin occupational deposits, in the case of villages, outlines of huts



and relatively thick deposits have been encountered. Kanewal in Gujarat, for instance, is 300 square metres and its cultural deposit (of 1.5 metre thickness) is suggestive of a secure village settlement. Similarly, the archaeological deposits of the Harappan phase in the Yamuna-Ganga *doab* – 1.8 metres at Alamgirpur and 1.4 metres at Hulas – indicates that the pioneer colonizers of that area lived there for a long period of time. What is worth remembering is that, on the basis of size, it is not wise to distinguish rural and urban sites of the Indus civilization. In Cholistan, there are a few large sites, one of which covers 25 hectares (and, thus, is larger than Kalibangan), which have been described as nomadic settlements, not urban ones. On the other hand, Kuntasi was only 2 hectares in size but has been rightly classified as an urban settlement because of its functional role as a provider of craft objects.

3.7 SUBSISTENCE PATTERN

A stable system of agriculture, supplemented by animal husbandry, hunting and plant gathering, provided economic sustenance to urban networks. In view of the widely differing ecological conditions of the distribution area of this civilization, the subsistence strategy is not likely to have been a single or uniform one. The Harappans were familiar with the plough. Terracotta ploughs have been found at Indus sites in Cholistan and at Banawali and a ploughed field was revealed through excavation at Kalibangan. Though it belonged to the early Harappan period, there is no reason to doubt that the pattern continued during the mature Harappan period. The Kalibangan field contained two sets of furrows crossing each other at right angles, thus forming a grid pattern, and it is likely that two crops were raised in the same field. In modern fields in that zone, mustard is grown in one set of furrows and horse gram in the other. Mixed cropping is suggested by other evidence as well as, for instance, in the mixture of wheat and barley at Indus sites. Such mixed cropping is practiced even today in many parts of north India as an insurance against weather hazards so that wheat fails to ripen, the hardier barley is sure to yield a crop.

Earlier, a broad division of cultivated crops among those areas in and around the Indus valley on the one hand and Gujarat on the other hand, used to be recognized. In the Indus area, the cereal component was considered to be exclusively of wheat and barley while in Gujarat, rice and millets were more important. However, both rice and finger millet have now been discovered in Harappa. There is a range of other cultivated crops including peas, lentils, chickpeas, sesame, flax, legumes and cotton. The range suggests cotton. In Sind, cotton is usually a summer crop and such crops have generally been cultivated with the help of irrigation. This is because rainfall is extremely scanty, at about 8 inches. In any part of the Indian subcontinent which has less than 10 or 12 inches of rainfall, if agriculture on any scale has to be carried out with a substantial reduction of the risk factor, it can only be done with irrigation.

Cattle meat was the favourite animal food of the Indus people and cattle bones have been found in large quantities at all sites that have yielded bones. In addition to their meat,



cattle and buffaloes must have supported agricultural operations and served as draught animals. Among other things, this is suggested by their age of slaughter. At Shikarpur in Gujarat, a majority of the cattle and buffaloes lived up to the age of maturity (approximately three years) and were then killed at various stages till they reached eight years of age. Mutton was also popular and bones of sheep/goat have been found at almost all Indus sites. Hunting of animals was not a negligible activity; the ratio of the bones of wild animals in relation to domesticated varieties is 1:4. The animals include wild buffalo, various species of deer, wild pig, ass, jackal, rodents and hare. The remains of fish and marine molluscs are frequently found as well. As for food gathering, wild rice was certainly consumed in the Yamuna-Ganga *doab* although the most striking evidence comes from Surkotada in Gujarat where the overwhelming majority of identified seeds are of wild nuts, grasses and weeds. In general, the Indus food economy was a broad-based, risk-mitigating system – a pragmatic strategy, considering the large and concentrated population groups that had to be supported.

3.8 ARTISANAL PRODUCTION AND TRADE

3.8.1 Artisanal Production

A spectacular range of artisanal production is encountered at Indus cities. On the one hand, specialized crafts that had roots in the preceding period became more complex in terms of technological processes, and on the other hand, the combinations of raw materials being used, expanded. Along with the widespread urban demand for shell artifacts, semi-precious stone and steatite beads, faience objects, and implements as also jewellery in base and precious metals. It is now reasonably clear that the Indus civilization was not, in the main, a bronze using culture. Pure copper was the dominant tradition. Additionally, there was a variety of alloys ranging from low and high grade bronzes to copper-lead and copper-nickel alloys.

Some of the crafted objects are quintessentially Indus, in the sense that they are neither found prior to the advent of the urban civilization nor after its collapse. Indus seals (inscribed, square or rectangular in shape, with representations of animals, most notably the ‘unicorn’) for example, are rarely found in the late Harappan and post-Harappan contexts since the commercial transactions for which they were used had dramatically shrunk. This is also true for the series of Indus stone statues of animals and men, of which the most famous is that of the ‘Priest King’. These appear to have had a politico-religious significance and are in a sculptural idiom that is very much within the realm of ‘High Art’. The disappearance of this stone carving tradition can be linked to the abandonment of urban centres, along with the migration and transformation of elite groups. Similarly, long barrel carnelian beads are a typical Indus luxury product, which were primarily manufactured at Chanhundaro. Their crafting demanded both skill and time; the perforation in a 6 to 13 cm length bead required between three to eight days. Evidently, the largely deurbanized scenario that followed the collapse of cities could not sustain such a specialized production.



One of the most striking features of the Indus craft traditions is that they are not region-specific. Shell objects were manufactured at Nagwada and Nageshwar in Gujarat and at Chanhundaro and Mohenjodaro in Sind. Similarly, metal artefacts were produced at Lothal in Gujarat, at Harappa in the Bari *doab* of Punjab and at Allahadino and Mohenjodaro in Sind. While craft objects were manufactured at many places, the manufacturing technology could be surprisingly standardized. In the case of shell bangles, at practically all sites they had a uniform width of between 5 mm and 7 mm and they were almost everywhere sawn by a saw that had a blade thickness of between 0.4 mm and 0.6mm. What is equally striking about the wide distribution of craft production is that, in a number of cases, manufacture depended on raw materials that were not locally available. At Mohenjodaro, shell artifacts were manufactured from the marine mollusc, *Turbinellapyrum*, found along the Sind and Baluchistan coast which was brought in a raw state from there. Similarly, there is impressive evidence of manufacture of copper based craft items at Harappa ranging from furnaces to slag and unfinished objects, even though the city was located in a minerally poor area.

3.8.2 Trade

The above mentioned craft production could survive and prosper because of a highly organized trading system. Indus people had the capacity to mobilize resources from various areas ranging from Rajasthan to Afghanistan and, considering the scale of manufacture, it is likely that there were full-time traders that helped in providing the necessary raw materials. Most of these resource-rich areas also show evidence of contact with the Indus civilization. For example, at Chalcolithic Kulli culture sites, Harappan unicorn seals and pottery have been found. Similarly, the exploitation of Rajasthan's raw materials is underlined by Harappan pottery at some sites of the Ganeshwar-Jodhpurachalcolithic complex and by the strong stylistic similarities in the copper arrowheads, spearheads and fish hooks of the two cultures.

In addition to raw materials, other types of objects were traded. On the one hand, there was trade in food items as is underlined by the presence of marine cat fish at Harappa, a city that was hundreds of kilometers away from the sea. Craft items were also traded. Small manufacturing centres like Nageshwar were providing shell ladles to Mohenjodaro which also received chert blades from the Rorhi hills of Sind. It is now possible to visualize the exchange of finished objects between the monumental cities of the Indus civilization as well. For instance, stoneware bangles – a highly siliceous, partially sintered ceramic body with low porosity – manufactured at Mohenjodaro have been found 570 kilometres north, at Harappa. The nature of the social process involved in this exchange is unknown but is unlikely to be a case of satisfying an economic demand, since Harappa was also producing such bangles. Possibly, the unidirectional movement of some bangles from Mohenjodaro to Harappa is related to social transactions among related status or kin groups in the two cities.

The Indus civilization had wide ranging contacts with cultures and civilizations to the northwest and west of its distribution area. Indus and Indus-related objects have been found



in north Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, north and south Iran, Bahrain, Failaka and the Oman Peninsula in the Persian Gulf, and north and south Mesopotamia. The objects include etched carnelian and long barrel-cylinder carnelian beads, square/ rectangular Indus seals, pottery with the Indus script, 'Indus' motifs on local seals, ivory objects, and various terracottas such as ithyphallic specimens that have strong Indus analogues. Externally derived objects and traits have been found at Indus sites such as seals with Mesopotamian and Persian Gulf affinities, externally derived motifs on seals and steatite/ chlorite vessels.

At the same time, the importance that has been attached in Indus studies to the regions west of Baluchistan as the main areas from which the Indus civilization procured its raw materials, whether it is copper from Oman or carnelian of Persian Gulf origin is somewhat misplaced. There is an abundance of raw materials on the peripheries and within the area where Indus cities and settlements flourished. Before the advent of Indus urbanism, these raw materials were being used by the various cultures that were antecedent to the Indus civilization and subsequently as well, they continued to be a part of the repertoires of late/post-Harappan horizons, albeit on a reduced scale as compared to the situation during the civilizational phase. While, there may have been some raw materials involved in long distance trade, there is no reason to argue that the Indus civilization was in any way either solely or significantly dependent on the regions to the west for such resources.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. State True or False:

- (i) The settlement pattern of the Harappan Civilization was a multi-tiered one with urban and rural sites that were markedly varied in terms of size and function.
- (ii) One of the most striking features of the Indus craft traditions is that they are region-specific.
- (iii) The Harappans were familiar with the plough.
- (iv) The Indus civilization had wide ranging contacts with cultures and civilizations to the northwest and west of its distribution area.
- (v) The Indus Civilization was solely dependent on the regions to the west for the raw materials.

3.9 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

One of the most complex issues concerning ancient history is to determine past ways of thought and beliefs, especially in the case of the Indus civilization where these must be inferred from material remains, since its writing has not been satisfactorily deciphered. The archaeological indicators here are mainly portable objects of various kinds, figural



representations and a few areas within settlements which seem to have been set apart for sacred purposes. There are no structures at Indus sites that can be described as temples nor are there any statues, which can be considered as images that were worshiped. A few structures reflect a connection between concepts of cleansing through water relation to ritual functions. The sunken, rectangular basin known as the 'Great Bath' at Mohenjodaro is one such instance. The cult connection of this water using structure is evident from its method of construction which had three concentric zones around it, including streets on all four sides (making it the only free standing structure of the city), for the purpose of a ritual procession leading into it. The bathing pavements and well in the vicinity of the offering pits on Kalibangan's citable also underline this connection. As for beliefs connected with fertility, it is possible that some terracotta figurines found at Mohanjodaro and Harappa represent such beliefs. At towns like Kalibangan and Surkotada, female figurines are practically absent. Even at Mohenjodaro, the fact that only 475 of the total number of terracotta figurines and fragments represented the female form means that this was not as common a practice as it has been made out to be. Several of the female figurines were utilized as lamps or for the burning of incense. Fertility in relation to the male principle has also been evoked not merely in the context on the 'Siva-Pasupati' seal but also with reference to the phallic stones that have been found at Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Dholavira as also with regard to a miniature terracotta representation of a phallic emblem set in a ovular shaped flat receptacle from Kalibangan. Religious sancity was associated with particular trees and animals as well. The presence of partly human-partly animal characters on Indus seals and a human personage on a pipal (*figusreligiosa*) tree, in fact, suggest a shamanistic component in Harappan religion. None of these features, however suggest a transregional Indus religion with cult centres and state dominated rituals, of the kind that is writ large on the architectural landscape of Bronze Age West Asia and Egypt.

3.10 DECLINE AND DEVOLUTION

The process of urban decline appears to have unfolded in various ways. At Mohenjodaro there was a steady deterioration, apparent in the fact that the walls of the terminal level structures are frequently thin walled, haphazardly laid out, made of unstandardized bricks. This is also true of Dholavira whose progressive impoverishment was hastened by two spells when the city was deserted. As urbanism crumbled, rickety, jerry-built structures and the reused stones robbed from older structures came to be commonly encountered on the other hand, Kalibangan was abandoned relatively suddenly and the same is true for Banawali. In other words, it is not one event but different kinds of events that must have led to the disappearance of urban life. There is, however, no unanimity about these events or about their relative importance. In fact, the collapse of the Indus civilization continues to be a focus of large historical speculation and debate.



The earliest formulations for urban collapse revolved around the hypothetical Aryans and the allusions in the *Rigveda* to the destruction wreaked on forts/cities by them. This idea continued to remain a popular one till the 1940s when archaeological ‘proof’ of Aryan invasions was claimed to have been discovered at Mohenjodaro, on the one hand, in the assortment of scattered skeletons (apparently signs of a ‘massacre’) and at Harappa, on the other hand, in the form of deliberate blocking of entrances and a culture (Cemetery H) overlying the mature Harappan phase which was supposed to represent the conquerors. Since the 1950s, however serious doubts have been raised about the historicity of an Aryan invasion. Among other things, it has been demonstrated that the massacre evidence was based on very few skeletons that cannot be dated to the same stratum.

Increasingly, greater attention has been paid to the question of the environment in the Indus distribution area and the role of rivers and climate in the decline of an urban culture. At several Indus cities such as Mohenjodaro, Chanhudaro and Lothal, there are silt debris intervening between phases of occupation and these underline the possibility of damage being caused by the inundations of swollen rivers. It has been suggested that the excess river water was a product of earthquakes. The river in question is the Ghaggar-Hakra, often been identified with the Vedic Sarasvati, which was drying up number of sites dramatically shrank in the phase that post-dates the urban one. The reduction in the flow of the Ghaggar-Hakra was a consequence of river diversion and, according to one group of scholars it was the Sutlej that abandoned its channel and began to flow westwards, while others have contended that the Yamuna was diverted from the Indus into the Ganges system.

The impact of the Harappans on their environment is also a factor that has been considered as contributing to the collapse of the Indus civilization. A possible disequilibrium between urban demand and the carrying capacity of the land, leading to a fodder requirements and fuel for firing bricks are among the explanations that have been offered. However, the archaeological scaffolding for supporting such arguments remains to be systematically worked out. In the stretch that lies roughly east of Cholistan, the absence of long-term cultural roots has been highlighted. It has been suggested that since the Indus phenomenon there did not evolve through a long process but was imposed on a hunting-gathering economic context, its presence over time came to be thinly stretched and eventually, could not be sustained. The question of the absence of a long antecedence for the civilization in the Indo-Gangetic divide and Gujarat may require modification in the context of the discovery of cultures antedating the mature Harappan phase in Kutch and Saurashtra on the one hand, and in the Hissar area of Haryana on the other. At the same time, in the period following the demise of the urban form, chalcolithic village cultures as also microlithic hunter-gatherers are encountered, an indicator that such cultures were economically sustainable in those regions. However, the highly complex system of an urban civilization, which delicately balanced different social and economic sub-system, was no longer viable.



What followed the collapse of Indus urbanism was a variety of late/post Harappan cultures – the Cemetery H culture in Punjab and Cholistan, the Jhukar culture of Sind, the Rangpur IIB and Lustrous Red Ware phases of Gujarat. In this latter phase, a few elements of the Harappan tradition, by which one means features whose genealogy can be located in the mature harappan period, persisted to a greater or lesser degree, mediated by other cultural elements. However, the *civilization* had ended and even though aspects of this *tradition* continued, it was in a landscape whose cultural diversity contrasts sharply with that of the preceding, mature Harappan period.

3.11 CONCLUSION

What does the end of the Indus civilization mean in relation to the character of the cultural developments that followed? Urban settlements, for example, did not disappear completely – Kudwala in Cholistan, BeytDwaraka off the coast of Gujarat and Daimabad in the upper Godavari basin are three of them. But they are relatively few, and certainly there is not a city that matches the grandeur and monumentality of Mohenjodaro and Harappan cities, these are now few and far between, although baked bricks and drains are present in the Cemetery H occupation at Harappa while at Sanghol there was a solid mud platform on which mud houses stood. Writing is occasionally encountered but remains generally confined to a few postsherds. The same holds true for seals, which became rare, and at Daimabad and Jhukar are circular, not rectangular like the typical Indus specimens. The Dholavira specimens, on the other hand, are rectangular but without figures. The other indicator of a reduction in the scale of trade is the relatively sparse evidence of interregional procurement of raw materials. On the whole, one would say that elements emblematic of the urban tradition of the Indus civilization dramatically shrank and finally disappeared.

Not everything that is associated with the Indus civilization disappeared, as it were, without a trace. A few craft traditions survived urban collapse and are found in the makeup of the late/post-Harappan mosaic. Faience was one such craft and ornaments fashioned out of this synthetic stone are commonly found in the post-Harappan period. A similar continuity can be seen in the character of metal technology, although there was a general decrease in the use of copper. The bronzes from Daimabad in Maharashtra made by the “lost wax” process and the replication of a marine shell in copper at Rojdi in Gujarat are evidence of this and underline the continuation of the technical excellence of the Indus copper and copper alloy traditions. There was diversification of agriculture. In settlements of late/post-Harappan lineage in the aftermath of the Indus phenomenon there was no cultural cohesion or artefactual uniformity of the kind that was a hallmark of that civilization. Instead of a civilization, there were cultures, each with its own distinct regional identity.



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Match the following:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| (i) The Great Bath | (a) Makran Coast |
| (ii) Cemetery-H | (b) Rajasthan |
| (iii) SutkagenDor | (c) Sind |
| (iv) Kalibangan | (d) Mohenjodaro |
| (v) Chanhudaro | (e) Harappa |

B. Which of the following statements are true?

- (i) At towns like Kalibangan and Surkotada, female figurines are practically absent.
- (ii) There are no structures at Indus sites that can be described as temples nor are there any statues, which can be considered as images that were worshiped.
- (iii) There are some terracotta figurines found at Kalibangan that represent beliefs connected with fertility.

C. Short Notes:

- (i) Origin of Harappan civilization
- (ii) Geographical distribution of the Harappan civilization
- (iii) Trade of the Harappan civilization

D. Long question:

- (i) Discuss the reasons for the decline of the Harappan civilization.

3.12 LET US SUM UP

- The Indus Civilization was the first urban culture in South Asia.
- Geographically, however, this civilization (also called the Harappan civilization after Harappa, its first known site) included much more than the Indus zone.
- The settlement pattern was a multi-tiered one with urban and rural sites that markedly varied in terms of size and function.
- A stable system of agriculture, supplemented by animal husbandry, hunting and plant gathering, provided economic sustenance to urban networks.



- A spectacular range of artisanal production (pottery, seals, beads, stone sculptures, terracotta figurines, etc.) is encountered at Indus cities.
- The Indus civilization had wide ranging contacts with cultures and civilizations to the northwest and west of its distribution area.
- The location of Harappan settlements along navigable waterways and traditional land routes also indicates deep involvement of the Harappans in exchange activities.
- The Harappan Civilization did not come to a sudden end.
- The process of urban decline appears to have unfolded in various ways. Increasingly, greater attention has been paid to the question of the environment in the Indus distribution area and the role of rivers and climate in the decline of an urban culture.

3.13 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

- A. (i) Indus Valley (ii) Bronze (iii) Settlement pattern (iv) Makran Coast (v) Ghaggar (vi) Mehrgarh.
- B. (i) Mohenjodaro, KotDiji (ii) SutkagenDor, Sotka-koh (iii) Rangpur, Lothal (iv) Banawali, Rakhigarhi.

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

- A. (i) True (ii) False (iii) True (iv) True (v) False.

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

- A. i-d; ii-e; iii-a; iv-b; v-c
- B. (i) and (ii) are true.

C. Short Notes:

- (i) See Section 3.3
- (ii) See Section 3.5
- (iii) See Section 3.8.2

D. Long Question:

- (i) See Section 3.10



3.14 ESSENTIAL READINGS

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UNIT IV

VEDIC AND MEGALITHIC CULTURES : AN OVERVIEW

STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Objectives
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the issues related to the Indo-Aryans.
- explain the culture of the Aryans as reflected in the Vedic texts.
- explain the society, polity, economy and religion of the Vedic people.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Vedic corpus is the earliest literary tradition in Indian history. The Vedic tradition is believed to have contained in it the essence of Indian social and cultural life. Some believe that everything emerging from history, philosophy, mathematics to political ideas in India are seen to emanate from Vedic sources, and hence the essence of Indianness. Understandings of the Vedic literature and its bearing on Indian history have generated immense debates. Questions of antiquity, authorship and spatial character and the people figuring in the literature are relevant to a student of history.

The “Vedic age” constructed on this literary tradition has carried different labels like ‘the iron age India’, ‘the second urbanization’ and ‘the Gangetic culture’. The designation ‘Vedic culture’ points to the main trajectory of historical development. It is important to note that the notion that the ancient Indian cities of the Indus were destroyed by invaders (Aryan?) has lost credibility. It is true that the high, urban culture spread over north-west of the subcontinent for a millennium disappeared by 1000 BCE.

4.2 THE RIG VEDA

The Rig Veda is considered to be the earliest specimen of the Indo-European languages. It is a collection of prayers offered to Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Soma and other gods by several families of poets or sages. It consists of ten mandalas or books, of which Books II to VII form its earliest portions and are called family books. Books I and X seem to have been the latest additions. Book X which is known as the Purusa Sukta is the latest addition and in fact, does not form the portion of the original Rig Veda. The family books do not contain purely Vedic or Aryan traditions. Even in these books Vedic and non-Vedic traditions are mixed up. Book III, which is supposed to have been composed by Visvamitra is such a good example of this mixing up of cultural traits.

The Rig Veda has several things in common with the Zend Avesta, which is the oldest text in the Iranian language. The two texts use the same names for several gods and for social



classes. The geographical distribution of the early portion of the Rig Veda has been assigned to the land of the seven rivers (*Saptsaindhavapradesh*). This area mostly covers Punjab, but its dating is not so easy. Several theories discuss the sites and antiquities attributable to the Aryans. As Aryans built their houses of timber or mud it makes it difficult to identify their remains in a tropical area. It is said that the Aryans used horses and war chariots fitted with copper or bronze. But the archaeological excavations have not revealed their vehicles. Stuart Piggot mentions five Bronze Age graves in the Urals containing lightly built wooden vehicles of cart or chariot type. Their dates have been assigned to a date around 1500 BCE A.H. Dani refers to the use of horse drawn chariots used in western Asia around 1800 BCE In the Indian subcontinent, we have noticed the remains of the horse in some Gandhara graves belonging to 2000 BCE Some Aryan names mentioned in the Kassite inscription of about 1600 BCE and the Mitanni inscriptions of about 1400 BCE discovered in Iraq have been used as the chief means of dating the Rig Veda. The much talked of excavations at four sites--Bhagwanpura (Kurukshetra district) Dadheri (Ludhiana district), Katpalan and Nagar (Jullundur/ Jalandhar district) have also been considered to fix the chronology of the Rig Veda. The dates assigned to these four sites range from 1500 BCE to 1300 BCE which more or less corresponds to the date assigned to the Rig Veda.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. State True or False:

- (i) Some historians regard horse as an indispensable marker or indicator of the early Aryan culture.
- (ii) The Rig Veda does not have anything in common with the Zend Avesta, which is the oldest text in the Iranian language.

B. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) The _____ is considered to be the earliest specimen of the Indo-European languages.
- (ii) The Rig Veda consists of ten mandalas or books, of which Books _____ to _____ form its earliest portions and are called family books.
- (iii) The geographical distribution of the early portion of the Rig Veda has been assigned to _____.
- (iv) Book III, which is supposed to have been composed by _____ is a good example of the mixing up of cultural traits.



