History of India - I

(From Prehistory to the 7ᵗʰ century CE)

COURSE CODE: SGB24HS102MC

Bachelor of Arts in History (Honours)
Major Course

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

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Self Learning Material

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Dear Learner,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Four Year UG History Programme offered by Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Established in September 2020, our university aims to provide high-quality higher education through open and distance learning. Our guiding principle, 'access and quality define equity', shapes our approach to education. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our academic offerings.

Our university proudly bears the name of Sreenarayanaguru, a prominent Renaissance thinker of modern India. His philosophy of social reform and educational empowerment serves as a constant reminder of our dedication to excellence in all our academic pursuits.

The Four Year UG History Programme covers all relevant areas aligned with historical studies and research methodologies. We have incorporated the latest trends in historical analysis to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum. Moreover, the programme encompasses flexible options for learners to choose from a range of Ability Enhancement Courses, Multi-disciplinary Courses, Value Added Courses, and Skill Enhancement Courses, complemented by discipline-oriented Advanced and Additional Advanced Courses.

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Our learner support services are always available to address any concerns you may have during your time with us. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or feedback regarding the programme. We wish you success in your academic journey with Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Best regards,

Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.
Vice Chancellor
Sreenarayanaguru Open University   01-09-2024

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Prehistoric and Protohistoric India

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Early Stone Age Settlements in India

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ familiarise themselves with key periods in prehistory (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic).

♦ understand the role of art and material culture in historical analysis

♦ recognise the importance of archaeological sources in reconstructing human history

♦ gain insights into major archaeological sites related to the Prehistoric period

Prerequisites

The Early Stone Age marks a significant phase in human prehistory, characterised by the development of basic stone tools and the emergence of early human societies. Inorder to reconstruct the history of early human kind, the historians have to rely on variou sources including archaeological, literary and numismatic. Literary sources, such as written texts and inscriptions, are valuable for understanding the more recent past, but they are often limited to later periods and have limited coverage of earlier periods. While archaeological sources, such as tools, weapons, fossils, pottery and paintings, procides information on early human communities. These artefacts reveal the technology, subsistence strategies and social structures of early human societies, such as hunting, gathering and construction of settlements. Fossils and cave paintings provide insights into the climate, flora and fauna of the time. To understand Early Stone Age settlements,

dating these artefacts is crucial. Techniques like carbon dating, stratigraphy and thermoluminescence help establish the age of these artefacts. Through careful study of these archaeological sources, historians and archaeologists can reconstruct the ways in which early human societies interacted with their environment, developed tools and formed social structures. These sources also provide a glimpse into the technological, economic and cultural evolution that laid the foundation for later historical developments. In the context of the Early Stone Age in India, archaeological evidence helps us understand settlement patterns, food habits, fire use and the transition from nomadic to semi-sedentary lifestyles.

Keywords

Archaeology, Palaeolithic, Epi-Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Microliths, Neolithic Revolution, Nuclear zones, Artefacts, Acheulian, Mousterian, Hunting-gathering, Cave Paintings, Stone Tools

Discussion

1.1.1 Prehistory and Protohistory

The term 'Prehistory' denotes the early phase of human evolution. The sources procured through archaeological excavations and explorations enhance the understanding of the prehistoric culture of human beings. The material remains like fossils, remnants of the food materials, housing structures, coins, inscriptions and other artefacts shed light on the story of humankind and their living environment. The information about prehistoric and protohistoric cultures can be gleaned only through the close analysis of archaeological evidence. According to the mode of subsistence, usage of tools to grab food, craftsmanship and social organisation, the prehistoric period can be divided into three phases - Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. The excavated sources expose various stone ages prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. This unit deals with early Stone Age settlements in India.

In the Indian context, Protohistory is the period that lies between the prehistoric and historical periods. Human beings began to lead a settled life in the protohistoric period following the transition from hunting-gathering nomadic communities to agro-pastoral sedentary communities. They began domesticating animals, cultivating crops and leading a settled life. Gradually, this way of life led to the emergence of villages and towns.

1.1.2 The Evolution of Humankind

Human beings often consider themselves the dominant creatures in this world. However, they appeared much

after the formation of the Earth and other living creatures. It is calculated that the Earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago and the first form of living matter appeared nearly 3500 million years ago. Humans appeared after a long time, i.e., before 200,000 years ago. However, the biological and cultural evolution of human beings from their ancestors began 2.5 million years ago.

It is always a matter of wonder that the species in the Universe are subject to continuous change over a long time. Recently, with the advancement in the genetic field and DNA studies, a comparatively clear picture of the evolution of human beings is obtainable. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, scientists like George de Buffon tried to understand the history of nature. He figured out that the natural world is not an immediate product but a product of a historical process over a certain period.

Moreover, the development of various scientific disciplines like geology and palaeontology enhanced the understanding of the continuous changes undergone by the species. In this context, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin introduced the theory that humankind is a product of a long evolutionary process. Darwin proposed the idea of the evolution of a new species. He argued that the species evolved due to the inheritance of minor variations in the individual members to their successive generations. The evolution process takes place over a long time through adaptation and survival mechanisms. He coined the term survival of the fittest to refer to such competent species chosen through 'natural selection'.

The theory of evolution created a massive controversy as it was in opposition to the biblical understanding of divine intervention in the creation of human beings. However, the theory was pathbreaking and emphasised the continuity of changes in the natural world. These theories and the subsequent advancement in science and technology explained the prehistoric past.

GEOLOGICAL EPOCHS

In terms of the evolution of the life forms, from single cells to complex organisms, the geologists divided the history of Earth into four geological periods- the primary (Palaeozoic), secondary (Mesozoic) and tertiary and quaternary. Tertiary and quaternary forms of Cenozoic, also known as the age of mammals, began 100 million years ago. Cenozoic is the shortest period of all geological time and was divided into seven epochs. The quaternary period of the Cenozoic is divided into two epochs; the Pleistocene (1.64 million years ago to 10,000 years ago) and the Holocene (10,000 years ago to the present). These two epochs were crucial in the evolution of the hominids or man-like species. Holocene is the epoch in which modern man lives and it continues.

1.1.2.1 Early Humans across the World

The discovery of fossils played a crucial role in determining the evolution of human beings. The modern human being belongs to the species *Homo Sapiens Sapiens,* a Latin term that means 'thinking man'. They evolved biologically over the centuries and acquired increased brain capacity, dental and pelvic structures and bipedal movement. Sometimes, fossil evidence can only represent the changes in these bodily structures. It may not be taken entirely as the feature of an entire population of that period. In the cultural transformation of human beings, the notable features include the making of stone tools, social organisation, changes in the thought process and modification in language.

The earliest known hominids come under the *Australopithecus* genus. The *Ardipithecus* or *Australopithecus Ramidus*, the earliest among them, is considered to live between 4.4 and 1.8 million years ago. They were identified as a similar line of the hominids in Africa. *Homo Habilis,* or the hand using man, is the earliest among the *homo* genus and is considered to live 2 million years ago. Afterwards, *Homo Erectus* was found in the African region around 1.7 million years ago. Their remains are also found in Asian regions like Java and Beijing. *Homo sapiens* are considered to appear nearly 500,000 years ago and *Homo Sapiens Neanderthals* about 130,000 years ago in western and central Asia and Europe. Modern human beings are 200,000 years old.

The stone tools and material remnants like animal bones were recovered with the hominid remains. However, the exact place of origin of the species is still not clear.

There are examples of the coexistence of various species like *homohabilis – Australopithecus* and *neanderthals* and homo sapiens.

1.1.2.2 Early Human Remains in India

In India, the fossil remains of apes dated 10-14 million years ago were found in the Siwalik ranges of the Himalayas known as *Ramapithecus*. Recent excavations on the riverbank of Narmada, near Hathnora village, revealed skull remains of hominids along with late Acheulean tools and fossil remains of animals. In an excavation in Tamil Nadu, fossil remains of a human baby skull, microliths and palaeolithic tools were found in Odai, Villupuram district. Some fossil remains are also retrieved from Pune in Maharashtra and Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh.

1.1.3 Early Stone Age in India

Many prehistoric sites were discovered from the nineteenth century onwards in the Indian subcontinent. The archaeological sources excavated from these spots include material remains of humans, animals and plants, burials and rock arts. These sources enrich the knowledge of the stone age period, which covers a long period in the human past. Nevertheless, one of the crucial sources which shed light on the prehistoric period is the stone age tools. There are artworks carved on the tools found at specific prehistoric sites. It implies the development of art skills possessed by prehistoric people over time. The stone tools made and used by the early humans are procured from different places of engagement like worksites and riversides. Even though stone tools were

identified, its potential to unearth the story of the human past is still underway. Hence, it is inevitable to identify the location of these tools, whether it is discovered from the place where it was made or carried to other places.

According to the mode of subsistence, stone tool technology and the geological period, archaeologists and scholars across the world divided the stone age into three - Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) and Neolithic (New Stone Age).

From the regional variations in the tools, technology and subsistence base, it is evident that the evolution of stone age culture was not a linear process. Even though the domestication of plants and animals began, hunting and gathering also continued alongside. In terms of the geological period, the Palaeolithic age coincided with the Pleistocene geological period and the Mesolithic and Neolithic with the Holocene era.

1.1.4 Palaeolithic Age (Old Stone Age)

The age of human remains associated with stone tools is as old as 35 million years in the world context. In India, they are considered to have lived from 500,000 BCE onwards. As mentioned in the above section, the Palaeolithic age belongs to the Pleistocene epoch. However, no clear picture of the beginning of the Pleistocene period is available. Hunting was the primary method of livelihood for Palaeolithic people. The Palaeolithic age is considered to last till 8000 BCE.

In 1863, Robert Bruce Foote, an officer at the Geological Survey of India and a renowned figure in prehistoric

studies, found a handaxe at Pallavaram, Tamil Nadu. It is considered to be the first palaeolithic tool discovered in India. However, in 1856, Le Mesurier, a railway engineer, found the first prehistoric tool in India at Nyaguthii village in Central India. Prehistoric tools are also found in eastern Vindhyas, Bengal, Jabalpur andamans and Sindh.

Phases in Palaeolithic Age

According to the type of stone tools used and the climate they belong to, the palaeolithic age is divided into three phases- Lower Palaeolithic (Early Stone Age), Middle Palaeolithic (Middle Old Stone Age) and Upper Palaeolithic (The Late Stone Age)

1.1.4.1 Lower Palaeolithic Age (Early Stone Age)

The Lower Palaeolithic Age lies between nearly 2 million and 100,000 years ago. The climate of this period, which belongs to the Lower Pleistocene, was less humid. The tools primarily used by the Lower Palaeolithic people were cleavers, hand axes, hammerstones and pebble tools. Some of them are found in the second Himalayan glaciation deposits. There are similarities found in these hand axes with those found in Western Asia, Africa and Europe. The lower palaeolithic communities followed hunting and gathering for their subsistence.

The unpolished, rough and large core tools of the Palaeolithic period are made of limestone, quartzite, dolerites, chert and sandstone. The symmetrical handaxes and cleavers, collectively called Acheulian, are mainly associated with the lower palaeolithic phase. However, it continues in later phases.

Some of the lower palaeolithic tools are found in parts of South India, the Son River valley in Pakistan, Kashmir, Chotanagpur Plateau and Kurnool. The tools found in the Chotanagpur Plateau date back to 100,000 BCE. The animal remains in Belan Valley in Mirzapur District in Uttar Pradesh suggest domestication of animals such as cattle, goats and sheep around 25,000 BCE. The caves and rock shelters in Belan valley suggest its role as seasonal camps for human beings.

The following are Lower Palaeolithic sites: Potwar plateau, Siwaliks, Riwat in Pakistan, Uttarabaini in Jammu, Didwana, Ajmer and Luni valley in Rajasthan, Valleys of Sabarmati, its tributaries, Hiran and Bhadar (Saurashtra in Gujarat), Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh, Wardha- Wainganga valley, Gangawadi area (Godavari river, Nasik), Dattawadi area (Mutha river, Pune) and Nevasa in Maharashtra, Yedurvadi, Isampur, Hunsgi- Baichbal and Krishna valleys in Karnataka, Jerruk and Milestone 101 in Lower Sindh, Sukkur and Rohri hills in Upper Sindh, Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh, Palghat in Kerala, Gudiyam Cave and Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu and the Konkan till Goa.

1.1.4.2 Middle Palaeolithic Age (Middle Old Stone Age)

The Middle Palaeolithic Age belonged to the Middle Pleistocene epoch, between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago. Meanwhile, the shape and size of the stone tools changed to small and lighter ones. The Middle Palaeolithic people used stone tools and bone tools; Pebble tools, burins, points and scrapers made of flakes, borers and blade-like tools. One of the characteristic features of this period is the crude pebble industry. The flake tools were made by a core technique called the Levallois technique.

Middle Palaeolithic tools are retrieved mainly from the river deposits. The flake tools and burins made of quartz were found along with the animal remains and hearths in the Sanghao cave in North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan. This site shows the order of the middle palaeolithic age. Some middle palaeolithic sites are found near the rivers and lakes of the Thar region. Some of the sites that belong to this period are found around the extinct and dried-up water bodies like Hokra and Baridhani and the Luni River system. Many reworked flake tools are recovered from the west of the Aravalli regions. The collection of these tools is termed the 'Luni Industry'.

The Middle Palaeolithic age is also connected with the Mousterian industry in the world context. In India, H.D. Sankalia, a renowned archaeologist, associated the Nevasan industry with this period. A group of middle palaeolithic artefacts found in central and peninsular India comes under the Nevasan industry. The scrapers are made up of stones like jasper, agate and chalcedony.

The Middle Palaeolithic sites are : Didwana, Ajmer and Luni Valley in Rajasthan, Hiran Valley in Gujarat, Potwar plateau between the river Indus and Jhelum, Nevasa in Maharashtra and Kalpi in Uttar Pradesh.

1.1.4.3 Upper Palaeolithic Age (The Late Stone Age)

The Upper Palaeolithic Age belongs to the Upper Pleistocene geological epoch,

i.e., about 40,000 to 10,000 years ago. The climate during this period became less humid and comparatively warm. The most important feature of this period is that modern humans first appeared during this period. Some of the notable features of this period are the flint industries, parallel-sided blades and burins made on flakes. These types of artefacts were found in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Bhopal and Chotanagpur Plateau.

Caves and rock shelters were the features of the upper palaeolithic site at Bhimbetka, near Bhopal. Several Upper Palaeolithic tools like hand axes, cleavers, blades, scrapers and burins were also retrieved from this site. Hunting and gathering continued to be their subsistence mode.

In the upper-palaeolithic context, the tools of animal bones were only discovered in the Kurnool district and Muchchatla Chintamanu Gavi. Hearth, animal bones and burials are the features of the Sanghao cave. Budha Pushkar lake in the Thar region gives evidence for both the middle and upper palaeolithic tools. An Ostrich eggshell belonging to this period is recovered from Mehtakheri.

Upper Palaeolithic tools were mainly made of a stone called chert, which is found near Vindhyas. Several inhabitation sites are found in the caves and rock shelters in the Vindhyan region. In the Son River Valley of Madhya Pradesh, the upper Palaeolithic site of Baghor I was excavated by the team led by the archaeologist G.R. Sharma and J.D. Clark. Baghor III is also a site identified there; hence, Baghor Culture is associated with the upper palaeolithic period. Upper Palaeolithic tools were also found in the places in West Bengal.

The Upper Palaeolithic sites are : Site 55 of Riwat in Rawalpindi (Pakistan), Kurnool caves, Muchachatla Chintamani Gavi and Renigunta in Andhra Pradesh, Rohri hills in Upper Sindh, Milestone 101 in Lower Sindh, Paisra in Munger district of Bihar, Budha Pushkar Lake, Chopani Mando in Belan valley and Baghor I, Baghor III and Son Valley in Madhya Pradesh.

1.1.4.5 Palaeolithic Art

There is a paucity of evidence of palaeolithic art in the Indian subcontinent. However, the evidence such as carved bone at Belan Valley, animal teeth at Kurnool, a circular disk at Bhimbetka, designed Ostrich eggshells at Patne in Tapti Valley and Bhimbetka rock shelters are considered to be artistic activities of this period. However, this claim requires more clarity. It is observed that Cave III F24, 'auditorium cave', found in Bhimbetka, is a part of the lower and middle Palaeolithic ages. This cave suggests its role in a community purpose.

1.1.5 Mesolithic Age

All the stone age phases, from Palaeolithic to Neolithic, were discovered in Chopani Mando in Belan valley. Palaeolithic sites cannot be found in the alluvial plains of the Indus and the Ganga. It is considered that around 8000 BCE, towards the end of the Ice Age, the Upper Palaeolithic Age came to an end. The warm and dry climate caused the human movement to newer areas. The period from 8000 BCE to 4000 BCE is known as the Mesolithic Age.

The Mesolithic Age was a transition period from the Palaeolithic to Neolithic (New Stone Age). It corresponds to the

post- Pleistocene, i.e., the Holocene era. The warmer climate of the Holocene era gradually transformed the ice-covered regions into forests. They also followed hunting and gathering like the palaeolithic people. However, their expertise in hunting made them adopt new ways of it. The evidence gathered from Mesolithic sites reveals that dogs were widely domesticated for hunting.

Prehistorians denoted the tools belonging to the Mesolithic age as microliths. These specially made small tools were used as knives, sickles, daggers, adzes, spearheads and arrowheads. This transition in the size and shape of the tools of the upper palaeolithic is termed as 'Epi - palaeolithic'. The microliths were found in different geometric stones such as chert, jasper, chalcedony, agate and quartzite. The stratigraphic sequence of Patne in Maharashtra reveals the clear distinction between the shape and size of the tools used by prehistoric humans. However, the cause behind the transition to the smaller sized tools is not yet specific. These microlithic tools are also found in Sri Lanka, such as Fa-hsien Lena, Batadomba Lena and Beli Lena.

Mesolithic people also engaged in fishing and the domestication of animals. The human occupation of the Mesolithic sites was either continuous or temporary inhabitation. Sarai Nahar Rai, Mahadaha, Damadama and Chopani Mando were occupied continuously by the Mesolithic people. The traces of Mesolithic pottery are found in Adamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, Langhnaj in Gujarat and Kaimur in Uttar Pradesh. Mesolithic artefacts such as microliths of different geometric and non-geometric shapes, animal bones, burnt clay, hearth and wild rice are found from

Chopani Mando in the Belan valley. As mentioned in the above sections, Belan valley reflects all the layers of stone-age culture. The excavations suggest the sequence from the Epi-palaeolithic to the Mesolithic period.

In Mahadaha, the remains of wild cattle, hippopotamus, pigs, deer and turtles were found in the butchering area. Traces of cultivation were reported at Damdama, where domesticated rice was identified as Mesolithic age. Animal bones are also recovered from sites like Bagor and Tilwara in Rajasthan, Kanewal, Loteshwar, Ratanpur and Langhnaj in Gujarat and Adamgarh and Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh. Rock shelters were unearthed at Lekhakia and Baghai Khor in Uttar Pradesh. Evidence of Mesolithic fishing communities was found near Maharashtra, Visakhapatnam and Tamilnadu.

The Mesolithic sites like Sarai Nahar Rai, Mahadaha and Damdama possessed microliths, animal bones, human burials and grave goods. The age of skeletal remains found at these places reveals their life expectancy. The presence of grave goods advocates some belief in the afterlife or diverting away from the bad omen of keeping the goods belonging to the deceased. The burial goods, such as the ivory pendant found at Damdama, suggest the ranks of the individuals in the community.

1.1.5.1 Mesolithic Art

Some paintings and rock art belonging to the Mesolithic period reflect the culture and the ways of life of the Mesolithic people. Mesolithic paintings and engraved bone objects were found at Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, which was discovered by

the archaeologist V.S Wakankar in 1957. This rock art site with 642 rock shelters is enriched with paintings and engravings in 400 of them. Bhimbetka paintings have 29 species of animals depicted on them. Birds, fish, crabs, frogs and lizards also appeared in these paintings.