4.3 THE RIG VEDIC PHASE

Some historians are of the opinion that Aryans came to India in several waves. The earliest wave is represented by the Rig Vedic people, who appeared in the subcontinent in about 1500 BCE. They came into conflict with the original inhabitants called the *dasas*, *dasyus*, etc. As the *dasas* are also referred to in the earliest Iranian literature, they are considered to have been a branch of the early Aryans. The war lord of Rig Vedic Aryan i.e. Indra led many battles against *dasas*, *dasyus* and *panis*. The *dasyus* seem to have been original inhabitants of India and an Aryan chief who conquered them was hailed as *trasadasyu*. But *dasyu* corresponds to *dahyu* in the Iranian language. Emile Benveniste believes that although the term *dasyu-hatya* occurs frequently and they seem to have been bitter enemy of the Rig Vedic people, Iranian evidence suggests otherwise. Perhaps *dasyu* or *dahyus* were one of the earliest waves to cross the Hindukush. It is a well known fact that inter and intra-tribal conflicts rocked the Aryan communities for quite a considerable time. The case of the Battle of ten kings or *dasarajna* fought on the river Ravi, mentioned in Book VII, is too well known. The Bharata ruling clan was opposed by a host of ten kings, five or whom were heads of Aryan tribals and the remaining five of Non-Aryan peoples. This famous battle gave victory of Sudas and established the supremacy of the Bharatas. Amongst the defeated Aryan tribes, the most important was the Purus. Gradually the Bharatas joined hands with the Purus and they together formed a new famous ruling tribe known as Kurus. During the later Vedic times, Kurus combined with the Panchalas and they together ruled in the upper Ganga valley. In addition to this story we hear of numerous other conflicts between Vedic tribes and non-Vedic tribes. But R.S. Sharma suggests that the overtones of racial conflict between the Aryans and the non-Aryans given to these conflicts by some Indian and foreign scholars is unwarranted. He further states that in spite of diligent diggings for the last three decades, it has not been possible to adduce proof of mass scale confrontation between the Rig Vedic people and the original inhabitants of north-western India.

4.3.1 Rig Vedic Economy

The careful study of Rig Veda clearly indicates that the Rig Vedic economy was predominantly pastoral. But it does not mean that in the sequence of social evolution nomadism and pastoralism preceded agricultural society. Archaeological evidence related to north western part of the sub-continent suggest different story. However, the family books show the Rig Vedic people to be primarily pastoral people. The wild animals (*mrga*) is differentiated from the domesticated animals (*pasu*), mainly cattle which were evidently valued for food as well as for dairy products. The cow is most favourite animal of the Rig Vedic people. This animal is par-excellence amongst all the cattle. The early Aryans' every sphere of life is overshadowed by this animal. The term for cow (*gau*) occurs 176 times in the family books of the Rig Veda. Cattle were considered to be synonymous with wealth (*rayi*) and a wealthy person was known as *gomat*. The terms *gavisti*, *gosu*, *gavyat*, *gavyu*, *gavesana*,



gavyuti, *gojat* and *gotra* etc., which cover several aspects of cattle rearing and social organization of the Rig Vedic people are frequently mentioned in the original portions of the Rig Veda. Even buffalo is described as *gaurigavala*. In the Aryan life of the family, the significance of cow is shown by the use of the term *duhitr* (one who milks), for daughter.

The horse is another important animal reared by the early Aryans. As we have discussed earlier, it is considered as an indispensable marker of the Aryan culture. The popular term for horse *asva* and its cognates are frequently referred to in Sanskrit, Avestan, Greek, Latin and other European languages. Morton Smith in his famous article. ‘What is in a name (in Ancient India)?’ states that in ancient texts, particularly in Vedic and Avestan, several personal names are horse-based. He has enumerated such 50 horse names and 20 chariot names referred to in the above texts. The term *asva* and its various terms occurs 215 times in the Rig Veda, Even the term *gau* occurs 176 times and *vrsbha* 170 times. It is suggested that the Rig Vedic cattle-rearing society was dominated by the horse-riding cheftancy. The horse is praised in two detailed hymns of the Rig Veda. No God could afford to be without the association of this powerful and shining animal. Indra and his companions Maruts are often shown riding horses in battles as well as in sports.

It is interesting to notice common terms for cattle and pasture in several Indo European languages. Special mention may be made of the term *pasti* found in Slavic, and its cognates in Serbo-Croatian, Bahemian, Russian and Polish. The terms *pasti* or *paste* have been referred to in the Rumanian and Rig Vedic texts. R.S. Sharma has enumerated the term *pastyā* 18 times in the Rig Veda. Several forms of this term include *pastyā*, *pastyā-sad*, *pastyā-vat*, *pastyā-vati* and *pastyā-van*. The frequent use of the term *vraj* in the early portion of the Rig Veda also indicates the pastoral life of the people. *Vraj* means cow-pen. In its different forms, this term occurs 45 times in the Rig Veda.

Unfortunately, archaeological evidence regarding dominant pastoral life of the Rig Vedic people are scanty. If we accept four important archaeological sites, namely, Bhagwanpura, Dadheri, Katpalan and Nagar as reflecting Rig Vedic material culture, then we may have some glimpses of pastoral life indicated by the findings of cattle-bones. A good amount of animal bones has been discovered at Bhagwanpura and Dadheri.

These include charred bones of cattle, sheep and goats, which were evidently used for food. Sharp cut marks on their bones corroborates this assumption. Literary evidence clearly shows that cattle, sheep and goats were domesticated for purposes both of dairy products and meat.

It seems that the Rig Vedic people possessed knowledge of agriculture. There are 21 references to agricultural activities in the Rig Veda, but only a few occur in its family books the term *krs* (to cultivate) occurs rarely in its kernel. The term *Krsti* is referred to 33 times in the Rig Veda but it is used in the sense of people, and five peoples (*pancakrstyah*) are mentioned two times. This reminds us of later use of *pancajanah* and *pancacarsaniyah*. The popular term *hala* does not find place in the Rig Veda, but two other terms for plough,



langala and *sira*, occur in the earliest books. The terms *phala* or ploughshare and furrows (*Sita*) is mentioned in Book IV, where a complete hymn is devoted to agricultural operations. But this book is considered late portion of the Rig Veda. Marks of furrows belonging to pre-Harappan period have been discovered in Kalibanga and the pre-Aryan practice may have been adopted by the Vedic people. It is said that the ploughshare mentioned in the Rig Veda were probably wooden ploughshare used in cultivating lands which were rendered fertile on accounts of floods in the seven rivers of Punjab although early Aryans seem to have been acquainted with sowing, harvesting, threshing and possessed the knowledge about different seasons, yet, their primitive means of production could not allow them to support a large number of people. In the age of the Rig Veda, *yava* or barley was produced. Barley ripens quickly and does not require much rain. It was perhaps, used for both the purposes of food as well as fodder. Rig Vedic people also grew some other coarse grains but they were definitely not aware of growing rice (*vrhi*). Thus, the lack of knowledge of growing a variety of crops and primitive agricultural technology prevented them to become essentially an agricultural society.

4.3.2 Rig Vedic Society

The terms *vra*, *vrata*, *vraj*, *sardha* and *grama* mentioned in the early portion of the Rig Veda have been explained as suggesting the existence of 'band' system in the age of Rig Veda. It is argued that these terms seem to be connected with two important sources of the livelihood of the Rig Vedic people, namely fighting, which meant 'booty production' and cattle rearing which supplied them with dairy products and food. Perhaps such terms were formed for fighting for livelihood, and once it assumed a permanent character it probably came to be considered as a kinship group. R.S. Sharma is of the view that 'although some references from the Rig Veda may indicate survivals of 'band' system, by and large the tribal element was strong in the Rigvedic society. He further argues that frequent occurrence of various terms such as *jana*, *vis*, *gana*, *gram*, *grha*, *kula*, *vrata* etc., which stand for kin-based units, suggest strong tribal elements in the early vedic society. The terms *jana* occurs 275 times, *vis* 171 times and *grama* 13 times in the Rig Veda. Romila Thapar also agrees with this kind of interpretations of these terms. But she emphasizes on kin-based, lineage-based or segmentary form of society in the Rig Vedic Age. According to social anthropologists, tribe is the largest unit of lineage-based or segmentary society and kinship is the unifying bond between them.

Some social anthropologists such as Emmanuel Terray and Marcel Mauss etc. have discovered the practice of redistribution. Romila Thapar has examined in detail the prevalence of this system in the Vedic period. She states that the system of *dana* and *dakshina* functioned as economic exchange during the tribal phase of the Vedic society. Some other Indian scholars have also investigated the practice of distribution and redistribution at one point of time in the age of the Rig Veda. Spoils of war, or gifts and occasional tributes were certainly redistributed. They largely consisted of cattle, sheep, goats,



horses, weapons and most importantly women slaves. Women were also an important gain of spoils of wars.

The nomadic or migratory nature of the early Aryan is indicated by the use of term *vis* in the sense of entering or settling in the Rig Veda. Several prefixes such as *a vis*, *upavis*, *nivis*, *punarvis*, *pravis*, etc., added to the term *vis* to form verbs also suggest migratory nature of the Rig Vedic tribes. These habits of people in a predominantly pastoral or cattle-rearing society constitute a natural phenomenon.

• The Position of Women in the Rig Vedic Society

What was the status of women in the Rig Vedic society? While there has been constant attempt to eulogize their position, it is likely that reality may have not been so simple. The term *duhitri* indicates some kind of role of women in the productive process. The frequent references to the role of women in weaving activities also strengthen this argument. A women distributor namely *Sanugi* is also mentioned in the Rig Veda. Further we have references to women seers of Vedic hymns and child-marriage was unknown. The term *dampati* has been explained as the equal sharing of the house hold property by wife and husband. It seems that women were given due regards during the early times of the Rig Vedic society. This was due to their larger involvement in the productive system of the society. But at later stage, when they were deprived of their productive role, their position started gradually declining. It can be seen that while there are prayers in the Rig Veda for birth of brave sons in particular, or *praja* or offspring in general, there are none for daughters. On divine plane male divinity dominated the horizon. The masculinity of Indra is eulogized. Some of these instances indicate matrilineal traces, and we have a few examples of sons being named after their mother, as in the case of *Mamateya*. The early Aryans seem to have adopted this practice from the non-Aryans.

• The division based on occupations

The Rig Vedic society which was predominantly a pastoral and tribal in nature and which could not to produce surplus did not create conditions for class differentiation. There could be differentiation of rank, as can be inferred from the titles of tribal chiefs such as *vishpati*, *vishampati*, *jansyagopa*, *ganashya raja*, *gananamganpati* etc. It is correct to postulate on the basis of famous *dansutimandala* of the Rig Veda that the society represented at least in that stratum was not completely egalitarian, but the phenomenon of the upper classes living on the labour of tribesmen was just beginning to emerge. The ritualistic and ideological ratification mentioned in the Purusasukta in the tenth mandala came at a much later stage. There is no denial that the division based on occupations had started. But this division was in its rudimentary form. We hear of a famous statement of a family member wherein he asserts that he is a poet, his father is a physician, and his mother is grinder. Earning livelihood through different means, they live together. The *brahmana* is mentioned 14 times and *kshatriya* 9 times in the Rig Veda. But most of these references are found in the



later portions of the Rig Veda. The *shudra* is mentioned for the first and last time in the *Purusha Sukta* (tenth mandala) of the Rig Veda. Thus, the later notion of *varna* system based on exploitative mode of production is not to be found in the Rig vedic society. We find domestic slaves, but not the wage earner or even beggars. Tribal traits in society were predominant and stronger. Social stratification based on collection of taxes or accumulation of landed property were completely absent. Due to serious constraints in productive mechanism, society still remained tribal and largely egalitarian.

4.3.3 Rig Vedic Polity

Unfortunately we do not get clear picture of administrative machinery in the Rig Vedic period. It seems that the king or *Rajanya* was the epicenter of the administrative or political power. This was primarily due to his major role in the success of his clan in the war. Some early portions of the Rig Veda show that the king was elected on the merit of his role in the war and other virtues. But later on his post had become hereditary. However, the king was not allowed to exercise unlimited power. The popular tribal assembly *samiti* successfully controlled his activities. His major duties were to protect his tribe, protect its cattle, fight its wars and offer prayers to gods on behalf of his whole tribal community.

We get references to some tribal or clan based assemblies such as the *sabha*, *samiti*, *vidatha*, *gana* etc., in the Rig Veda. They exercised deliberative, military and religious functions. The *vidatha* functioned as an excellent tribal politico-economic organization for the distribution and redistribution activities. Sometimes women played an important role in the functioning of this organization. But the two most important assemblies were the *sabha* and *samiti*. Sometimes women also attended the *sabha*. These two assemblies were so powerful and prestigious that the chiefs or the kings always showed eagerness to win over the support of the members of these assemblies. It seems that the *sabha* was represented by few respected and wise elders and it looked after mainly social and religious problems. *Samiti* was most powerful tribal assembly which dealt with administrative and political activities. Its members elected the king and controlled his other activities. When the post of king or *rajanya* became hereditary, the power of this assembly began to decline.

In routine administrative work, the king was assisted by a few functionaries. The *purohita* seems to have been most important functionary amongst all. We hear of the two famous *purohita*, Vasistha and Vishvamitra, in the Rig Vedic period. Their main duty was to inspire the tribal chief to action in wars and lauded their exploits in return for handsome rewards in cattle, metals, clothes and women slaves. *Senani* seems to have been another important functionary, who used spears, axes, swords, etc. in the wars. But we do not come across any administrative functionary for collecting the tax, probably the *rajanya* or chiefs received from the people voluntary gifts called *bali*. *Bali* was evidently received both from *vis* of one's own *gana* as well as from hostile people who were subjugated. It is said that the gods when pleased with offerings or *bali*, grant the sacrificer his desires for cattle, horses sons, victory in raids etc. The Rig Veda does not refer to any functionary for administering



justice. But it does not mean that the Rig Vedic society was free of theft, burglary and other petty crimes. We often hear of theft. The king did not maintain any regular army, but in times of war he mustered a militia whose military functions were performed by different tribal groups such as *vrata*, *gana*, *grama*, *sardha* etc. It is rightly argued that the Rig Vedic society had a tribal system of government in which the military element was dominant feature. The lack of civil system or territorial administration was due to constant migratory or nomadic nature of the Rig Vedic people.

4.3.4 Rig Vedic Religion

Rig Vedic religion was evolved from its overwhelming tribal surroundings. The early Aryans found it difficult to explain the advent of rains, the appearance of the sun and the moon, and the existence of the rivers and mountains etc. So these natural forces were personified and given human or animal attributes. The poets of various families offered prayers in their honour. Indra is most important divinity in the Rig Veda. He is also called *purandara* or literally breaker of forts. According to D.D. Kosambi, a leading Marxist historian, Rig Vedic Aryans demolished the forts of Harappan cities under the divine leadership of this war-lord. He led the Aryan soldiers to victory against *panis* and other demons. Two hundred and fifty hymns are devoted to him. He is also considered as the rain god and to be responsible for causing rainfall. The later story of Krishna protecting the people of Mathura from excessive rain havoc created by angry Indra seems to have its earlier origin. But by this time he had lost his past glory and only his status of rain god remained intact.

Agni (fire-god) is the second most important god mentioned in the Rig Veda. Fire played a vital role in the life of primitive people because of its use in burning forests, cooking etc. The cult of fire occupied a central place not only in India but also in Iran. About 200 hymns are devoted to this god in the Rig Veda. In the Vedic period, Agni acted as a kind of intermediary between the gods on the one hand and the people on the other. The oblation offered to Agni were supposed to be carried in the form of smoke to the sky, and thus conveyed to the gods. Agni is butter-backed, butter-faced and beautiful tongued. He is the eagle of the sky and a divine bird. His flames are like the roaring waves of the sea. More generally Agni is spoken of as born in wood as the embryo of plants or as distributed in plants. The terrestrial existence of Agni is further indicated by his being called the navel of the earth; Agni is celebrated and worshipped by Varuna, Mitra, the Maruts, and all the gods.

Varuna, shown by the side of Indra, is the next important god in the Rig Veda. Two dozen hymns have been devoted to this god. It seems that this god occupied third important position in the Rig Veda. Varuna personified water. He was supposed to uphold the natural order, and whatever happened in the universe was thought to be the reflection of his desires. Soma was regarded to be the god of plants, and an intoxicating drink is named after him. 114 hymns have been devoted to this god. The Soma sacrifice forms the main feature of the ritual of the Rig Veda, when drunk by Indra soma caused the sun to rise in heaven. Etymologically Soma-Haoma means ‘pressed juice’, being derived from the root *su-hu* ‘to press’.



The Maruts personify the storm. 33 hymns have been dedicated to this god. Maruts are closely associated with the goddess Rodasi. She has been regarded as their beautiful bride. Thus Rig Veda refers to a large number of gods, who represent the different forces of nature in one form or another, but are also attributed human activities.

The Rig Veda refers to several female divinities such as Usas, Aditi, Surya etc. Usas, goddess of dawn, is celebrated in about 20 hymns of the Rig Veda and mentioned more than 300 times. But these female divinities were not so prominent in the Rig Vedic period. The male gods overshadowed the religious horizon of the Rig Vedic society.

The popular mode of worshipping the gods was through the recitation of prayers and offering of sacrifices. Both collective and individual prayers were made. It seems that prayers were offered to gods in chorus by members of a whole tribe. The Rig Vedic tribal society did not worship gods for their spiritual uplift or for ending the miseries of life. They wanted to enjoy every bit of their life. For this enjoyment, they needed *praja* (children), *pasu* (cattle), food, wealth (*rayi*) and health. The complex rituals and magical power of the words were required in the stratified society of the later Vedic age.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Name the following:

- (i) The Veda that belongs specifically to the Early Vedic period.
- (ii) A new famous ruling tribe formed by the Bharatas and the Purus.
- (iii) The most favourite animal (other than *asva*) of the Rig Vedic people.
- (iv) The epicenter of the administrative or political power in the Rig Vedic age.
- (v) The Rig Vedic God who was supposed to uphold the natural order (*Rta*).

B. Short Notes:

- (i) The position of women in the Rig Vedic Society.
- (ii) Early Vedic religion.

4.4 THE LATER VEDIC PHASE

4.4.1 Sources

We get both literary as well as archaeological sources for the study of this period. The literary sources are comprised of the Vedic texts which were compiled after the age of the Rig Veda and the archaeological sources pertain to the Painted Grey Ware phase.



• Literary Sources

The Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Atharva Veda, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanisads constitute the later Vedic Samhitas. Sama Veda is perhaps the oldest Aryan poetical treatise based on musical tunes. For purposes of signing, the prayers of the Rig Veda were set to tune in this Veda. The Yajur Veda contains hymns as well as detail and complicated formulae for conducting numerous rituals. These rituals not only throw light on religions practices but also reflect the social and political background which helped them to emerge and grow. The Atharva Veda reflects the horizon of composite culture of the Vedic and non-Vedic times. It contains charms and spells to ward off evils and diseases. The famous Prithvi Sukta of this Veda reveals the non-vedic practices of fertility-cult and matrilineal traits. The Vedic Samhitas were followed by the composition of a series of text known as Brahmanas. These Brahmanas are the invaluable literary source of the later Vedic period. The ritualistic formulae contained in them not only explain socio- religious functions but also throw light on economic activities of their times. The Aranyakas were perhaps composed by the Vedic seers living in the fourth stage of their life in the forests. They contain the bitter and sweet experiences of their life witnessed in the earlier three stages. The Upanishads deal with the metaphysical aspects of the life of the later Vedic Aryans. The sophisticated and complex philosophical debates and discussions are the main theme of these texts. All these Vedic texts were compiled in the Indo-Gangetic divide and the upper Gangetic basin in circa 1000-600 BCE. The geographical distribution forms the major portion of western UP, almost the whole of Haryana, and the neighbouring parts of the Punjab and Rajasthan. It is postulated that from the climatic point of view this whole area constitutes one unit having the same kinds of plants and trees.

• Archaeological Sources

It has been argued that the material background of the social evolution in the first half of the first millennium BCE in the Indo-Gangetic divide and the upper Ganga valley is provided by the Painted Grey Ware culture and especially by the first phase of iron using culture. The PGW sites are spread from northern most sites at Mandu in Jammu. Ujjain is in south and Bikaner in the west to the Vaisali (Bihar) in east. But its main centers of production seem to be the basins of Sutlej and upper Ganga valley. More than 750 sites of the PGW culture have been excavated in this area.

It seems that there had been a change and re-grouping of tribes of the Rig Veda, and many new tribes. Aryans and non-Aryans emerged during this period. The Bharatas and the Purus, the two prominent tribes, combined and thus formed the Kurus, who with their allies, the Panchalas, became the formidable tribe group. It seems that in the beginning the Kurus settled themselves between the Sarasvati and Drisadvati just on the fringe of the doab. Soon the Kurus occupied Delhi and the upper portion of the Gangetic plains the area called Kurukshetra or the land of the Kurus. The centre of culture gradually shifted eastwards and become localized in the upper and middle portions of the doab, covering the modern districts



of Bareilly, Badaun and Farukhabad that produced the most learned brahmanas and philosopher kings of the later Vedic times. It is interesting to note that it is precisely this area which has yielded the maximum number of iron-weapons and tools. Thus it is the land of the *Kuru-pancalas* which has archaeologically shown a denser population living on assured and continuous means of subsistence. The average distance between the one Painted Grey Ware site and another is nearly 8 kilometers, which is an indication of greater density of population in comparison to other-areas where PGW layers have been unearthed. The distance is still less between the sites on the bank of the river Yamuna. Further easterly direction shows concentration of the more PGW sites with the solitary exception of the Ghaziabad district, where there are nearly 7 sites within the radius of ten miles. The PGW iron phase deposits in this area, which are said to have been 3 to 4 metres deep at several places, makes our point more clear that these settlements lasted for at least three to four centuries. Their relative stableness and richer material content indicating an increase in population suggest that they were inhabited by agrarian society. It seems quite plausible that when the later Vedic people migrated towards more fertile and monsoon-fed easterly direction the north and west (particularly Punjab) not only declined in importance, but the inhabitants of this area were looked down upon with disapproval.

4.4.2 The Iron Technology and its Impact

The PGW archaeology clearly shows that iron weapons such as arrow-heads-and spear heads came to be commonly used in western UP from about 800 BCE onwards. These iron-weapons may have helped the *Kurupancalas* to establish their political supremacy over their adversaries living in this area. The iron axe may have been used to clear the forests in the upper gangetic basin. Towards the end of the later Vedic period knowledge of iron spread in eastern UP and Videha region of Bihar. The earliest iron implements unearthed in this area belong to the 7th century BCE. It is interesting to note that reference to this black metal in the later-Vedic texts belonging to this period increased many-folds. The most important Brahmanas i.e. the Satapatha Brahmana emphatically asserts that the iron is the back-bone of the peasantry. It shows that iron began to play an important role even in agricultural operations. The Atharva Veda and Aitareya Brahmana refer to this metal as *syamayas* or *Krishna ayas*. Although few agricultural tools made of iron have been found, undoubtedly agriculture became the chief source of livelihood of the later Vedic people. The Satapatha Brahmana gives a detailed account of agricultural operations. It refers to six, eight, twelve and even twenty four oxen yoked to the plough. The other Brahmanas have also mentioned ploughing rituals.

4.4.3 Later Vedic Economy

The study of the later Vedic texts shows that people produced not only barley, which is frequently mentioned in the Rig Veda, but also wheat, several kinds of pulses and above all, many kinds of rice as well. The Aitaraya Brahmana refers to atleast six kinds of rice. Besides barley rice and wheat have been found in the PGW levels at Atranjikhhera. Bean pulse



(*masa*) and seasm (*tila*), millet (*syamaka*) etc. are also mentioned in the later Vedic text. The cultivation of rice in the upper Gangetic basin suggests that in ancient times this area had a heavier rainfall and much waterlogging. It is interesting to note that wheat has no significant place in the Vedic ritual. It has rather been condemned as the food of *mlechha* (non-Aryan). The Panchavimsa Brahmana refers to barley and rice as the source of life (*pransayapranah*). The later Vedic texts state that the use of rice immortalized the *yajman* (the person who performs the yajna). It is known as *akshat* – meaning indestructible. The cultivation of variety of crops suggest more than subsistence economy. Peasants started producing a little more than what they needed to support themselves. Now they could maintain non-producing section such as priests and princesses and even some other professional groups which had just started to emerge during this period. R.S. Sharma is of the opinion that although the practice of agriculture has increased many folds it was still in primitive stage. Ploughing was done with the help of the wooden shares possibly having iron tips on them. This could possibly work in the light soil of the upper Gangetic plains. Thus according to Sharma the later Vedic society was a small scale non-monetary peasant society and not a full-fledged class society. He further states that the limited availability of agricultural surplus on account of wooden plough share based agriculture and indeterminate killing of cattle in sacrifices, could not sharpen class antagonism. But it is beyond doubt that the booty capture, cattle rearing and semi-nomadic tribal society of the Rig Veda was transformed into a sedentary peasant society in this period.

The later Vedic period also witnessed the emergence of some professional groups. The arts and crafts have been mentioned in the later Vedic texts. Archaeological findings also support this argument. We hear of smith and smelters, who had certainly to do some thing with iron – working from about 1000 BCE. A larger number of copper – hoards (consisting of copper tools) have been discovered in western UP and even in Bihar. These hoards belong to the phase of Ochre Colour Pottery (OCP) ware. The OCP ware phase has been assigned prior to 1000 BCE. These copper tools might suggest the existence of copper – smiths in both Vedic and non-vedic societies. In any case copper was one of the first metals to be used by the Vedic people. The pottery made out of this metal was praised highly in the Vedic rituals. A large number of copper objects have been found in PGW sites. They were used mainly for war, hunting and also for ornaments.

Leather-work, pottery-making, carpenter's work and above all weaving made great advance in this period. It seems that the later Vedic people were acquainted with four types of pottery- Black and Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Painted Grey Ware and Red Ware. However, the most distinctive pottery of the period is known as Painted Grey Ware. Glass hoards and bangles have also been found in the PGW phase. These findings suggest some arts and crafts in them as well. Jewel workers are also mentioned in the later Vedic texts. They might have catered to the needs of the affluent sections of the later Vedic society.



Mortimer Wheeler believes that the PGW phase culture witnessed a full fledged urban life. The term *nagara* occurs in an Aranyaka and *Nagrin* in two Brahmanas. But these texts belong to a period not earlier than 600 BCE. The study of PGW settlements clearly indicates that the PGW phase of culture does not warrant its characterization as urban. The excavations at Hastinapur and Kausambi show the faint beginnings of towns towards the end of the later Vedic period. They have rightly been called as proto urban sites. Some later Vedic texts refer to the seas and sea-voyages. This shows that the rise of new-arts and crafts resulting in petty – commodity production stimulated some kinds of trading and commercial activities. But the barter – based and backward agrarian economy could not provide congenial atmosphere for the growth of full fledged urbanization during this period.

4.4.4 Later Vedic Polity

On the political horizon we witness some vital transformation during this period. The popular tribal assemblies lost their significance. The monarchical power increased at their cost. The *Vidatha*, which functioned as distributive tribal organization, disappeared during this period. Even the *Sabha* and the *Samiti* lost their egalitarian and participative character. They were now being dominated by rising chiefs and ritualistically powerful Brahmanas. Women were no longer allowed to sit on the *Sabha* or function as distributive officials. The pastoral, booty capture, semi-nomadic and tribal society of the Rig Veda was transformed into a peasant (although small scale) and territorial society. Though princes still ruled over the tribes, but their dominant tribes became identical with territories, which might be inhabited by tribes other than their own. Initially Panchala was the name of a people, and then it became the name of a region. Thus the tribal name became the name of a territory. The earlier practice of electing the chief or king was gradually relegated to the background. The Rig Vedic voluntary gift popularly called *bali*, which the tribal chief used to receive from the *vis* now had been transformed into a mandatory tax. Thus the beginnings of tax collection are found in this period. The powerful rising class of priestly ideologues namely Brahmanas developed mechanism of complex rituals to establish the fiscal and administrative control over the peasantry. The Satapatha and the Aitareya Brahmanas strongly condemn the *vis* or the peasants who looked down upon the ruler, disobeyed and revolted against him. The Satapatha Brahmana suggests that the *vis* or the peasants should not be placed above the nobility, and that those who made the peasantry equal to the nobility and thus made them refractory caused confusion between the nobility and the peasants. The Aitareya Brahmana says that the *vis* or the peasantry are grasses and the nobility is the deer. The grasses are always meant to be eaten by deer. The SatapathaBrahamana suggests that the peasantry must be surrounded by the brahmanas from the one side and the kshatriya from the other. It is clear from the several Vedic references that *vaisyas* were for more numerically stronger than the brahmanas and kshatriyas. Thus, the need arose to control them and forced them to pay periodical tithes or taxes to the ruling classes. But it is surprising to notice that the later Vedic texts do not refer to any established administrative mechanism for collecting taxes. The term *bhagdugha* is interpreted not in the sense of tax collector but distributor. Thus we have no



clear idea about the nature of the taxes collected from the peasants. In spite of the use of precious metals such as gold and silver, the later Vedic society was a non-monetary society in which taxes had to be collected only in kind. This was due to the limited availability of agricultural surplus on account of pre-field wooden ploughshare based agriculture in this period. Thus, it was a small scale non-monetary peasant society.

4.4.5 Later Vedic Society

The *Varna* hierarchy emerged as one of the salient features of social formations in the later Vedic times. During the Rig Vedic period the *varna* description was probably initially primarily between the Aryan and non Aryan original inhabitants. But in the later Vedic period, the system expanded and clearly divided into four fold *varna* groups wherein the brahmana claimed the first rank and the *shudra* was pushed to the fourth and last rank. The brahmanas, which claimed the highest rank, were earlier merely one of the seventeen kinds of priests. The origin of this dynamic priestly rank is shrouded in mystery. D.D. Kosambi has argued that it may have included representations of the practitioners of Harappan culture as well as other indigenous tribal priestly class. The birth of two most important Vedic *risis* such as Vasistha and Agastya being regarded as born from jar also testifies to this kind of argument. Whatever may have been the reason of the emergence of this class it is beyond doubt to state that the Brahmanas not only overshadowed the other priestly groups but other categories of varnas as well. It seems quite possible that with the advance of the agriculture, surplus produce became available to support non-producing classes such as the Brahmanas, rajanyas and some other fast emerging professional social groups. The Brahmanas invented numerous complicated rituals which provided ideological legitimization for the rajanyas or kshatriyas to rule over the *vaishyas* and *shudras*. In reward to this ideological support, Brahmanas claimed substantial shares in the available social surplus. The study of the later Vedic texts and particularly the Brahmanas texts clearly indicates that this priestly class performed several ritual ceremonies not only for the rajanyas or ksatriyas but for the huge mass of peasantry as well. By performing ritual ceremonies for *vaisya* class (the main producing class) they earned substantial amount of *dakshina*. The royal ceremonies and rituals such as *rajsuya*, *asvamedha*, *vajapeya* etc., fetched them huge amount of gifts. These gifts include hundred thousand of cows (their horns covered with gold) the horses, clothes, maid servants and even in some cases grains as well. Thus, the brahmanas established themselves economically in an advantageous position. They had easy and direct access to the kings and at the same time maintained ritualistic relations with the *vaisyas*. In the back drop of rising power of monarchy with its territorial identity and advance in field-agriculture (though restrained by some technological constraint) created atmosphere for the conflict between these two dominant classes of the later Vedic period. Several echoes of these conflicts are mentioned in the later Vedic texts. The Atharavaveda warns the rajanyas or Ksatriyas even about the touching of the cows and wives of the brahmanas. It refers to horrific consequences of such acts committed by earlier Ksatriyas. So they are suggested not to even imagine to injure the property of the brahmanas. Nevertheless, we find references to



real conflicts between these classes. Possibly the priestly claim to highest social and ritualistic status wounded the vanity of the fast emerging powerful monarchical class i.e. rajnyas or kshatriyas. But the most important factor seems to be economic i.e. the sharing of the surplus grain and cattle made available by the Vaisyas or peasantry. As the conflict became serious towards the end of the later Vedic period, the latest Vedic texts, particularly the Satapatha Brahmana found it necessary to emphasize unity and cooperation between the kshatriyas and brahmanas. The Aitareya Brahmana even warns them of being overwhelmed or over powered by the huge mass of peasantry if they are not united. It says that the brahmanas and kshatriyas are the two vital pillars of the society and they must be united to uphold the social order. It seems that the perpetual need of collecting tributes and sacrificial fees from the peasantry supplemented by the demand for the services of the *shudras* kept the two upper social classes together. But the focus of social conflict seems to be limited to the relation between kshatriyas and the vaisyas.

The vaisyas constituted the bulk of the population and they were assigned the producing functions such as agriculture, cattle breeding and even limited trading activities. It seems that the *shudras* at this point of time were numerically not so significant. They helped vaisyas in their producing functions and served brahmanas and kshtariyas as domestic servants. But the latest later Vedic texts particularly the Brahmana texts refer to their worst status in the society. The Aitareya Brahmana refers to the *shudras* as being the servant of another, to be compelled to work at will by another, and above all to be beaten at will.

4.4.6 Later Vedic Religion

Some significant transformations or changes took place in the religious spheres during this period. The later Vedic times witnessed the inventions and practices of complicated series of sacrifices involving a large number of rituals associated with them. In the changed socio-economic scenario two outstanding Rig Vedic gods, Indra and Agni, lost their former glory and were relegated to the background. Now, the Prajapati the creator, came to occupy the unchallenged supreme position in the later Vedic religious horizon. Some of the insignificant gods of the Rig Vedic period now became powerful. Rudra, the god of animals, become important during this period. The nomadic god Vishnu was now transformed into a prominent preserver, protector and sedentary god in the later Vedic times. Some gods were even categorized on the basis of *varna*, hierarchy. For instance, the Maruts were referred to as the gods of peasantry and the Pusan was associated with the *shudras*. The mode of worship changed considerably during this period. Sacrifices occupied the epicenter of religion. They assumed public as well as private character. Sacrifices involved the killings of animals on a large scale and, especially the destruction of cattle wealth. We hear some protests against this practice in the Upanishads. But this happened towards the end of the later Vedic period.



4.5 CONCLUSION

Around 600 BCE, the Upanishads were compiled. These philosophical texts criticized the rituals and laid stress on the value of right belief and knowledge. The Vedic people spread to Koshala and Videha. Now we find far reaching changes in the political, social, economic and religious sphere.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Short Notes:

- (i) The *Varna* system
- (ii) Later Vedic Religion

B. State True or False:

- i. The archaeological sources for the study of Later Vedic period pertain to the Painted Grey Ware phase.
- ii. Towards the end of the later Vedic period knowledge of copper spread in eastern UP and Videha region of Bihar.
- iii. The term *bhagdugha* is interpreted in the sense of tax collector.
- iv. The *Varna* hierarchy emerged as one of the salient features of social formations in the Later Vedic times.
- v. The Upanishads criticized the rituals and laid stress on the value of right belief and knowledge.

C. Long Questions:

1. What does the study of the Rig Veda reveal about the economy, society and polity of the Early Vedic period? Elaborate.
2. Critically examine the social hierarchy and religious practices of the Later Vedic period.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

- The Early Aryans occupied the *SaptaSaindhava* region or the land of the seven rivers.
- The Rig Vedic economy was predominantly pastoral and cow was the most important form of wealth.



- Kinship was the basis of social structure, the Early Vedic society being tribal and basically egalitarian.
- The Early Vedic people personified and worshiped natural forces
- All the later Vedic texts were compiled in the upper Gangetic basin in circa 1000-500 BCE.
- Agriculture and various crafts enabled the later Vedic people to lead a settled life.
- People used iron weapons and cultivated rice and wheat as principal crops.
- Well defined political units were established, laws were codified and a distinct social stratification emerged.

4.7 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. (i) True (ii) False.

B. (i) Rig Veda (ii) II to VII (iii) the land of seven rivers (*SaptaSaindhavapradesh*) (iv) Vishvamitra.

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

A. (i) The Rig Veda (ii) Kuru (iii) Cow (iv) King or *Rajanya* (v) Varuna.

B. Short Notes:

(i) See Section 4.3.2

(ii) See Section 4.3.4

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

A. Short Notes:

(i) See Section 4.4.5

(ii) See Section 4.4.6

B. (i) True (ii) False (iii) False (iv) True (v) True.

C. Long Questions:

(ii) See Section 4.3.1 and 4.3.3

(ii) See Section 4.3.2 and 4.3.4



4.7 THE MEGALITHIC CULTURES OF SOUTH INDIA

STRUCTURE

4.7.0 Objectives

4.7.1 Introduction

- The Term ‘Megalith’

4.7.2 Chronology

4.7.3 Distribution of Megalithic Cultures

4.7.4 Megalithic Culture – The Iron Age Culture of South India

4.7.5 Classification of the Megaliths

- Rock Cut Caves
- Hood Stones (*Kudaikallu*) and Hat Stones / Cap Stones (*Toppikkals*)
- Menhirs, Alignments and Avenues
- Dolmenoid Cists
- Cairn Circles
- Stone Circles
- Pit Burials
- Barrows

4.7.6 Grave Goods in Megalithic Burials

4.7.7 Subsistence Pattern

- Agriculture
- Pastoralism
- Hunting and Fishing
- Technology: Industries and Crafts

4.7.8 Trade and Exchange Network



4.7.9 Social Organisation and Settlement Pattern

4.7.10 Religious Beliefs and Practices

4.7.11 Polity

4.7.12 Legacy of the Megalithic Culture

4.7.13 Limitations of the Sources for the Study of Megalithic Culture

4.7.14 Conclusion

4.7.15 Let Us Sum Up

4.7.0 Objectives

After reading this Section you will be able to:

- define the term 'Megalith'
- trace the origin and spread of Megalithic cultures in south India
- explain the nature of settlements, economy and other traits of these cultures
- discuss the limitations of the sources available for the study of these cultures

4.7.1 Introduction

The period from circa 1000 BCE to 300 BCE in south India and the Deccan was marked by the presence of Megalithic cultures. These cultures refer to the cultural remains found in the Megaliths and from the habitation sites associated with them.

The Term 'Megalith'

The term 'megalith' is derived from Greek '*megas*', which means great and '*lithos*' meaning stone. As the nomenclature suggests, the 'megaliths' refer to the monuments built of large stones. But all monuments constructed of big stones are not megaliths. The term has a restricted usage and is applied only to a particular class of monuments or structures, which are built of large stones and have some sepulchral, commemorative or ritualistic association except the hero stones or memorial stones. In other words, the megaliths usually refer to the burials made of large stones in graveyards away from the habitation area.

4.7.2 Chronology

Megalithic cultures in India (including North India) have been roughly assigned to a prehistoric period or to a great antiquity by different scholars like M.H. Krishna, R.S. Panchamukhi, G.S. Ghurye, Panchanan Mitra and others. But their dating is not considered to be based on well-observed archaeological data. So, this dating is generally countered by the archaeologists.



The problem of chronology of these cultures has evaded a clear solution. R.E.M. Wheeler, for the first time, on the basis of excavations at Brahmagiri provided a firm archaeological setting for megalithic cultures in South India. Based on archaeological evidence, he places these cultures between the 3rd BCE and the 1st century CE. But the limits prescribed by Wheeler on the basis of Brahmagiri evidence are unconvincing. Megalithic culture of South India had a much larger chronological span than what Wheeler could visualise over five decades ago. Similarly, B.K. Thapar, on the basis of his excavations at Maski, assigned the megalithic culture in South India from circa 200 BCE to the middle of the 1st century CE with a reasonable margin of a century on either side.

The problem in ascertaining the chronological span of the megalithic cultures in South India lies in the fact that only a few radiocarbon dates are so far available from megalithic habitations. The habitations site at Hallur gave a C-14 date of 1000 BCE for the earliest phase of these cultures. Nagaraja Rao correlated this phase with the graves at Tadakanahalli, 4 kilometers away from this site. S.B. Deo gives two radiocarbon dates for the sites at Naikund and Takalghat and places Vidarbha megaliths in *circa* 600 BCE. In Tamilnadu, Paiyampalli recorded a C-14 date of *circa* 4th century BCE. A. Sundara, on the basis of his explorations and excavations, pushed the date of the megaliths in North Karnataka region as early as 1200 BCE.

As the megalithic culture overlapped with the end phases of Neolithic-chalcolithic culture, it is found in association with Neolithic-chalcolithic wares at the lower end and with the rouletted ware at the upper end. In other words, the late phase of these cultures merges with the early historical period. On this basis the time bracket of the megalithic cultures in South India may be placed between 1000 BCE and 100 CE. This view is supported by many scholars like K. Rajan. However, the available archeological data suggests that the period of their maximum popularity lies somewhere between 600 BCE and 100 CE.

It is interesting to note that in other parts of the world, for example England, France, Iran and Seistan, such sepulchral monuments of the dead were constructed through this period and are not identical in all the countries.

4.7.3 Distribution of Megalithic Cultures

The main concentration of the megalithic cultures in India was the Deccan, especially south of the river Godavari. However, large-stone structures resembling some of the usual megalith types have also been reported from some places in North India, Central India and Western India. These include – Seraikala in Bihar; Deodhoora in Almora district and Khera near Fatehpur Sikri in Agra district of Uttar Pradesh; Nagpur; Chanda and Bhandra districts of Madhya Pradesh; Deosa, 32 miles east of Jaipur in Rajasthan. But since neither the excavation nor a reliable surface-examination of these monuments has so far been carried out, it is difficult to say if and how far they are connected with the megaliths of the Deccan. Similar monuments or structures are also found near Karachi in Pakistan, near Leh in the Himalayas and at Burzahom in Jammu and Kashmir. However, their wide distribution in the

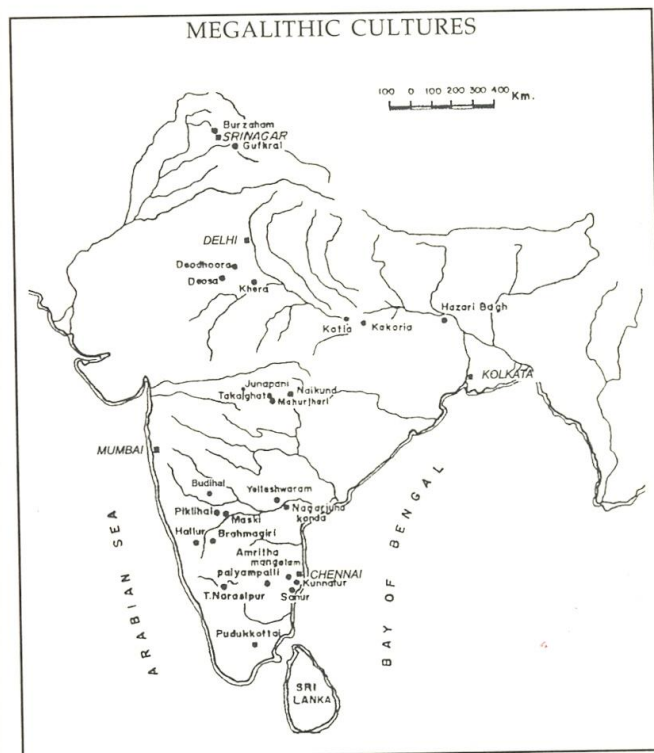


southern region of India suggests that it was essentially a South Indian feature which flourished at least for a thousand years, resulting in a variety within the underlying megalithic unity of common origin.

4.7.4 Megalithic Culture – The Iron Age Culture of South India

In the present state of research, these megalithic monuments, whatever their external shape and contents be, seem to herald the Iron Age in South India. The megalithic culture in South India was a full fledged Iron Age culture when the great benefits of the use of this metal were fully realised by the people. Hence, normally the stone dropped out of use as a material for the weapons and tools to a large extent. The megalithic people of South India, or, for that matter, the Iron Age people of the subcontinent in general, found out new uses of stones in their daily life. Most of the information about the Iron Age in South India comes from the excavations of the megalithic burials. Iron objects have been found universally in all the megalithic sites right from Junapani near Nagpur in Vidharba region (Central India) down to Adichanallur in Tamilnadu in the far south.

With the introduction of iron, there was a gradual change in almost everything except perhaps the house plans. But, of all these changes the most remarkable was the elaborate method of disposing the dead. This became a characteristic feature of the South Indian regions. Instead of laying the dead accompanied by four or five pots in a pit in the house, now the dead were buried in a separate place – a cemetery or a graveyard away from the house. The remains of the dead were collected perhaps after exposing the body for sometime and then the bones were placed underground in specially prepared stone box called a cist. The cists were elaborate structures and must have necessitated an amount of planning and cooperation among the community and the existence of masons and other craftsmen capable of manufacturing the required size of stones, large and small. It is probable that like Egyptian cellars, these megaliths must have been planned and kept ready before the death of an individual.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. State whether true or false:

- (i) Megalithic cultures refer to the cultural remains found in the Megaliths and from the habitation sites associated with them.
- (ii) All monuments constructed of big stones are megaliths.
- (iii) The problem in ascertaining the chronological span of the Megalithic cultures in South India lies in the fact that only a few radiocarbon dates are so far available from megalithic habitations.
- (iv) Scholars, by and large, unanimously look forward to a West Asian origin of the Megalithic cultures.
- (v) The main concentration of the megalithic cultures in India was the Deccan, especially south of the river Godavari.

B. Name at least five sites and also the types of megalithic structures discovered at those which represent the megalithic culture of South



4.7.5 Classification of the Megaliths

It is not easy to prepare a typology of the megaliths of South India in general because the megalithic burials show a variety of methods for the disposal of the dead. Moreover, there are megaliths which are internally different but exhibit the same external features. Nevertheless, on the basis of the explorations and excavations carried out on different sites of South India, the megaliths can be classified under different categories depending upon their outstanding features. These are:

- I. Rock Cut Caves,
- II. Hood Stones and Hat Stones / Cap Stones,
- III. Menhirs, Alignments and Avenues,
- IV. Dolmenoid Cists,
- V. Cairn Circles,
- VI. Stone Circles,
- VII. Pit Burials, and
- VIII. Barrows

• Rock Cut Caves

These are *scooped out on soft laterite*, as found in the southern part of the West Coast. These rock cut cave tombs are peculiar to this region and occur in the Cochin and Malabar regions of Kerala. They also occur in other regions. On the East Coast of South India, they are present in Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) near Madras. In the Deccan and western India they are observed at Elephanta, Ajanta, Ellora, Karle, Bhaja etc. But these belong to a later date and were used for entirely different purposes while those in Kerala are purely megalithic and funerary ones, the others being of different tradition.

The Kerala funerary rock cut caves consist of an open well, roughly rectangular or square, cut vertically down the rock and provided with a flight of steps for descending to the floor. Such caves are found at many sites like Chovvannur, Kakkad, Porkalam, etc. More elaborate specimens of such caves occur at sites like Eyyal, Kattakampal, etc.

On the basis of his detailed study of these rock cut burial caves in Cochin region, Y.D. Sharma (1956) recognises four types of caves – (i) Caves with Central pillar, (ii) Caves without central pillar, (iii) Caves with a deep opening and (iv) Multi-chambered caves.

• Hood Stones (*Kudaikallu*) and Hat Stones / Cap Stones (*Toppikkals*)

Allied with the rock cut caves but of a simpler form are the Hood stones or Kudaikallu. These consists of a dome-shaped dressed laterite block which cover the underground circular pit cut into a natural rock and provided with a stairway. In some cases



the hood stone gives place to a hat stone or *toppikkal*, which is a plano-convex slab resting on three or four quadrilateral clinostatic boulders, forming a square base and a truncated top on which rests the *toppikkal* or the hat stone. This also covers an underground burial pit containing the funerary urn and other grave furnishings. Unlike as in the rock cut caves, there is no chamber apart from this open pit in which itself the burial is made. Usually, it contains a burial urn covered with a convex or dome-shaped pottery lid or a stone slab and contains skeletal remains, small pots and, sometimes ashes. Similar monuments are commonly encountered in Cochin and Malabar regions extending along the Western Ghats into the Coimbatore region upto the Noyyal river valley in Tamilnadu.