Mesolithic paintings were also identified at Kharwat, Kathotia, Jaora and Lakhajoar in Madhya Pradesh. An engraving on chert core and microliths were recovered from Chandravati in Rajasthan. The Mesolithic art represented the hunters wearing ornaments and carrying tools and dogs. Other animals represented in these arts were buffalo, rabbit, tiger, monkeys and stag. A division of labour is observed in the artworks as hunting was performed by men and gathering and preparing food by women. Some Mesolithic art also identifies a depiction of dancing and sexual activity.

A.C.L Carlleyle, an archaeologist, exposed the first rock painting in India, which belongs to the Mesolithic period, at Sohagighat in the Kaimur hills of Uttar Pradesh. Almost 150 rock art sites belonging to the Mesolithic period have been identified in different parts of India, especially in central India. Rock art is also found in various rock shelters in eastern India. Around 55 rock art sites are found in the districts of Sundargarh and Sambalpur in Orissa. The reserve forests in Chhengapahad and Garjanpahad are enriched with rock paintings in the 12 rock shelters. Ezuthu Guha in the Idukki district of Kerala is considered a late Mesolithic site. Even though rock paintings and other rock engravings help us reconstruct their ways of life, the urge behind such works is not known.

1.1.6 Neolithic Age (New Stone Age)

While the ice ages ended with the Pleistocene epoch, the next Holocene epoch experienced warmer climatic conditions. This had a profound impact on the life of the people and hence, they began trying a new mode of subsistence. This period is known as the Neolithic period. In the world context, the Neolithic age began in 9000 BCE, while in India, Mehrgarh, the earliest settlement of the Neolithic period, appears to belong to 7000 BCE. The specific features of this period include food production, pottery making and sedentary life.

Mehrgarh, also known as the 'breadbasket of Balochistan', is located on the Bolan Riverbank in Kachi plain of Balochistan province in Pakistan. The archaeological studies reveal it as the largest Neolithic settlement found in this region. The topography and the unfavourable climatic conditions of the region made it uninhabitable. Hence, the pastoral nomads and farmers moved from this mountainous area to the riversides. Wheat was found to be the primary crop of this area. The people who lived in this period transformed themselves into a food-producing and animal domesticating community. However, some prehistorians argue that their activities were troubled by the flood in 5500 BCE. Later, with the help of the tools, they continued their work in 5000 BCE.

One of the characteristic features of this age is the use of celts and polished hand axes. These ground and pecked tools were primarily found in hilly areas of the Indian subcontinent.

Another feature of the Neolithic period is the grave goods found at sites like Mehrgarh. It consisted of stone, shell and copper ornaments, turquoise and lapis lazuli beads. While lapis lazuli is supposed to come from Afghanistan or the Chagai hills in Baluchistan, the origin of turquoise is considered to be from Iran or Central Asia. The archaeologists presume the source of the shells is the Makran coast. All these materials show the possibility of long-distance exchange. Some of the burials had red ochre-covered bodies.

1.1.6.1 Subsistence Mode of Neolithic People

The primary mode of subsistence of Neolithic people was food production by domesticating animals and plants. The excavations in the mid-twentieth century provided some information on the initial agricultural practices of the neolithic people in the Indian subcontinent. It is considered that agrarian villages emerged in the world around 8000- 6000 BCE. Wheat and barley were the most cultivated crops during this period. There is evidence of the cultivation of similar crops in Mehrgarh.

Cattle, sheep and goats were domesticated during the Neolithic period. However, in the later period, cattle rearing became their significant engagement. The archaeological excavations expose various compartments in the neolithic settlements. It is assumed to be the granaries where surplus cereals were stored. Between 4500- 3500 BCE, there witnessed growth in agricultural production in the areas lying between Kachi and Indus plains. Pottery had been known to the neolithic people from 5000 BCE onwards. The pottery making and division of labour were also

considered the important features of this period.

1.1.6.2 'Neolithic Revolution' and the Debate on the Shift to Agriculture

As mentioned above, the neolithic age was marked notably by its advancement in making stone tools and transition to food production. The shifts in the subsistence mode were reflected in their structure of tools. V. Gordon Childe, a prehistorian and an Australian archaeologist coined the phrase 'Neolithic revolution' for this gradual and varied transition during the neolithic period. In 1952, Childe identified the changes that occurred at the end of the Pleistocene era, which determined the shift in the subsistence strategy of the neolithic people. He links the dry climate of West Asia around 10,000 years ago to the mobility of human beings and animals toward the water bodies and their confinement around these regions. It is presumed as one of the reasons for the close interdependence between human beings, plants and animals. Gradually, it paved the way for the beginning of agricultural practice.

Gordon Childe put forth his theory based on the evidence available during his time. However, the later writings during the 1960s, such as Robert. J. Braidwood opposed Childe's theory of the desiccation factor and the origin of agriculture. An American archaeologist and anthropologist, Braidwood eliminated the environmental factor and upheld the transition to food production as a cultural process. He identified the potential areas of the domestication of wild plants and animals as 'nuclear zones'.

Lewis Roberts Binford, another American archaeologist, focused more on the demographic factors which fuelled the shift to agriculture. He pointed out that a new adaptation strategy would be devised if there is a disturbance in the equilibrium between the environment and the population. Here, in the case of the transition to agriculture, the climatic changes at the end of the Pleistocene era brought a migration of coastal people to the interior. It further led to a search for new subsistence strategies. However, there is not much evidence available to support the above argument. Hence, lack of food supplies and increased size in population appear to be a misnomer.

In 1969, Kent Flannery, another archaeologist, discussed the possibility of the advent of food production. He analysed the process in terms of experimentation of human beings on the productivity of the crops. However, these arguments do not substantiate why the Neolithic people began domesticating plants and animals.

The prehistorians criticised the term 'neolithic revolution' in denoting the shift to agriculture. They consider the process a part of evolution rather than 'revolution' as it is not a sudden momentary change. However, it is agreeable that agriculture changed the lives of humans in the later period.

1.1.6.3 Neolithic Settlements in India

One of the most significant Neolithic settlements in Kashmir valley is Burzahom, dated 2700 BCE. The neolithic settlers of this site mostly lived in pits. The artefacts belonging to the neolithic period found in this place were ceramics, pit dwellings and tools made of stones and bones. The bone tool industry was in a well-developed form. Here, the neolithic people lived near the lakeside and engaged in hunting, fishing and agriculture for subsistence.

Burzahom provides crucial information on the Neolithic phase. One of the significant features of this site is the coarse grey pottery. However, Burzahom is famous for its pit dwelling and the burial of animals with their masters. Sometimes wild animals were also buried in the same way. Gufkral, another neolithic site in Kashmir in which settlers depended upon animal husbandry and agriculture, but the dominant subsistence method remained hunting. Different types of wheel-made pottery were recovered from Gufkral. In Kashmiri Neolithic culture, bone tools and weapons appeared to be prominent.

Fig. 1.1.1 Pit houses at Burzahom.

Another neolithic settlement is in Chirand, near Patna and the northern Ganges. Chirand is known for many bone implements made of antlers and also belongs to the northeastern group of stone tool classification. The bone implements recovered from Chirand represent the late neolithic phase. The settlements were mainly concentrated at the confluence point of four rivers- Ganga, Son, Gandak and Ghaghra. This neolithic site had a paucity of stone tools since stones were not readily available in the river tracts. Nevertheless, the bones recovered from Chirand suggest its period as early as 2000 BCE.

The remains found at the sites along Bolan Pass, including Kili Gul Mohammad and Damb Sadaat, give evidence of the domestication of animals such as cattle, goats, sheep and horses. Other artefacts recovered from here include remains of mud-brick houses, microliths and handmade and wheel-made pottery. The Neolithic people lived here during different periods. One of the essential features of the Kili Gul Muhammed is the Kechi Beg Ware pottery. Damb Sadaat provided the pottery types called Quetta ware and Faiz Mohammad Grey Ware. In places like Anjira and Siah Damb, the neolithic occupation is also found in different periods. Togau Ware and Zari Ware are the two Neolithic pottery types identified in these places.

Mundigak in south-east Afghanistan, Zhob -Loralai area and Nal in Baluchistan and Sarai Khola in Pakistan were other neolithic sites excavated in the twentieth century. Sur Jangal, Dabar Kot and Rani Ghundai are the important sites in the Baluchistan area. There is evidence of terracotta figures, pottery and animal bones found at these sites. Some sites, such as Gumla and Rahman Dheri, were excavated in the Gomal valley in the late twentieth century. Nal is known for its pottery and water management system. In the Kolwa area, Kulli pottery and artefacts such as stone objects and semi-precious stones like lapis lazuli, carnelian and agate were discovered.

Several Neolithic tools were found in the hills in Assam, Garo hills in Meghalaya, Kaimur hills, northern spurs of Vindhyas in Mirzapur district and
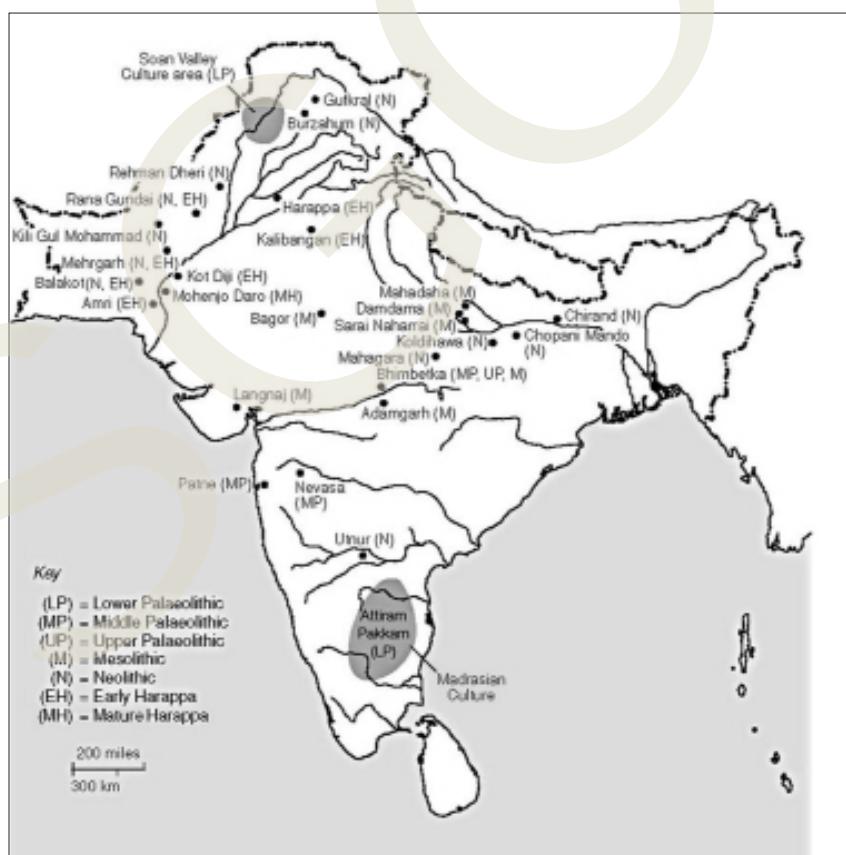

Fig. 1.1.2. Map of pre-historic sites

Allahabad districts of Uttar Pradesh. In the fifth millennium BCE, the Neolithic people of Koldihwa Mahagra in the Allahabad district cultivated rice. Other important neolithic sites include Senwar in Rohtas district in the Kaimur hills and Taradih, near Bodh Gaya temple.

Around forty-seven late neolithic settlements were found in the dried basin of Hakra, which led to the rise of Harappan Culture. It is considered that some of the neolithic sites on the Vindhyas belong to 5000 BCE and several South Indian settlements belong to 2500 BCE. Neolithic settlements in Southern and Eastern India are presumed to belong to 1000 BCE.

1.1.6.4 Neolithic Culture in South India

The neolithic phase in South India is between 2400 and 1000 BCE. The Neolithic settlements in South India are found on the tops of granite hills or near river banks, mainly near the Godavari River. During the neolithic period, the tools prevalent in the area were stone axes and blades. Evidence like fire-baked earthen figurines shows cattle rearing other than the domestication of sheep and goats.

The stone querns found at the neolithic sites in South India suggest the cereal production and grinding of corn during those periods. The abundance of stone was a reason for the prominence of neolithic settlements in this part of India. There are 850 settlements identified in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The neolithic phase is identified in the places like Maski, Hallur, Sanganakallu, Brahmagiri, Kodekal, Piklihal and Takkalakola in Karnataka; Payampally in Tamil Nadu and Utnur in Andhra Pradesh.

Cattle herding and animal domestication was a significant subsistence activity of Piklihal. Cattle, sheep and goats were the important animals domesticated by Neolithic settlers. Moreover, they constructed seasonal camps and there were compartments for dung collection. Whenever they migrated, they burned the previous campsites. From Piklihal, ash mounds and habitation sites were also identified. Ash mounds are the distinctive features of some of the Neolithic settlements, like Budihal in Karnataka. There are different opinions among historians on the formation of such ash mounds.

Recap

- ♦ Classification of a geological period: prehistory, stone age and palaeolithic age
- ♦ The period of palaeolithic ages and the corresponding geological periods
- ♦ Subsistence mode of Palaeolithic ages and sites
- ♦ Stone tool technology of Palaeolithic Ages
- ♦ Mesolithic period, sites and its characteristic features

- Representations in Mesolithic art and the sites
- Subsistence method and tool technology of the Neolithic period
- 'Neolithic revolution' by V. Gordon Childe and the arguments of archaeologists on the shift from hunting-gathering to agriculture
- Important neolithic sites and features; Burzahom, Gufkral and Chirand
- Neolithic settlements in South India and features- Piklihal and Budihal ash mounds

Objective Questions

1. What is the classification of the Stone Age?
2. Which are the three divisions of the Palaeolithic age?
3. Who discovered the first palaeolithic tool in India?
4. Acheulian tools were mainly associated with which palaeolithic period?
5. Which are the major stone tool industries of the middle palaeolithic age?
6. Which Palaeolithic age is connected with the Levallois technique?
7. What was the mode of subsistence of Mesolithic people other than hunting and gathering?
8. Who discovered the first rock painting in India and where is it?
9. Who coined the phrase 'neolithic revolution'?
10. Mention three important Neolithic sites in India.

Answers

1. Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age)
2. Lower Palaeolithic (Early Stone Age), Middle Palaeolithic (Middle Old Stone Age) and Upper Palaeolithic (The Late Stone Age)
3. Robert Bruce Foote (1863)
4. Lower Palaeolithic Age

5. Luni industry, Mousterian industry, Nevasan industry

6. Middle Paleolithic Age

7. Fishing and animal domestication

8. A.C.L Carlleyle, at Sohagighat in the Kaimur hills of Uttar Pradesh

9. V. Gordon Childe

10. Burzahom, Gufkral and Chirand

Assignments

1. Discuss the impact of environmental changes at the end of the Pleistocene era on the lifestyle of Early Stone Age humans. How did these changes facilitate the transition to agriculture?

2. Discuss the characteristic features of each stone age period, with a focus on art, tool technologies and subsistence patterns.

3. Evaluate V. Gordon Childe's concept of the 'Neolithic Revolution' and compare it with the arguments of archaeologists such as Robert J. Braidwood, Lewis R. Binford and Kent Flannery on the transition to agriculture.

4. Compare the subsistence strategies of Early Stone Age communities with those of Neolithic societies. What were the key factors that led to the transition from one to the other?

5. Reflect on the importance of archaeological sources in reconstructing early human history. How do these sources enhance our understanding of prehistoric societies compared to literary sources?

Suggested Reading

1. Chakrabarti, Dilip. K., *India- An Archaeological History: Palaeolithic Beginning to Early History Foundation*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

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2
UNIT

Chalcolithic Age

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the characteristics and significance of Chalcolithic tool technology

♦ understand the geographical distribution and extent of Chalcolithic cultures

♦ identify and analyse various pottery types associated with Chalcolithic cultures

♦ examine and compare the features of different Chalcolithic cultures

♦ explain the transition from Chalcolithic cultures towards urbanisation

Prerequisites

As we have discussed in the previous unit, prehistoric humans transitioned from a hunting-gathering lifestyle to an agricultural community. It marked a significant turning point in human history. This transition led to the establishment of permanent settlements, advancements in technology and the creation of surplus resources, which laid the groundwork for the later emergence of towns and cities.

The Chalcolithic Age, following the Neolithic Age is known for its unique technological and cultural characteristics. Archaeological evidence, such as tools, pottery, paintings and other material remains, provides insights into the lifestyle, technology and socio-economic patterns of Chalcolithic communities.

The study of these artefacts allows historians to reconstruct the past and gain an understanding of the early stages of human civilisation.

The Chalcolithic Age also witnessed changes in settlement patterns, with small villages and hamlets emerging. These settlements were often located near fertile river valleys, which provide insight into the social organisation and lifestyle of Chalcolithic people. This unit focuses on the Chalcolithic period, its technological advancements, material culture and socio-economic changes. By examining archaeological evidence, learners can gain insights into the significant developments of this age and understand its role as a bridge between the Neolithic period and the subsequent Bronze Age.

Keywords

Chalcolithic, Pre-Harappan, Harappan, Metallurgy, Copper, Bronze, Neolithic, Pottery, Agriculture, Social Stratification, Regional Variations, Trade

Discussion

1.2.1 Chalcolithic Phase

The stone age cultures were followed by the cultures using metals and the period after the Neolithic period witnessed the usage of copper as the first metal. It was notable for the presence of stone and copper tools and was called Chalcolithic. The word 'chalcolithic' means the copper - stone age. It is identified as a pre-Harappan phase. Nevertheless, some parts of India also witnessed the Chalcolithic period after the Harappan period. The evidence of the use of copper in the Indian subcontinent dates back to 3000 BCE.

1.2.1.1 Chalcolithic Sites

The chalcolithic sites in India concentrate on the South-eastern Rajasthan, western parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra

and Southern and Eastern parts of India. The sites from Rajasthan that lie in the Banas valley include Ahar and Gilund. These sites constitute the Ahar or Banas culture in the Chalcolithic cultures.

Kayatha and Eran are the sites excavated from the Western Madhya Pradesh or Malwa region. Malwa culture in central and western India contains Malwa ware, which is the characteristic ceramic of the period. In Western Maharashtra, sites such as Jorwe, Nevasa, Daimabad, Chandoli, Songao, Inamgaon, Prakash and Nasik are identified as Chalcolithic. These sites in Western Maharashtra collectively come under the Jorwe culture, named after the site Jorwe in Ahmednagar district.

Rajasthan, Malwa and the northern Deccan provide evidence of settled life

in the chalcolithic phase. Bagor in eastern Rajasthan reflects the transition from the Mesolithic phase to the chalcolithic and then the iron age phase.

Some of the Chalcolithic sites were identified in the Vindhyan region of Allahabad. East Indian chalcolithic sites include Pandu Rajar Dhibi and Mahishdal in West Bengal. In Bihar, Senaur, Sonpur and Taradih and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Khairadih and Narhan are regarded as the Chalcolithic sites.

1.2.1.2 Chalcolithic Tools

The primary tools of the Chalcolithic people were small stone tools and weapons. They also used stone blades and bladelets. The Stone axes and stone blade industry belonged to the Chalcolithic period and was found in many parts of South India.

The sites of Ahar and Gilund, situated in the dry area in Rajasthan, exhibited several copper objects. No microlithic tools, including stone axes or blades, were found in Ahar, unlike other Chalcolithic farming cultures. Ahar had copper deposits and was known as Timbavati, which means place of copper. Hence, they were engaged in smelting and metallurgy. Their tools included copper-made flat axes, sheets and bangles. The remains of copper fragments and stone blade industry were found in Gilund. Jorwe and Chandoli had flat and rectangular copper axes. Copper chisels are also found in Chandoli.


Fig. 1.2.1 Rewari Copper hoard object

Ganeshwar is a site near the copper mine of Rajasthan, which provides the copper objects such as arrowheads, spearheads, fish hooks, chisels, colts and bangles during the excavation. Ganeshwar was known as the supplier of copper objects to Harappa. However, it reflects the pre–Harappan culture from its stone tools and microliths collection.