- **Menhirs, Alignments and Avenues**

Menhirs are monolithic pillars planted vertically into the ground. These may be small or gigantic in height, ranging from 14 to 16 ft. down to a mere 3ft. Their common heights range between 3 to 6 feet. They are often rudely dressed or not dressed at all. These are essentially commemorative stone pillars set up at or near a burial spot. These menhirs are mentioned in ancient Tamil literature as *nadukal* and are often called *Pandukkal* or *Pandil*. In some cases, the menhirs are not planted in ground but rest on the original ground propped up with a mass of rubble as at Maski. These occur in a number of sites in close vicinity of other type of megalithic burials, mostly in different regions of Kerala and Bellary, Raichur and Gulbarga regions of Karnataka in large numbers, but less frequently at other places of South India.

Alignments are closely associated to the menhirs. These consist of a series of standing stones, oriented to the cardinal directions. Some of these stones are 14 to 16 ft. high and one monolith at a certain place measured 25 ft. long. But the normal heights range between 3 and 6 ft. These stones are sometimes dressed. The alignments are found at Komalaparathala in Kerala and at a number of sites in Gulbarga, Raichur, Nalgonda and Mahboobnagar districts of Karnataka.

Avenues consist of two or more parallel rows of the alignments and hence many of the sites in the Deccan, mentioned above under alignments, may be considered as examples of this category of monuments when they are in parallel lines.

- **Dolmenoid Cists**

Dolmenoid cists consists of square or rectangular box-like graves built of several orthostats, one or more for each side, supporting the superincumbent capstone consisting of one or more stones, often with the floor also paved with the stone slabs. The orthostats and the capstones might be formed either of undressed rough blocks of stone or partly dressed flattish stones. The dolmenoid cists occur in large number at Sanur near Chingleput and many other sites in this region. The cists built of dressed slabs or the slab cists are the normal type of cists, occurring all over South India, as also in some parts of the north. There are many sub-types of this in Tamilnadu – (i) Dolmenoid cist with multiple orthostats, (ii) Dolmenoid



cist with four orthostats planned contra-clockwise with U-shaped port-hole in the east or west, (iii) Dolmenoid cist with four orthostats kept contra-clock-wise with U-shaped port-hole on the top corner of the eastern orthostat, and (iv) Dolemnoid cist with four orthostats arranged contra-clockwise and with slab-circles.

• Cairn Circles

The Cairn circles are one the most popular type of megalithic monuments occurring all over south India in association with other types. They consist of a heap of stone rubble enclosed within a circle of boulders. On the basis of the form of the underground burial, they may be divided into three sub-types – (i) Pit burials, (ii) Sarcophagi burials, and (iii) Pyriform or other types of urn burials.

The pit burials under the cairn circles consist of deep pits dug into the natural soil, roughly circular, square or oblong on plan. The skeletal remains and the grave furniture were placed on the floors of these pits. The pits were then filled up with earth, either the earth dug up in the pit or that which was brought from elsewhere, upto the original ground level. Above this earth filling was placed the cairn heap which might be just a thin layer or may rise upto 3 to 4 ft. above the ground level and bounded by a circle of stones. Such pit burials have been found at many sites in the Chingleput (Tamilnadu), Chitradurg and Gulbarga (Karnataka) districts.

A sarcophagus is literally a legged coffin made of terracotta. The cairn circles containing sarcophagi entombments are comparatively more widespread than the pit burials. They are similar to the pit burials described above but the skeletal remains and the primary deposits of the grave furniture are placed in an oblong terracotta sarcophagus. This sarcophagus is generally provided with a convex terracotta lid, rows of legs at the bottom and often with a capstone at a higher level. Rarely, these sarcophagi are not provided with legs, but are supported on pottery stands and vessels or placed on the floor directly. Such megalithic structures are found from South Arcot, Chingleput and North Arcot districts of Tamil Nadu and Kolar district of Karnataka. They are also found in the southern districts of Andhra Pradesh, though they are comparatively rare in these regions.

The urn burials under the cairn circles are a variant form of the sarcophagi burials described above and occur in large number in most parts of South India. The urns, in which the burials are made, are deposited in pits dug into the soil. The pits are filled up with the soil upto the ground level and are frequently provided with a capstone. Then, the heap of cairns on the surface, which marks the burial, is surrounded by a circle of stones. They are predominant in Kerala and have been known to occur is Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Salem, Chingleput and South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu; Kolar, Bangalore, Hassan, Chitradurg, Bellary, Raichur and Gulbarga districts of Karnataka; various districts of Andhra Pradesh and the region around Nagpur in Maharashtra.



- **Stone Circles**

They are the most commonly encountered megalithic monuments in India. They reflect the features of various forms of megalithic monuments such as the *Kudaikallu*, *Topikkal*, different types of pit burials, menhirs, dolmenoid cists of different types, cairns, etc. These occur from the southern tip of the peninsula upto Nagpur region and in different parts of North India, where the megalithic monuments are known to occur. But in this category under consideration, only stone circles without any considerable cairn filling within the circle, containing burial pits with or without pyriform urns or sarcophagi, are included. The monuments under this category are distinguished from the cairn circles only in that the cairn heaps occur or do not occur in these circles. Otherwise, all the three sub-types discussed above under the cairn circles are found to occur in this category also. It may appear that there is not much justification in making this distinction between cairn circles and stone circles. But at some sites like Sanur near Chingleput, both the kinds exist side by side, but in separate groups. Therefore, on the basis of some distinctions they are placed under different categories under our considerations.

- **Pit Burials**

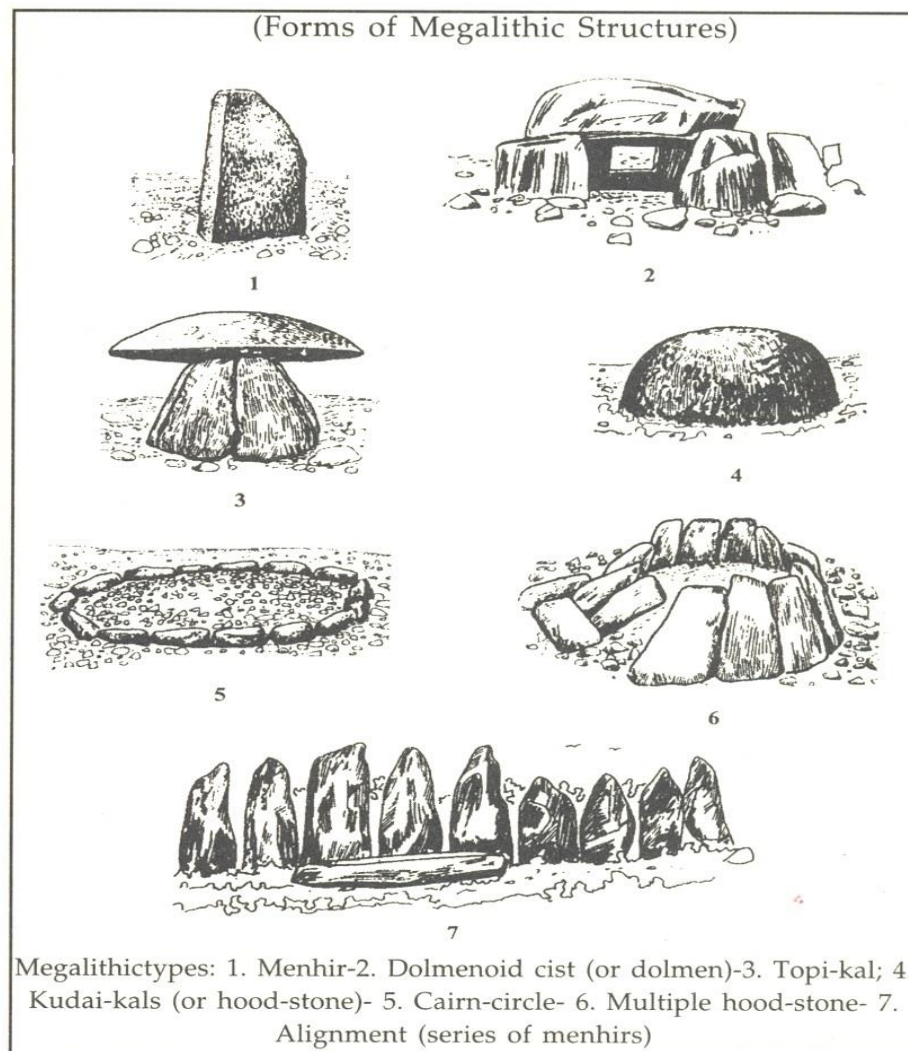
Burials in pyriform or fuciform urns, large conical jars or *handi-shaped* jars containing the funerary deposits, are buried in the underground pits specially dug for the purpose into the hard natural soil and sometimes into the basal rock and the pits are filled up. In these kinds of burials we do not find any surface indication of the burial in the form of a stone circle, cairn heap, hood stone or hat (cap) stone, or even a menhir. These urn burials are without any megalithic appendage. But in some sites like Amritamangalam in Chingleput district some small heaps of earth mixed with quartz chips would make out the place of the burial. Strictly speaking, this class of megalithic burials cannot be included under the megalithic burial monuments, because no megalithic or, for that matter, any lithic appendage in the form of stone circle or capstone is observed in relation to them. But they exhibit the general traits of the megalithic culture of South India, characterized by the use of the typically megalithic Black-and-red ware (BRW) and associated wares with iron objects. These grave goods are identical typologically with their counterparts found in the regular megalithic burials. Moreover, these occur in the general areas where the typical megalithic burials exist. In fact, these urn burials do not differ in any detail from the urn burials under a stone or cairn circle of the megalithic order, except for the surface features. These urn burials without megalithic appendage are found in many sites of Tamil Nadu like Adichanallur, Gopalsamiparambu and scores of other sites, practically in almost every village in Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Coimbatore, Salem, and South Arcot districts. However, these occur less abundantly in Karnataka and Andhra regions. Even in North India, these urn burials are frequently observed at a number of Harappan and the Later Chalcolithic sites in Western, Central and North-western India, but their context is completely different from the South



Indian urn burials. But the latter might have had some phylogenetic (racial affinity) connection with the former.

- **Barrows**

The barrows or earthen mounds mark off the underground burials. They may be either a circular or a round barrow, oblong or oval on plan, a long barrow. They have or may not have the surrounding stone circles or ditches. Monuments of this kind have not been found in large numbers in India. However, such monuments have been observed in the Hassan district of Karnataka.



(Source: V.K. Jain, *Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 2006)



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Identify the following:

- (i) These are scooped out on soft laterite, as found in the southern part of the West Coast.
- (ii) They consist of square or rectangular box-like graves built of several orthostats.
- (iii) These are monolithic pillars planted vertically into the ground.
- (iv) They are the most commonly encountered megalithic monuments in India.
- (v) Burials in pyriform or fuciform urns or large conical jars or *handi-shaped* jars containing the funerary deposits, and buried in the underground pits.

4.7.6 Grave Goods in Megalithic Burials

The megalithic burials have yielded a variety of objects, which prove to be very important for us in the study of megalithic culture. It is observed that right from the Later Palaeolithic period, an intentional burial was accorded to the dead for manifold motives. The megalithic people were no exception to the age-old custom and, therefore took pains to construct elaborate and much labour-consuming tombs. They furnished them with as many essential objects as they could afford. They thought this practice to be necessary as they believed in after-life of the dead. And so, the dead were suitably provided for a place to live in with goods of their essential needs.

In the Indian megalithic especially those in South India, the grave furniture consisted of a large variety of pottery; weapons and implements mostly of iron but often of stone or copper; ornaments like beads of terracotta, semi-precious stones, gold or copper, shell, etc., strung into necklaces or rarely the ear or nose ornaments, armlets or bracelets and diadems; often food as indicated by the presence of paddy husk and chaff, and some other cereals; skeletal remains of animals, sometimes complete in these graves.

4.7.7 Subsistence Pattern

A detailed analysis of the available archaeological, archaeobotanical and archaeozoological data recently by U.S. Moorti (1993), and their correlation with certain environmental factors indicates an agro-pastoral base for the megalithic period of South India, with other crafts coming to the fore and all plausibly intertwined in a symbiotic relationship with each other. Now let us discuss the sector-wise developments illuminating the subsistence pattern during the period.



- **Agriculture**

The basis of the economy during the period of megalithic phase was agriculture. In fact, the megalith builders were responsible for the introduction of the advance methods of agriculture on a large scale, based on irrigation. Scholars like E.H. Hunt and N.R. Banerjee have observed that the megalithic builders introduced the ‘tank-irrigation’ in South India and thus brought a revolutionary change in the agricultural system. Their statement is based on the circumstantial evidence that the megaliths are concentrated invariably on the slopes of the hills or on elevated ground, which are not suitable for irrigation as they do not encroach upon arable lands. Some of the megaliths which seem to be on the edge of the tanks in the summer season are virtually submerged in water during the rainy season. However, one can argue that the embankment, if at all, was man-made. Was the water stored in it sufficient for cultivation? Some of the sites are on the river banks. Does this mean that megalithic people were harnessing the river water for cultivation? Further, some of the sites are in thick forest. Neither is there any land for irrigation nor any tanks in these regions. There are many sites where there are no tanks.

On the basis of the above evidence, B. Narasimhaiah opines that the megalithic builders were not the people who introduced ‘tank-irrigation’ in South India. Of course, it is a well-known fact that even from the prehistoric times humans settled where there was perennial water source for their sustenance. The tanks therefore might have been natural ponds, which supplied water for their daily needs, but not for irrigation. However, most of the scholars believe that these tanks supplied water for their household life and to their crops. The tank-irrigation system, according to them, was definitely introduced into South India by the megalithic builders and it has lasted for more than 2500 years, till the present day.

These highly intelligent and pragmatic communities were to see that the fertile arable lands were not wasted from encroachments by their graves. Unproductive foot-hills, rocky and gravelly lands were used for the location of their graves, while lower down, the plains were reserved for agricultural purposes. But they seem to have considered that the spirit of their dead ancestors would not only guard but also bestow prosperity on their fields and hence, located massive though empty dolmens in the midst of their fields at Uttaramerur in Chingleput district of Tamilnadu.

Rice, an essentially irrigational crop, served, no doubt as their staple food. Paddy husks and rarely paddy grains are reported from a number of excavated graves from all over the region. Rice as attested by the Sangam literature, is the staple food of the people of South India since very early times and remains till today. The archaeobotanical evidence indicates the cultivation of other crops too such as Ragi, Navane, Wheat, Kodo millet, Barley, Hyacinth bean, Horse gram, Black gram, Green gram, Common pea, Pigcon pea, Grass pea, Jobs tears, Indian jujube, Goosefoot (Fathen), Lentil, Cotton, etc. in the megalithic period of South India.



- **Pastoralism**

Scores of megalithic sites have yielded evidence of the remains of the domesticated animals like cattle, sheep/goat, dog, pig, horse, buffalo, fowl, ass, etc. On the basis of the analysis of these faunal remains at different sites, it is inferred that cattle (including buffalo) predominates over other domesticated species at these sites. Invariably, in all these sites it accounts for nearly more than 60% of the total faunal assemblage. This brings out two important facts. First, the earlier Neolithic tradition of cattle keeping was continued and second, cattle pastoralism and not sheep/goat pastoralism, formed a major preoccupation of megalithic society.

The occurrence of the remains of domesticated pig and fowl suggests pig rearing and poultry farming on a small scale at many of the sites.

- **Hunting and Fishing**

Hunting naturally augmented the food supply, as the equipment for hunting, like arrowheads, spears and javelins would indicate. Sling was probably another equipment used for hunting by megalithic people, as attested by the large scale findings of stone balls. The occurrence of skeletal remains of wild fauna like Wild boar, Hyena, Barking deer, Chousingha, Sambar, Chital, Nilgai, Peacock, Leopard, Tiger, Cheetah, Sloth bear, Wild hog, Pea fowl, Jungle fowl, Water fowl, etc. from different sites indicate that these species were hunted and obviously formed part of their dietary system. Even now, many of these wild species are found in and around the areas.

The evidence in the form of terracotta net sinkers from Takalghat and fish-hooks from Khapa and Tangal besides the actual skeletal remains of fish from Yelleshwaram reflect that fishing was also practised by the megalithic folk.

- **Technology: Industries and Crafts**

For the fulfilment of other societal needs in domestic, technical and cultural fronts an efficient infrastructure of subsidiary economic activities is essential. The industrial activities such as smithery, carpentry, pottery making, lapidary, basketry and stone cutting which formed other economic activities of megalithic society, are dealt here mainly because of the interdependent link between these and the primary methods of production.

1. Metals

There are many megalithic sites which in all probability were the production sites of metals like iron, copper, gold, silver etc. The available archaeological evidence in the form of crucibles, smelting-furnaces, clay tuyers and presence of material like iron ore pieces, iron slag, copper slag and traces of ancient copper, gold mines or the mineral resources at or near to these sites is suggestive of smithery. The available archaeological evidence indicates the utilisation of metal implements such as axes, phoughshares, hoes, sickles, spades, etc. The use of axe was either for cutting logs or for clearing forests. The use of hoe (or bladed harrow) for cultivation has been recorded at many sites. This particular implement resembles the modern bladed harrow, known as “*kunte*” in Kannada and “*gunlaka*” in Telugu. The use



of ploughshare from many sites amply attest to the technological base of megalithic people for carrying out the agricultural operations. A recent study (1986) also highlights a wider knowledge of agricultural technology attained during the protohistoric and early historical India.

Iron was the metal used predominantly to produce weapons of different shapes and for different purposes, tools and implements for agricultural purposes and everyday household needs. The rich variety of iron objects enables us in understanding the aspects of their economy and their way of life to a large extent. These objects reflect that agriculture was their primary occupation as a large number of iron tools necessary for agricultural activities are found at different sites. Copper was used for the production of vessels and ornaments. The ornaments were also made of gold. The use of silver was rather scarce. Though Adichannallur burials and Nilgiris yielded bronze objects the use of bronze at these two sites are exceptions and it is rather doubtful if these were locally manufactured.

An efficient utilisation of metallic resources is dependent upon another crucial factor and they are the availability of fuel and type of fuel capable of producing the required degree of temperature. Perhaps the most common type of fuel used by these pre-industrial smelters were charcoal, wood dung and paddy husk.

2. Woodcraft / Carpentry

A wide variety of technomic items viz., those related to woodcraft indicates another skilled profession practised by megalithic people. The evidence shows that the axes, chisels, wedges, adzes, anvil, borers, hammer stones, etc., formed the main tool-kit for working on the wood. The archaeobotanical evidence from megalithic sites show that the information regarding some of the plant species like Acacia, Pinus, Brassica, Stellaria, Teak, Satinwood etc. were already known to these communities. The use of wooden plough for cultivation cannot be set aside as suggested by M.K. Dhavalikar and G. Possehl. Even now, the tillage implement common in black cotton soil tracts, is the country wooden plough, which is large and very heavy.

The woods were also used for posts in the construction of huts with thatched or reed roofs supported on wooden posts. Postholes are observed at Brahmagiri and Maski indicating the presence of timber constructions for domestic buildings. Some scholars like S.B. Deo suggest an advance stage of wooden architecture involving dressing of wood and creating different types of mortice holes either for interlocking or for tenons. The common occurrence of these technomic items suggests ample use of wood for construction and many other purposes.

3. Ceramics (Pottery)

The ceramic fabrics associated with the megalithic culture are Black-and-Red Ware (BRW), Burnished Black Ware, Red Ware, Micaceous Red Ware, Grey Ware, Russet Coated Painted Ware (RCPW), etc.

BRW, which is a wheel-turned pottery, essentially consists of utilitarian shapes and a majority of the forms probably served as tableware of megalithic society. The prominent



shapes encountered in this ware are varieties of bowls, dishes, lids or covers, vases, basins, legged jars, channel-spouted vessels and conoids.

The burnished black ware, which is also wheel-turned, comprises some prominent shapes such as elongated vases, tulip-shaped lids, funnel-shaped lids, goblets, spouted vessels, circular ring-stands, knobbed and rimmed lids with bird or animal finials.

In red ware the shapes are strictly utilitarian which include legged vessels, double knobbed lids, ring-stands, dough plates and vases.

Of all the types, the most attractive are the RCPW with wavy lines and other decorations. They are occasionally bearing post-firing graffiti. Russet-coated jars are recovered from several sites.

The micaceous red ware exhibits typical shapes like pots with globular body and funnel-shaped mouth, dough plates and basins. Decorations in the form of cordings, applique and painted designs have also been noticed.

All these varieties of pottery are characterised by a fine fabric and are produced from well levigated clay rarely with sand or such gritty material. They were generally well fired in open kilns at low temperature. R.E.M. Wheeler opines that possibly the pottery were turned on a slow wheel.

The evidence of pottery kilns from at least two sites, viz., Polakonda and BeltadaBanahalli can be taken as supportive evidence for the practice of this craft. Although, the above evidence at both these sites comes from late Neolithic levels, a continuation in the habitation deposit bearing megalithic levels may help us to assume so. A wide variety of shapes in different fabrics to serve as tableware for eating and drinking purposes and cooking utensils and the technical efficiency evident in the preparation of these ceramics or potteries might hint at a professional class of potters and pottery making as one of the important economic activities.

4. Miscellaneous (Bead making, Mat weaving, Stone cutting, Terracotta making, Rock art, etc.)

A number of objects ranging from single terracotta beads to very finely manufactured gold ornaments were used by the megalithic folk for their personal decoration. The locational occurrence of some of the megalithic sites in resources zones, and the evidence of bead making industry attested at two megalithic sites –Mahurjhari and Kodumanal, are suggestive of the practice of this craft. The availability of a large variety of beads show that agate, carnelian, chalcedony, feldspar, coral, crystal, garnet, jasper, tremolite, magnesite, faience, paste martz, serpentine, shell, steatite, amethyst and terracotta were utilised in the preparation of beads of different exquisite shapes. Apart from the use of semi-precious stones, some of the shapes have also been worked on precious metals like gold, shell, horn, bone and glass.



The mat impressions left on the base of jars at sites like Managondanahalli and Nagarjunakonda indicate that the art of mat-weaving was known and practised.

The activity of stone-cutting is attested by the chisel impressions noticed at Borgaon Khurd (Maharashtra) on a stone trough, excellent laterite cutting evidenced in rock-cut chamber tombs of Kerala region, the field observation by A. Sundara in the construction pattern of chamber tombs in North Karnataka and also the occurrence of domestic stone artefacts such as pestles, mortars, saddle querns, etc., at many megalithic sites.

Terracotta discs, figurines, gamesman, miniature pottery vessels found from graves attest their use as toys for entertainment of children. The most remarkable is the terracotta disc resembling spindle-whorls, which was probably used in hop-scotch game. This is suggested by the discovery of a disc in the grave of a child.

Scholars like S.P. Tampi, Y. Mathpal and K.J. John, on the basis of the engravings and paintings on the rock-shelters in peninsular India, argue that these megalith builders were the authors of these paintings. There is evidence in Sangam literature also of the erection of burial stones with paintings as well as writings. But, unless direct dating of the pigments from the painting is done, the antiquity and authorship of these paintings cannot be ascertained.

Thus, we can say that the megalithic people practised a highly specialised agro-pastoral economy. The divergent economic patterns, which seem to have prevailed then, as is the case even now, were not isolated but had a symbiotic relationship with each other.

4.7.8 Trade and Exchange Network

The excavations have yielded various non-local items among the grave goods which reflect that there were exchange activities during the megalithic period. According to R.N. Mehta and K.M. George, carnelian beads reported from coastal sites, which were points of exchange in ancient times, direct us to the presence of trade activities. Similarly, the availability of bronze suggests the arrivals of copper and an alloy, either tin or arsenic, from somewhere. From the Graeco-Roman writings and the Tamil texts it is clear that at a little later period maritime exchange was the major source for procuring them. The archaeological remains like the rouletted ware, amphora and other ceramic materials found at many sites like those at Arikamedu are evidence for this. Scholars like H.P. Ray, Rajan Gurukkal, R. Champakalakshmi and others have already shown that inter-regional and intra-regional exchange of goods were fairly well established in South India by the 3rd B.C. Regional variation in the production of commodities and the non-availability of local raw materials/finished goods had set in long-distance transactions under the initiative of the long-distance traders from the Gangetic region as well as the overseas world. The exchange network which was in an incipient state during the early Iron Age expanded over the centuries as a result of internal dynamics and external impetus involving the demand for goods in other parts of the subcontinent as well as the Mediterranean region. Many scholars including B. Morris, S. Gupte and D. Stiles opine that it was a network across land and seas



with long-distance traders in the middle and unevenly developed people at either side. Thus, the megalithic people as the hunter-gatherers and shifting cultivators of Iron Age also had active participation in the exchange network.

4.7.9 Social Organisation and Settlement Pattern

It is not archaeology but anthropology, which provides us evidence to assume the possibility of production relations transcending clan ties and kinship in such remote periods of tribal descent groups. By and large they point to the material culture of diverse forms of subsistence such as hunting/gathering and shifting cultivation besides the production of a few craft-goods, which have been discussed in the previous section (“Subsistence Pattern”) of this lesson.

Though there was commonality in the idea of megalithism and the associated assemblages, the variations observed in the external and internal features of the burials reflect that the Iron Age society of the megalithic people was not a homogenous entity. Some of the relatively huge burial types are suggestive of status differentiation and ranking of the buried individuals as discussed earlier. Differences in the types and contents of the burials suggest that there was some sort of disparity in the attributes of the buried individuals. The number of more elaborate burials like the multi-chambered rock-cut tombs at many sites, are limited. Moreover, these have yielded rare artefacts made of bronze or gold. On the other hand, many of the burials are simple urn burials with a very few artefacts. The variety, high quality and fineness of ceramic goods in huge burials including the elaborate urn burials, are also suggestive of the difference in social status. The studies on the megalithic society of South India by scholars like J.M. O’shea and U.S. Moorti generally assume that “an individual treatment at death bears some predictable relationship to the individual’s state in life and to the organisation of the society to which the individual belonged”.

The megalithic people lived in villages consisting of a sizeable population. Though they had a bias for the urban life, they were slow in building huge cities like their contemporaries in the Gangetic Valley. The size of the population is indicated by the organised mass of manual labour that was available for transporting and housing massive blocks of stone in the construction of cists, dolmens and other types of megaliths, or in erecting large rubble and earthen mounds across the water courses for storing up rain waters for irrigational purposes. The large size of population is further attested by the fact that extensive burial grounds with numerous graves, many of them containing the remains of more than one individual, and occasionally of as many as 20 or more individuals, have been found.

The houses in which the megalithic people lived probably consisted of huts with thatched or reed roofs, supported on wooden posts as indicated by the presence of postholes in the excavated sites. At Brahmagiri and Maski were found postholes indicating the presence of timber construction for ordinary buildings. Some scholars like S.B. Deo suggest an advance stage of wooden architecture during the megalithic period.



An increase in the size and number of settlements during megalithic period from the preceding Neolithic/chalcolithic phase and growing use of different metallic resources was certainly not an independent development. This can be perceptively observed, as Sheratt (1981) argues in the effect of the spread of plough cultivation which produced major alterations in the structure and distribution of settlements. Although it is difficult to substantiate this point further in the absence of studies concerning land-use patterns during the megalithic period. However, an analysis of the available data by U.S. Moorti on the locational context and the distribution patterns of these sites strongly indicate a growing inclination towards intensive-field method. He suggests village transhumance on the basis of the location of most of the settlement sites either on the banks of major rivers or on their major tributaries and that of most of the burial sites within a distance of 10-20 km from major water resources. The maximum concentration of sites in river valleys and basins and preference shown towards occupying black soil, red sandy-loamy soil zones also supports this contention. The distribution pattern of these sites in rainfall zones where the average annual precipitation is 600-1500 mm, also hints to the same conclusion.

4.7.10 Religious Beliefs and Practices

The elaborate architecture of their graves, the grave goods and other metal and stone objects throw light on the religious beliefs of megalithic people. The megalithic people had great veneration for the dead as they constructed these monuments with great effort and devotion. They believed that the dead had a life after death and the living had to provide them with their necessities. The grave goods indicate that they belonged to the dead man in life and since they were required for his/her use in the other world, they were buried along with the mortal remains. All these certainly reflect that the 'cult of the dead' had a strong hold on the people. The grave goods represented the affection and respect of the living for their dead.

Their belief in animism is reflected in animistic cults. This is evident by the occurrence of animal bones of domestic animals like cattle, sheep/goats and the wild animals like wolf in the megaliths. It seems that these animals were killed for the funeral-feast and the skeletal remains were buried in the graves, or they were sacrificed and buried in the graves to supply food for the dead. Animism is also reflected by terracotta figurines of animals decorated with garlands and ornaments.

Sangam literature, which is contemporaneous with the end phase of the megalithic culture in South India, also throws light on the different methods of disposal of the dead prevalent among the megalithic people. Many of the earlier beliefs continued during the Sangam age. So, we may assume that the religious practices referred to in the Sangam literature reflect, to an extent, those that prevailed among the megalithic people. The tradition of associating stone with the dead has survived in South India till late times and the herostones or the *Virakal* or the *Mastikal* are examples of this.



4.7.11 Polity

The differences in the size of the monuments and the nature of the grave valuables reflecting differentiation in status and ranking, also suggest the nature of contemporary political power. The construction of a huge monument involving the mobilisation of substantial collective labour implies the power of buried individual to command it.

In the light of the fact that the contemporary people were tribal descent groups, anthropologically we may assume the prevalence of chiefly power, i.e. chiefdoms. The chief was the great son of the descent group. The Late phase of the megalithic cultural coincides with the Early historical period as reflected by the excavation at many sites. So, the Sangam works also help us in understanding the period. The chief of the tribal group is referred to as *perumakan* (great son) in the literary texts. He commanded the entire personal, material and culture resources of his clan. This attests that these elaborate burials probably were of the chiefs or descent heads. The tribal pattern of the distribution of power was simple and involved no hierarchy, though the chiefs, their heirs and warriors had a privileged status. However, this differentiation in status was too flexible to be made out as a stratification.

There is no theoretically plausible evidence showing the existence of a class-structured society anywhere in South India even by the mid-first millennium A.D, which is the upper date now ascribed to the megaliths. Therefore, the remarks of some scholars about the existence of tribal descent groups as a stratified society with aristocrats seems inconceivable. The period of these huge monuments hardly crosses the last two or three centuries before Christ. This period witnessed numerous small chiefdoms co-existing and contesting against one another and anticipating the emergence of big chiefdoms by the turn of the Christian era. As RajanGurukkal has shown, the people under big chiefdoms also were in a social organisation based on clan kinship ties and a complex system of redistribution. From the references in Tamil heroic texts like *Purananuru*, it is evident that even the big chieftains, who had enjoyed prestigious status among many other chieftains, were also given urn burials. So, in a way all burials including the most commonly seen urn burials represent individuals or groups with some status and ranking as headmen or kinsfolk. Thus, it can be assumed that even urn burials were of chiefly type. Sometimes memorial stones (*natukal*) were erected over the urn burials of great chieftains and warriors. However, the huge multi-chambered rock-cut tombs are not mentioned anywhere in the literary texts, probably because the practice of erecting such elaborate burials must have become uncommon by that time.

Some of the chiefdoms must have been bigger depending upon their human strength, resource control and exchange relations. This is testified by the prestige goods and varieties of ceramics and other artefacts found in the graves.

The megalithic people had been interacting and exchanging material and cultural goods with one another. There was need-oriented and use-value based interaction at the level of clans. But at the level of chiefs it was competitive and hence combative process of plundering raids, both inter-clan and intra-clan, led by chiefs for predatory control. This led



to subjugation of one chief by the other which in turn helped the emergence of bigger chiefs and the formations of bigger chiefdoms. These armed fights among the clans must have resulted in the death of many chiefs and warriors. Probably, this was the reason for erecting numerous sepulchral monuments during the megalithic period. This also accounts for the emergence of the cult of heroism and ancestral worship. Through armed confrontation and predatory subjugation the cultural and political power of a few chiefdoms became more evolved over the years and they emerged as bigger chiefdoms. The Tamil heroic texts represent the phase of bigger chiefdoms. From this we can infer that the last phase of the megalithic period which is contemporaneous to the Sangam period, marked the march towards bigger chiefdoms.

4.7.12 Legacy of the Megalithic Culture

It is interesting to note that megalithism is still alive amongst different tribes in India, for example the Maria Gonds of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, the Bondos and Gadabas of Orissa, the Oraons and Mundas of Chotanagpur region now in the state of Jharkhand, and the Khasis and Nagas of Assam. Their monuments, which are of a memorial nature, include dolmens, stone-circles and menhirs. The North-east Indian megalithic culture seems to have a South-east Asian affiliation rather than the western influence.

In South Indian context, the remnants of megalithism among the Todas of Nilgiris are very significant. The account of M.J. Walhouse regarding the funeral customs of this primitive tribe reflects the surviving burial practices that were followed by the megalithic people. It helps us in understanding the probable customs that existed among the now extinct megalithic builders of South India. The existing burial practices of the Todas include many common features of the megalithic burials with grave goods including food items and the use of stone circles to mark the place of the burial.

4.7.13 Limitations of the Sources for the Study of Megalithic Culture

The major problem that comes in our way of studying the megalithic culture is the form in which the sources are available to us. Firstly, as almost the whole of our evidence is collected from the burials, the knowledge about the conditions and methods of their everyday life is necessarily limited to the evidence supplied by their grave furniture and the various inferences that can be drawn from the observation of the architecture of the graves and connected considerations. The literary evidences which include the accounts of Graeco-Roman writers and the ancient Tamil texts (Sangam literature) have their own limitations as their period marks the end phase of the megalithic culture. Secondly, vertical digging in excavations of different habitation sites with aim to unfold the cultural sequence of these sites provides us with evidence, which is scanty and limited in nature. And, on the basis of these evidence it is hazardous to generalise about their cultural attainment. Though scrappy, the evidence obtained by these excavations nevertheless enables us to build a tentative picture of the megalithic culture. Moreover, the lack of settlement remains associated with the burials is the frequently raised issue in the context of the peninsular Indian megaliths. Due to the



absence of habitation sites in regions like Kerala, the analysis of the settlement pattern of the megalithic culture has become a difficult task. The settlement sites could have provided a variety of evidence in addition to the stratigraphic data for separating periods of various culture strands, thus, making the reconstruction of the cultural history of megalithic people more illusive.

Thus, the megaliths of South India reflect a series of questions, answers to which are still shrouded in mystery. In his very recent writings B. Vidyadhara Rao (2000) has even questioned the authenticity of the megaliths as a burial. The issue still requires more investigations. Let us hope that the future researches on the subject would illuminate us with a more confirmed and clear image of the megalithic culture.

4.7.14 Conclusion

Summing up the above discussion, we can say that the megalithic culture in South India was gifted with dynamic people, who almost revolutionised the society of the earlier Neolithic-chalcolithic times. They depended heavily on agriculture to sustain a considerably large society, though hunting and fishing supplemented their food supply and various industries and crafts enriched their economy. It becomes amply clear that the megalithic people practised a mixed-economy based on agro-pastoral production. They had a bias towards the urban life but were slow in building up huge cities unlike their contemporaries of the Gangetic valley, where well-established cities had been flourishing since the 6th-5th centuries B.C. They were essentially a separate and more group of dynamic people than the other iron age folk in India. The cult of the dead became the dominant feature of their religion and life, which survives in the culture of many tribes till today.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Name any three ceramic types associated with the Megalithic culture.

B. Short Notes:

- (i) Cairn Circles
- (ii) Religious beliefs and practices of the Megalithic people

C. Long Question:

- (i) Discuss the origin and spread of the Megalithic cultures.

4.7.15 Let Us Sum Up

- The south Indian Megalithic people are the first to use iron in India and, there their culture is sometimes described as “The Iron Culture of South India.”



- They depended heavily on agriculture to sustain a considerably large society, though hunting and fishing supplemented their food supply and various industries and crafts enriched their economy.
- The megalithic people practised a mixed-economy based on agro-pastoral production.
- The presence of grave goods – weapons, pottery, ornaments -suggests a belief in afterlife.
- The Megalithic Cultures laid the foundation for the subsequent growth in peninsular India and the Deccan during the early centuries of the Christian era.

ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. (i) True (ii) False (iii) True (iv) True (v) True.

B. Brahmagiri (Karnataka); Paiyampalli (Tamilnadu).

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

(i) Rock-cut caves (ii) Dolmenoid Cists (iii) Menhirs (iv) Stone circles (v) Pit Burials.

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

A. Black-and-Red Ware, Burnished Black Ware, Red Ware.

B. Short Notes

(i) See Section 4.7.5

(ii) See Section 4.7.10

C. Long Question:

(i) See Section 4.7.3

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SECOND URBANIZATION, MATERIAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES, BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Social and Economic Life of North- India
 - 5.2.1 Society
 - 5.2.2 Economy
- 5.3 Emergence of various religious sects
 - 5.3.1 Causes that led to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism
- 5.4 Jainism
 - 5.4.1 Mahavira
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 - 5.4.3 Principal Sects of Jainism
- 5.5 Buddhism
 - 5.5.1 Gautam Buddha
 - 5.5.2 Teachings of Buddha
 - 5.5.3 Factors responsible for the popularity of Buddhism
 - 5.5.4 Buddhist Schools
 - 5.5.5 Difference between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism
 - 5.5.6 Contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture
- 5.6 Conclusion
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Answers to In-Text Questions
- 5.9 Rise of Territorial States
- 5.10 Emergence of Magadha
- 5.11 Essential Readings



5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able:

- Explain the social and economic life of North India in the sixth century BCE
- Identify the causes for the emergence of new religions such as Buddhism and Jainism

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Sixth century BCE witnessed many religious movements in different parts of the world. Heraclitus in Eoinia Island, Socrates in Greece, Confucious in China, Zoroaster in Persia, Isaiah in Babylon preached new ideas. These widely separated parts of the world displayed a wave of discontentment with the traditions of Kingships, priesthood and ritualistic sacrifices. People were waking up to find answers to their questions regarding salvation and the ultimate Truth. India too, witnessed an emergence of various religious sects.

5.2 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF NORTH INDIA

5.2.1 Society

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

5.2.2 Economy

However, the real cause of the rise of these new religions lay in the spread of a new agrarian economy in north-eastern India. The primary factor that revolutionized the material life of the people around 700 BCE in eastern UP and Bihar was the beginning of the use of



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

• Rise of Urban Centres

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



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

- **Trade**

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

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

- **Arts and Crafts**

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

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

In the countryside also, a new social group was coming up to the forefront by virtue of its wealth. The greater part of land came to be owned by *gahapati* (peasant-proprietors). In the earlier period, the word *gahapati* (literally the lord of the house) stood for the host and principal sacrificer at any considerable sacrifice. But in the age of the Buddha, it came to



mean the head of a large patriarchal household of any caste who got respect primarily because of his wealth, which in the post-vedic period was measured not so much in cattle as in land. References to several affluent *gahapatis* occur in the early Buddhist writings. The *gahapati* Mendaka is described as paying wages to the royal army, as donor he is said to have instituted 1250 cow herds to serve the Buddha and his sangha. Anathapindika, another *gahapati* is said to have paid a fabulous price for Jetavana, a plot of land which he donated to the Buddha. Sometimes, the *gahapatis* are also represented as lending money to promising shopkeepers. The emergence of the *gahapatis* from the Vedic householder to a comparatively wealthy head of the household may indicate the growing disparity of wealth within the society. Common people, slaves and labourers, seem to have coveted his wealth and wished his harm, often he is depicted as keeping a bodyguard to protect himself.

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

5.3 EMERGENCE OF VARIOUS RELIGIOUS SECTS IN INDIA

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

5.3.1 Causes that led to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism

Vedic Brahmanism, by the sixth century BCE had made its influence so widely spread on Indian soil that people started realizing that the degeneration in Indian society was mainly because of the evils of Vedic Brahmanism. The emphasis on sacrifices, rituals and the dominance of Brahmanas had vitiated the original doctrines of Vedic Brahmanism. Society was largely guided by Brahmanism which was firmly established by now and priesthood had also become predominant. It was discrimination under *varna* hierarchy prevailing in the society then which prepared grounds for the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. Buddha and



Mahavira tried to reform the society of its innumerable evil practices and evils. They did not want to start new or independent religions but drew their inspiration from the teachings as embodied in the Upanishads. They provided a rational approach to handle the problems that had crept in the Indian society as a result of the prevailing complexities. They did not approve the costly religious rituals and sacrifices involving killing of animals. The changing features of social and economic life, such as the growth of towns, expansion of the artisan class and the rapid development of trade and commerce also focused on the necessity to bring about changes in society and religion. The new ideas brought about by the reform movements challenged the established hierarchical social order, the religious rituals and sacrifices, and the supremacy of the Brahmanas. It was based on individual and spiritual upliftment of humans. It emphasized personal liberty and purity and claimed that every individual had the right to attain *Nirvana*. These new religious ideas emerged out of the prevailing socio-economic and religious conditions of the times.

The urban setting in the age of the Buddha also gave rise to certain features of town life. The urban surroundings and breakup of the old tribal family created a class of women who took to prostitution as a source of livelihood. Buddha also preached in support of such women alienated from society which is evident in his meeting Amrapali.

The use of iron weapons revolutionized military equipment and added to political importance of warriors in contrast to that of priests. They naturally claimed a position of equality in other fields. The conflict between the interests of the Brahmanas and Kshatriya is evident in many texts. This partly explains the Kshatriya origin of Mahavira and Gautama and also the fact that from the beginning of Buddhism texts accord the first place to the Kshatriya and the second to the Brahmanas. As the Kshatriya rulers could be maintained only by regular payment of taxes, so both Brahmanical and Buddhist texts of the age of the Buddha justify the royal share of the peasant's produce on the ground that the King gives protection to the people (contract). In this way, with the change from nomadic pastoralism to settled agrarian villages, tribal identity was extended to territorial identity as is reflected in tribal names being given to geographical areas. This, in turn, gave rise to the concept of the state with both monarchical and non-monarchical form of government and woven into this concept were the institutions of caste and property, as already pointed out. With the rise of city life in the Ganges valley, a new pattern developed in the sub-continent, the cultural dominance of the Ganga region – the Hindustan of later centuries – exerted itself over all the regions.

The newly developed features of the social and economic life of people did not fit in with the Vedic ritualism and animal sacrifice. The conflict between the Vedic religious practices and the aspirations of the rising social groups led to the search of new religions and philosophical ideas which would fit with the basic changes in the material life of the people. Thus, in the sixth century BCE, in the Gangetic valley there emerged many new religious teachers who preached against Vedic religion. Ajita Keshva Kambalin propagated a thorough



going materialistic doctrine called annihilationism (*uchhaedavada*). From this, the Lokayata or Charvaka School of philosophy is believed to have derived a great deal. PakudhaKatyayana, another religious leader, held that just as the earth, water, air and light are primary indestructible elements, so are sorrow, happiness and life. It has been suggested that from his ideas, the later Vaisheshika School originated. Purana Kassapa, the third contemporary preacher, which regarded the soul as distinct from the body, laid the foundations of what later came to be known as the Sankhya school of philosophy. But of all the sects prevalent in northern India around the Sixth century BCE, only Jainism and Buddhism came to stay in India as independent religions.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. State True or False:

- (i) Post-Vedic society was clearly divided into four varnas: *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*.
- (ii) The *Shudras* formed the lowest rung of the social order and were meant to serve the upper three castes as domestic slaves, agricultural labourers etc. in post-Vedic times.
- (iii) The primary factor that revolutionized the material life of the people around 700 BCE in eastern UP and Bihar was the beginning of the use of iron.
- (iv) The earliest coins discovered can only be dated after the time of Buddha.
- (v) The use of iron weapons revolutionized military equipment and added to political importance of warriors in contrast to that of priests.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Briefly discuss the causes that led to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism.

5.4 JAINISM

The changing scenario of the socio-economic order of the Sixth century BCE led to the establishment of Jainism and Buddhism as heterodox sects later to be popularly known as reform movements. Jain tradition speaks of twenty four *tirthankaras* (ford-makers). In the Rig Veda there are references to Rishaba, the first *tirthankara* as claimed by Jains. Historical records, however, refer to the last two *tirthankaras*, Parsva and Mahavira. Very little is known about the life of Parsva. It is believed that he was the son of the King of Banaras who



became an ascetic at the age of thirty, got enlightenment after 84 days of penance, gave his message to the people upto the age of 100 years and died in Bihar nearly 250 years before Mahavira.

5.4.1 Mahavira

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

5.4.2 Teachings of Jainism

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

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

- There is something called the living.
- There is something called the non-living.



- The two come in contact with each other.
- The contact leads to production of energies.
- The process of contact could be stopped.
- The existing energies could be exhausted.
- Salvation could be achieved.

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

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

5.4.3 Principal Sects of Jainism

The principal sects of the Jainism are two, *Svetambara* and *Digambara*. There are differences between the two sects regarding versions of some incidents of the life of Mahavira, the type of food taken by Jaina preacher or munis, and the question whether women could attain Nirvana or not. But the basic difference is on the use of clothes. The preachers of *Svetambara* wore white clothes while the preachers of *Digambara* sect practice complete nudity. Some scholars maintain that Prasva did not ask his followers to discard clothes but Mahavira insisted on nudity. Jain sacred texts known as 12 *Angas* were also non-acceptable to *Digambaras* as authentic. The original doctrines taught by Mahavira were



contained in 14 old texts known as 'purvas'. In the first council at Pataliputra, the Jaina canon was divided into 12 sections which the Svetambaras accepted but Digambaras refused to accept this claiming that all old scriptures were lost. At the second council held at Vallabhi new additions were made in the form of 'Upangas' or minor sections. Among the 12 angas the Acharayanga Sutta and the Bhagwati Sutta are the most important. While the former deals with the code of conduct which a Jaina monk is required to follow, the later expound the Jaina doctrines in a comprehensive manner.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. State true or false:

- (i) The real founder of Jainism was Mahavira, the first *tirthankara*.
- (ii) Religious texts written in Pali do not recognize Mahavira as an originator of a new religion but as a reformer of an existing religion.
- (iii) Mahavira did not accept the religious doctrines of Parsva at all.
- (iv) According to Mahavira man is the architect of his own destiny and he could attain salvation and even the status of a God by pursuing a life of purity, virtue and renunciation.
- (v) The principal sects of the Jainism are two, *Svetambara* and *Digambara*.

5.5 BUDDHISM

5.5.1 Gautam Buddha

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

Though his life was spent in royal splendor, it failed to attract the mind of Gautama. As traditions describe, he was deeply affected by the sight of an old man, a sick person, a dead body and an ascetic. The misery of the human life left a deep impact on Gautama. To find a solution to the misery of mankind, he spent years as a wandering ascetic. From a sage called Alara Kalama he learned the technique of meditation and the teachings of the Upanishads. After attaining the supreme knowledge, he proceeded to Sarnath near Varanasi to deliver his first sermon which is known as 'Dharma Chakra Pravartana' (setting in motion the wheel of Dharma).