1.2.1.3 Important Features of the Chalcolithic Period

The Chalcolithic people in South-Eastern Rajasthan, Western MP and Maharashtra were engaged in the domestication of animals and agriculture. Domesticated animals include buffaloes, cows, sheep, goats, pigs and hunted deers. Other animal remains also were found in these places. They consumed beef and pork and produced wheat, rice and bajra. Sites such as Navdatoli in Maharashtra had pulses such as lentil, black gram, green gram and grass pea cultivated by the Chalcolithic people. Other crops produced include ber, linseed, millets, rai and Bajra. Cotton was also cultivated. Fish and rice were considered to be the diet of the eastern chalcolithic people.

Chalcolithic people were great coppersmiths and stone workers. Many tools, weapons and bangles made of copper were found. The spindle whorls from Malwa suggest the art of spinning and weaving among the chalcolithic people. Carnelian, steatite and quartz crystal were the semi-precious stones used for bead making. The cloth making is reflected in the evidence such as cotton flax and silk threads found in Maharashtra. Inamgaon provides evidence of potters, ivory carvers, lime makers, smiths and terracotta artisans.

R.S. Sharma asserts that the first large villages were formed by the Chalcolithic people and produced cereals more extensively than the Neolithic people. One of the striking issues observed by historians was the highest number of burials of children indicating the high infant mortality rate. Grave goods from the burials suggest that hierarchy existed in the chalcolithic society. The terracotta figurines found in Inamgaon indicate the worshipping of women as mother goddesses. The bull terracotta from Malwa and Rajasthan demonstrates that the bulls were used in a religious cult.

1.2.2 Chalcolithic Culture in Pre- Harappan and Harappan Period

Chalcolithic settlements exhibit layers of culture- pre-Harappan, contemporary to Harappan and Post- Harappan. There were phases called Neolithic – Chalcolithic, which is the gradual disappearance of the Neolithic to the chalcolithic culture. The Pre- Harappan or the Early Harappan culture at sites such as Kalibangan (Rajasthan) and Banawali (Haryana) are particularly chalcolithic. Kot Diji in Sindh, Pakistan, also shows the same culture. This culture was primarily found in northern, western and Central India. In the case of Kayatha, the culture reflects all three phases; pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan.

Certain chalcolithic cultures stayed out of the influence of the Harappan civilisation. The Malwa culture in Navdatoli, Eran and Nagda; Jorwe in Maharashtra; Chalcolithic settlements in South and East India are non- Harappan chalcolithic cultures. Furthermore, the chalcolithic settlements in the Vindhya region, Bihar and West Bengal are also non – Harappan.

Pre- Harappan Chalcolithic Cultures encouraged agriculture in the regions such as Sindh, Baluchistan and Rajasthan. The beginning of urbanisation is observed in this period. Some pre-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures are Amri and Kot Diji in Sindh, Kalibangan and Ganeshwar in Rajasthan. There are assumptions that some of these

chalcolithic farming communities shifted to the Indus plains, were acquainted with the bronze technology and later paved the way to establishing cities.

The chalcolithic cultures are located in almost all parts of India except the alluvial plains and the dense forests. Some sites in the alluvial plains of the mid - Gangetic region are mainly concentrated near lakes, rivers, or their confluence point.

Recap

♦ Chalcolithic sites and corresponding cultures

♦ Chalcolithic tool technology

♦ The highest number of burials of children shows the high infant mortality rate.

♦ The terracotta figurines in Inamgaon and worshipping women figurines as mother goddesses

♦ Layers of culture- pre-Harappan, contemporary to Harappan and Post-Harappan, Neolithic – Chalcolithic- non- Harappan

♦ The beginning of urbanisation

Objective Questions

1. What does the term ' Chalcolithic ' mean?

2. Which are the major Chalcolithic sites in Rajasthan?

3. Which site reflects the transition from the Mesolithic phase to the chalcolithic and then the iron age phase?

4. Which part of India provides evidence of animal domestication and agriculture during the chalcolithic period?

5. What was the chief diet of the eastern chalcolithic people?

6. Which chalcolithic site provides evidence of terracotta figurines indicating the worshipping of women as mother goddesses?

7. Mention one chalcolithic culture which reflects pre – Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan phases.

8. Which are the major pre-Harappan chalcolithic sites?

9. What does the high number of child burials at Chalcolithic sites indicate?

10. Which material was most commonly used for tools during the Chalcolithic period?

Answers

1. The copper-stone age
2. Ahar and Gilund
3. Bagor in eastern Rajasthan
4. South-Eastern Rajasthan, Western MP and Maharashtra
5. Fish and rice
6. Inamgaon
7. Kayatha
8. Amri and Kot Diji in Sindh, Kalibangan and Ganeshwar in Rajasthan
9. High infant mortality rates
10. Copper and stone

Assignments

1. Examine the technological innovations of the Chalcolithic Age. How did these advancements contribute to the development of early urban centers?

2. Analyse the key features of two distinct Chalcolithic cultures. How did geographical factors influence their development?

3. Discuss the significance of pottery in Chalcolithic societies. What does the evolution of pottery styles reveal about social and economic changes during this period?

4. Evaluate the factors that led to the transition from Chalcolithic cultures to urbanisation.

5. Compare and contrast the different Chalcolithic cultures that flourished in India, focusing on their pottery styles, tool technologies and social organisation.

6. Analyse the role of copper metallurgy in the social and economic transformation of societies during the Chalcolithic period.

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3
UNIT

Harappan Civilisation: Origin and Expansion

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ analyse the geographical extent and patterns of expansion of the Harappan civilisation

♦ evaluate the diverse scholarly perspectives and debates on the origin of the Harappan civilisation

♦ differentiate between the various phases of the Harappan civilisation, their key features and developments

Prerequisites

The transition from nomadic to settled agriculture during the Neolithic period marked a significant shift in human history. It further led to the development of towns and cities. However, the beginnings of civilisation in the Indian subcontinent were elusive until the discovery of the Harappan civilisation in 1924. This civilisation, dated around 2500 BCE, was on par with Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations and marked the first urban phase of the Indian subcontinent.

The Harappan civilisation, also known as the Indus Valley Civilisation, extended across present-day Pakistan, north-western India and parts of Afghanistan. Urban centers displayed well planning, grid-pattern streets, advanced drainage systems and standardised weights and measures. The Harappans demonstrated expertise in craftsmanship, metallurgy and trade, with evidence of long-distance commerce with Mesopotamia and Central Asia.

Archaeology plays a key role in studying the Harappan civilisation, providing valuable inputs into their economic activities, social structure and cultural practices. Artefacts such as seals, pottery, beads and tools provide glimpses into their economic activities, social structure and cultural practices. The use of burnt bricks, granaries and dockyards indicates their technological progress.

This unit explores the origins and expansion of the Harappan civilisation, by examining factors that contributed to its rise as one of the most advanced civilisations of its time. By analysing archaeological evidence and interpretations, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Harappan civilisation and its importance in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

Keywords

Indus Valley Civilisation, Harappan, Urban Planning, Trade, Expansion, Geographical Extent, Origin, Harappan sites

Discussion

Numerous sites of the Harappan period were concentrated in the Indus Valley. Hence, the Harappan civilisation was also known as the Indus Valley civilisation. Those major sites include Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Chanhudaro and Allahdino. However, later, more sites were discovered beyond the Indus area and later, scholars preferred to use 'Harappan Civilisation' after the name of the first sit identified. Lothal, Surkotada and Dholavira in Gujarat; Banawali and Rakhigarhi in Haryana; Kalibangan in Rajasthan; Shortughai in Afghanistan; and Lurewala and Ghanweriwala of the Cholistan region in Pakistan were identified as Harappan sites. Among these, the largest concentration of sites was found in Cholistan, i.e., 174. All these sites were located near the river Ghaggar-Hakra.

1.3.1 Geographical Extent of the Harappan Civilisation

The Harappan sites are found in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the North-western region of the Indian subcontinent. It extends from Manda in Jammu and Kashmir in the North to Malvan in Gujarat. In the west, it extends from Sutkagendor, on the Makran coast of Pakistan, to Alamgirpur of Uttar Pradesh.

Mohenjodaro is located in the Larkana district, the lower part of the Indus valley. Sukkur-Rohri hills of Upper Sindh provide evidence of workers' settlements around chert quarries. Chert was used for making blades. Makran Coast consists of Sutkagendor and Sotka-Koh, the sites that maintained sea trade with the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. Baluchistan provided
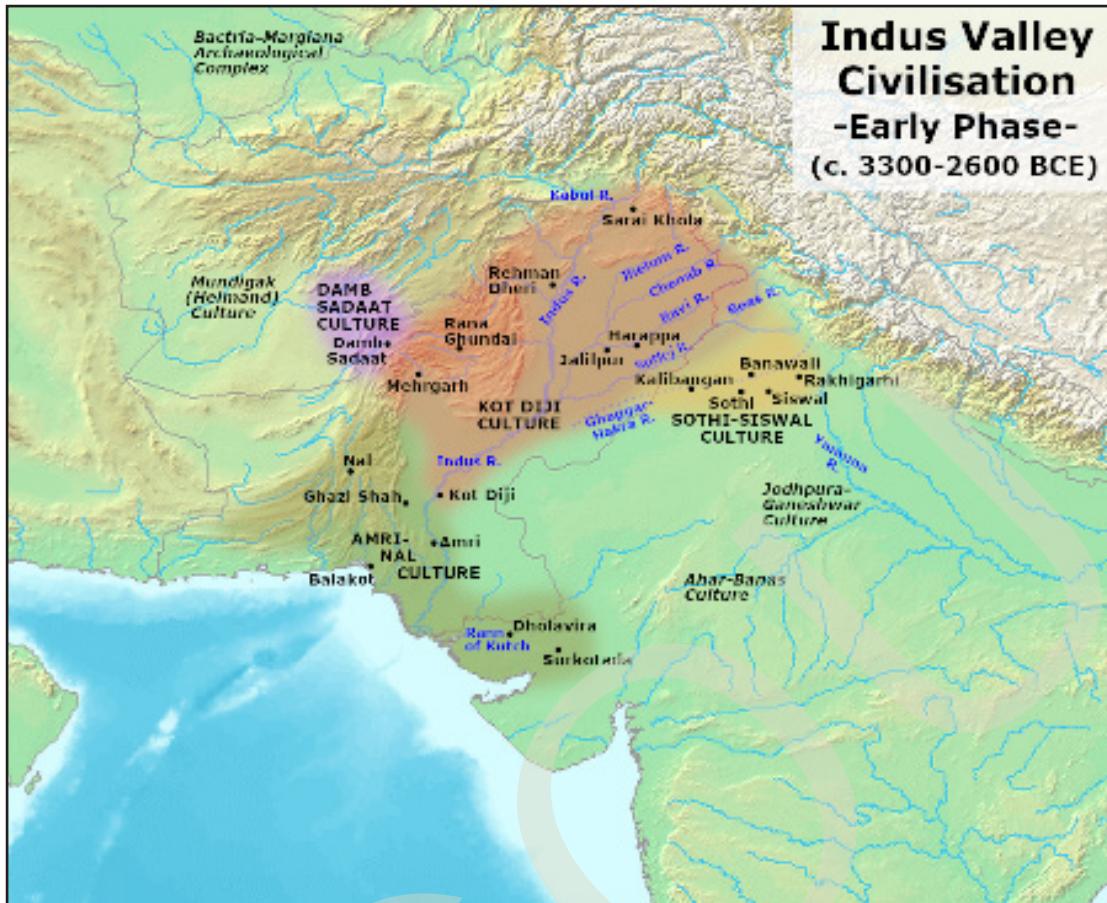
Fig. 1.3.1. Indus Valley Civilisation, Early Phase (3300-2600 BCE)

evidence of copper, lead and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli and turquoise.

Shortughai in northeast Afghanistan played an important role in fetching *lapis lazuli* from Badakhshan and tin and gold from Central Asia. Harappa is the most important site of this period, located in the Punjab province of Pakistan, near the banks of the river Ravi. The Cholistan region of Pakistan had the most significant number of settlements in the Harappan period. This area connected the Indus region with the copper deposits of Rajasthan. Banawali, Rakhigarhi, Kalibangan, Dholavira and Lothal were the most significant sites of the Harappan civilisation.

1.3.2 Phases of Harappan Culture

The Harappan civilisation dates back to the period from 3300 BCE to 1300 BCE. The Harappan culture is divided into three phases- The Early Harappan (3300- 2600 BCE), the Mature Harappan (2600- 1800 BCE) and the Late Harappan (1800- 1300 BCE). The early Harappan phase marks a proto-urban or formative period. The sites such as Harappa, Kot Diji and Amri reflect this level. The important features of this phase include fortification, grid planning, development of trade network and craft specialisation.

The Mature phase is characterised as urban and observed in sites such as Mo-

Fig. 1.3.2. Indus Valley Civilisation, Mature Phase (2600-1900 BCE)

henjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan and Dholavira. This phase was the period of urbanisation, along with the development of writing and the flourishing of trade. The late Harappan is featured as post-urban or the desertion and decline of cities and diversification of agriculture. Cemetery H at Harappa, Siswal, Rojdi and Rangpur exhibit this phase.

1.3.2 1 Origin of Harappan Civilisation - Different Perspectives

The initial debate on the origin of the Harappan civilisation was whether it was of foreign origin. John Marshall (1931) assumed that civilisation was indigenous.

Gordon Childe and Stuart Piggot agree with the indigenous origin of the civilisation. It was identified as the human effort to adapt to the environment.

E.H. Mackay emphasises the role of the Uruk Culture of Mesopotamia in shaping the urban character of the Harappan civilisation. Mortimer Wheeler opposed the indigenous origin theory and proposed spreading ideas from West Asia. Evidence was not shown other than the assumption of a foreign influence in constructing mud-like structures and citadels. Scholars like D.H. Gordon, Heine-Geldern and S.N. Kramer assume the actual movement of people from Mesopotamia.

The excavations at Kot Diji, Ghaggar Valley, Amri and Kalibangan after the 1960s provided evidence of the fortified citadel complex and related artefacts. Pottery similar to pre-Indus Kalibangan and planned pre-Indus settlement with a vast pottery collection instigated the scholars such as F.A Khan, A. Ghosh and J.M. Casal respectively to come to the conclusion the Harappan culture is indigenous. F. R. Allchin and Bridget Allchin also make a similar argument. M. R. Mughal used the terms 'early Harappan' and 'incipient urbanisation'. He pointed out the trade relation with Mesopotamia and the similar features shared by the contemporary cultures.

Various scholars agreed on the existence of the 'Early Harappan' culture before the Mature phase of Harappan civilisation. However, the cause behind such a transition remains obscure. Dilip K. Chakrabarti highlights two factors which characterise the Mature Harappan level from the Early Harappan level as the proliferation in the craft specialisation, for instance, copper metallurgy; and the irrigation system. He argues that these developments led to a complex structure of society and a mature phase. Irfan Habib, the medieval historian, finds a uniformity in the mature phase. He also connects the abandonment of particular sites with warfare or fire. However, the destruction of sites by fire is contested by some scholars, arguing that it is a ritual.

1.3.2.2 Early Harappan Phase

The Early Harappan phase, spanning from 3300-2600 BCE, was a period of significant development in agriculture, trade, craft specialisation and settlement patterns that laid the foundation for the

mature Harappan civilisation. The sites, spread across Afghanistan, Baluchistan, the Indus region and northwest India.

Early Harappan Sites

- Mundigak (Southern Afghanistan)

- Quetta Valley - Damb Sadaat, Rana Ghundai and Periano Ghundai

- Central and Southern Baluchistan- Anjira, Togau, Nindowari and Balakot

- Indus region- Amri, Kot Diji, Mehrgarh , Rahman Dheri, Tarkai Qila (Bannu area, North-West Frontier Province), Levan and Sarai Khola

- Punjab and Bahawalpur

- Kalibangan (North Rajasthan)

- Sothi Bara and Siswal

1.3.2.3 Mature Harappan Phase

Urban Planning and Architectural Features of Harappan Cities

Urban planning during the Mature Harappan phase (c. 2600-1900 BCE) was characterised by large, well-organised cities with advanced urban layouts, including grid pattern streets, fortifications and well-developed drainage systems. Cities like Mohenjodaro and Harappa were laid out in a grid pattern, providing efficient and organised urban spaces. Most major Harappan cities were surrounded by large walls, sometimes with bastions, indicating a concern for defense and regulation of access. The cities also had well-developed drainage systems, with covered

drains connecting individual homes. The presence of large, centralised buildings, such as the Great Bath in Mohenjodaro and granaries in Harappa, indicates a high degree of social organisation and centralised planning. The cities were divided into distinct zones for residential, commercial and administrative functions, reflecting careful consideration of urban life needs.

Most Harappan cities were divided into two distinct parts: the citadel and the lower town. The citadel housed important administrative, religious and ceremonial structures and was fortified with massive walls, constructed using baked bricks. The Great Bath of Mohenjodaro, an architectural feature, was located in the citadel. The lower town consisted of residential buildings, marketplaces and artisan workshops.

The Harappans exhibited unparalleled expertise in water management and sanitation, with their cities equipped with an extensive drainage system, covered drains running along the streets and each house having its own bathing area and a drain connected to the main system. These features are particularly well-preserved in Mohenjodaro and Lothal.

The Harappans were pioneers in water conservation and management, with their cities featuring wells, tanks and reservoirs to address water needs. Dholavira stands out for its water management system, comprising large reservoirs made out of stone and connected to a network of drains.

The Great Bath (Mohenjo-Daro) is the most famous example of public architecture, believed to have held religious or social significance. Large granaries discovered at Harappa and Mohenjodaro suggest a centralised storage system for agricultural surplus, with raised platforms for ventilation and protection from floods. Assembly halls may have served as assembly halls or meeting places.

Fortifications around Harappan cities were with massive brick walls surrounded by bastions for defensive purposes. Market areas were strategically located, with Lothal being a significant trade hub. Granaries and storage facilities were essential for food storage and management and trade and commerce were vital aspects of Harappan cities.

Recap

♦ The discovery of Harappa

♦ Nomenclature - Indus Valley Civilisation

♦ Geographical Extent of the Harappan Civilisation

♦ Origin of the Harappan civilisation- theories- indigenous and foreign

♦ Phases of Harappan culture- Early, mature and late phases

♦ Significant sites and features of the early Harappan phase

♦ Mature Harappan phase

♦ Urban planning and architectural features of Harappan Cities

Objective Questions

1. When was the discovery of the Indus valley civilisation announced and who?
2. Who were the archaeologists involved in the initial discovery of the Harappan sites?
3. Which are the major Harappan sites in the Indus Valley?
4. Which sites maintained sea trade with the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia?
5. Which are the major semi-precious stones found in the Harappan sites?
6. Mention two names of Early Harappan sites.
7. Which are the sites reflecting the mature Harappan phase?
8. Which culture was dominant in the Late Harappan phase?
9. Which river valley is the Harappan Civilisation primarily associated with?
10. What is the current state of our understanding of the Harappan script?

Answers

1. 1924, John Marshall
2. Alexander Cunningham, Daya Ram Sahni and Rakhal Das Banerjee
3. Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Chanhudaro and Allahdino
4. Sutkagendor and Sotka-Koh
5. Lapis lazuli and turquoise
6. Kot Diji and Amri
7. Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan and Dholavira
8. Cemetery H
9. Indus
10. Not yet deciphered

Assignments

1. Discuss the various scholarly perspectives on the origin of the Harappan civilisation. What evidence supports these theories?

2. Analyse the geographical extent of the Harappan civilisation. How did the environment shape its development and expansion?

3. Explore the evidence of trade and cultural exchange between the Harappan civilisation and neighbouring regions. What impact did this have on Harappan society?

4. Evaluate the urban planning and architectural features of Harappan cities. How do these features reflect the social and economic organisation of the civilisation?

5. Compare Harappan civilization with other civilizations in contemporary South Asia.

Suggested Reading

1. Allchin, Bridget & Raymond, *The Rise of Civilisation in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2007.

2. Chakrabarti, Dilip. K., *India- An Archaeological History: Paleolithic Beginning to Early History Foundation*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

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4 UNIT

Nature of Harappan Society and Culture

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to :

♦ familiarise themselves with the social, economic and cultural aspects of Harappan society

♦ evaluate the Harappan economy, its agriculture, crafts, trade and technological advancements

♦ analyse the Harappan religion, art and social organisation

Prerequisites

As we discussed in the previous unit, the Harappan civilisation, also known as the Indus Valley civilisation, was a Bronze Age civilisation that flourished until approximately 600 BCE. Its significance lies in its advanced urban planning, architecture, society and culture, which can be reconstructed through extensive archaeological findings. Archaeological excavations conducted during the 19th and 20th centuries have unearthed the hidden history of Harappan life till then. The excavations at the sites such as Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Dholavira yielded a mine of artefacts, including pottery, seals, tools and terracotta figurines. These artefacts provide insights into the daily lives, economic activities and cultural practices of the Harappan people.

The economic base of the Harappan civilisation was primarily based on agriculture, alongwith animal husbandry and trade. The fertile plains of the Indus River facilitated agricultural production, which was essential for sustaining large urban populations. The discovery of granaries and evidence of crop cultivation, including wheat and barley, indicates that the Harappans were skilled farmers.

The Harappan society was likely characterised by a degree of social stratification, with varying house sizes and public buildings. These structures suggest distinctions in wealth and status within the community. The role of women in Harappan society is also a subject of interest, with artefacts suggesting their involvement in various economic and social activities. In this unit, let us discuss more about the nature and culture of the Harappan civilisation.

Key Themes

Subsistence method, Arts, Crafts, Technology, Trading networks, Social Stratification, Religion, Economy, Social Organisation, Culture, Society

Discussion

1.4.1 Subsistence Method of Harappan Civilisation

Harappan society was based on agricultural subsistence along with animal husbandry and hunting. Agricultural production tends to change with regional variations and climatic conditions. The archaeological remains from the sites suggest this variation in crop availability, i.e., wheat has been discovered at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, barley from Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Kalibangan and sesamum at Harappa. Along with these varieties, evidence of watermelon seed, peas and dates has been discovered from Harappa. The largest structure found at Mohenjodaro is known as the 'Great Granary'. The citadel of Harappa had almost six granaries. Adjacent to these structures, there were areas for threshing grain. Kalibangan also had granaries.

Remains of rice were found at Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal and Rangpur and that

of millets from Harappan, Surkotada and Shortughai. Evidence also suggests that they were aware of grapes and cotton. The mature site of Balu (Haryana) yielded more evidence of the plant-based economy. The site has evidence of various types of barley, wheat, rice, horse gram, green gram, chickpea, field pea, sesamum, watermelon, dates and grapes.

The discovery of the ploughed field at Kalibangan suggests that they might have continued using the plough even in the mature Harappan phase. Terracotta models of ploughs discovered from Bahawalpur and Banawali validates this point.

Along with plant-based dietary habits, the analysis of human remains in the coastal sites of Gujarat indicates that the people consume riverine and marine resources. There were remains of protein-rich elements in the people's diet. The discovery of marine catfish bone at Harappa substantiates that they have traded the dried fish within the cities.

Bones of many wild animals were found at the Harappan sites. These include deer, pig, boar, sheep and goat. Bones of tortoises and fish are also found. Skeletal remains of Rhinoceros were evident from Amri. Along with these, remains of elephants and horses were also discovered, but on a nominal scale. Harappan sites also yielded remains of domesticated animals. The remains include humped and humpless cattle, buffalo, sheep and goats. Cattle and buffalo were important domesticated animals. The discovery of dog figurines suggests that they were also domesticated.

1.4.2 Arts, Crafts and Technology

The discovery of various artefacts from Harappan sites implies people's technological awareness and standardised crafts. Harappan pottery showed efficient mass production of pottery, bricks and faience. Pottery kilns were found at Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Nausharo and Chanhudaro. Varieties of pottery have also been discovered. These include black on red pottery, grey, buff and black and red wares. Most of the pottery was wheel-made. The typical Harappan potteries were fine, strong and wheel made with a bright red slip and decorated with black designs. Some of the designs include fish scales and pipal trees.

1.4.2.1 Terracotta

Harappan sites have yielded an excess of terracotta including those of toy carts, figurines of animals like bulls, buffalo, monkeys and dogs, human figurines, bangles and others.

Fig. 1.4.1. Terracotta boat in the shape of a bull and female figurines. Kot Diji period (c. 2800–2600 BC)

Terracotta masks have been discovered from Mohenjodaro and Harappa. A distinctive feature of the Harappan craft was the making of high-fired bangles, known as 'stoneware bangles'.

1.4.2.2 Stonework

Stonework was another important craft activity. The stone sculpture of a bearded head found at Mohenjodaro is the best example of stonework. The eyes of the sculpture were half-closed, which indicates a state of meditation. Hence, scholars believed this could be an image of a priest and termed as 'priest king'. Along with this, a stone image of a lizard was discovered from Dholavira.

Chert blades were also found from Harappa. Some of these blades were used as knives for domestic and agrarian activities. Stone quarries have been found in the Rohli hills of Sindh.

1.4.2.3 Copper and Bronze Objects

The most famous art piece of the Harappan civilisation is the bronze dancing girl discovered in Mohenjodaro. The figure is dancing with head backwards, relaxed eyes and right arm placed on the hip and left arm hanging down. This image is considered one of the Harappan masterpieces of art.

Harappan civilisation is marked by its use of copper objects. Harappan artisans sometimes alloyed copper with arsenic, tin or nickel apart from using pure copper items. Copper and bronze items include vessels, spears, knives, swords, arrowheads, axes and fish hooks. The sharp tools like knives, axes and chisels were usually alloyed. Scholars suggest that the use of alloy increased over time. They insist that at Mohenjodaro, bronze tools have increased from 6 percent to 23 percent.

Sixteen copper furnaces were found at Harappa. At Lothal, copper workshops were found. A large amount of copper oxide was discovered at Mohenjodaro in a brick line pit. Archaeologists believed that copper objects were highly valued as they were buried along with other precious objects. Such hoard discovered from Harappa consists of a cooking pot with a bronze lid.

1.4.2.4 Gold

Gold jewellery like bangles, necklaces, bracelets, pendants and earrings were found at Harappan sites. At Allahdino, a hoard of gold, silver and semi-precious stones were found. They also used lead. While the two metals found from Lothal, which contain iron, suggest that the Harappans might have been familiar with iron smelting.

1.4.2.5 Seal Making

Seal making was another important craft activity of Harappans. Even though a majority of the seals were rectangular or square, some were cylindrical and round. The average size of a seal ranged from 2.54 cm to 6.35 cm. Most of these seals were made of steatite, but there is evidence of a few silver, faience and calcite seals.

Fig. 1.4.2. Seal with two-horned bull and inscription; Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, Ohio, US)

While two silver seals have been found from Mohenjodaro, copper and soapstone seals were discovered from Lothal. The seals have motifs including elephant, tiger, antelope, crocodile, humped bull, buffalo, rhinoceros and unicorn. Most of the seals have short inscriptions.

1.4.2.6 Bead making

New techniques, materials and styles of bead making were introduced by the Harappans. A new type of 'cylindrical stone drill' used to pierce the beads of semi-precious stone was found in Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Chanhudaro and Dholavira. The beads were made of steatite, carnelian, lapis lazuli, shell, terracotta, gold, silver and copper. The importance of this industry can be traced from the discovery of bead-making factories and tools and furnaces from Chanhudaro and Lothal.

1.4.2.7 Shell work

The evidence of beads, bangles and items of shell works indicate that the artisans were skilled in shell working. Bangles were often made from a conch

shell. Important centres of shell work were Chanhudaro and Balakot. The specialisation in shell work is evident in Gujarat. Nageshwar (Gujarat) is exclusively famous for shell working and bangle making. Other evidence of shell works comes from Kuntasi, Dholavira, Rangpur, Lothal, Nagwada and Bagasra.

1.4.2.8 Weights and Measures

Harappans were impressive for their standardisation.

Fig. 1.4.3. Harappan weights found in the Indus Valley,
(National Museum, New Delhi)

According to Kenoyer, the control from the state could be the reason for this high level of standardisation in crafts. The standardisation was noteworthy in the units of weights and measures.

Cubical weights made of chert and black stone have been discovered at all sites and these weights possess uniform weight in all zones. The binary system is used in smaller weights (1:2:8:16:32:64), while the decimal system is used for higher weights with a ratio of 160, 200, 320 and 640. The heaviest weight thus discovered is from Mohenjodaro, which weighs 10.856 g.

1.4.3 Trading Networks

The evidence of Harappan trade with other cultural zones opened a new understanding of cultural homogeneity. The importance of trade was clear from the range of material goods discovered in the Harappan zones. Since the trading activities happened before the introduction of coinage, scholars insist that the trade was based on the barter system.

The discovery of raw materials used by the Harappans helped to identify the inland and overseas trading activities. Excavations in the Rohri Hills suggest that chert blades were produced on a mass scale and sent to various Harappan settlements. The Khetri deposits in Rajasthan are an important source of copper. Lead and zinc probably came from Rajasthan. Tin was obtained from Haryana, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Gold might have come from Kolar fields in Karnataka. Gujarat yields a variety of beads and semi-precious stones. Lapis lazuli was obtained from Afghanistan.

Bronze and terracotta models of two-wheeled carts indicate that this could be their primary mode of transportation. None of the carts survived, but their tracks have been found at sites. Animals were also used for transportation purposes. Towards the end of the Mature Harappan period, there is evidence of the use of camels. Boats are depicted on the seals and tablets. The clay models of boats were evident from Harappa and Lothal. The dockyard found at Lothal also is considered as evidence of Harappan trade.

1.4.3.1 Long-distance Trade

The main source of information on long-distance trade was Harappan artefacts found outside the subcontinent

and numerous foreign objects from Harappan sites. Several Harappan objects were found in Turkmenistan. A rectangular Harappan seal with Harappan script was evident from Altyn Depe (Turkmenistan). Iran yielded Harappan objects of seals and carnelian beads. The important evidence of trade with Afghanistan comes from the trading outpost at Shortughai. A round seal discovered in the Persian Gulf had a short-horned bull motif and Harappan writing.

Harappans also traded with Oman. At Umm-an-Nar, a carnelian bead of Harappan type was discovered. Harappans exported items like beads, chert weights and ivory objects to Oman. Major imports from Oman include chlorite vessels, pearls and shells.

Harappan trade with Mesopotamia is noteworthy. The literary evidence of this brisk trade was evident from the records of the time of King Sargon (2234-2279 BCE). The record refers to the ship from the lands of Dilmun, Magan and Meluha. Meluha might be a generic term which comprises the Indus Valley. The archaeological evidence consists of Harappan seals and carnelian beads found at the Mesopotamian sites of Kish, Lagash, Nippur and Ur. Bull motifs on the Mesopotamian seals also reflect the Harappan influence. However, the absence of Mesopotamian seals from Harappa suggests that Mesopotamian traders were not directly involved in the Harappan-Mesopotamian trading activities.

1.4.4 Writing System

The language and writing systems of the Harappan civilisation are still covered in mystery. Scholars believed in numerous theories concerning script and language. People might have spoken different languages and dialects in various parts of the civilisation. Some scholars have suggested that the language belongs to the Dravidian language family, while others suggest its allegiance to the Indo-Aryan family.

A total of 3700 inscribed objects have been found at Harappan sites. Most of the inscriptions were short. The longest inscription has 26 signs. The inscriptions contain nearly 400-450 basic signs and the script is logo-syllabic. It means that each symbol stands for a word. Scholars believed that the inscription could be read from right to left.

1.4.5 Religious Activities

The basic idea of 'Harappan religion' was first propounded by John Marshall in 1931. One of the significant features of the Harappan religion was the worship of female goddesses associated with fertility. Scholars reached this conclusion by citing the evidence of terracotta female figurines discovered from various sites. These figurines were labelled 'Mother Goddesses'. The female figurines are found in sites such as Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Banawali.
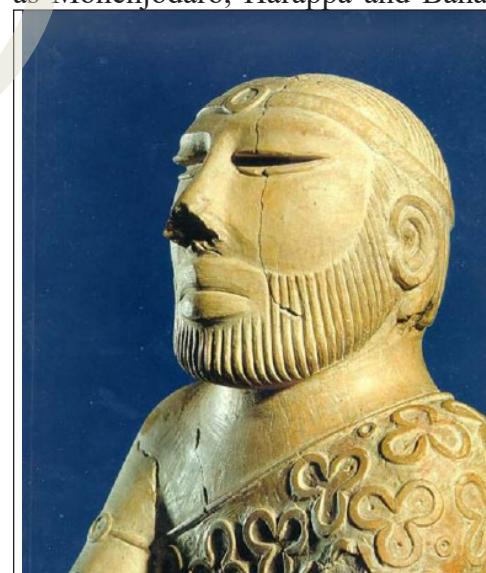
Fig. 1.4.4. Priest- King at Mohenjodaro

Marshall also suggests that the Harappans also worshipped the male god. It was represented in a steatite seal discovered at Mohenjodaro, called the Pasupati seal. According to Upinder Singh, "the seal shows a male figure with a buffalo horn headdress seated on a dais with legs bent double under him, heels together, toes pointed down". He is bordered by four animals- elephant, rhinoceros, water buffalo and tiger. Marshall saw the resemblance between this image and the Siva of Hindu mythology.

John Marshall has also identified some other aspects of the fertility cult of the Harappan people, in which males and females were worshipped in the form of icons of *lingas* and *yonis*. Later, George

Dales argued that these icons may not represent the cultic significance of the period but might have been used for astronomical or architectural purposes.

The seals of the Harappan period depict numerous trees, plants and animals. Scholars viewed these images in terms of their cultic significance. There are many instances where the pipal tree often appeared, suggesting its importance. Animals depicted include humped and humpless bull, snake, elephant, rhinoceros, antelope and tiger. These animals may have some cultic importance.

The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro has some ritualistic importance. Scholars believe it as a place for elite ritual activity, mainly ceremonial bathing.
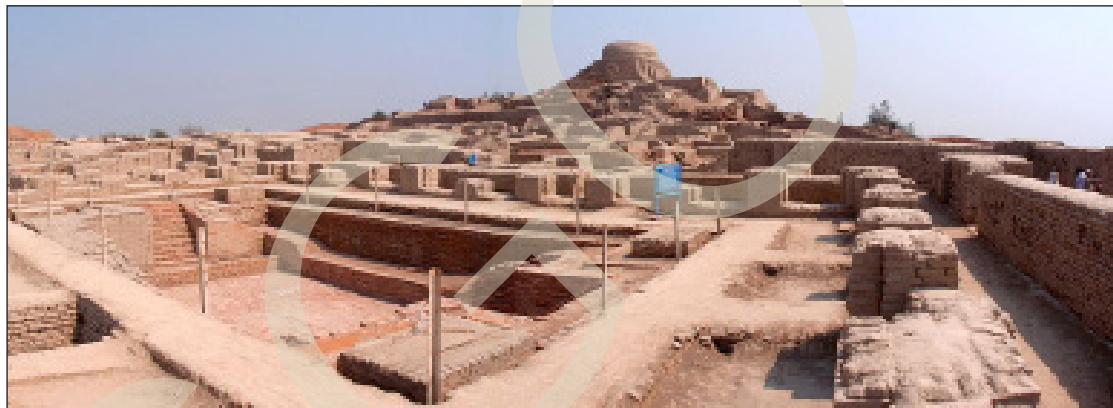
Fig. 1.4.5. Excavated ruins of Mohenjo-daro, with the Great Bath in the foreground and the granary mound in the background.

1.4.5.1 Sacrificial Rituals

The archaeological evidence from Harappan sites tends to validate the existence of sacrifice. For example, a triangular terracotta cake found at Kalibangan has carvings of deity on one side and an image of an animal being dragged by a human is shown on the other side, possibly suggesting animal sacrifice's prevalence. Another seal from the same

place where a woman is surrounded by two men holding her with one hand and a raised sword, suggests the probability of human sacrifices.

The most crucial evidence of the existence and prevalence of sacrificial rituals comes from the 'fire altars' found on the citadel mount at Kalibangan. These pits have been identified for offering sacrificial rituals. Fire altars have also been reported at Banawali, Lothal, Amri,

Nageshwar and Vagad in Gujarat and Rakhigardhi (Haryana). However, it is only at Kalibangan and Banawali that these altars may have some ritual significance.

1.4.5.2 Harappan Cemeteries

The cemeteries have been located at Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal, Rakhigarhi and Surkotada. The common method of burial practice was that the body of the deceased was placed in an extended position with the head pointing towards the north direction either in a simple pit or a brock chamber. Excavations also proved that the burials contained grave goods like food, pottery, tools and ornaments, indicating that the Harappans preferred to use wealth in their afterlife.

At Kalibangan, a symbolic burial has been excavated with grave goods but no skeletal remains. Harappa and Mohenjodaro gave the evidence of urn burials. In Lothal, burials of both men and women were discovered.

1.4.6 Harappan Society

The features of the Harappan people were traced from the human figurines in terracotta and sculptures. The female figurines wore necklaces, chockers, hair ornaments, bangles and belts. Scholars suggest that the Harappan women wore short skirts made of cotton or wool from the terracotta images.

Male figures were bare-headed, though some of them had turbans. Most of the male figurines were nude. Hence, it is difficult to say the kind of drapery which they used. In some stone sculptures, the use of a dhoti-like lower garment and a shawl over one shoulder has been found. Their hairstyles ranged from braids to bunds and some had loose hair. Both men and women had long hair.

Terracotta toys of various kinds were discovered from Harappan sites. These include carts, balls, rattles and whistles. The miniature terracotta cooking vessel, beds and other furniture have also been discovered, with which the children played.

The absence of deciphered evidence restricts history students from gathering information regarding the social setup of the Harappan period. Based on archaeological data, a few inferences can be made. The society comprised occupational groups such as farmers, herders, hunters, craftsmen, merchants, sailors and rulers. The level of social differentiation can be inferred from the sizes of houses and hoards of jewellery, which indicates that the wealth was concentrated among wealthy individuals with social and economic status. These people might comprise rulers, land owners and merchants. Scholars inferred that class and rank differences based on occupation, wealth and status might have existed. However, the notion of the existence of the caste system in Harappan society is hypothetical.

1.4.7 Debates on the nature of the Harappan Society

The debate on the nature of the political organisation in the Harappan society has opened more comprehensive questions among scholars on whether there was a state system or not. Moreover, if there was a state system, what was the nature of the state? Many scholars observed that the elements of warfare and conflicts in this civilisation seem weak compared to other contemporary civilisations like Mesopotamia and Egypt. Archaeological evidence of weapons is scarce from the Harappan site. There are few depictions of

the fight between people in terracotta and faience tablets.

Upinder Singh reflected that since the civilisation lasted for about 700 years, a continuing tradition of artefacts, symbols and traditions suggests a strong element of political stability. There must have been a group of rulers in various cities. The veracity of these groups and their identity is a mystery. These groups functioned for the cities, especially maintaining walls, drains and public buildings.

Stuart Piggott put forth the earliest assumption of Harappan political structure. Mortimer Wheeler supported his argument. Piggott suggests that the Harappan states were highly centralised empires under autocratic priest-kings from the twin capitals of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. He based his arguments on the level of uniformity of material remains, common scripts and standard weights and measures.

Urban planning and public works required a massive, specialised labour force. The 'granaries' at Mohenjodaro and Harappa symbolised the exercise of power over production, distribution and consumption.

The 'centralised state system' theory received criticism from Walter A Fairservis in 1967. He argued that Harappans did not have an empire or a state. According to him, Mohenjodaro was a ceremonial centre, not an administrative one. However, he modified his argument by suggesting the existence of some element of centralised administrative control and a class structure. S C Malik (1968) pointed out that the lack of monuments and supreme gods showed the lack of a strong and centralised state. According to him, Harappan polity is an example of the chiefdom stage, a transitional stage between kinship society and civil state.