Asvajit, Upali, Magallana, Sariputra and Ananda were the first five disciples of Buddha. His message laid down the foundation of both Buddhist religion and philosophy which in course of time spread far and wide to Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, etc.

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

5.5.2 Teachings of Buddhism

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

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

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

Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the existence of God. He was a practical reformer who took note of the realities of the day. He said everything is transient in this Universe. There is no immortal soul. The Universe is soulless. The transmigration is no transmigration of soul. In transmigration nothing passes over from one life to another – only a new life arises as part of events which include the old or rather it is the reaction of one's own actions. He believed that one's ignorance makes a person believe in existence of God or



soul and this ignorance creates desire in man, then leads to action and that action leads to impulse to be born again to satisfy desire. This leads to chain of birth and rebirth which is the primary cause of misery of a man. The chain of ignorance, desire, attachment etc. can be snapped by knowledge or Gyan. According to him, the time knowledge is to acknowledge the absence of soul. He who realises the absence of soul knows that he does not exist as an individual and as such there can be no relationship between him and the objects around him. Therefore, nothing in this world can make him happy or sad. So he is free (*Vimukta*) – he is an *Arhat*. Those who wish to attain this knowledge to attain salvation should have faith in ‘Four Noble Truths’ and ‘Eight Fold Path’. For this, he has to work out mental training for concentration.

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

5.5.3 Factors responsible for the popularity of Buddhism

• Simple Philosophy with Emphasis on Social Equality and Practical Morality

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



• **Personal Character of Buddha**

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

• **Simple Teachings in Simple Language**

The teachings of Buddha were not only simple but quite practical. Buddha prescribed a middle path for the attainment of Nirvana. For the common man, it did not mean acquisition of difficult knowledge, observance of costly rituals, severe ascetism or abandoning family life but it meant observing certain simple rules of morality to attain salvation. This factuality was not catered to by contemporary religions. Moreover, Buddha preached in the language of the masses, i.e. Magadhi which facilitated the spread of Buddhist doctrines among the common people.

• **Organization of Sangha**

Gautama Buddha also organized the sangha or the religious order whose doors were open to all irrespective of caste, creed and sex. However, slaves, soldiers and debtors could not be admitted. The Buddhist sanghas proved to be the best instruments in the propagation of Buddhism. Each local sangha was like a workplace or an assembly for the followers of Buddhism where teachings of Buddha were imparted to the followers. The sanghas were also centres of learning, spiritual exercise for the monks, exchange of ideas among the members. These Sanghas prepared religious preachers or monks into a well- organized body to propagate the teachings of Buddha. These monks worked selflessly for propagation of Buddhism. According to Vincent A. Smith, ‘The well organised body of monks and nuns was the most effective instrument in the hands of this religion. Besides various scholars like Nagarjuna, Vasumitra, Dinang, Dharamkisti etc. produced vast literature on Buddhism which provided the base for its strength.

• **Royal Patronage**

From its inception, Buddhism got the protection and support of various rulers. Bimbisara and Ajatshatru of Magadha, Prasanjit of Kosala and Udayana, king of Kaushambi, were either followers or admirers of Buddha. Pradyata, king of Avanti too had invited Buddha to his kingdom. King Ashoka also played an important role in the propagation of the religion. Emperor Kanishka also patronized Buddhism and took measures to propagate it outside India. Asoka’s son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra



were sent to Sri Lanka to preach Buddhism. Many monasteries were established by him and the sanghas were also liberally donated by the Mauryan Emperor. Buddhism also came to be adopted by merchant class. Merchants like Anatha Pindika and courtesans like Amrapali accepted the faith because they got due respect in this religion.

5.5.4 Buddhist Schools

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

By this time, Buddhism was already divided into eighteen important sects but the two most important and major ones were Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle and the Mahayana the Great Vehicle.

5.5.5 Difference between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism

The Hinayanists believed in the original teachings of Lord Buddha and did not want any relaxation in them. Whereas Mahayanists accepted many Bodhisattvas who were in the process of obtaining but had yet not obtained Buddhahood. Both the sects agreed that the Buddha had taken birth several times and in several forms as bodhisattvas before the attainment of Buddhahood and would take birth in future also. But both differed with regard to the cause of these births and deaths. According to Hinayanism, the different births were simply different stages of progress of the Buddha till salvation. Thus they believed that Buddha was a man and his birth as Gautama was his last stage in the attainment of Nirvana. But Mahayanism believed that Buddha was an incarnation of God. He took birth several times not to attain Nirvana for himself but to help others in the attainment. Secondly, whereas the Hinayansim regarded the salvation of one's own self as the highest goal, Mahayanism believed that the greatest ideal is to help the society in self elevation. Thirdly, Hinayanism regarded Nirvana as a state of permanent bliss or peace away from the cycle of birth and death while the Mahayanism regarded it as the union of an individual with Adi Buddha, an idea quite simpler to the union with the Brahman of the Upnishadas. Fourthly, Hinayana did not regard the Buddha free from the bond of birth and death while Mahayana regarded the Buddha as God and believed in his different incarnations, all free from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Fifthly, Hinayanism believed in the practice of self-culture and good deeds as the only way to salvation. Mahayanism was based on faith and devotion to various Buddha to



attain salvation. Finally, while the religious texts of Hinayanism were written in Pali, those of Mahayanism were written in Sanskrit. The Mahayanism remained closer to the concepts of Hinduism with regard to Nirvana, Brahma, incarnations of God, faith, devotion etc. thus forming a bridge between the old Buddhism and modern Hinduism.

5.5.6 Contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture

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

5.6 CONCLUSION

Thus, there is no doubt that Jainism and Buddhism, born at different intervals, though at about the same period of time, were marked by distinct characteristics along with possessing strong resemblances. Both these religions were the outcome of the revolt against the orthodox cult and exclusiveness of Brahmanical Hinduism.



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-4

A. Short Notes:

- (i) Factors responsible for the popularity of Buddhism.
- (ii) Difference between the philosophies of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism.

B. Long Questions:

- (i) Write an essay on the teachings of Mahavira.
- (ii) Analyse the socio-economic base of Buddhism.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

- Sixth century BCE witnessed an emergence of numerous religious sects in the mid-Gangetic plains, of which Jainism and Buddhism became most popular.
- These new religious ideas emerged out of the prevailing socio-economic and religious conditions of the times.
- Both, Buddhism and Jainism were the products of intellectual, spiritual and social forces of their age which arose as a challenge to the existing Brahmanical order.
- Mahavira and Buddha came forward as reformers very much determined to clean Hinduism of its innumerable evil practices.

5.8 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. See Section 5.3.1

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) False (v) True.

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

A. (i) False (ii) True (iii) False (iv) True (v) True.

Answers to In-Text Questions-4

A. Short Notes:

- (i) See Section 5.5.3



B. Long Question:

- (i) See Section 5.4.2
- (ii) See Section 5.2

5.9 RISE OF TERRITORIAL STATES

STRUCTURE

5.9.0 Objectives

5.9.1 Introduction

5.9.2 Rise of Territorial States

- Material milieu
- Janapadas and Mahajanapadas

5.9.3 Republics or the Non-monarchical States

5.9.4 The Sixteen Mahajanapadas

5.9.5 Conclusion

5.9.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.9.0 Objectives

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- determine the reasons for the emergence of several territorial states in different parts of the country in the sixth century BCE
- explain the importance of sixth century BCE in ancient Indian history
- explain the rise of various *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas*

5.9.1 Introduction

The period extending from the sixth century BCE to the fourth century BCE is justifiably regarded as a very significant period of Indian history. We have read in the earlier unit that this was the age of intense philosophical speculation. Buddhism, Jainism and many other heterodox sects emerged during this period. It was also the period when the changes taking place in the earlier period matured to give a new dimension to the political



developments which were deep rooted in the changed material life of the people. In the context of the agrarian situation, a new type of society emerged in the Ganga valley. That is why historians place the beginning of the early historic period of Indian history in this phase.

5.9.2 Rise of Territorial States

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

- **Material Milieu**

The literature belonging to our period of interest refer to various kinds of units of settlements as *Mahajanapadas*, *Janapadas*, *Nagara*, *Nigama*, *Grama* etc. *Janapada*, literally means the place where the people place their feet. In the early Vedic times, the members of *Jana* were pastoral groups roaming in search of pastures. In later Vedic phase, the members of *Jana* took up agriculture and began to lead a settled life. These agriculture settlements came to be known as *Janapadas*. Initially, these settlements were named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages settled in that area. The Kuru and Panchal *Janapadas* located around Delhi and upper UP were named after their Kshatriya lineages. With the use of ploughshares and introduction of iron, people decided to settle down in one place and practice agriculture. The agriculturist could now clear the forest land and make it arable with the use of iron tools and implements. Middle Gangetic valley i.e. the area east of Allahabad came to be recognized as best suited for wet rice cultivation. The agricultural expansion led to the growth of population. Agricultural surplus was made available. Cattle were no more considered a major strength of wealth. Money economy had surpassed barter system. This led to the chiefs of the lineages constantly at war with each other either to show their might or to surpass each other by financial strength. Through the process of agricultural expansion, war and conquest the Vedic tribes had come in closer contact with each other and with the non-Aryan population. This in fact led to the formation of large territorial units. For example, the Panchalas represented the amalgamation of five different tribes. The kings or groups of Kshatriyas, the chiefs of which called themselves rajas or kings ruled over *Janapadas* or *Mahajanapadas*.



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

It is in this context that one notices the emergence of *Janapadas* and the *Mahajanapadas* in the sixth century BCE.

- **Janapadas and Mahajanapadas**

We find information about the *Janapadas* and the *Mahajanapadas* from some Vedic and Buddhist texts. These texts have clear references to various regions and geographical divisions. Excavations at Hastinapur, Ahichchatra, Kaushambi, Ujjaini, Sravasti, Vaishali suggest prosperous agricultural settlements and towns. The contemporary texts also indicate changes in society and economy which were taking place in well-defined geographical space.

- **Janapadas**

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



be a seminal development in ancient India. These units or *Janapadas* became the centres for the development of uniform language, customs and beliefs.

With progress in agriculture and settlement by 500 BCE *Janapadas* became a common feature. Around 450 BCE, over forty *Janapadas* covering even Afghanistan and south-eastern Central Asia are mentioned by Panini. However, the major part of southern India was excluded.

• Mahajanapadas

By the sixth century BCE, some of the *Janapadas* developed into *Mahajanapadas*. This happened as a result of the series of changes in the internal social and political organisation of the *Janapadas*. One such important change as mentioned earlier was the expansion of agricultural communities. Agricultural land now came to be considered as an important economic asset as against cattle. Another important change was the emergence of new categories and groups of people in the society, namely the *Gahapati* or the master of an individual household which owned land, and merchants or settlers or a person having the best, a term used by the Buddhist texts for people who dealt with money and had acquired considerable prestige and power. Combined with developments in the social and economic fields were changes in the nature of the polity of the *Mahajanapadas*. In the period prior to our period of study the word *Raja* was referred to as the chief of a lineage. *Rama* was referred to as *Raghukularaja* meaning one who rules over *Raghu* clan. Similarly, *Yudhishtira* is called *Kuru* or *Raja*. They ruled over their lineage and the concept of ruling over a territory had not come into existence. The taxes collected from the Kinsmen were mostly voluntary contributions. King was a father figure who ensured the safety and prosperity of the lineage. He did not function independently and taxation or maintenance of independent army was not his prerogative. The reference to kings in the sixth century BCE on the other hand indicate his rule over a geographical unit belonging to him with a regular taxation system and an army. The distinction between *Raja* or Ruler and *Praja* or the ruled became more pronounced. There are references to *Krsaka* or peasants who paid taxes to the king. The cattle raids of the preceding period were now replaced by organised campaigns in which territory was annexed and the agriculturists and craftsmen were to pay taxes. *Bhaga* or share of the agricultural produce was given to the king for safeguarding their interests and welfare and for being in subordination to the king. Survey of the agricultural land was done by an officer called *rajjugahaka* besides *bhagadugha* an officer who collected *bhaga*. These officers are mentioned in the contemporary literature. The Jatakas also mention royal officials measuring out grain to send to royal granary. The *Mahajanapadas* did not bear the name of the dominant Kshatriya lineage. For example, Kosala, Magadha, Avanti. Vatsa were not named after any Kshatriya lineage. Thus one notices that a new political system had emerged by the sixth century BCE. The word '*Mahajanapadas*' denoted large *Janapadas* like those of Magadha, Kosala etc. which were ruled by powerful kings or oligarchs. In fact, many of the *Mahajanapadas* of the sixth century BCE came up by incorporating *Janapadas*



which were earlier independent. For example, Kosala *Mahajanapada* included the *Janapada* of the Sakyas and of Kashi. Magadha came to include the *Janapada* of Anga, Vajji etc. even before it grew into an empire.

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

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. State true or false:

- (i) The increasing use of iron in eastern UP and western Bihar created conditions for the formation of large territorial states in the sixth century BCE
- (ii) The emergence of several territorial states in different parts of the country formed an important feature of the political life of the in the sixth century BCE.
- (iii) Middle Gangetic valley i.e. the area east of Allahabad came to be recognized as best suited for wheat cultivation.
- (iv) In the *Mahajanapadas*, the king functioned independently and taxation or maintenance of independent army was his prerogative.
- (v) *Ksetrika* or *Kassaka* denoted the peasantry class and generally belonged to the *shudrajati*.



5.9.3 Republics or the Non-monarchical States

During the sixth century BCE, India came to be divided into a number of independent states and even north India had no single paramount power. Most of these states were monarchical but quite a large number of them had republican or oligarchic constitutions. The Buddhist and Jain religious texts are more informative regarding them as compared to the Hindu religious texts. The Buddhist texts mention the following republican or oligarchic states:

- The Sakyas of Kapilvastu in the foothills of the Himalayas near the border of Nepal.
- The Bhaggas of Sumsumara hill in eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- The Butis of Allakappa between the districts of Sahabad and Muzaffarpur in Bihar.
- The Kalama of Kesaputta.
- The Kaliyas of Ramagama.
- The Mallas of Pava-modern Faizpur in Bihar.
- The Mallas of Kusinara-modern Kasiya in eastern Uttar Pradesh.
- The Moriyas of Piphalivana in the foothills of the Himalayas.
- The Videhas of Mithila-modern Janakpur near the boundaries of Nepal.
- The Licchavis of Vaisali – Basarh in the modern district of Muzaffarpur in north Bihar.

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

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

The existence of republics along with monarchies in the sixth century BCE is found in *Avadantashataka*, accounts of visits of merchants from mid-India to Deccan. Jain *Ayengasutra*, *Bhagvati Sutra* and coin legends also refer to the existence of republics at that time. The existence of republican form of government signifies noticeable advancement in the



political career of the people in this age. According to Shobha Mukerji, the rise or fall of several monarchies in this period gave opportunity to the republics to flourish where people experienced organizational experience. In historic times, republics existed in north-west and north-east zones and Punjab. Buddhist canons and Jataka stories refer to republics in Uttar Pradesh and North Bihar. But very little is known about the political history of these states except for Sakyas and Licchavis.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Briefly discuss the material milieu in the sixth century BCE.

5.9.4 The Sixteen Mahajanapadas

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

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

Kashi

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



However, by the time of the Buddha the Kashi *Mahajanapada* had been annexed by Kosala and was a cause of war between Magadha and Kosala.

Kosala

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

Anga

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



Magadha

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

Vajji

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

The Vajji state is said to have been a confederation of eight clans (*atthakula*) of whom the Videhas, Licchavis and the Jnatikas were the most well known. The Videha had their capital at Mithila which has been identified with Janakpur in Nepal. The Ramayana



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

Mallas

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

Chedi

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



Vatsa

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

Kuru

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

Panchala

The Panchal Mahajanapada was located in the Rohilkhand and parts of central Doab (roughly Bulandshahr, Bareilly, Pilibhit, Aligarh, Badaun etc.) The ancient texts make reference to the existence of two lineages of the Panchala – the northern Panchalas and the southern Panchalas with the river Bhagirathi dividing the two. The northern Panchalas had their capital at Ahichchakra located in the Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh. The southern Panchalas had their capital at Kampilya. They seem to have been closely linked to the Kurus. The Kurus allied with the Panchalas and their trade centre is said to have been visited by the Buddha. Very little information is available about them but they too are called Samgha. By the sixth century BCE, they seem to have become an obscure power.

Matsya

Not much information is available about Matsya who are traditionally associated with modern Jaipur–Bharatpur – Alwar region of Rajasthan. Their capital was at Viratnagara, the famous hiding place of the Pandavas. The *Mahabharata* refers to this place as suitable for cattle rearing that is why when the Kauravas attacked Virat they took away cattle as booty.



Since it was primitive, Matsya could not compete with the powers which had settled agriculture as their base. It was therefore absorbed by the rising Magadhan Empire. Some of the most famous Ashoka edicts have been found in Baurat (Jaipur district), the ancient Virat.

Surasena

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

Assaka

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

Avanti

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

Gandhara

Gandhara was located between Kabul and Rawalpindi in the North Western Province. Some parts of Kashmir might have been included in this territorial limit. In the early Vedic times, it was of considerable importance but in the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of



the later phases it was not given any importance. The capital Taxila was an important city for learning and trading. In the sixth century BCE, Gandhara was ruled by a king Pukkusati who was a friend of Bimbisara but by late sixth century BCE, the kingdom was conquered by Persians. According to Greek historian Herodotus, Gandhara formed the twentieth province of the Archaemenid empire and was the most populous and wealthy, it supplied men and material to the Persian army fighting against the Greek.

Kambhoja

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

Another Buddhist text *Mahavastu* enumerates a similar list of the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* while omitting Gandhara and Kambhoja in the North West. These are substituted by Sibi and Dasarna in Punjab and central India respectively. Bhagavati Sutra, a Jaina work gives a comparatively different list of the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* while including Vanga and Malaya. However, the number sixteen seems to have been acceptable and conventional but the list of the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* varied because the regions important to the Buddhist and Jains had some variation. The list includes a gradual shift of focus to the middle Gangetic valley because of the location of most of these *Mahajanapadas* in this area.

5.9.5 Conclusion

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



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Match the following:-

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| (i) Bimbisara | (a) Avanti |
| (ii) Udayana | (b) Kosala |
| (iii) Pradyota | (c) Magadha |
| (iv) Prasenjit | (d) Vatsa |

B. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) The Magadhan King _____ is said to have called an assembly of the Gaminis of 80,000 villages.
- (ii) The _____ territory roughly corresponds to the eastern parts of the modern Bundelkhand and adjoining areas.
- (iii) Of the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* _____ seems to have been the most powerful in the beginning.
- (iv) The _____ relates the story of the war of succession between the Kauravas and the Pandavas.
- (v) The dramatist Bhasa, has immortalized one of the kings of the Vatsa named _____ in his plays.

C. Short Notes:

- (i) Republics in Ancient India
- (ii) Magadha

D. Long Questions:

- (i) Write an essay on the importance of the sixth century BCE in the context of social, economic, and political developments in India.

5.9.6 Let Us Sum Up

- In the later Vedic phase new agricultural settlements, mostly named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages settled in that area, came into being. These were known as Janapadas.
- Specialisation of crafts along with localization of the people led to a major change in the socio-economic and political life



- Mahajanapadas were located in distinct geographical zones and emerged as regions where new kinds of socio-political developments took place
- Use of iron, transplantation of paddy, and religious sanction for the preservation of cattle facilitated the growth of urban centres in the period between sixth and fourth century B.C.
- Trade and the system of coinage also played a crucial role in the development of urban economy.

ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 1

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) False (iv) False (v) True.

Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 2

A. See Section 5.9.3

Answers to Check Your Progress Exercise 3

A. (i)-(c), (ii)-(d), (iii)-(a), (iv)-(b)

B. (i) Bimbisara (ii) Chedi (iii) Kashi (iv) Mahabharata (v) Udayan.

C. Short Notes:

(i) See Section 5.8.3

(ii) See Section 5.8.4

D. Long Questions:

(i) See Section 5.8.2

5.10 EMERGENCE OF MAGADHA

STRUCTURE

5.10.0 Objectives

5.10.1 Introduction

5.10.2 Four great states in the latter half of the sixth century B.C.

5.10.3 Rise and Growth of Magadha



5.10.4 Let Us Sum Up

5.10.0 Objectives

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- identify the reasons for the emergence of Magadha as the center of political activity in north India

5.10.1. Introduction

We have seen in the earlier lessons that the period from Sixth century BCE to about 400 BCE, was marked by far reaching changes in almost every aspect of life in India. This period saw the spread of agriculture over large parts of the country, the rise of cities and the formation of states. The period is important not only for political unity but also for cultural unity. Two major religions – Jainism and Buddhism – which arose in the Sixth century BCE left a lasting influence on the religious beliefs and practices. The *Varna* system, the system of social organization popularly known as the caste system, which had arisen in the Vedic age, now became well-established and gradually became the dominant form of social organization throughout the country. The rise of cities, crafts and trade also furthered the process of cultural unity.

5.10.2 Four great states in the latter half of the sixth century BCE.

The focus of the Aryan civilization now moved to Magadha, Vatsa, Kosala and Avanti, eastwards during this period of our study. Of all the sixteen principal states, four great kingdoms and the Vajji Republic of the Lichchhavis eclipsed the old land of the Kurus both in political and economic importance.

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

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

In the days of Lord Buddha, Prasenajit was the ruler of Kosala. He was a disciple of Lord Buddha as is evident from a sculpture at Bharhut. He gave his sister Kosaladevi in marriage to Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha and gave a part of Kasi for her maintenance. When Ajatasatru, the son of Bimbisara, starved his father to death, Kosaladevi died of grief. Thereupon Prasenajit confiscated the part of Kasi which he had given to his sister. This led to a war between Kosala and Magadha which continued for a long time. In the end Prasenajit gave his daughter Vajira in marriage to Ajatasatru and with her the revenues of Kasi. Thus, the conflict was patched up between two royal families. Prasenajit controlled the



administration of his kingdom through tribal chieftains and vassal kings. When his son became king he treated his generals cruelly and this led to the decline of the kingdom.

5.10.3 Rise and Growth of Magadha

Ultimately it was the kingdom of Magadha which eclipsed the power of the other three kingdoms. In the sixth century BCE (circa 543 -491 BCE) Magadha was ruled by Bimbisara of the Haryanka-kula. He was also known as Srenika. At first his capital was Girivajra, later he transferred it to Rajagriha some sixty miles to the South-East of Patna.

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

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

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

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

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

About the middle of the fourth century BCE the Sisunaga dynasty was overthrown by the first Nanda ruler Mahapadma. There are different traditions about his origin. According to



the Puranas, he was born of a *shudra* woman. In the Jain works, he is described as the son of a courtesan by a barber and according to a Greek writer Curtius, Mahapadma was the son of a barber who by his good looks had won the queen's heart and who subsequently assassinated the ruler of Sisunaga dynasty (probably Kalasoka/Kakavarna). All these accounts show that Mahapadma was of low origin, and succeeded in capturing the Magadhan throne by defeating the earlier political power.

Mahapadma is said to have uprooted the Kshatriyas by defeating the Ikshvakus, Kurus, Panchalas, Kasis, Surasenas, Maithilas, Kalingas, Asmakas and Haihayas. There may be some exaggeration in this tall claim but it is certain that almost the whole of Madhyadesa and Malwa region formed parts of Sisunaga's empire.

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

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

- **Factors which contributed to the rise of Magadha**

There were a number of factors which contributed to the growth of Magadha as the most powerful monarchy from the sixth century BCE to the fourth century BCE. This kingdom occupied a strategic position between the upper and lower parts of the Gangetic plain and it was a very important centre for trade and commerce. Though half in size in comparison to Kosala it had abundant forest resources, metal and prosperous agriculture. The rulers of Magadha built an impregnable mountain fort and organized a strong army because they had sufficient resources in men and money. They also had the wisdom of establishing an efficient system of government on the basis of regular officials and standing army devoid of tribal life. The bards of Magadha inspired the people and with their support, the rulers realized the ideal of establishing an empire under a Chakravarti ruler which had been the goal that many of the authors of the Brahmanas and the Upanisads in pre-historic times had set for the rulers.