Archaeological analysis of Harappan sites and other cross-cultural societies by Shereen Ratnagar suggests that there could be a 'Harappan Empire'. Jim Shaffer strongly critiqued this argument and concluded that the existence of homogeneity in the Harappan civilisation could result from a well-developed network of internal trade rather than a centralised government. He emphasises the lack of royal tombs, palaces, temples and social differentiation.

Scholars, therefore, assumed that there existed a form of state. It could be a different form of state. The communication system, standardisations, specialisation of crafts and mobilisation of labour and works indicate the economic complexity and the existence of a state system. Some of the buildings in the citadel could have been administrative structures.

Recap

- Means of subsistence of the Harappan people- domestication of animals and plants
- Harappan Art, crafts and technology
- Inland and overseas trading networks
- Writing system
- Harappan sacrificial rituals
- Harappan society
- Advanced urban planning and architecture of Harappan cities
- Debates on the nature of the state

Objective Questions

1. Where does the evidence of rice occur in the Harappan civilisation?
2. Where does the ploughed field discover in the Harappan context?
3. From which Harappan site were the pottery kilns found?
4. Which were the major kinds of pottery excavated from the Harappan sites?
5. Which Harappan site provides evidence of the sculpture of a dancing girl?
6. Which were the bead-making factories of the Harappan civilisation?
7. Which was the Harappan trading outpost in Afghanistan?
8. What type of urban planning feature divided Harappan cities into a citadel and a lower town?
9. Which Harappan site is associated with fire altars?
10. What does the discovery of granaries in Harappan cities suggest about their economy?

Answers

1. Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal and Rangpur
2. Kalibangan
3. Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Nausharo and Chanhudaro
4. Black on red pottery, grey, buff and black and red wares
5. Mohenjodaro
6. Chanhudaro and Lothal
7. Shortughai
8. Grid pattern
9. Kalibangan
10. Surplus food production

Assignments

1. Analyse the social structure of Harappan society. What evidence is there to suggest the presence of social stratification?
2. Discuss the means of subsistence and economic activities of the Harappan people. How did agriculture, trade and craftsmanship contribute to their economy?
3. Examine the belief systems of the Harappan civilisation. What archaeological findings provide insights into their religious practices and ideologies?
4. Evaluate the significance of art and craftsmanship in Harappan culture. How do artefacts such as seals, pottery and jewelry reflect their artistic values?
5. Discuss the technological innovations of the Harappan civilisation. How did advancements in metallurgy, urban planning and agriculture impact their society?

Suggested Reading

1. Allchin, Bridget & Raymond, *The Rise of Civilisation in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2007.

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5
UNIT

The Decline of the Indus Civilisation

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand various theories proposed for the decline of the Indus Civilisation

♦ analyse the archaeological evidence for the decline of urban centers and the transformation of Harappan society

♦ evaluate different theories and interpret archaeological evidence

Prerequisites

The Indus Valley civilisation which flourished around 3300 BCE to 1300 BCE. It was characterised by well-planned cities, advanced drainage systems and trade networks. However, by around 1800 BCE, signs of decline began to emerge, which in turn led to the eventual disintegration of urban life. Understanding the decline of the Harappan civilisation is challenging due to the non-decipherment of the Harappan script.

Various theories have been proposed to explain the decline of the Harappan civilisation. Each theory offers different perspectives on the factors that may have led to this significant transformation. One prominent theory suggests that environmental changes, such as shifts in climate and river patterns, played a crucial role in the decline.

Natural disasters, such as floods or earthquakes, have also been suggested as potential catalysts for the decline of the Harappan civilisation. Archaeological evidence from sites like Mohenjodaro indicates that some urban centers may have experienced catastrophic events that disrupted life and led to the abandonment of cities.

In this unit, we will engage with archaeological evidence, scholarly debates and various theories to understand the decline of Indus Valley Civilisation.

Keywords

Aryan Invasion Theory, Natural Hazards, Ecological Disturbance, Trade, Decline, Environmental Change, Climate Change, Archaeological Evidence

Discussion

1.5.1 The Decline of the Harappan Civilisation

At Mohenjodaro, the decline started around 2200 BCE. The archaeological data proves that the settlement ended by 2000 BCE. However, in some places, the civilisation continued till 1800 BCE. The archaeological evidence suggests that from 1800 BCE onwards, the urban phase of civilisation ended. Scholars assert that the pace of the decline of civilisation varied. Studies show that Mohenjodaro and Dholavira declined gradually while Kalibangan and Banawali show a sudden city life disintegration. However, the reasons for the decline of civilisation were not clear. However, numerous theories substantiate the gradual disintegration of this urban civilisation.

One popular explanation related to the decline of the Harappan civilisation was the Aryan invasion. The theory of Aryan invasion was first put forth by Ramaprasad Chanda (1926). Nevertheless, the theory was popularised by Mortimer Wheeler (1947). According to Wheeler, the references in the *Rig Veda* to forts, attacks on walled cities and the epithet *Purandara* (fort destroyer) must have some historical basis and these references could be the indication of the Aryan invasion of the Harappan cities. Wheeler substantiated his theory based on skeletal remains found at Mohenjodaro and asserted that these remains show proof of the Aryan massacre. The Cemetery- H-culture, according to Wheeler, represented the Aryan culture, proving the Aryan presence. However, he also accepted other possible causes like a flood, decline in trade and utilisation of natural resources for the decline.

The Aryan invasion theory received criticism from a group of scholars like P. V Kane (1955), Gorge Dale (1964) and B. B Lal (1997). They argue that it is spurious to believe a religious text with an uncertain date to determine the cause of the decline. Moreover, the archaeological sources never suggest any invasion as such. Therefore, there was no evidence of a military attack or conflict in the Harappan sites.

Fig. 1.5.1. Cemetery H house

Further, the group of skeletal remains unearthed does not belong to identical cultural sequences; therefore, these cannot be connected to the massacre. K. A. R. Kennedy's examination of the skeletal remains showed no intrusion of any new settlers. Hence, the Harappan civilisation was not destroyed by an Indo-Aryan invasion.

Natural Hazards, sudden or gradual, have an important role to play while dealing with the decline of a riverine civilisation. Several layers of the slit at Mohenjodaro give evidence that the city was affected by recurrent episodes of floods in the Indus River. The archaeological evidence suggests that the people of Mohenjodaro rebuilt their houses and streets on top of the debris after the flood receded. M. R Sahni, Robert L Raikes and George F Dales argue that the floods at Mohenjodaro resulted from tectonic movements. According to Dales, the tectonic movements may have occurred in Sehwan (90 miles downstream from Mohenjodaro).

R. L Raikes put forth another possible cause of the flooding of the Indus. He argued that the Harappan civilisation declined due to disastrous flooding resulting in prolonged submergence of the cities on the banks of the Indus. He insists that the Indus area is a seismic zone. Earthquakes might have alarmed the disaster. However, the theory of such tectonic movements was not convincing.

H. T Lambrick (1967) viewed that the Indus might have changed its course, moving eastward, destroying Mohenjodaro and its inhabitants. The Indus is an unstable river that keeps shifting its bed. The people of the city and surrounding food-producing villages might have left the area due to the scarcity of water. However, this theory too cannot explain the actual cause of the decline.

When Mohenjodaro may have been affected by excess water, the Harappan cities in Ghaggar-Hakra valley were affected by the scarcity of water. D. P Agarwal and Sood have introduced the theory of drying up of the Hakhra river. They believed that the Indus civilisation declined due to the increasing aridity and drying up of the Ghaggar-Hakra river. Their studies showed an increase in arid conditions by the middle of the second millennium BCE. This condition affected the semi-arid area of Harappan cities with a reduction in moisture and water availability, affecting agricultural production.

The Ghaggar river flows through Punjab, Rajasthan and Rann of Kutch. Rivers like Sutlej and Yamuna were its tributaries. Because of some tectonic disturbances, the Ghaggar river was left waterless, which would have affected the towns in this area. The ecological imbalance eventually brought increased aridity in the area, which led to the decline of the Harappan civilisation.

Scholars like Fairservis tried to explain the cause of the decline concerning the ecological imbalance. He analysed the population and calculated the food requirements of the townspeople. He argued that the increasing population might have affected the ecological balance of semi-arid areas, which resulted in the depletion of forests, food and fuel resources. When the forests and grass disappeared, there were more floods and droughts. This depletion of the subsistence economy adversely affected the Harappan economy. In such a situation, there seems to have been a gradual shift to the areas that could offer better subsistence. Therefore, he argued that the Harappan community moved toward Gujarat.

Shereen Ratnagar has argued that the decline in the lapis lazuli trade with Mesopotamia was a factor in the decline of the civilisation. The archaeological shreds of evidence do not give direct evidence of the decline of civilisation. However, it indicates that the civilisation underwent a process of de-urbanisation.

Recap

- The decline in the urban cities
- Cemetery H culture and Aryan Invasion theory
- Natural Hazards- Tectonic movements, submergence of the cities, Mohenjodaro flood and Indus flood
- Increased population and the destruction of natural resources
- Shifting in the course of Indus River
- Aridity and drying up of river Ghaggar- Hakra
- 'Ecological disturbance'
- Decline in *lapis lazuli* trade with Mesopotamia

Objective Questions

1. Who propounded the Indo-Aryan invasion theory?
2. Who was the first to put forth the advent of Aryans?

3. Who popularised the theory 'shift in the course of the Indus River'?

4. Which scholar popularised the idea of ecological imbalance?

5. Mention some factors that led to the decline of the Harappan Civilisation.

6. What is one environmental factor that contributed to the decline of the Indus Civilisation?

7. Which theory attributes the decline of the Indus Civilisation to external invasions?

8. Which Harappan city is believed to have been affected by floods?

9. Who argued that the decline in the *lapis lazuli* trade was a factor in the decline of the civilisation?

10. Who introduced the theory of drying up of the Hakhra river?

Answers

1. Mortimer Wheeler
2. Ramaprasad Chanda
3. H. T Lambrick
4. Fairservis
5. Aryan invasion theory, natural hazards, the shift in the course of the river, the drying up of the Hakhra river, 'ecological disturbance' and decline in trade
6. Drying up of the Hakhra river
7. Aryan invasion theory
8. Mohenjodaro
9. Shereen Ratnagar
10. D. P Agarwal and Sood

Assignments

1. Discuss the various theories proposed for the decline of the Indus Civilisation. Analyse the evidence for each theory and critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

2. Evaluate the environmental factors that may have contributed to the decline of the Indus Civilisation.

3. Examine the social changes that occurred during the decline of the Indus civilisation.

4. Write a short essay on the continuity and discontinuity between the Harappan Civilisation and subsequent cultures in South Asia.

Suggested Reading

1. Allchin, Bridget & Raymond, The Rise of Civilisation in India and Pakistan, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2007.

2. Chakrabarti, Dilip. K., India- An Archaeological History: Paleolithic Beginning to Early History Foundation, Oxford University Press, 2009.

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6 UNIT

Post-Harappan Cultures

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the major post-Harappan cultures that emerged in South Asia, identifying their key characteristics and regional variations.

♦ analyse the continuities and discontinuities between the Harappan Civilisation and post-Harappan cultures

♦ evaluate the impact of post-Harappan cultures on the subsequent history of South Asia

♦ analyse the similarities and differences between different post-Harappan cultures

Prerequisites

The Harappan settlements in Sindh, Punjab and the Hakra Valley underwent significant changes around 1900 BCE. Archaeological evidence suggests that many settlements were deserted. There exists a debate among scholars on the 'decline' of the Harappan civilisation. While the urban nature of the period declined, the basic subsistence methods continued.

During this post-Harappan period, several distinct cultures emerged and evolved. These cultures retained elements of Harappan influence, such as pottery styles, agricultural practices and artisanal traditions, while also developing unique characteristics. Examples include the Cemetery H culture in Punjab and Haryana, the Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) culture and the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture. Many cultures prevailed and continued along with the Harappan civilisation and resurfaced as the significant cultures during the post-Harappan period. Let us discuss the characteristics of such post-Harappan cultures in detail.

Keywords

Copper Hoard, Ochre-Coloured Pottery, Painted Grey Ware, Northern Black Polished Ware, Post-Harappan, Regional Variations, Transformation, Continuity, Technology, Regional cultures, Chalcolithic, Material Culture, Social Organisation

Discussion

1.6.1 Transformation or Continuity- Post-Harappan Period

There is a scholarly debate regarding the nature of the post-Harappan period. Some considered it a continuation of Harappan culture, while others a change to de-urbanisation. R.S Sharma argues that without the urbanisation character, it is impossible to claim cultural continuity. The Harappan towns and their script disappeared and the structures were burnt.

Even though there is an argument that Harappan culture continued in some parts of north India, some historians refute it by pointing out the absence of Harappan features in the Painted grey Ware culture found in the first millennium BCE. The following PGW culture hardly witnessed any scripts, large buildings or urbanisation. These post-Harappan cultures were distinguished by their pottery types. The writing script of NBPW culture was in Brahmi script. The writing structure and the pottery type of this culture were very different from that of Harappan. It was noted for the usage of iron and currency. The usage of iron brought a tremendous change in the structure of the society during the fifth century BCE. After the end of the Harappan civilisation in 1900 BCE, the prevalent cultures had some interactions with the Indo- Aryan culture.

1.6.2 Post- Harappan Cultures

After the decline of the Harappan civilisation, the Indus Valley witnessed some cultures. Some elements found before the Harappan civilisation and continued with were also discovered from the post- Harappan level. One of the basic features of these cultures was the use of ceramics. Several cultures belong to the post-Harappan period, including Chalcolithic, OCP, BRW and NBP.

1.6.2.1 Chalcolithic Cultures

These non-urban and non-Harappan cultures emerged in various parts of the Indian subcontinent, distinguished by the presence of stone and copper tools and their geographical location, called Chalcolithic. Most protohistoric cultures are named after the sites where it was first identified, the region where it was dominated, or the pottery type that belonged to that period. Accordingly, there are many Chalcolithic cultures present. Some of the significant Chalcolithic cultures are - Ahar or Banas culture in Rajasthan (2100-1500 BCE), Kayatha culture in Madhya Pradesh (2000-1800 BCE), Malwa culture in Malwa and parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and Jorwe culture in Maharashtra.

Fig. 1.6.1. Chalcolithic cultures and Indus Valley Civilisation, Late Phase
(1900-1300 BCE

The new features identified with this chalcolithic culture include painting of Cemetery H culture and seals, amulets and terracotta bolsters belonging to Jhukar culture. Their houses were made of mud and followed a rural settlement pattern.

Several other chalcolithic cultures were prevalent in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, which was already continuing along with the Harappan civilisation. Ahar or Banas culture in East Rajasthan is famous for its copper smelting. Ahar site contains copper deposits. Malwa culture is another chalcolithic culture in the eastern region. Jorwe culture existed in the north Deccan region. Pottery, which was specific to each chalcolithic culture, distinguished each of those cultures.
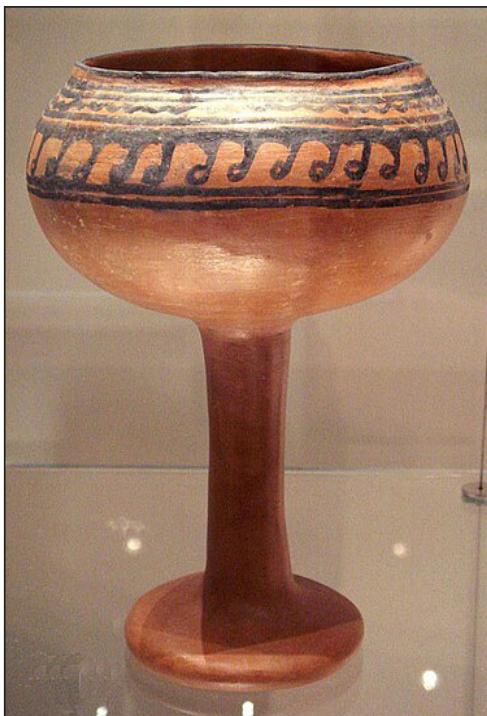
Fig. 1.6.2. goblet from Navdatoli, Malwa, 1300 BCE.

1.6.2.2 Copper Hoard Culture

The usage of copper marked the Chalcolithic phase distinctive from other lithic cultures. More than eighty copper hoards were located from West Bengal and Orissa to Gujarat and Haryana and then from Andhra Pradesh to Uttar Pradesh. These copper hoards contain rings, celts, hatchets, swords, harpoons, spearheads and anthropomorphic figures. Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh had the most significant and largest copper hoard containing 424 copper implements and weapons and 102 thin sheets of silver objects. Hundreds of copper hoards are concentrated on the Ganga Yamuna doab.

In order to identify certain regional cultures, they were marked based on particular pottery that dominated that particular site. The primary regional cultures named after the pottery types are listed below.

1.6.2.3 Ochre-Coloured Pottery Culture (2000-1500 BCE)

The chalcolithic sites in western Madhya Pradesh provide evidence for the Ochre- Coloured Pottery along with the copper objects and mud structures. Potteries were made of dark colours, mostly black and red, either treated by extreme heat or cold conditions. They were not baked properly and the paint was also done in a shallow manner so that it gets imprinted on anyone who handles it for some time. The designs used were much less as compared to the other pottery cultures that coincided with this period.

A Considerable number of Ochre-Coloured Pottery sites are identified in the upper part of the Ganga- Yamuna doab. Here the settlements began with the coming of the OCP people. Jodhpura, near Rajasthan, yielded the thickest OCP deposits of 1.1 m. OCP communities are considered to have interactions with the Harappans. Bahadarabad, Bisauli, Rajpur Parsu, Saipai, Ambkheri, Baheria, Jhinjhana, Lal Qila, Atranjikhera, Hastinapur, Ahichchhatra and Mayapur were identified as the OCP sites.

1.6.2.4 Black and Red Ware Culture (2000 BCE Onwards)

In the latter half of the twentieth century, excavations in Atranjikhera, Jodhpura and Noh in Rajasthan unearthed another level between Ochre Coloured Pottery and Painted Grey Ware level and came to be called Black and Red Ware. In certain places, it is also found with PGW.

BRW pottery was predominant from 2000 BCE onwards. This pottery was found in the settlements in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. BRW was also found in the habitations in Bihar and West Bengal. They were also found to be associated with paintings. BRW pottery was made of clay and was white linear in design. These wares were considered to be used for inverted firing. They were either wheel-made or handmade.

Fig. 1.6.3. Black and Red Ware

1.6.2.5 Painted Grey Ware Culture (PGW Culture)

Haryana and Upper Ganga Valley are the major PGW sites in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. PGW was first identified in Ahichchhatra. Other sites include Ropar in Punjab; Bhagwanpura in Haryana; Noh in Rajasthan; Alamgirpur, Hastinapura, Atranjikhera, Jakhera and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. The usage of iron was first marked in the PGW culture.

PGW pottery is wheel-made, grey in colour, painted in black and contains designs of bowls and dishes. They were usually thick and sticky in nature with designs and coloured over their outer core.

Fig. 1.6.4. Painted Grey Ware - Sonkh (Uttar Pradesh)

It got its name as Painted Grey Ware due to the immense use of ferrous oxide which turned grey on exposure to extreme hot conditions which was an essential procedure in the making of potteries not only in this phase but also in all other pottery related cultures.

Terracotta objects from the PGW sites include human and animal figurines, discs, balls and potter's stamps. The evidence for houses built in the wattle and daub method is found in the sites such as Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura, Atranjikhera and Jakhera.

An assortment of objects such as axes, chisels, fish hooks and arrowheads was in PGW culture. These objects were made of copper, iron, glass and bone. Iron was used to make spearheads. An iron made-sickle and hoe were discovered from Jakhera. Iron implements were found at all the PGW sites barring Hastinapura. It consists of a furnace, slag and tongs and iron slag. PGW people used ornaments made of beads of terracotta, glass, bone and semi-precious stones such as agate, jasper, carnelian, chalcedony and lapis lazuli. The semi-precious stones were not available at any of these sites. Hence, it indicates the practice of trade or exchange. While agate and chalcedony are found in Kashmir, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, lapis lazuli is available in Badakhshan province in Afghanistan.

Evidence of the cultivation of rice, wheat and barley was found from Hastinapura and Atranjikhera, respectively. The material remains of wild and domesticated animals are found in PGW sites such as Hastinapura, Allahpura and Atranjikhera, including bones of horses, cattle, pigs, goats and deer.

Fig. 1.6.5. Painted Grey Ware Culture (1200-600 BCE)

1.6.2.6 Northern Black Polished Ware Culture

The evidence of Northern Black Polished Ware was located at Taxila for the first time. Nearly 74 out of 1500 NBPW sites stretching from Taxila and Udgram in the northwest to Talmuk in east Bengal and Amravati in the south were excavated. Ropar in Punjab, Raja-Karna-ka-Qila in Haryana, Jodhpura in Rajasthan, Noh in Rajasthan; Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura, Atranjikhera, Kaushambi and Sravasti in Uttar Pradesh; Vaishali, Pataliputra and Sonepur in Bihar; Chandraketugarh in W. Bengal were the major NBPW sites.

Fig. 1.6.6. Painted Grey Ware Culture (1200-600 BCE

In some places, the NBPW level followed PGW levels and in some other places, it followed BRW and in other places, it was followed by Red Slipped Ware. NBPW culture was divided into three phases according to the frequency of pottery making.NBPW sites such as Hastinapura, Atranjikhera and Kausambi provide evidence for the construction of buildings on a considerable scale and it led to the emergence of cities. NBPW houses were built using burnt bricks and timber;

roofs with tiles. Some were fortified as well. Hastinapura site provides evidence of a drainage system.

Even though black is the prominent colour of the NBP wares, golden, silver, white, pinkish, steel blue, chocolate and brown were also seen in some NBP wares. Many items were retrieved, including tools, weapons and ornaments made of copper, iron, gold, silver, stone, glass and bone. The mid-phase of the NBPW culture had silver punch-marked coins and the usage of metallic currency was one innovative step observed in the NBPW culture. Like PGW culture, beads made of semi-precious stones, glass, clay, copper shell and bone were also found. A golden bead belonging to c. 300 BCE was located at Kausambi. There were bangles made of terracotta, faience, glass, shell, stone and copper; finger rings of copper, iron, horn and clay; and pendants of terracotta, agate and carnelian were also found.

Terracotta figurines found included that of human beings and animals, in which human figurines were cast in moulds. The female figurines were adorned with ornaments and dresses. The animal figures include horses, bulls, rams and elephants. Seals and sealings etched in the Brahmi script were one of the features of the later stage of NBP culture. Miscellaneous terracotta objects were found, including discs, balls and toy carts. The toy carts suggest the possibility of the cart as a mode of transportation. The remains of rice, wheat, barley, millet, peas and black gram were found. Some of the Buddhist texts mention the guilds as a part of this culture.

Fig. 1.6.7 Northern Polished Black Ware Culture (700-200 BCE)

1.6.3 Features of Chalcolithic Culture

Many of these chalcolithic cultures were tribal yet had the potential to become chiefdoms. In prehistoric cultures, archaeological evidence such as funeral remains, including grave objects, are one of the primary sources of revealing the existence of a hierarchical structure.

Inamgaon is a chalcolithic site near the Ghod river of Maharashtra, occupied during 1600- 1700 BCE. Based on the material remains found from a burial site in Inamgaon, M.K. Dhavalikar, an archaeologist, identifies the hierarchy and functioning of a chief. A granary was attached to a fortified house, which was identified as the chief's house.

Fig. 1.6.8 Chalcolithic Anthropomorphic figures Ganges-Yamuna basin, 2800-1500 BCE. Location: Bisauli, Badaun district, Uttar Pradesh

Moreover, many houses were identified in Inamgaon. The houses of the chalcolithic people were made of wattle and daub. Ahar people built their houses with stones. Inamgaon represents the Malwa phase from 1600-1400 BCE and has the earliest occupation of human beings during this period. It was followed by the Early Jorwe between 1400 and 1000 BCE and the Late Jorwe phase between 1000 and 700 BCE.

While the Jorwe culture was rural, some settlements, such as Inamgaon and Daimabad, exhibited urban nature. Daimabad is the largest Jorwe site in its extent and had fortified mud walls and stone rubble bastions. It also had bronze goods and was influenced by Harappan culture.

1.6.3.1 Domestication of Animals And Plants

The Chalcolithic people in South-Eastern Rajasthan, Western MP and Maharashtra engaged in the domestication of animals and agriculture. Domesticated animals include buffaloes, cows, sheep, goats, pigs and hunted deers. Other animal remains were also found in these places. They consumed beef and pork and produced wheat, rice and bajra. Sites such as Navdatoli in Maharashtra had pulses such as lentil, black gram, green gram and grass pea cultivated by the Chalcolithic people. Other crops produced include ber, linseed, millets, rai and Bajra. Cotton was also cultivated. Fish and rice were considered to be the diet of the eastern chalcolithic people.

1.6.3.2 Art and Crafts

Chalcolithic people were great coppersmiths and stone workers. Many tools, weapons and bangles made of copper were found. The spindle whorls from Malwa suggest the art of spinning and weaving among the chalcolithic people. Carnelian, steatite and quartz crystal were the semi-precious stones used for bead making. The cloth making is reflected in the evidence such as cotton flax and silk threads found in Maharashtra. Inamgaon provides evidence of potters, ivory carvers, lime makers, smiths and terracotta artisans.

1.6.3.3 Religious Beliefs

Grave goods from the burials suggest the hierarchy existed in the chalcolithic society. The terracotta figurines found in Inamgaon indicate the worshipping of women as mother goddesses. The bull terracotta from Malwa and Rajasthan demonstrates that the bulls were used in a religious cult.

1.6.4 Disappearance of Chalcolithic Cultures

In central and western India, the chalcolithic culture disappeared by 1200 BCE. However, the Jorwe culture lasted till 700 BCE. and BRW pottery existed till the 2nd century BCE. Even though it ended in central and western India, there was a pause between the end of the chalcolithic culture and the early historic cultures.

In Western India and M.P, the decline of chalcolithic culture began at about 1200 BCE. and is related to the decline in rainfall. In West Bengal, it lasted for some more time. According to R.S Sharma, in Western India, the difficulty in digging the black clay soil in the dry season made it hard for the chalcolithic people to survive. While in eastern India, the red soil was one reason behind the immediate shift to the iron phase without any interval and it facilitated the practice of agriculture. Meanwhile, in the southern states of India, the chalcolithic culture was transformed into iron using Megalithic culture.

Recap

- ♦ Debate on the continuity of the Harappan culture
- ♦ The disappearance of Harappan towns and script
- ♦ Chalcolithic age and the presence of stone and copper tools
- ♦ Chalcolithic cultures- Ahar, Kayatha, Malwa culture and Jorwe
- ♦ Cemetery H culture
- ♦ Copper hoard culture and Ganga Yamuna doab
- ♦ Pottery cultures- OCP, BRW, PGW, NBPW
- ♦ Subsistence method and other features
- ♦ Burial practices
- ♦ The disappearance of Chalcolithic cultures

Objective Questions

1. Which are the major post- Harappan cultures?
2. Mention some of the influential Chalcolithic cultures.
3. Which chalcolithic site had the largest copper hoard?
4. Which are the sites identified as OCP culture?
5. Mention the names of major PGW sites.
6. Which script was used on the seals and sealings of the later stage of NBPW culture?
7. Which metal marked the Chalcolithic phase distinctive from other lithic cultures?
8. Which post-Harappan culture is linked with the Malwa region?
9. What type of metal tools became prevalent during the post-Harappan period?
10. Which is the largest Jorwe site in its extent and had fortified mud walls and stone rubble bastion?

Answers

1. Chalcolithic, OCP, BRW and NBPW
2. Ahar or Banas culture, Kayatha culture, Malwa culture and Jorwe culture
3. Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh
4. Bahadrabad, Bisauli, Rajpur Parsu, Saipai, Ambkheri, Baheria, Jhinjhana, Lal Qila, Atranjikhera, Hastinapur, Ahichchhatra and Mayapur
5. Ropar in Punjab; Bhagwanpura in Haryana; Noh in Rajasthan; Alamgirpur, Hastinapura, Atranjikhera, Jakhera and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh
6. Brahmi
7. Copper
8. Malwa culture
9. Copper and bronze tools
10. Daimabad

Assignments

1. Discuss the major post-Harappan cultures that emerged in South Asia. Analyse their distinctive features and their relationship to the Harappan Civilisation.

2. Discuss the cultural continuity and change from the Harappan civilisation to post-Harappan cultures. What elements persisted and what new features emerged?

3. Analyse the regional variations in post-Harappan cultures across the Indian subcontinent. Discuss the factors that contributed to the diversity of post-Harappan cultures across South Asia.

4. Examine the material culture of post-Harappan societies, including pottery and tools. What do these artefacts reveal about their daily lives and economic practices?

5. Evaluate the social organisation of post-Harappan cultures. How did the decline of urban centers influence social structures and community life of the period?

Suggested Reading

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BLOCK 2

Vedic Age and PGW Culture

1 UNIT

Debates on the Original Home of the Aryans

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the diverse historical perspectives regarding the characteristics of Aryans

♦ understand the debates developed on the original homes of Aryans

♦ develop idea about the homeland of the Aryans on valid evidence

♦ understand the geographical expansion of the Aryans

Prerequisites

The decline of the Harappan culture, often attributed to environmental changes, shifting river courses and possibly declining agricultural productivity, occurred around 1500 BCE. Around this time, a new group of people, often identified in historical and linguistic studies as speakers of Indo-European languages, began entering north-western India from the Indo-Iranian region. These people, commonly referred to as the Aryans, are believed to have brought with them distinct cultural, linguistic and social practices that played a significant role in shaping the early Vedic civilisation. The general opinion is that the Indo- Aryan speakers from the Indo-Iranian borderland and Afghanistan migrated to the northern part of India in waves. Many orientalists and historians have made extensive efforts to determine the original homeland of the Aryans, but the question remains unresolved and highly debated. The quest to trace their origins has led to the development of numerous theories, each supported by varying degrees of historical, linguistic and archaeological evidence. Some scholars proposed Central Asia as the homeland based on linguistic connections within the Indo-European family, while others

suggested regions such as the Indo-Iranian borderlands or the Sarasvati River basin, emphasising cultural and textual interpretations. The 19th-century colonial scholars, like Max Muller, linked the Aryans to Europe and Central Asia, whereas modern historians, including Romila Thapar, have argued for linguistic and cultural classifications rather than racial ones. The controversy persists, as no single theory has garnered unanimous acceptance among scholars, leaving the original homeland of the Aryans an enduring enigma in historical studies.

Keywords

Central Asian theory, Artic region, Sapta Sindhu, Rig veda, Hungarian homeland theory, Indo-European

Discussion

It is still a debate among historians whether the Aryan's is a myth or reality. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Aryans were considered a racial group. However, with the continuous linguistic and archaeological studies, new opinions emerged from time to time. This unit will focus on the major theories that revolved around the Aryan debate.

2.1.1 Who Were the Indo-Aryans?

How the Aryans are characterised in historical narratives is a complex issue and two of the key questions still debated in academic circles are: who were the Aryans? and where did they come from? The word 'Aryan' was derived from old Iranian *Arya*, which was used in the Zoroastrian text *Avesta*. The composers of the *Rig Veda* considered themselves the 'Aryas'. The generally accepted notions among historians are that the Aryans

were the Indo-Aryan speakers living in Afghanistan's Indo-Iranian border and river Sarasvati area. However, there are different opinions among historians in defining the term.

The colonial scholars have a different opinion on the word '*Aryan*'. The nineteenth-century scholars interpreted the term '*Aryan*' to denote a group of people closely associated with certain languages. In 1794, William Jones, a British orientalist, first translated the term '*Arya*' as "noble" in his work '*Institutes of Hindu Law*'. The 'Aryans', according to Max Muller, a German Orientalist, are simply those who speak an Aryan language. The Aryans were fair-complexioned Indo-European speakers who invaded the dark-skinned non-Aryans of India.

According to Vincent Smith, an Irish historian, the term 'Arya' originally meant 'kinsmen'. This term was later considered to imply 'nobility' or 'respectability of

birth'. He further argued that the Indo-Aryans were the invaders or settlers who wrote the Rig Vedic hymns. They called themselves 'Aryans' or 'Indo-Aryans' in order to distinguish them from others. The Aryans were perceived as tall and fair-skinned.

According to Trautmann, an American historian, *Arya* is the word the Sanskrit speakers used to refer to themselves in contrast with other groups. Hence, Arya might be the name that the early speakers of Indo-European languages used themselves. According to A.L. Basham, a noted historian, said the *Aryans* were semi-nomadic barbarians who inhabited the Great Steppe land from Poland to Central Asia. These people were considered to be tall, fair and mostly long-headed. They migrated in bands toward the west, east and southwards by conquering local populations.

Modern historians based their argument on the theory of the common ancestral language of the Aryans. They rejected the racial labels attested by the colonial historians in defining "*Aryan*". Romila Thapar, an Indian historian, conceived the term 'Aryan' as a language label. Indo-Aryan belongs to the Indo-European family of languages and there is a linguistic similarity with some of the languages of West Asia and Iran. She tried to depict them as 'Indo-European speaking people' and 'Indo-Aryan speaking people'. The word 'Indo-Aryan' or 'Aryan' is the shortened form commonly used.

R.S. Sharma, an Indian Marxist historian, defines Indo-Aryans as the speech and its speakers who appear in India as a wave. Another Indian Marxist historian, D.D. Kosambi conceived Aryans as the people who first used Vedas as a sacred text, who spoke Sanskrit and worshipped Lord Indra. These people called themselves the *Arya*, which means "noble", "well-born" and "free". Upinder Singh, an Indian historian, understood the word as an ethnic or cultural term. Accordingly, the Indo-Aryans were the speakers of the sub-group of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages.

2.1.1.1 Debates on the Original Home of Aryans

As pointed out earlier, the original home of Indo-Aryans is a topic of ongoing debate among linguists, historians and archaeologists. Many held the view that Aryans came to the Indian subcontinent as immigrants. Throughout historical writings, there were different opinions regarding the identification of the original homeland of the Aryans. Romila Thapar argued that locating the home of Aryans originated in the nineteenth-century, because the period witnessed the increasing tendency of reading of Vedic corpus and subsequent philological studies. No surprise, the historians viewed the matter as the "Aryan Problem".

Historians like D.N. Jha, Romila Thapar and R.S. Sharma emphasised the point that the Aryans were initially regarded as a 'race' in India and Europe. D. N. Jha mentioned that Dayananda Saraswathi and Nazi Germany were carried away by notions of the superiority of the 'Aryans'. However, latest studies reveal that it is wrong to categorise the 'Aryans' as an ethnic or racial group. Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma and D.N. Jha argues that the expressions denoting the 'Aryans' are to be seen as language labels and have nothing to do with ethnicity. The

linguistic commonality between Sanskrit, Iranian and other languages led historians to identify the original homeland of Indo-Aryan.

2.1.1.2 Major Theories on Origin of Aryans

William Jones was the first to identify the similarity between Sanskrit and Greek, Latin and other European languages in 1786. Based on his studies, he forwarded the hypothesis that the Aryans lived either in central Asia or in Eastern Europe.

In his Lecture on the Science of Language (1861), Max Muller argued that the Aryans originated from Central Asia. He held that the ancestors of Indians, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Germans and Celts must have come from the same place. He validated his argument by suggesting linguistic similarities between the languages of these places. In his opinion, the Aryans might have originated in Central Asia, one branch migrating to Europe and the other settled in Iran. A segment of the Iranian branch subsequently migrated to the Indian subcontinent. He maintained that the Aryans had invaded the indigenous population of northern India in the second millennium BCE.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, an Indian nationalist, argued that the original home of Aryans was the Arctic region. This theory was advocated in his work "The Arctic Home in the Vedas" (1903). Tilak propounded that the Aryans initially inhabited the North Pole before the glacial period. After the Pleistocene period (period of repeated glacial formation), its climate and geography changed. This necessitated the Aryans to migrate from the North Pole to Europe and to Asia for new settlements. Hence, the Arctic region

has to be regarded as the original home of the Aryans. Tilak utilised the Vedic hymns, Avestic passages and the Vedic calendar to support his argument. A group of scholars like R.N. Dandekar and others supported the theory of the Arctic homeland of the Aryans. However, the Arctic theory was rejected due to its lack of scientific basis.

According to A.C. Das, an eminent historian, the original home of Aryans was the Sapta Sindhu region or the 'land of seven rivers', which has been identified as Punjab. He made his argument based on geographical references in Rig Veda. Das argued that the Aryans migrated from the Sapta Sindhu region to the west. R.C. Majumdar, an Indian historian, argued that the home of Aryans would be the valley of the rivers Sindhu, Drishadvati and Sarasvati. They were mainly confined to the present region of Punjab, but their outer settlements reached the banks of Ganga and Yamuna. Some Aryans stayed on the western side of the Indus, on the banks of Kabul, Swat, Kurram and Gomal rivers. Swami Dayanand Saraswati and F.E.Pargiter (a British Orientalist) argued that the original home of Aryans was Tibet. This view was expounded in the work Satyarth Prakash of Dayanand Saraswathi and Ancient Indian Historical Traditions of Pargiter.

In support of the theory of Indian origin, some scholars, like Ganganath Jha, B.B. Lal and others have argued that the north-western part of India was the original home of the Aryans. These scholars insisted that the Rig Vedic Aryans of India reached Iran and spread to Central Asia and Europe. They forwarded their argument based on the linguistic similarity of the Rigveda with the Iranian, Latin, Greek and Germanic languages. Considering the Indian origin theory, Romila Thapar argued that the

exponents of the theory of Indian origin might have aimed to propagate the idea that the Aryans and their language were indigenous.

The supporters of the Indian origin of Aryans also insisted that the Europeans and Iranians might have migrated from India. Henceforth, the Vedas were composed in India and thus had Indian origin. Those who support Indian origin argue that there were no traces of immigration of the Aryans into India in the Vedas or other Sanskrit texts. However, the critics of this theory held that the things familiar to the Aryans were not Indian. Plants that were known to Aryans, like birch, pine and oak, were not grown on the Indian plain.

P. Giles, a famous Scottish philologist, propounded the Hungarian homeland theory. He proposed this argument based on the birch theory. He found that the birch tree was common in Indian, Iranian, Germanic, Baltic and Slavic languages. Hence, the Indo-Europeans must have belonged to these areas, which led him to identify the homeland of Aryans as the Hungarian plain. This theory was rejected by Brandenstein, stating that there was a shift in the meaning of the word Bhergo, which denotes birch. According to Brandenstein, the Indo-Europeans might have lived in Kirgiz Steppe(northern Kazakhstan). It might be from here that the Indo-Iranian tribes moved eastward.

According to Lewis H. Morgan, an American anthropologist, the homeland of Aryans was located in western Siberia. He held that as Siberia became colder, the Aryans were forced to migrate. Based on the similarity between the Indo-European languages like Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Germanic, Slav, Romance, D.N. Jha postulated that the common homeland of Aryans might be from the steppes stretching from Southern Russia to Central Asia.

According to Romila Thapar, the 'Indo-European speaking people' had their original home in Central Asia. Gradually, they spread in search of pastures. Some groups migrated to Anatolia and others to Iran. Among the latter, some migrated to India. R.S. Sharma believed that the Aryans seem to have lived around the east of the Alps, that is, Eurasia. Sharma pointed out that certain names of plants and animals like goat, horse were similar in all Indo-European languages. He argued that the Indo-Iranians moved towards India from two broad regions of Central Asia.

The archaeological evidence of migration is evident from what is known as Andronovo culture or Proto-Indo-Iranian culture, which extended from Volga (Russia) in the west to the Chinese border in the east. The second piece of evidence was yielded from the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), covering Central Asia, including Bactria, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Andronovo culture demonstrated almost all elements of Aryan life. At the same time, BMAC shows the evidence of a domesticated horse, the terracotta image of the horse. Sharma, therefore, insists that the Aryans lived in the geographical area covering Afghanistan, North Western Frontier Province and Punjab.

The scholars who studied the 'Aryan Problem' concluded that those who speak the same language need not necessarily belong to the same racial group. Hence, many scholars conceive 'Aryans' as 'Proto-Indo-European language' rather than a single race.