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

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. State True or False:

- (i) The Varna system, which had arisen in the Vedic age became well-established and gradually became the dominant form of social organization throughout the country in the period from sixth century BCE to about 400 BCE.
- (ii) The focus of the Aryan civilization in the sixth century BCE moved eastward to Magadha, Vatsa, Kosala and Avanti.
- (iii) In the days of Buddha, Prasenajit was the ruler of Magadha.
- (iv) About the middle of the fourth century BCE the Sisunaga dynasty was overthrown by the first Nanda ruler Mahapadma.
- (v) After Alexander, Asoka destroyed the power of the Nandas of Magadha (circa 320-21 BCE).

B. Long Questions:

- (i) Account for the emergence of territorial states with special reference to the rise of Magadha from sixth to fourth centuries BCE.

5.10.4 Let Us Sum Up

- In the sixth century BCE. only four states -Kashi, Koshala, Magadha, and the Vajjian confederacy – remained important.
- Magadha emerged as the dominant state owing to, among other things, its advantageous geographical position and several ambitious rulers such as Bimbisara, Ajatashatru, and Mahapadma Nanda.
- In north-east India, smaller principalities and republics gradually merged with the Magadhan Empire.



ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) False (iv) True (v) False

B. See Section 5.9.3

C. Long Questions:

(i) See Section 5.9.2, 5.9.3 and 5.9.3

5.11 ESSENTIAL READINGS

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THE MAURYAN EMPIRE: ADMINISTRATION, ECONOMY, ASHOKA'S DHAMMA, PILLARS AND ROCK EDICTS

STRUCTURE

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 - 6.5.2 Ashoka's *Dhamma*
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 - 6.5.4 Ashoka's Concept of Peaceful Co-existence
 - 6.5.5 Pillars
- 6.6 Conclusion
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 Answers to In-Text Questions
- 6.9 Essential Readings



6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- identify various sources of information regarding Mauryan empire
- explain the functioning of the administrative units under the Mauryas
- explain the social and economic pattern in Mauryan India
- explain the various aspects of Ashoka's policy of *Dhamma*

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mauryas came to prominence after the overthrow of the Nanda dynasty in the later part of the fourth century BCE. The history of their rule can be reconstructed with fairly authentic evidences from many sources.

6.2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

6.2.1 Accounts of classical writers —Greek and Roman

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

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



6.2.2 Jain and Buddhist Literature

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

6.2.3 Kautilya's Arthashastra and Vishakadatta's Mudrarakshasa

Another valuable source of information for this age is the treatise on statecraft, the *Arthashastra*, generally ascribed to Kautilya (also known as Vishnugupta or Chanakya), who was a councillor of Chandragupta. This work may be “used as a general guide to Mauryan polity”. An historical play written in about 500 CE by Vishakadatta named *Mudrarakshasa* also yields useful data about the history of the Nandas and early Mauryan rule.

6.2.4 Ashokan Inscriptions

Last but not the least, we have those remarkable inscriptions of Ashoka engraved on rocks and pillars which notwithstanding the ravages of time, have supplied us with authoritative details of inestimable value.

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

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

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

- A. Discuss briefly the various sources of information for the study of the Mauryas.



6.3 MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION

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

6.3.1 Central Administration

• The King

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

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

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

• The Council of Ministers

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



Samaharta was the highest officer in charge of assessment and *Sannidhata* looked after the treasury.

• Municipal Administration

The city administration was entrusted to a commission of thirty members divided into six boards of five members each. Each board had its own departments allotted to it. The first board supervised industries and crafts, regulated work and wages and enforced the use of correct material. The second board looked after the comfort and security of the foreigners. The third board's work was registration of births and deaths. The fourth board regulated the sales of produce, supervised and tested weights and measures, stamped the articles sold, issued licenses to merchants. The fifth board inspected the manufactured goods and prevented the frauds arising from adulterations. The sixth board collected taxes on the goods sold. Thus, nothing escaped the notice of the city officials from birth to death. In their collective capacity these officials looked after the civic amenities like water, sanitation, cleanliness, public-buildings (temples) etc. There were city-magistrates, each termed as the *Nagarvyavaharika Mahamatra* as mentioned in the Ashokan Edicts, to maintain law and order and to settle disputes of the residents of the city.

• The Army

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

• Espionage

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

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



• Law and Justice

For the administration of justice, there were two sets of courts besides the village tribunals that dealt with petty cases under the guidance of the village headmen or the elders. These were styled the *Dharmasthiya* and *Kantakasodhana*. The *Dharmasthiya* courts were civil courts presided over by three *Dharmasthas* learned in sacred law and three *amatyas* and they were located in all important centers. They tried cases involving disputes in marriage, divorce, inheritance, houses, water-rights, trespass, debt, deposits, serfs, labour and contract, sale, violence, abuse, assault, gambling and miscellaneous. Punishments were carefully graded and executed by royal authority; they included fines, imprisonment, whipping and death. There must have been in existence also caste panchayats and guild-courts which regulated the affairs of communities and professional and dealt with disputes among them in the first instance.

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

The sum-total of this judicial system was that control of the bureaucracy over the people was strengthened and there was a sharp decline in crime as a result of fear and moral exhortation as mentioned by Megasthenes. King was also the head of the judiciary. Greek writers refer to judges who listened to cases of foreigners. Penal code was strict. We are informed by the Greek writers that “theft was a thing of very rare occurrence”. They were surprised to observe that the people “have no written laws and are ignorant of writing but conduct all matters by memory”. The crime of giving false evidence was punished by mutilation of limbs, and in certain unspecified cases, offences were punished by the shaving of the offender’s hair. Torture for the purpose of extorting a confession was recognized and freely used.

In short, King was at the head of the judicial administration. He constituted the highest appellate court in the realm. In the villages and towns, cases were settled by the *Gramvidha* and *NagarvyavaharikaMahamatras* respectively. In the countryside, there were *Rajukas* who were equal to our modern district-magistrates.

6.3.2 Provincial Administration

The Mauryan empire was a vast one. But Chandragupta devised a plan in overcoming these difficulties and introduced a decentralized scheme of administration. The whole empire



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

The Viceroyalties were subdivided into provinces under the charge of the *Pradeshikas* referred to in Ashoka's inscriptions and the Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman I dated 150 CE Girnar was one such province governed by Pushyagupta in the time of Chandragupta and Raja Tushaspa in the time of Ashoka.

6.3.3 Local Administration

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

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

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

Chandragupta was not only a great conqueror, he was also a great administrator. Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus in the court of Chandragupta, has left detailed accounts of his system of government. The treatise on state craft called the *Arthashastra* attributed to Chandragupta's able minister Chanakya (also known as Kautilya), confirms and



supplements the accounts of Megasthenes. According to the *Puranas*, the son and successor of Chandragupta was Bindusara who is believed to have ruled from 300 BCE to 273 BCE. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for four years. Ultimately, Ashoka succeeded him to the throne. Ashoka's imperishable records inscribed on rocks and pillars testify that the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka embraced the whole of India except Assam in the extreme east and the Tamil Kingdom of the Far South.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) _____ was at the apex of the Mauryan administrative system.
- (ii) _____ was the highest officer incharge of assessment.
- (iii) The Mauryan civil courts presided over by three *dharmasthas* learned in sacred law and three *amatyas* and located in all important centers were known as _____.
- (iv) The courts which functioned as special tribunals during the Mauryan rule to protect the state and people against the anti-social persons were called as _____.
- (v) The viceroyalties were subdivided into provinces under the charge of the official called _____.

6.4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PATTERN OF MAURYAN INDIA

6.4.1 Mauryan Economy

The discovery of iron and introduction of its technology in the Madhyadesa (U.P. and Bihar) by 800 BCE, at the latest, revolutionised the economic pattern of India. Barring the Indus Valley experiment in Chalcolithic agrarian economy the rest of India was passing through Neolithic pastoral-cum-agricultural village economy. The transition of India from the Neolithic to the Metal Age and its subsequent corollary of pastoral to agrarian economy was accelerated by the discovery and use of iron. *The revolution took place in the Madhyadesa and it dominates the political scene than culminating in the Magadhan or Mauryan Empire.* Out of 27 Adhyakshas mentioned in the Arthashastra, 21 were superintendent or directors of the important departments of economy such as agriculture, mines, trade and commerce, salt, liquor, textile etc.

The use of iron facilitated the clearing of the jungles and furrowed the land more deeply so as to exploit fully the potential fertility of the Ganga-Yamuna valley. The spurt in



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

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

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

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

Relationship between Mauryan Polity and Economy

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



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

Socio-Agricultural Policy of the Mauryas

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

Trade and Industry

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

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



important factors in the Mauryan state policy. Kautilya points out that the origin of treasury is mining, and of force in treasury, and earth is acquired by means of treasury and force.

System of Taxation

Apart from the incomes of the economic undertaking, the state also imposed a large number of customary and new taxes. The main tax was the 1/6 of the production of the peasants as the royal share. The state also received 1/4 and sometimes 1/2 from the share croppers who received land and other agricultural inputs from it. The peasants also paid another tax known as the *pindakara*, imposed on the groups of villages. The old Vedic Tax *bali*, perhaps is now regarded as the religious tax. *Kara* was a tax received from flower and fruit gardens. *Senabhakta* was a tax received from the villagers in the form of supply of provisions to the army when it passed the villages concerned. *Hiranya* was known as payment in cash. The peasants had also to pay irrigation cess.

There were also customs and ferry dues. Taxes were also imposed on the guilds of urban artisans. Even those numerous taxes could not meet the mounting expenditure of the state. So, *Arthashastra* provides for large real emergency taxes. One such measure was the imposition of *pranaya* or the gifts of affection which was to be levied only once on peasants and which amounted to 1/3rd or 1/4th of their produce. *Arthashastra* also provided for compulsory raising of a second crop by the cultivators, a share of which went to the state. According to Patanjali and Kautilya, the Mauryan emperors also collected money by setting up images of Gods for worship. Jaina tradition also suggests that Kautilya issued 800 million karsapanas i.e. Kautilya debased silver coins to fill up the treasury. All such emergency measures enormously increased the income of the Mauryan State. Normally half of the income of the Mauryan state was deposited in treasury to meet the emergency.

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

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

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Discuss briefly the economic changes that took place in Mauryan period.



6.5 ASHOKA

Ashoka has an honourable place in the galaxy of monarchs ever known to Indian history. He is a great ideal today because he was a great harbinger of peace. He is the only monarch in the history of the world who was the preacher of universal morality to the people.

6.5.1 Ashoka as an Emperor

The ideal of kingship of Ashoka was to promote the material as well as spiritual welfare of his subjects; to make the mankind happy in this world and also in the other world. Ashoka's efforts towards *dhamma* date from his conquest of Kalinga. The reason of his moral principle is suggested to be that he felt bound to promote the real welfare of his subject, as 'a father does of his children'. The reason is further indicated in the following statement: "And whatever efforts I am making is made that I may discharge the debt which I owe to living beings, that I may make them happy in this world and that they may attain heaven in the other world" (Rock Edict VI). Thus Ashoka adopted moral code of conduct as an absolute duty of the ruler towards his subjects, one of the obligations of kingship.

We are told in Rock Edict XIII that a turn in his ideal of kingship or in his religious thought came after his conquest and annexation of Kalinga in his 9th regnal year. There arose in his mind a heavy remorse by thinking of horrors of Kalinga war. The slaughter, death and captivity seemed exceedingly serious to the monarch. His actions as a monarch were changed and since then the sound of 'Bheri' or 'Bherighosha' (sound of war drums) was replaced by the sound of 'Dharma' or 'Dhammaghosha' (sound of *Dhamma*). Ashoka was now convinced that the victory of law of Piety (*dharma vijaya*) was superior to the victory in a military war. He advised his sons and grandsons against any military conquest and that they should consider conquests through the law of piety, as it avails good both in this world and the next.

It appears that after Kalinga war Ashoka altogether stopped slaughter and killing of animals. Ashoka was opposed to sacrificial killings in Vedic sacrifices and even discouraged festive gatherings as referred to in the Rock Edict I. The Pillar Edict V gives the list of animals and birds which should not be killed on some days and another list of animals which have not to be killed at all occasions. D.R. Bhandarkar opines that 'his ideal was to promote material and spiritual welfare of the whole world consisting not only of men but also of beasts and other creatures, not only again in his own kingdom but also over the world known or accessible to him.

6.5.2 Ashoka's *Dhamma*

The source of his ideal was his *dhamma*. Ashoka's *dhamma* is a code of certain ethical principles and humanitarian ideals with its universal dimension which Ashoka tried to propagate as far as possible. His *dhamma* of edicts is not any particular religious system but the moral law independent of any caste or creed, the *sara* or essence of all religions. One can



see in it the efforts on the part of the king to unite the various sects and sections of the society and to promote the ideas of peaceful co-existence and universal brotherhood.

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

- **Dhamma as reflected in Ashokan Inscriptions**

We find mention of certain virtues in Ashokan edicts, which are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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



Ashoka has pointed out certain vices which should be avoided and not be practiced by human beings viz *krodhah*, anger; *manam*, pride; *irsa*, envy; *nisthuryam*, cruelty; *chandayam*, rage or fury. In Rock Edict X the *dhamma* is also negatively defined as *aparivramam*, i.e. freedom from evil.

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

Ashoka has drawn certain comparisons between the practices of ordinary life and those of *dhamma* so that the people may understand his idea of *dhamma*. *Dharmadana* is better than the ordinary gift. While alms-giving was commended, the higher doctrine was taught that there is no such charity as the charitable gift of the law of piety; no such distribution as the distribution of piety Rock Edict XI. He advocated kind treatment to slaves and servants, honour to teachers, respect for life and liberality towards *sramanas* and *brahmanas*. Ashoka insisted on *Dharmavijaya*, which, he considers is only the true conquest rather than an ordinary conquest. According to him, glory of a king does not depend upon the physical extent of his dominion but upon the victory of hearts and wills of the people by the force of moral persuasion.

Ashoka's *dhamma* is distinguished by several doctrines and philosophical positions bringing out Ashoka's ideas of moral reform. Ashoka insists on the quality of self-examination. This must mean examination of one's bad deeds with his good ones (Pillar Edict III). In Pillar Edict I, he emphasises intense self-examination (*pariksha*) and intense effort (*utsaha*) as among the aids to moral life.

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



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

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

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

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

The *dhamma*, thus, presented in these Edicts is another name for the moral and virtuous life and takes its stand upon the common ground of all religions. It is not sectarian in any sense, but is completely cosmopolitan, capable of universal application and acceptance as the *Sara*, essence of all religions and is thus worthy of a sovereign of a vast empire comprising peoples following different religions. Thus in the moral interests of the diverse peoples committed to his care, Ashoka was at pains to think out a system which might be



imposed upon his subjects irrespective of their personal faiths and beliefs. Thus he laid the basis of a universal religion and was, perhaps, first to do so in history.

6.5.3 Propagation of *Dhamma* External Relations

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

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

In organizing such missions to foreign countries at the expense of India, Ashoka perhaps felt that India also would be benefited along with them. These were the countries with which India had active intercourse in those days, and it was desirable that they should conform to common codes and ideals of conduct and thought. The influx of foreigners to India in those days is quite apparent from the statement of Megasthenes that there was a separate department of administration to deal with their special interests. The history of the Western Greek countries does not preserve any record showing how Ashoka's missionaries fared there, but we need not assume on a priori grounds that those countries did not welcome the Indians who too brought them only a message of peace and good will. It is difficult to dispute that Buddhist thought has left its marks upon some phases of Western thought, notably "the heretical Gnostic sects and some of the more orthodox forms of Christian teaching". (V.A. Smith, *Early History of India*, 4th edition, p.197).

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

6.5.4 Ashoka's Concept of Peaceful Co-existence

The discussion on Ashoka's *dhamma* would remain incomplete unless it is analysed in the light of his idea of peaceful co-existence. Through this idea, he suggests to pay respect



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

Religious toleration in India has been traditional co-existence of all religious sects and creeds which prevails even now. The principles of non-violence and peaceful co-existence reflected in Ashoka's *dhamma* are the instruments of global force of "peace, progress and prosperity" that plays by the rules without hegemonic designs based on military might. Hence, it was an empire of righteousness, an empire resting on right and not on might. He also gave to his people belonging to different communities and sects, certain common ideas of thought and conduct which entitle him to be the humanity's first ruler with universal love and morality. He lives with us even today in our national emblem. Such is the influence of Ashoka's *dhamma* on history.

6.5.5 Pillars

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

The perfect uninscribed pillar at Bakhira near Basar, the ancient Vaishali in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, is a monolith of fine sand stone highly polished for its whole length of 32 feet above the water level. A square pedestal with three steps is said to exist under water. The shaft tapers uniformly from a diameter of 49 inches at the water level to 38 at the top. The total height above the level of the water is 44 feet. Including the submerged



portion the length of the monument can not be less than 50 feet and its weight is about 50 tons.

The inscribed LauriyaNandangarh pillar in the Champaran district of Bihar resembles that at Bhakhira in design but is lighter and less massive and therefore appears graceful. The polished shaft diminishes from a base diameter of 35 inches to a diameter of only 22 inches at the top. The entire monument is nearly 40 feet high.

Two mutilated pillars exist at Rampurva in the Champaran district of Bihar. One Pillar was surmounted by a finely designed lion and the other uninscribed pillar had a bull capital.

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

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

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-4

A. Discuss important features of Ashoka's policy of *dhamma*.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Thus, it may be said that the weakness of Ashoka's successors was the main cause of the downfall of the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka's responsibility (in terms of his pacifist policy) was indirect while that of his weak successors was immediate and direct. The economic and political factors, too, had a role to play in the disintegration of the empire.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

- Indian history entered a new era with the beginning of the Mauryan Empire in around 321 BCE as for the first time, India attained political unity and administrative uniformity.

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- The imperial organization under the *Mauryas* as it comes down to us through the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, inscriptions of Asoka and other sources, was of a very high order with the king as the head of the State, wielding all power, a huge standing well organized military system and an efficient system of criminal administration, new sources of revenue and a huge bureaucracy organized in a hierarchical way, which together contributed to strengthen the royal power.
- Mauryans adopted the policy of state control of the entire economic activities consisting of agriculture, industry, trade and transport, and the imposition of all possible varieties of taxes on the people.
- Growth of local polities both in the North and South coupled with a number of other political and economic factors accelerated the process of disintegration of the Mauryan Empire soon after Ashoka's death.
- Ashoka's idea of *dhamma* absorbed common ethical principles or essence of all religious sects in which Buddhist principles also form a part
- Ashoka organised an efficient system of foreign missions with a desire to propagate *dhamma*
- The history of art in ancient India virtually begins from the reign of Ashoka. There may be some Hellenistic influence on Mauryan art, yet the theme, spirit and details are purely Indian.

6.8 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. See Section 6.5.2

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

A. (i) King (ii) *Samaharta* (iii) *Dharmasthiya* (iv) *Kantakashodhana* (v) *Pradeshikas*.

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

A. See Section 6.4

Answers to In-Text Questions-4

A. See Section 6.5.2

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EARLY TAMILKAM: SURVEY OF SANGAM LITERATURE, POLITY, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

STRUCTURE

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- examine the level of literary and linguistic development in the Sangam Age
- classify the literary works belonging to this period
- explain the polity, economy and the various stages of social evolution as reflected in the Sangam texts

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Historians and Indologists regard the Sangam period as the ‘classical age’ of the Tamils analogous to the age of the classics in Greece and Rome and to that of the Renaissance of later period in Europe. Some even consider the Sangam age as the ‘Golden age’ of the Tamils, which marked a unique epoch in the history of the Tamilakam. The archaeological sources found from different explored or excavated sites throw light on the various aspects of the political, social, economic, religious and cultural life of the Sangam age people. However, the precious literary finds of this period discovered from various places in South India provide us with the significant information in this regard. In other words, the Sangam literature is the major source for the study of the Sangam age.

7.2 THE TERM ‘SANGAM’

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

7.3 CHRONOLOGY

There is controversy among the scholars regarding the chronology of the Sangam age. The main reason behind this is the lack of unanimity concerning the age of the Sangam works, which are of great historical value for the study of the Sangam age. On the basis of the composition of Sangam literature, K.A.N. Sastri traces the Sangam age to the period 100-250 CE. According to tradition, the *Tolkappiyam* is the oldest among extant Tamil works. M. Arokiaswami holds that as Tolkappiar, the author of *Tolkappiyam*, flourished sometime in the 4th or 3rd century BCE, the same date can be assigned to this literary work. The



corroboration of the literary sources with archaeological data enables us to place the Sangam age in the chronological span of roughly about 600 years from circa 300 BCE to 300 CE.

7.4 THE TRADITION OF THE THREE SANGAMS

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

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

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. State True or False:

- (i) The Sangam literature is the major source for the study of the Sangam age.
- (ii) The term 'Sangam' literally means 'confluence'.
- (iii) In the context of early South Indian history the term 'Sangam' can be rendered into English as an assembly, a college or an academy of learned people, held under the patronage of the Pandyan kings.
- (iv) The corroboration of the literary sources with archaeological data enables us to place the Sangam age between 100-250 CE.
- (v) According to the traditions, all the three Sangams were held at the capital of the Pandyas.



7.5 THE CORPUS OF SANGAM LITERATURE

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

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

While the individual poems included in the above mentioned three groups may be taken to have been produced within the first three centuries of the Christian era, they were very probably collected and arranged in the order in which they are now found, at a much later date. Length of the poem was one of the very important basis for the classification into three broad divisions. The poems in the ‘Eight collections’ run from three to thirty one lines, whereas in the ‘Ten Songs’, the shortest poem runs to 103 lines and the longest has 782 lines. The ‘Eighteen Minor Works’ include the ethical and didactic literature. The didactic literature, which includes the world famous *Tirukkural* is mostly in stanzaic form, the stanza having from two to five lines. It has 133 chapters each containing 10 couples or kurals, thus, a total of 1330 couplets in total. It deals with various aspects of life.

The Sangam collections at present consist of 2279 poems of varying lengths from 3 lines to about 800 lines. Some of these works are attributed to a single author, while others, like the *Naladiyar*, contain the contributions of many poets. This Sangam poetry available to us runs to more than 30,000 lines. These were composed by 473 poets including women besides 102 being anonymous. Among the poets nearly 50 were women poets.



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

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

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

7.6 POLITY

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

7.6.1 Kingship

Of the three *muventars* (three crowned monarch) the Cholas controlled the fully irrigated fertile Cauvery (Kaveri) basin with their capital at Uraiyur, the Pandyas ruled over the pastoral and littoral parts with the capital at Madurai, and the Cheras had their sway over the hilly country in the west with Vanji (Karur) as the capital. The Sangam works mention



the names of so many kings that ascertaining both their genealogy and chronology are highly problematical. However, the genealogy of the Chola kings Uruvaphrerllanjetchenni, his son Karikala and his two sons, Nalankilli and Nedunkilli have been confirmed to a great extent by the scholars. The kings of other two dynasties include Muthukudumi Peruvaludi, Ariyapadaikadantha Nedunjeliyan, Verrivercheliyan and Talayalankanathu Ceruvenra Nedunjeliyan among the Pandyas and Imayararamban Nedumceralatan, Cheran Senguttuvan and Mantaram Cheral Irumporai among the Cheras.