2.1.1.3 Aryan Migration and Spread of Aryan Settlement

The Aryans might have migrated to India in several waves. They first appeared in Iran. The *Rig Veda*, the earliest Indo-European language specimen, contains names common in the Iranian text, *Avesta*. The two texts use the same name for several gods. Similarly, several Aryan names were found in the Iranian inscriptions, like the Kassite inscription (1600 BCE) and Mittani inscription (1400 BCE). These inscriptions suggest that the Aryans moved west from Iran.

It can be suggested that the Aryans appeared in India around 1500 BCE, with the arrival of Rig Vedic people. The geographical description of *Rig Veda* enabled the location of the Aryan settlements. R.S.Sharma and D.N. Jha insists that the Aryans lived in Afghanistan, Punjab and the fringes of Uttar Pradesh. The region where the Aryans settled in India was *Saptasindhava*, "The Land of Seven Rivers". This land seemed to indicate Punjab.

Jha also remarked that there might be an Aryan settlement in Swat Valley. However, the focus of Rig Vedic culture was Punjab and Delhi. The text mentions the names of rivers like Sindhu, Saraswathi, Drishadvati (Ghaggar), Sutlej (Shutudri), Vipas (Beas), Parushini (Ravi), Asikini (Chenab) and Vitasta (Jhelum). Hence, he opined that the geographical knowledge of Aryans does not seem to have extended beyond the Yamuna.

Inferring from the archaeological evidence, Romila Thapar opined that the Indo-Gangetic divide and western Ganga valley settlement could be traced back to the second millennium BCE. The upper Doab shows evidence of Later Harappan and Ochre-Coloured pottery culture. However, the archaeological inference suggests that the Painted Grey War`e culture dominated the region subsequently. She argues that the Painted Grey Ware culture seems to have spread from Rajasthan to Southern Punjab into western Ganga valley. This culture marks the beginning of a new society with evidence of pastoralism, agriculture and domestication of new animals in the early first millennium BCE.

The later Vedic literature was familiar with Ganga valley, that is, Ganga-Yamuna doab. Thapar opined that from the textual reference, it could be said that the initial settlement was in the northwest valley and plains of Punjab. Historians observed that the habitat of Rig Vedic times had shifted eastwards from Punjab to Haryana in the later Vedic phase. The eastward movement of the later Vedic times was evident from the text Satapatha Brahmana. The text provides the movement of Mathava from Sarasvati to Sadanira (east). At the end of the journey, he reached Videha (north Bihar). Hence, he is called Videha Madhava(the founder of Videha Kingdom). The detailed account of the story and the expansion is discussed in the following units.

Recap

- The original home of Aryan's is a continuing debate

- *Aryans* were not a race, but a language group, according to D.N. Jha, Romila Thapar and R.S. Sharma

- *Aryans* were called as 'speakers of Indo-Aryan or Speakers of Indo-European language'

- Max Muller opined that *Aryans* belong to central Asia

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak propounded the Arctic Homeland theory

- A.C. Das propounded the origin of Aryans from the Sapta Sindhu region

- Swami Dayanad Saraswati and Pargiter considered the origin of Aryans from the Tibet region

- The Indian origin of Aryans was supported by the likes of Triveda, Kalla, Ganganath Jha and B.B. Lal

- The Hungarian homeland theory was propounded by Giles

- According to Brandenstein, the Aryans lived in Kirgiz Steppe

- According to Morgan, the Aryans might have belonged to Siberia

- The migration of Aryans might have happened in waves

- They might have moved from Punjab to Haryana in the later Vedic phase

Objective Questions

1. What was the theory of origin of Aryans propounded by Max Muller?
2. Who advocated the Arctic homeland theory?
3. Who said that the original home of Aryans was the *Sapta-Sindhu* region?
4. Who propounded the Hungarian homeland theory?
5. Who said that the Aryans might have lived in Kirgiz Steppe?
6. Who were the Aryans, according to Thapar, Sharma and Jha?
7. Where do the Aryans first appear during migration?

Answers

1. Central Asian Theory
2. Bal Gangadhar Tilak
3. A C Das
4. Giles
5. Brandenstein
6. 'Indo-European Language speaking people
7. Iran

Assignments

1. Critically analyse the various interpretations of the term 'Aryan' provided by colonial and modern historians.
2. Explain the importance of the Kassite inscription (1600 BCE) and Mittani inscription
3. Discuss the major theories regarding the original homeland of the Aryans as proposed by William Jones & Max Muller.
4. Evaluate the Indian origin theory of the Aryans, considering the perspectives of A.C. Das & R.C. Majumdar.
5. Examine the role of archaeological evidence, such as the Andronovo culture and the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), in understanding the Aryan migration and settlement patterns

Suggested Reading

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4. Muller, Max, *Biographies of the Words and the Home of the Aryans*, Longmans Green and Co., London, 1888.
5. Majumdar, R. C.,*Outline of Ancient Indian History and Civilisation*, 1927.

Reference

1. Chakravarti, Ranabir, *Exploring Early India upto c. AD 1300*, Macmillan Publishers India, 2013.

2. Sharma, R S., *Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

3. Basham, A.L., *India's Ancient Past*, OUP, 2005.

4. Sharma, R.S., *Looking for the Aryans*, Orient Black Swan, 1995.

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2 UNIT

Vedic Literature

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand various Vedic literary works

♦ understand Vedic literature and its importance

♦ understand the role of Vedic literature in reconstructing the past

♦ understand the nature and content of Vedic and post-Vedic literature

Prerequisites

The Vedic corpus is one of the most important sources of information for the period ranging from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, often referred to as the Vedic Age. It is regarded as the earliest and most foundational literary tradition in Indian history. Consequently, the period of the Vedas marks the beginning of the historic phase of Indian antiquity, as it transitions from prehistory to a documented literary era. The Vedic literature encapsulates the original philosophy, societal norms and cultural practices of early Indian civilisation, reflecting a deep connection between the spiritual and material aspects of life.

Understanding the wide corpus of Vedic literature, including the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda, alongside the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, enables historians to reconstruct various facets of the past. These texts reveal an evolving image of the polity, economy and religious traditions over time. It is crucial to note that the Vedic literature does not represent a static period but rather a dynamic phase of constant change, marked by the gradual shift from a pastoral to an agrarian economy, the formation of political hierarchies

and the evolution of ritualistic practices into more abstract philosophical ideas. The literary phase introduced by the Vedas remains pivotal in understanding the complexity and continuity of Indian civilisation.

The Smriti literature, considered human-authored, complements the divinely revealed Shruti (Vedic corpus) and provides valuable insights into ancient Indian society, culture and thought. It includes a wide range of texts such as the Vedangas, which serve as auxiliary disciplines for understanding the Vedas; the Puranas, which preserve myths, cosmology and genealogies; and the great Epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which reflect moral, social and political themes.

Key Themes

Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, Aharva Veda, Samhita, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Smriti literature

Discussion

The Vedic literature consists of the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda, apart from numerous other literary works. These kinds of literature reflect the past according to the time in which they were written.

2.2.1 Vedic Literature

The main source of information about the Aryans was the Vedas. The Vedas can be considered as the oldest text of the Indo-European language family. The term 'Veda' implies knowledge. According to popular Indian observation, the Vedas are believed to have a divine source and eternal (nitya). Max Muller, a German orientalist, viewed the Vedas as a sacred text learned from the heart. Colonial historian Vincent Smith argued that the Vedas were the oldest text of Indo-Aryans. R.C. Majumdar argued that the Vedas do not signify individual literary work like "Koran" or the collection of books arranged at a particular time like Tripitaka or Bible. Instead, he mentioned that the Vedas are a "mass of literature which had grown in many centuries and was orally handed down from generation to generation".

According to Romila Thapar, the Vedas are manuals of rituals and commentaries of rituals. It is a collection of compositions from the period mid-second millennium to mid-first millennium BCE. Ranabir Chakravarti, argued that the Vedic Samhitas were divine revelations that were heard (sruti) by the sages. Thus the Vedas were called apaurusheya, which means 'not made by man'. It was essentially an oral literary tradition passed from generation to generation by memorising the hymns. The Vedic corpus essentially

provides an idea of the changes in polity, society, economy and cultural life of the Vedic people from the Rig Vedic period to later Vedic times. The literary work also covers religious life, rites, rituals, philosophical questions and prayers.

Nature of Chronology

The Vedic texts can be chronologically divided into two periods. The early Vedic literature (1500-1000 BCE) and the later Vedic literature (1000-600 BCE). The early Vedic text comprised much of the hymns of the Rig Veda. The composition of the remaining Vedas (Sama, Yajur and Atharva Veda), Brahmanas, Upanishads and Aranyakas and Smriti literature are regarded as the Later Vedic Literature. D.N. Jha remarked that the two phases of the literature showed the two different phases of Aryan expansion.

The question of the original date of the Vedic corpus is a controversial issue among historians. Hence, it is not possible to figure out an absolute date. However, historians forwarded a relative chronology of the texts. According to Romila Thapar, the language of the Vedic corpus was an archaic form of Sanskrit. Hence, the composition of these texts can be placed earlier than Epics and Puranas.

According to Ranabir Chakravarti, the chronology forwarded by Max Muller is considered neat and schematic. Muller placed the Rig Veda from 1200 BCE to 1000 BCE. The Upanishads and Aranyakas were dated from 800-600 BCE. The three later Samhitas and the Brahmanas were dated from 1000-800 BCE.

2.1.1.1 Sruti Literature

The Vedas were considered as Sruti, which means 'which has been heard'.

These Vedic hymns were handed down from generation to generation. William Jones defined Sruti as "what was heard from the above", which means the Veda.

2.1.1.2 Samhita

The Samhitas referred to the text of the four Vedas. These comprise hymns, prayers, charms and sacrificial formulas. The four Samhitas are: Rig Veda, Sama Vedas, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. The Rig Veda can be assigned to 1500-1000 BCE. However, the Atharva Veda and Yajur Veda, belong to 1000-500 BCE.

The Rig Veda Samhita

The Rig Veda Samhita is a group of 1028 sukta (hymns) divided into ten mandalas. The 'family book' is considered as the earliest hymn of the Rig Veda. The family book of Rig Veda was composed in eastern Afghanistan and Punjab. The oldest family books of Rig Veda Samhita are books 2-7. The Shakala shaka (recension) is the only surviving recension of the Rig Veda. The Rig Veda Samhita contains hymns addressed to various deities. This Samhita is the earliest work in Vedic literature. Micheal Witzel, a German – American philologist, remarks that the contents of the family books 2-7 were arranged "according to the decreasing number of the stanzas per hymn". The hymns of Book 8 are dedicated to the Kanva family and Angirasas. The ninth mandala (Soma Mandala) is dedicated to Soma.

The first and tenth mandalas were considered as later additions. According to Hermann Oldenberg, a German Indologist, the tenth mandala has the largest number of hymns and observed that it clearly violates the arrangement of hymns compared to the other mandalas. The tenth mandala, therefore, is regarded as an interpolation

of the Rig Veda. According to Micheal Witzel, the tenth mandala is considered 'the great appendix' of the Rig Veda.

The Sama Veda Samhita

The Sama Veda Samhita comprised 1810 verses. It is called the "Book of Chants". A specific class of the Brahmanas called Udgatris sang these hymns during the Soma sacrifice. The Sama Veda is considered the earliest Indian text on music. The recensions (shaka) of the Sama Veda are Kauthuma, Ranayina and Jaiminiya.

The Yajurveda Samhita

Yajurveda Samhita is considered as the "Book of sacrificial prayers". It comprised hymns related to rituals like sacrifice. The Yajur Veda is divided into two recensions or (shakas): Shukla (White school) and Krishna (Black school). The White school of Yajurveda comprised only hymns, while the Black school comprised hymns accompanied by commentaries.

The Atharva Veda Samhita

The Atharva Veda Samhita was not originally included in the Vedic Samhitas. The Atharvaveda was originally called Atharvāṅgirasa, since it had two parts, the Atharvan and the Āṅgirasa. It is considered as the latest Veda and contains hymns from the Rig Veda. It is considered as a text of magic. The Atharva Veda Samhita deals mostly with charms, magic and spells. For this reason, this Samhita was not included in the Vedic literature for a long time.

2.1.1.3 Brahmanas

The Brahmans are the explanations for the Vedic Samhitas mainly for rituals. They explain the meaning of each sacrifice and the method of performing each sacrifice.

These were mainly composed in prose. The Brahmanas were included in the category of later Vedic compositions. Historians dated the composition of the Brahmanas around the first millennium BCE. V.D. Mahajan opined that Brahmanas could be considered the transition from Vedic to later brahmanical social order. He defines Brahmanas as commentaries of the hymns in the Vedas. According to Upinder Singh, the Brahmanas are the prose explanations of the Samhita portion and give detailed explanations of rituals and their outcome.

Each Vedic Samhita has its own Brahmana. The Brahmana of Rig Veda are the Kauhitaki Brahmana and the Aitreya Brahmana. The Brahmana of Rig Veda explains the importance of the priest Hotri. The three Brahmanas are associated with the Sama Veda. Those were Tandya Mahabrahmana, Sadvinsa Brahmana and Jaiminiya Brahmana. The Brahmana of Sama Veda also deals with the duties of priest Udgatri. The Satapatha Brahmana belongs to the white Yajur Veda. The Satapatha Brahmana gives reference to the cultural progress from Kuru-Panchala to Videha. It also contains the sacrifices performed by Adhavaryu priests. The Gopatha Brahmana is associated with the Atharva Veda.

2.1.1.4 The Upanishads and Aranyakas

The Upanishads and Aranyakas can be dated from 800-600 BCE. The Upanishads and the Aranyakas are philosophical discourse. The Upanishad means "sitting near", which means the "sitting down of the initiated pupil near the guru for a confidential communication of the secret doctrine concerning the relationship between the creator and the created individual".

The Upanishads seek to conceptualise unity and identity with Atman (self) and Brahman (universal being). This doctrine is expressed as "Tat Twam Asi". The Upanishads contain philosophical ideas about sacrifice, body and the universe. Many illustrative stories in the Upanishads imply the connection between Atman and Brahman. One of the examples is the story of Nachiketa, which is given in the Katha Upanishad. There are 108 Upanishads. Some important Upanishads are Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Chhandogya Upanishad, Taittiriya Upanishad, Aitareya Upanishad, Kena Upanishad and Kaushitaki Upanishad.

The Upanishads do not present an image of a consistent philosophy but contain the opinions and lessons of various guru's who know philosophy and religion. Aranyakas are philosophical speculations of sages in the forest. Hence, the Aranyakas are called the Forest Books. These were the concluding portion of the Brahmanas. It deals with mysticism and philosophy in particular and not with rituals.

2.1.1.5 Smriti Literature: Vedangas, Puranas, Epics, Secular Literature

Along with sruti literature, another set of literature is known as smriti, which means 'remembered'. According to William Jones, smriti means "what was remembered from the beginning".These texts were transmitted verbally through generations and were remembered. This literature was categorised as later Vedic literature. The Smriti literature includes the Vedangas, Puranas, epics and secular literature. To study Vedic literature, we can divide its composition into Samhita, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Aranyakas and the Smriti literature.

Vedangas

The Vedangas are called limbs of a Veda. These texts help in proper recitation, use and understanding of the Vedas. The six important Vedangas include Siksha (pronunciation), Kalpa (ritual), Vyakarana (grammar), Nirukta (etymology), Chandas (meter) and Jyotisha (astronomy). The text is generally ascribed from the fifth to second century BCE, the post-Vedic phase.

The Vedangas also comprise a huge corpus of texts known as the Kalpasutra. The Kalpa Sutras contain sayings on rituals. The Kalpasutra was divided into four subdivisions- the Srauta Sutra, Grhya Sutra, Dharma Sutra and Sulva Sutra. Both the Srauta Sutra and the Grihya Sutra relate to 600-300 BCE.

The Srauta Sutra deals with the Vedic sacrifices such as Aswamedha and Rajasuya. The Grihya Sutra contains norms for domestic rituals. The Sulva Sutra mentions the principles of geometry for the construction of altars. Thapar perceived these kinds of literature as normative texts on social and ritual obligations. The hymns composed were memorised and transmitted orally.

Secular Literature

Secular literature comprises the law books called the Dharmasutras and the Smritis. The commentaries of the Dharmasutras and the Smritis are called Dharmasastras. According to R.S. Sharma, the Dharmasutras were compiled in 500-200 BCE, while the smriti literature was codified in the first six centuries of the Christian era. These texts prescribe the duties to be performed by different varnas. They set rules for marriage, laws regarding property, punishments for theft, assault,

murder etc. Some of the Dharmasastra texts include Manavadharmasastra, Vishnudharmasastra, Manusmriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, Narada Smriti and Vishnu Smriti.

Epics: The Ramayana and Mahabharata

Epic literature like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the narrative of the society of the heroes. Unlike Purana literature, epics contain some explanations of the past. Historians like Thapar consider epics as not part of history. But they were seen as a way of looking at the past. The two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, belong to the smriti and itihasa categories of literature. Historians place the composition of the Mahabharata between 400 BCE and 400 CE and the Ramayana between 500 BCE and 3rd century CE.

The epics give us an insight into the social and political condition of the people. Initially, the Mahabharata consisted of 8800 verses called Jaya Samhita, which means collection dealing with victory. Later, the verses were increased to 24000 and came to be called Bharata, named after one of the earliest tribes. Subsequently, the verses were added to make the text 100,000 verses which came to be called Mahabharata or Satasahasri Samhita. The Mahabharata consists of 18 Parvas, comprising didactic, descriptive and narrative materials. The text mainly narrates the war between Kaurava and Pandava, which may belong to the later Vedic period.

The Ramayana consisted of 24000 verses and had seven kandas (books). The first kanda (Bala Kanda) and last (Uttara Kanda) are later additions. Historians believe that the text was composed later than the Mahabharatha. The excavations at Ayodhya indicate the settlement of the Northern Black Polished Ware phase, which can be dated to 700 BCE.

The Puranas

According to Romila Thapar, the Puranas were sectarian literature of later times. Therefore, the purposes of Vedas and the Puranas are different. The Puranas contain the information of perception of the past. R.S. Sharma argued that the major Puranas were finally compiled by 400 AD. There are 18 mahapuranas and many upapuranas.

The eighteen puranas include the Vishnu Purana, Narada Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Garuda Purana, Padma Purana, Varaha Purana, Matsya Purana, Kurma Purana, Linga Purana, Shiva Purana, Skanda Purana, Agni Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Markandeya Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Vamana Purana and Brahma Purana.

The composition of the Vedic corpus suggests that the Vedic corpus evolved through various centuries. The literature presents the image of continuing changes in the polity, society, religion and cultures. Kumkum Roy asserted that the period of Vedic corpus covered the period from post-Harappan cultures, including Grey Ware and Painted Grey Ware cultural sites of Ganga-Yamuna doab and the Northern Black Polished Ware phase of Ganga Valley.

Recap

- The Vedas are considered Sruti literature
- The Vedangas, Puranas, Epics, Dharmashastra and Niti Shastra belong to later Vedic literature
- The early Vedic literature (1500-1000 BCE) and Later Vedic literature (1000-600 BCE)
- The four Samhitas are: Rig Veda, Sama Vedas, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda
- The family book of Rig Veda II - VII is the oldest Vedic text
- The X mandala of Rig Veda is later interpolation
- The Sama Veda is a book of chants
- The Yajurveda consisted of hymns related to rituals
- The Atharva Veda is the last Veda
- The Brahmans are the explanations for the Vedic Samhita
- The Upanishads and Aranyakas are philosophical discourses
- The Vedangas are the limbs of a Veda
- Kalpasutra has four sub divisions- Srauta Sutra, Grhya Sutra, Dharma Sutra and Sulva Sutra
- The text dealing with dharma is the Dharmasastra
- The Ramayana and Mahabharata are smriti texts
- The Puranas are sectarian literature

Objective Questions

1. Which category does Vedas belong to?
2. Which all are the smriti literature?
3. Which are the four Vedas?
4. Which was the oldest family book of Rig Veda?
5. Which mandala of Rig Veda is the latest interpolation?
6. Which Samhita is sung during soma sacrifice?
7. Who sang the Sama Veda during soma sacrifice?
8. Which book is considered the earliest Indian text on music?