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

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

7.6.2 Chieftains

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

7.6.3 Administration

Now, let us discuss the administrative machinery as described by the Sangam texts. The policies of the king were controlled by a system of checks and balances in the councils. *Silappadikaram* refers to the two types of councils — *Aimperunkulu* and *Enperayam*. The *aimperunkulu* or the council of five members was the council of the ministers. The *enperayam* or the great assembly (*perayam*) consisted of 8 members (government officers). This worked as an administrative machinery of the state. These two assemblies that of the



Five and that of the Eight functioned as administrative bodies, though their function was generally advisory in character. However, their advice was rarely rejected by the king. Their important function was judicial though the *aimperunkulu* seems to have been solely in charge of it as described by *Maduraikkanni*.

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

7.6.4 Defence

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

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

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

Sangam polity was influenced by the North Indian political ideas and institutions in many aspects. Many rulers sought their origin and association with deities like Siva, Vishnu



and ancient sages. Many kings are said to have participated in the *Mahabharata* war like their North Indian counterparts. The rulers of Sangam age were also the patrons of art, literature and performed *yajnas* (sacrifices).

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

- A. Name the ‘twin epics’(great poems) which belong to the Sangam literature.**
- B. Give the names of at least three anthologies forming a part of the Sangam literature.**
- C. Fill in the Blanks:**
 - (i) In the Sangam age the king was called as _____.
 - (ii) The king also had recourse to advisers in the course of his administration. The Sangam literature frequently mentions them as _____.
 - (iii) *Silappadikaram* refers to the two types of councils namely _____ and _____.
 - (iv) The chieftains who were subordinate to the king in the Sangam Age were divided into two categories namely _____ and _____.

7.7 ECONOMY

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

7.7.1 Agriculture

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

Agriculture was the main occupation in the *marutam* area. It was the most important source of revenue for the state. In the *Palai* area people primarily practiced cattle rearing. The Sangam poems frequently refer to milk and milk-products such as curd, butter, ghee and butter milk. The importance of cattle is also attested by the cattle raids on enemy country



mentioned in the literary works. One of the primary duties of the king was to protect the cattle of his kingdom. The cattle wealth in turn enhanced the wealth of the farmer. *Silappadikaram* also relates the happiness and prosperity of the people to the agriculture.

The paddy and sugarcane were the two important crops cultivated in a large quantity. Besides these chief crops, other varieties of crops and fruits included gram, beans, roots like *Valli* (a kind of sweet potato), jack-fruit, mango, plantain, coconut, areca nut, saffron, pepper, turmeric, etc.

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

7.7.2 Industry

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

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

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

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



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

7.7.3 Trade

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

7.8 SOCIAL COMPOSITION

7.8.1 Social Composition

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

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

7.8.2 Women

The women like men, enjoyed certain freedom and went around the town freely, played on the seashore and river beds and joined in temple festivals as depicted in Sangam poems such as *Kalittogai*. However, the status of women was one of subordination to men,



which was an aspect of the general philosophy of the contemporary period. This is well reflected in *Kuruntogai* which mentions that the wife was not expected to love the husband after evaluating his qualities but because of the fact of his being her husband. In other words, it was not possible for a wife to estimate her husband. Though there are references to women being educated and some of them becoming poetesses, this can not be applied to the general mass. They had no property rights but were treated with considerations. Women remained a widow or performed *sati*, which was considered almost divine. Marriage was a sacrament and not a contract. *Tolkappiyam* mentions eight forms of marriage of which the most common was the *Brahma* marriage. However, there are references to wooing or even elopements, which were followed by conventional marriage.

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

7.8.3 Others aspects of the Society

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

Food and Drinks

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

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



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

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

7.9 RELIGION: BELIEFS AND RITUALS

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

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

The four important deities as mentioned by *Tolkappiyam* were—Murugan, Tirumal, Vendan (Indra) and Varunan. Indra was worshipped as the rain god and a festival in his honour was celebrated every year. In *Pattinappalai* worship of Muruga is mentioned. Muruga is the son of Siva. Besides these deities, Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity), Mayon (later



Vishnu) as guardian of the forest region, Baladeva, Kaman (the god of love), the moon-god, sea-god and other divinities were also worshipped.

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

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

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

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

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

The Tamils of Sangam age believed in the ritual uncleanness on occasions of birth and death. Dead were disposed either by cremation, burial or by being left in open to vultures



or jackals. Burning grounds are mentioned in *Manimekalai* where dwelled different kinds of spirits.

7.10 CONCLUSION

Thus, the picture that emerges from the study of Sangam literature reflects that the period witnessed the conception of state for the first time in South India. However, it was still in the process of crystallisation. Sangam literature reflects a society with its distinct cultural traditions. The trading activities, especially trade relations with the Mediterranean World enriched their economy. The foreign elements also influenced the socio-economic and cultural life of people. Many of the traditions of the age continued and survived in the later periods and some exist even till today.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Short Notes:

- (i) Sangam Literature
- (ii) Trade in the Sangam period

B. Long Questions:

- (i) Describe the economic conditions as reflected in Sangam literature.
- (ii) Give an account of the social and religious life of the people during the Sangam age.

7.11 LET US SUM UP

- Sangam poetry shows the existence of a vibrant and sophisticated literary culture in ancient Tamilakam.
- Sangam polity was characterised by the patriarchal and patrimonial systems in which the administrative staff system and various offices were directly controlled by the rulers.
- We also notice social inequalities with the dominance of the *Brahmanas*. But the acute class distinction, which appeared in later times, were lacking in Sangam age.
- Agriculture was the backbone of Sangam economy. The trading activities, especially trade relations with the Mediterranean World enriched their economy.
- The beliefs and customs practised by Sangam people suggest the complex nature of their religion. Both, animism and idol worship, were followed during the Sangam age.



7.12 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) True (iv) False (v) True

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

A. *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*

B. *Ahananuru*, *Purananuru* and *Kuruntogai*

C. (i) *ventan* (ii) *surrām* (iii) *aimperunkulu* and *enperayam* (iv) *velir* and non-*velir*.

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

A. Short Notes:

- (i) See Section 7.5
- (ii) See Section 7.7.3

B. Long Questions:

- (i) See Section 7.7
- (ii) See Section 7.8 and 7.9

7.13 ESSENTIAL READINGS

- Karashima, Noborou (Ed.). (2014). *A Concise History of South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. (Chapter 2)
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**POST-MAURYAN AGE: POLITY, ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND
CULTURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
SATVAHANAS AND KUSHANAS**

STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Political History
 - 8.2.1 The Shungas
 - 8.2.2 The Chedis
 - 8.2.3 The Satavahanas
 - 8.2.4 Dynasties of External Origin
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 - 8.4.3 Rituals
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 - 8.5.1 Religion
 - 8.5.2 Literature
 - 8.5.3 Art and Architecture
- 8.6 Conclusion
- 8.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.8 Answers to In-Text Questions
- 8.9 Essential Readings



8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- trace the political history of India from 200 BCE to 300 CE
- identify the reasons for increase in trade and urbanization
- examine the intensified political and economic developments and their impact on society
- explain the various aspects of society and culture during this period
- analyse the impact of religious and social conditions on art and architecture of the period

8.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

8.2 POLITICAL HISTORY

Subsequent to the collapse and break-up of the vast Mauryan Empire, we see the rise of a number of smaller territorial powers in its place in different regions of the subcontinent.

8.2.1 The Shungas

In the Ganga valley, for instance, the Mauryas were immediately succeeded by the Shungas under Pushyamitra, the general of the Mauryan army who is believed to have assassinated the last Mauryan king in circa 180 BCE. The Shungas, who ruled for about a 100 years (and were then replaced by the Kanvas who quickly made way for the Mitras), included in their kingdom Pataliputra (Magadha), Ayodhya (central Uttar Pradesh) and Vidisha (eastern Malwa), and possibly reached up to Shakala (Punjab). Pushyamitra is associated with the performance of the Vedic Ashvamedha sacrifice and with an antagonistic attitude to the Buddhist faith.



8.2.2 The Chedis

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

8.2.3 The Satavahanas

The Satavahanas were a major ruling dynasty of the post-Mauryan period which held sway from the first century BCE to the early third century AD. However, there is uncertainty about who the Satavahanas were and where they came from. While in their inscriptions they claim to be exalted brahmanas (*ekabrahmana*) who performed Vedic *yajnas*, the Puranas call them Andhras who are described as lowly social groups. Similarly, apart from the name 'Andhra', the discovery of early Satavahana coins from sites in Andhra Pradesh led some historians to believe that the Satavahanas began their rule in the eastern Deccan and then spread westwards. On the other hand, their inscriptions in the Nasik and Nanaghat caves point to the western Deccan as the original power center of the Satavahanas. At any rate, the Satavahanas adopted the title of Lord of Dakshinapatha and Pliny, the Roman chronicler, too says that the Andhras had many villages and thirty walled towns and a large army of 1,00,000 infantry 2,000 cavalry and 1,000 elephants.

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

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

8.2.4 Dynasties of External Origin

Finally, in the post-Mauryan period the north-west and west-central parts of the subcontinent witnessed the rule of not one but several dynasties of external origin, often simultaneously, as a result of tribal incursions from central Asia.



The Indo-Greeks

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

The Scythians

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

The Parthians

Close on the heels of the Shakas were the Parthians or Pehlavas, originally from Iran. They occupied a relatively minor principality in the north-west. Gondopernes was their best known king. Their early capital was at Taxila which was shifted to the region between Kabul and Peshawar. Their coins and artefacts bear Hellenistic influence.

The Kushanas

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



from the Oxus river in the north to the Indus Valley in the south, and from Khorasan in the west to Punjab in the east.

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

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

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

As the power of the Kushanas declined, various local dynasties subdued by them resurfaced all over north and central India. These included the Shakas of Malwa and a number of Naga, Mitra and Datta kings, as well as non-monarchical ganas like the Arjunayanas, Malavas and Yaudheyas who are known from their coins, seals and inscriptions. These were the conditions in which a new phase started with the rise to power of the Guptas in the early fourth century AD. In South India, the three chiefdoms of Chera, Chola & Pandaya occupied the Tamilakam area in the Post-Mauryan period which have been discussed in the earlier unit 7.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-1

A. Match the following:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (i) Kharvela | (a) a Parthian ruler |
| (ii) GautamiputraSatakarni | (b) a Shunga ruler |
| (iii) Rudradamana | (c) a Mahameghavahana ruler |
| (iv) Gondophernes | (d) a Satavahana ruler |
| (v) Pushyamitra | (e) a Saka ruler |



8.3 ECONOMIC HISTORY

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

8.3.1 Growth of Cities

Cities in this period not only show extensive construction activity, complex burnt brick buildings, well laid out streets and drains, and fortification walls but the adoption of new techniques like the use of tiles in flooring and roofing. There is also abundant evidence from the urban centers of the presence of coinage, a range of sophisticated artifacts like fine pottery, beads and terracottas, and of a population that engaged in a variety of urban occupations. A list of the thriving cities of this period includes Rajagriha, Pataliputra, Varanasi, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Mathura, Hastinapura, Ayodhya, Ujjayini, Pratishthana, and new towns like Sirkap, Sirsukh and Shaikhan (north-west) Hushkapura and Kanishkapura (Kashmir), Purushapura (Pakistan), Jaugada and Shishupalagarh (Orissa), Bairat and Nagari (Rajasthan), Kaundinyanagara and Bhogavardhana (Maharashtra), Nagarajunakonda and Amaravati (Andra). At the root of this urban efflorescence was undoubtedly a firm agrarian base. While we no longer hear of state farms like under the Mauryas, texts like the *Jatakas*, *Milindapanho* and *Manusmriti* convey a picture of thriving cultivation on privately or individually owned plots of land in this period. Some inscriptions from the western Deccan indicate that the fields ranged in size from 2,3 or 4 nivartanas (one nivartana=one and a half acres) to 100 nivartanas or more. Nonetheless, the king exercised a general territorial sovereignty thanks to which he could grant (the revenue from) entire villages as *dana* to brahmanas and bhikkhu sanghas. In fact the earliest inscriptional evidence of royal land grants comes from the Satavahana kingdom (Maharashtra) from the first century BCE and then again from the second century CE. Royal land grants carried certain privileges for the donee like exemption from tax freedom from entry of royal troops. The practice of making land grants was to become common from the Gupta period onwards, with important consequences for the agrarian structure.

8.3.2 Crafts Production

A striking feature of the post-Mauryan economic scene was the remarkable growth in crafts production. Both texts and donatives inscriptions from stupa sites like Sanchi, Bharut and Mathura indicate proliferation and a high degree of specialization of craft-based



occupations. The *Mahavastu* lists 36 kinds in Rajagriha alone and the *Milindapanho* enumerates as many as 75. Some of the artisan groups mentioned are blacksmiths (*lohakara*), goldsmiths (*suvarnakara*), jewellers (*manikara*), stone masons (*selavaddhaki*), carpenters (*vaddhaki*), leather workers (*carmakara*), oil-pressers (*tailaka*), perfumers (*gandhika*), garland makers (*malakara*), and also weavers, potters, ivory carvers, sugar manufacturers, corn dealers, fruit sellers and wine makers.

8.3.3 Guilds

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

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

8.3.4 Coins

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

8.3.5 Trade

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

Goods traveled up and down long distances connecting market towns by an intricate web of land and riverine routes that crisscrossed the subcontinent. For instance, the *Uttarapatha* was the major transregional route of north India, joining Taxila in the north-west with Tamralipti on the east coast via Mathura, Vaishali, Shravasti and Pataliputra. The *Dakshinapatha* started from Pataliputra and went up to Pratishthana and from there to ports



on the west coast. Another route ran from Mathura to Ujjayini and on to Mahishmati, on the one hand, and Bhrigukaccha and Sopara, on the other. Many routes then went further south.

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

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

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

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

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

It is important and interesting to note that social and cultural exchange went hand in hand with India's commercial contracts with the world. As we have seen, the north-west of



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

8.4 SOCIAL HISTORY

It will be obvious that the intensified political and economic developments discussed above had important social implications. This took the form chiefly of the widening and deepening of the stratification along caste, class and gender lines that had started in the sixth century BCE.

8.4.1 Caste and Class Structure

The four varnas and the four ashramas (*chaturvarnashramadharma*) emerge as the pillars of brahmanical ideology in the *Dhramashastra* texts of this period. Important features of caste were the preference for endogamy and hereditary occupation. There are indications of localization of caste and occupation with people of the same profession living in their own separate settlements or in distinct parts within settlements.

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

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

8.4.2 Position of Women

Linked to the need for the maintenance and perpetuation of the caste and class structure was the strengthening of patriarchy in this period. It took the form of subordinating



women and controlling their reproductive potential. The preference for sons over daughters continued. Women's access to knowledge, secular and scriptural, was diminished. Women of affluent classes were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, making them economically dependent on their male kinsmen. Great emphasis was put on the chastity of women which was sought to be preserved by early (Pre-puberty) marriages, on the one hand, and severe strictures on widows, on the other.

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

8.4.3 Rituals

The post-Mauryan period also saw the growing role of rituals in the life of the individual and household, and society at large. Known as *sanskaras*, these were rites performed to mark various life stages such as pre-natal (*garbhadana*), initiation by sacred thread (*upanayana*), marriage (*vivaha*) and death (*antyeshti*). And then there were *panchamahayajnas* that were actually simple ceremonies obligatory for upper caste householders, including making offering to ancestors (*pitriyajna*), to the sacrificial fire (*daivayajna*) and to all being (*bhutayajna*). These can be understood as ways to regulate the individual's life as well as to string society together through common beliefs and practices.

IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-2

A. State True or False:

- (i) A striking feature of the post-Mauryan economy was the remarkable growth in crafts production.
- (ii) The earliest inscriptional evidence of royal land grants comes from the Satavahana kingdom.
- (iii) Terminal trade involved such commodities that originated in India and were destined for other lands, and only passed through the subcontinent.
- (iv) The post-Mauryan period saw a considerable increase in the number of guilds and the scale of their activities.
- (v) The Buddhist religion went from China further east to Japan and Korea and underwent significant transformations.

B. Briefly discuss the caste and class structure in post-Mauryan India.



8.5 CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

While in terms of economic, social and political history, the post-Mauryan period was one of the culmination, in various spheres of culture it saw the inaugurating and founding of fundamental trends. Below we outline the chief new cultural developments and specimens of the time.

8.5.1 Religion

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

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

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

The most important mode of worship that characterizes religion from this period onwards is *puja*. *Puja* refers to ceremonial worship with the making of offerings such as flowers, fruits and camphor for the deity. The two natural accompaniments of this new form of ritual were image worship and worship in shrines/temples evidence for both which can be traced to our period. They indicate growing institutionalization and permanence of cults. Shiva was most commonly worshipped in his *linga* (phallic) form. Earliest *linga* and man like representations of Shiva are from second century BCE Mathura. Idols of Vishnu and Vasudeva-Krishna and his brother Balarama and sister Ekanamsha increase in number and variety from the early centuries CE in central India, but their earliest images occur on coins from Ai-Khanoum



(Afghanistan) from second century BCE. Earliest remains of stone temples are from those dedicated to Vishnu at Besnagar (Madhya Pradesh) and Nagari (Rajasthan) again from the second century BCE. The most striking image of Shakti in this period is that *Durga-Mahishasuramardini* (The Slayer of the demon Mahishasura) on stone plaques from the Mathura area (first century BCE-CE).

Interestingly, Buddhism underwent transformation in this period along similar lines. In other words, the element of devotionism came to dominate this creed which, in this form, is known as Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle) as opposed to Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle), the older, orthodox and austere form. A central difference was that in Mahayana the highest goal was not that of attaining nirvana for oneself and disappearing from the cycle of life and death, but to be a Bodhisattva or the one who, although he had attained perfection himself, renounces nirvana so as to continue in the world for ages and work for the spiritual welfare of others. Great compassion (*mahakaruna*) and universal altruism are the key elements of the Bodhisattva ideal. This had a special messianic appeal that inspired bhakti and self-surrender to the lofty-minded and merciful bodhisattva.

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

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

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

At the level of Jaina lay practice, the post-Mauryan period saw the development of a temple cult and related rituals which, interestingly, did not involve any intermediary monastic or priestly class. A number of images of Jinas and tirthankaras have been found



from sites like KankaliTila (Mathura) from 200 BCE onwards while Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves in Orissa were centres of Jaina monasticism.

8.5.2 Literature

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

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

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

An interesting aspect is represented by the technical treatises on a variety of 'secular' themes that are associated with post-Mauryan period. These include Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*, a commentary on Panini's grammar, and Pingala's *Chhandasutra*,



a work on metrics. Parts of the Mauryan work on statecraft, the *Arthashastra*, were also composed in the post-Mauryan. Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*, an exposition on pleasure especially of the sexual kind, belongs to the end of our period. And so do the twin medical treatises, *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, though they were added to subsequently. They lay down with an astonishing degree of expertise and accuracy a comprehensive approach to human and even animal physiology, diagnosis of disease and treatment.

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

8.5.3 Art and Architecture

Post-Mauryan art has the following broad characteristics: (i) It is structural art, meaning that it was originally part of architectural structures like the gateways, railings and facades of stupas, chaityas, viharas and temples. (ii) It is by and large narrative, describing scenes from myths and legends to do with divine and semi-divine beings, and also depicting signs and symbols. (iii) It is regarded as popular art, representing the folk spirit of commoners, unlike Mauryan art which was royal and stately. (iv) It is overwhelmingly religious in nature and predominantly Buddhist.

It should be noted, however, that the earliest brahmanical stone temples and sculpture are also from this period. A Vishnu temple stood at Vidisha (Besnagar) from the third century BCE onwards in the vicinity of the famous Heliodorus pillar which was a Garuda column dedicated to Vishnu by a Greek ambassador called Heliodorus. Remains of a Vishnu shrine are also found at Nagari (third century BCE), of a Lakshmi temple (200-50 BCE) at Atranjikhhera, a Durga temple at Sonkh (100-200 CE) and one Vishnu and five shiva temples at Nagarajunakonda (400 CE). A number of stone statues and reliefs depicting four armed Vishnu, Krishna-Balarama-Ekanamsha triads, Govardhana-Krishna, Shiva lingas, and Mahishasuramardini have been found from various sites, as already mentioned.

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

In the north-west a large monastic complex was revealed at Takht-i-Bahi while Taxila yielded a number of stupas and chaityas including the huge Dharmarajika stupa. The stupas at Sanchi and Bharhut in central India are the best known. These were equipped with a stone circumambulatory path (*pradakshina patha*), two flights of stairs (*sopana*) at the base, stone



balustrades (*vedika*) at the ground and a stone umbrella (*chhatra*) on the summit. Four gateways (*torana*) and a stone railing enclosed the stupa compound. Sculptural decoration was confirmed to these parts and was not done on the stupa itself. It consisted of narrative scenes from the Jatakas and also symbols like the triratna, and figures like yaksha and nagas.

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

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

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

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

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

8.6 CONCLUSION

The burst of cultural effort in the post-Mauryan period sampled above should be understood against the larger background of proliferation of centres of political power, a burgeoning economy, prospering, upwardly mobile social groups, institutionalization of religious cults, and interaction with foreign traditions.



IN-TEXT QUESTIONS-3

A. Fill in the Blanks:

- (i) _____ refers to devotion centred on a distinct personal or favourite god.
- (ii) Vasudeva-Krishna, the supreme god is the preacher of the _____.
- (iii) In _____ form or sect of Buddhism, the highest goal was not that of attaining *nirvana* for oneself and disappearing from the cycle of life and death.
- (iv) _____ composed by Jaimini in the second century BCE emphasized Vedic ritual as the embodiment of *dharma* and the means to salvation.
- (v) The dome-shaped funerary mounds preserving relics of the Buddha or special monks were called as _____.

B. Short Notes:

- (i) Indo-Greeks
- (ii) Satavahanas
- (iii) Kushanas

C. Long Questions:

- (i) Discuss the impact of external trade and cultural interaction between 200 BCE to 300 CE on the society of early India.
- (ii) Discuss the development in the field of art and architecture in the post-Mauryan period.

8.7 LET US SUM UP

- In the eastern and central parts of India and in the Deccan, the Mauryas were succeeded by several native rulers such as the Shungas, the Kanvas, and the Satavahanas
- In north-western India a number of ruling dynasties from Central Asia such as the Greeks, the Shakas, the Parthians and the Kushanas succeeded the Mauryas



- Literature and archaeology amply indicate that the period between 200 BCE and 300 CE was one of urban prosperity all over the subcontinent. There was development of agriculture, crafts production and trade
- The social implications of the various political and economic developments included the widening and deepening of the stratification along caste, class and gender lines that had started in the sixth century BCE.
- The post-Mauryan period also saw the growing role of rituals in the life of the individual and household, and society at large.

8.8 ANSWERS TO IN-TEXT QUESTIONS

Answers to In-Text Questions-1

A. (i)-(c), (ii)-(d), (iii)-(e), (iv)-(a), (v)-(b).

Answers to In-Text Questions-2

A. (i) True (ii) True (iii) False (iv) True (v) True.

B. See section 8.4.1

Answers to In-Text Questions-3

A. (i) Bhakti (ii) Bhagavad Gita (iii) Mahayana (iv) Mimamsasutra (v) Stupas.

B. Short Notes:

- (i) See Section 8.2.3
- (ii) See Section 8.2.2
- (iii) See Section 8.2.3

C. Long Questions:

- (i) See Section 8.3.5
- (ii) See Section 8.5.3

8.9 ESSENTIAL READINGS

- Chakravarti, Ranabir. (2010). *Exploring Early India Up to C. AD 1300*. New Delhi: Mac-Millan. (Chapter 5)
- Sahu, B.P. (2015) *Society and Culture in Post-Mauryan India c.200 BC to AD 300*. A People's History of India series. New Delhi: Tulika Books. (also available in Hindi)
- Sharma, R.S. (2015). *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas. (Chapters 18 and 19)



DISCLAIMER

The present study material is a modified version of the earlier study material by the same name under the CBCS Semester System. Some of the content was taken from the Discipline Course, “History of India upto Eighth Century A.D.” of the Annual Mode.

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