Answers

1. Sruti

2. Vedangas, Puranas, epics, Dharmashastra and Nitishastra.

3. Rig Veda, Sama Vedas, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda

4. Family book II to VII

5. Xth mandala

6. Sama Veda

7. Udgatris

8. Sama Veda

Assignments

1. Examine the nature and significance of the Rig Veda as the earliest Vedic text.

2. Analyse the role of Sruti literature in the Vedic tradition

3. Analyse the role of Dharmasutras and Smritis in shaping social and legal norms in ancient India.

4. Examine the historical significance of the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. How do these epics offer insights into the social and political conditions of the time?

5. Discuss the purpose and evolution of the Puranas in the context of Indian literature. How do the Puranas differ from Vedic literature.

Suggested Reading

1. Jha, D. N., *Ancient India: Historical Outline*, Manohar, 2009.

2. Kosambi, K.K., *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1956.

3. Majumdar, R. C., *Outline of Ancient Indian History and Civilisation*, 1927.

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Reference

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2. Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From Stone age to the 12th Century*, Pearson, 2009.

3. Thapar, Romila, *Early India from Origins to AD 1300*, Penguin, 2002.

3 UNIT

Rig Vedic Society and Culture

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the nature of the polity and everyday life of early Vedic people

♦ learn the Rig Vedic social division and stratification

♦ understand the features of the Rig Vedic religion

♦ understand the family structure during the Vedic period

Prerequisites

During the nineteenth century, the reading of Vedic literature and its in-depth study led to the different reconstructions of the past. The linguist traces the similarity in the language of the Vedic corpus with those of Greek and Latin. This encouraged the European scholars to formulate the theory of a common ancestral language, an Indo-European language.

The linguists, archaeologists and historians have different opinions on identifying the original homeland of the Aryans. The accepted notion is that the speakers of the Indo-European language belong to Central Asia. Gradually, they expanded as a pastoralist and migrated in search of pastures. Among them, a group migrated to India and called themselves 'Arya'.

The Rig Veda references these groups' activities in various spheres, like polity, economy, culture and religion. Hence, the Rig Veda is considered the earliest source of information about the Aryans in India. Though the literature does not provide information on events chronologically, it can be considered a relevant source for locating the life of early Vedic Aryans.

Keywords

Dasa and *Dasyus*, *Rajan*, tribal assemblies, *Bali*, pastoralism, *Dana-dakshina*, *Jana*, *Viś*, *Kula*, *Varṇa*

Discussion

The Rig Veda contains numerous stories regarding the period's society, polity and economy. One of the important stories was the Battle of Ten Kings. The exact motivation of the battle is doubtful, but historians believe it can be understood in tribal conflicts.

2.3.1 Tribal Conflicts

Fig. 2.3.1. Depiction of War of Ten Kings.

The *Rig Veda* refers to many tribes settled in the *Sapta Sindhava* region. The migration into Ganga-Yamuna Doab carries a few references to the conquests against the local population. According to the tradition, the Aryan tribes were divided into five tribes called *panchajana,* meaning 'five people'. The five tribes of Rig Vedic Aryans, referred to as the *Panchajana,* had occupied the *sapta*

sindhava region and inter-tribal conflicts marked this phase.

Romila Thapar is of the opinion that the migration into the Gangetic doab brings references to the tribal conflicts and battles. These conflicts involve the battle among significant clans. The most important battle is mentioned in book VII of the *Rig Veda* as the Battle of Ten Kings or *dasarajna*. The battle was fought between the Bharata clan and the confederacy of ten tribes on river *Parushni*, identified as Ravi. The Bharatas won the battle and established their supremacy. The Bharatas were also involved in the battle against *dasa* chief Sambara. Subsequently, in the later Vedic period, the Bharatas joined with the Purus and formed a new tribe called Kurus. The Kurus, combined with Panchalas, established rule in the upper Gangetic basin.

Thapar argued that the references to inter-tribal conflict come from the *Rig Veda* or earlier events in the later texts. The location of these events points to the area to the North West of the Doab. The indigenous population of this area was either being absorbed or pushed to the margins. According to R.S. Sharma, the Aryans succeeded in the battle because they had chariots driven by horses. He further argued that the Indo-Aryans

engaged in two types of conflicts. First, they fought with the pre-Aryans and secondly, they fought between themselves.

2.3.1.1 Tribal Chiefdom

It has already been pointed out that the Rig Vedic Aryans were organised into tribes. The *Rig Veda* mentions five among them as '*panchajana*'. The tribal chief was referred to as the '*rajan*'. He was their leader both in times of war and peace.

According to R.C. Majumdar, the nature of the tribal state varied in character. He maintains that in some cases, hereditary monarchy existed, while in others, the tribe shows the character of oligarchy. Along with this, a few states had a democratic organisation, in which the chief was elected through a village assembly. Whatever the form of government, he argued that the state was not absolute.

Historians suggest that it is difficult to equate Rajan as the head of the monarchical state. Sharma argues that the *Rajan* does not bear the epithets like *Bhupathi, Nrpathi* or *Adhipathi*. Instead, he assumes the titles like *gopathi* and *viśpati*, indicating the chief of the tribe or clan. The titles give us an idea of the functions and responsibilities of the chief and the nature of Rig Vedic polity and economy. Sharma further argues that the post of the chief was hereditary. However, the power of the *rajan* was limited to tribal assemblies.

Thapar argues that in the early stage *raja* or chief was merely the leader. The word *raja* is derived from the root 'to shine' or 'to lead'. He was regarded as the successful leader of a raid. Leadership in this phase required protecting cattle and clans and controlling the gazing ground or *vraja*. Hence, the words *gopa, gopathi* and *janasya gopathi* refer to the *raja*. Hence, the *raja* or chief was the leader of a raid or battle and the protector of the tribe. Thapar adds that when protection and social regulation became necessary, the chief was nominated by a capable protector. He gradually accumulated privilege and later amalgamated into kingship in the later phase.

According to Tripathi, the family (*kula*) was the basis of Vedic state. The *jana* (tribe) was under the rule of the chief. Historians argue that the idea of the territorial monarchy did not evolve during this period. The early Vedic text had no references to the *janapada*, which implies a territorial state.

2.3.1.2 Tribal Assemblies

The nature of Rig Vedic tribal assemblies has been interpreted differently by historians over the period. The nationalist historian R.C. Majumdar maintained that various assemblies existed to check the chief's authority. However, historians like Romila Thapar believed these assemblies functioned as 'clan gatherings'. According to R.S. Sharma, these were 'tribal or kin-based assemblies'. The most important were *gana, vidatha, sabha, samiti* and *parishad*.

● *Gana*

According to Thapar, *Gana* can be understood in two different manners. Firstly, *gana* can be identified as the sub-group in the *gotra* system. Secondly, it is also identified as the name of a common ancestor. She defined *gana* as a "special body of selected members who held equal status and formed a peer group".

● *Vidatha*

According to Rudolf Von Roth, a German Indologist, *Vidatha* is 'order' and then understood as 'assembly for secular, religious or for war'. According to Hermann Oldenberg, a German indologist, the term *vidatha* means 'ordinance'. Considering the nature of the composition of the *vidatha*, Sharma argued that it could be the earliest collective institution of the Indo-Aryans. The Vedic literature has mentioned *vidatha* 122 times, which indicates the significance of the assembly. Sharma defines *vidatha* as the "earliest folk assembly of Indo-Aryans attended by men and women, performing all kinds of economic, military, religious and social".

The members of *viś* or *jana* and *rajan* attended this popular assembly. The assembly held discussions on wars and political matters. The *Rig Veda* has a few references to the military nature of *vidatha*. This may indicate that *vidatha* might have been formed to conduct tribal wars.

Thapar conceived that *Vidatha* was also the gathering where acquired war booty was distributed and shared. It was also the gathering where the poets praised the exploits of the chief. Hence, it would be associated with cattle raids and heroic exploits. She also remarked that Vidatha could be equated with *yajna* because wealth redistribution was considered a ritual.

● *Sabha and Samiti*

Zimmer, mentioned that the *sabha* was the assembly of the villagers, while Samiti denoted the central assembly of the tribe, which the king attended. According to Arthur Berriedale Keith, a Scottish Indologist, the *Samiti* was "the assembly of the people for the business of the tribe" and *Sabha* denoted the "place of assembly, which served as a centre of social gatherings".

R.C. Majumdar maintained that the *sabha* was a 'village council', which served as a meeting place for general conversation, interaction, debates and verbal contests. He, therefore, maintained that the *sabha* tends to mean the 'local' and the Samiti as the 'central assembly'. According to Thapar, the *sabha* means the assembly of the kinsfolk, which makes its membership exclusive. The *Samiti* could be defined as the assembly of the clan. This appears to have been a more open assembly than the sabha. Upinder conceived the *sabha* as a small, elite gathering and the *samiti* was the general assembly presided by the *rajan*.

These two assemblies were considered the two daughters of *Prajapati*. Women attended the *sabha* and *vidatha* in the Rig Vedic times. While *samiti* was less exclusive. Sharma suggests that assemblies like the *sabha* and *samiti* were tribal. While in the case of *vidatha*, there is no direct evidence to prove its tribal character.

● *Parishad*

The term *parishad* is mentioned less frequently in the early Vedic texts. However, the assembly appears to have had a smaller membership. It might be a body of specialized advisers. Thapar argued that such a body might not be relevant to the political needs of the time.

2.3.2 Political Organisational Practices

As mentioned earlier, the chief or *rajan* was the protector of his tribe. He protected the cattle, fought for the cattle and often

made prayers for the cattle. The crowned queen is known as the *mahishi*. In the day-to-day administration, some functionaries assisted the chief.

Apart from the *rajan*, *purohita*, *senani* and *gramani* were the important functionaries who helped the rajan in administration. Purohita assisted the chief in the day-to-day administration. The *Rig Veda* has references to two priests, Vasistha and Vishvamitra. The *purohitas* received gifts by spells and prayed for their master's success. The next important official was *senani*. He was the head of the army. However, it should be noted that the king did not maintain any standing army. Instead, the chief gathered a militia where tribal groups like *vrata, gana, grama* and *sradha* performed the military functions. Sharma maintained that there was no special officer for revenue collection and justice.

The officer who enjoyed the pasture land is called *vrajapati*. He led the head of the family, called *kulapas* and *graminis,* to the battle. The military functions were entrusted to tribal groups called *gana, grama a*nd *sardha*. Sharma argues that the titles entrusted to these functionaries do not indicate territorial administration. He insists that the Rig Vedic polity exhibits a tribal organisation suited for both defence and offence. The military organisation of such a government was still strong. It should be noted that there was no territorial administration or civil system because the people were engaged in continuous expansion. D.N. Jha insisted that certain rudimentary states had begun appearing in the Rig Vedic period, but the political system was based on tribal chieftainship, lacking a specific territory.

2.3.2.1 Sources of Wealth

As mentioned earlier, Rajan was the chief of the tribe, who protected and led the tribe in the battle. In return for this, people often offered him obedience or voluntary gifts. However, there is no reference to a fixed tax for the royal state. Romila Thapar, D.N. Jha and other historians suggest that the chief usually received booty from the people's cattle raids.

The king receives voluntary offerings called *bali*, from the people directly. Jha viewed *Bali* in terms of surplus production. *Bali* is a tribute to the prince or god. The tribute paid to the chief was obligatory, but there is no evidence to show it was compulsory. The priest received *dana* and *dakshina* after sacrificial rituals. *Dakshina* is the fee in the form of a gift to the person who performs the ritual.This type of Dakshina helps in the distribution of wealth. Hence, the institution of *dana* (gift) and *dakshina* (fee) established a closer relationship between the patron and the chief.

War booty was another source of wealth. The conquered booty was distributed among the clan. However, this distribution was unequal. The gifts were distributed mainly among the priests and heroes. The *dana-stuti* of *Rig Veda* gives affirmation to the distribution of wealth. Cattle, horses, gold, chariots and female slaves were often distributed to priests. Thapar suggests that the wealth was distributed amongst families of priests and chiefs and neglected the rest of the clan.

2.3.2.2 Pastoralism,Agriculture and Other Activities

D.N. Jha argued that the Aryans came to India as semi-nomadic people with a

mixed pastoral and agricultural economy, in which cattle reared. According to Sharma, the Rig Vedic Aryans had superior knowledge in agriculture. They were familiar with various agricultural practices and knew about different seasons. He argued that pastoral and nomadic life became prevalent after 6000 BCE when cattle and horses were domesticated. Thus agriculture was perhaps used mainly to produce fodder.

The Family Book of *Rig Veda* suggests that the major economic activity of the early Vedic people was cattle herding. Thus, cattle were the measure of wealth. Pastoralism is dependent on the assured grazing ground and the ability to increase the herd. This was the main source of wealth. The economy is dependent on an increase in the herd. The importance of cattle can be derived from the words containing '*gau*' as an epithet. The accumulation of cattle called '*gāviṣṭhi*' comes through breeding and capturing other herds. Thus, cattle raids were common. The other names of cattle raids were *goshu*, *gavyat*, *gavyu* and *gaveshana*. The winner of cows, *gojith* is considered an epithet for a hero. The capture of herders often accompanied cattle raids. The buffalo was known as *gauri* or *gavala*.

As mentioned earlier, the number of cattle determined wealth and the cow had a special status. *Gomat* was a term used for a wealthy man. Wealth was also computed by the number of horses, cattle raids and migrations. Horses were more valuable than cows. Since the cow was considered the main unit of value, the priests were often rewarded with cattle. Hence, cattle became the medium of exchange. The daughter was known as *duhitri*, which means mulcher of the cow. The cow was often described as an animal

not to be killed (*aghnya*). This reference explicitly implied the economic value of the cow. However, the cow was not held sacred at this time. There are references to the slaughter of cows and ox for food. Along with cows, goats and sheep were also domesticated.

2.3.2.3 Occupation

Along with cattle rearing, the Rig Vedic people were aware of agriculture. Agricultural activities can be considered subsidiary activities. The references to the agricultural activity in *Rig Veda* were fewer. R.S. Sharma points out that there are twenty-one references to agricultural activities in *Rig Veda.* The term *krishi* which means cultivating rarely occurs in the Family Books of *Rig Veda.* The term *hala* (plough) does not appear in the early text. Still, two other terms *langala* and *sira* occur in the earliest book that denotes plough. We have references to *phala* for ploughshare in the Family Book. It can be assumed that oxen often drove the ploughshares. Moreover, they used wooden ploughshare for cultivation. Other equipment includes a hoe (*khanitra*), sickle (*datra*) and axe (*parashu*). Copper pieces of equipment were not used for agrarian purposes.

The cultivated fields were called *kshetra* and fertile land were called *urvara*. Jha, Sharma and others argue that the Rig Vedic people have cultivated only one variety of grain, called *yava*. This suggests that the *Rig Veda* refers to barley (*yava*) cultivation. It is not certain that they cultivated rice. The word *vrihi* is taken as a crop in general and not precisely paddy.

The small-scale agricultural activities tend to pose the question of private property. Sharma and Jha argued that

there was no notion of private property of land in the early Vedic period. It was stated that the cultivation tended to shift from riverbanks to riverbanks due to the absence of iron ploughshare and sufficient water supply. This indicated that agriculture in a place did not last long. Besides, while considering the literary evidence, we can see that the early Vedic text makes references to the sale of cattle, goat, chariots and horses, but not the sale and gift of land. Hence, the 'individual ownership of land was absent.

The inference of agrarian activities like ploughing, sowing, reaping, threshing and winnowing occur in the latter portion of the *Rig Veda*. This indicated that the agrarian activity became more stable towards the end of the early Vedic period.

2.3.2.4 Crafts

The *Rig Veda* mentions artisans like carpenters, chariot makers, weavers, potters etc. All the evidence suggests that they were experienced in these crafts. According to Ranabir Chakravarti, the artistry activities were in their rudimentary stage because the occurrence of these terms in *Rig Veda* seems less in number.

The early Aryans did not possess advanced technology. Historians assume that they domesticated horses and used chariots and some bronze arms. Therefore, it is difficult to establish solid evidence for using iron from *Rig Veda*. However, their knowledge of metals seems to be limited. The *Rig Veda* references only one metal *ayas* (copper or bronze). Some scholars like B.B. Lal wrongly understood the term *ayas* in the sense of the iron. Scholars contested his argument by insisting that the term *ayas* mentioned in *Rig Veda* simply signify any metal in general. The term '*ayas'* also implied that they were

good at metalworking. Other metal objects mentioned in the *Rig Veda* include *kshura* (razor), *khadi* and *asi* (axe). Upinder Singh mentioned that it was not clear which metal these objects were made of.

2.3.3 Social Organisation: Tribe and Family

The social organisation of the Rig Vedic period was tribal in nature and was based on kinship. The socio-political units of the Rig Vedic period include *jana, viś , gana, griha* and *kula*. The kingship is based on these units. The *jana* in the *Rig Veda* can be translated as a tribe comprising several *viś* . The *Viś* means people or clan. The *Kula,* according to Sharma, is the semi-pastoralist group of unrelated families. The *Kula* or family was hence the smallest unit. He, therefore, argued that the Rig Vedic society was a typical clan-based society.

The basic unit of Aryan tribal society was *kula*, which is a patriarchal family. The *Kulapa* was the eldest male member of the family. He was considered the protector of the family. The birth of a son was considered a virtue. The Rig Vedic society was familiar with slavery. There are references in *Rig Veda* regarding the enslavement of men and women in the war. Upinder Singh remarked that the slaves worked in the household and were not employed for production activities.

The position of women was better in the Rig Vedic period. Women's education was not neglected. They attended rituals and sacrifices with their husbands. There are references to unmarried women like Visvavara and Apala offering sacrifices themselves. However, there are no references to women priests. Some women were credited with the composition of Rig Vedic hymns.

In the Rig Vedic period, the institution of marriage was established. Monogamy was a common form of marriage. Polygamy was known among *rajas*, while polyandry was unfamiliar. There is no mention of the custom of *sati* in the *Rig Veda*. We also have references to the practice of widow remarriage. *Niyoga* (levirate) was a practice of remarriage of widows to the husband's brother.

2.3.3.1 Divisions and Stratifications

The *Rig Veda* shows some awareness of the people's physical appearance in about 1500-1000 BCE. *Varna* in the early Vedic context implies colour and gives the impression that the Indo-Aryan speakers were fair and the indigenous inhabitants were dark in complexion. D.N. Jha argued that the term '*varna*' in the Rig Vedic period was used to demarcate the complexion between the Aryans and the indigenous people. However, some scholars used this term to explain the emergence of the *varna* (caste) system. The colour distinction may have given rise to social ordering in the *Rig Vedic* period.

The *Rig Veda* frequently mentions two *varnas*: *arya varna* and *dasyus varna*. The *Rig Veda* uses the term *Krishna-tvach* to denote the *dasyus*. This can be interpreted as 'dark skinned'. The *dasas* were denoted as *anasa*. The distinctive features of *varna* society like hereditary occupation, taboos on marriage, inter-dining are not seen in the *Rig Veda*. R.S. Sharma argued that the *Rig Veda* shows much more familiarity with terms like *jana*, *gana* and *viś* than with *varna*. All these terms point towards the existence of a clan-based social group and a simpler society.

The family book of the *Rig Veda* has the reference to the words '*Brahmana*' and '*Kshatriya*', but the term *varna* is not associated with these terms. Upinder Singh identifies these people as a group who enjoyed respect. Similarly, there are no references to the words '*Vaishya*' and '*sudra*' in the *Rig Veda*. Jha and Sharma insist that the important factor that led to the social division of the Rig Vedic period was the conquest of the *Dasas* and *Dasyus*. The *Dasa* and *Dasyus* were assigned to the status of slaves and the *Sudras*, respectively. Romila Thapar insisted that the meaning of the term *dasa* changed in the later Vedic phase. In the later Vedic text, the term *dasa* denotes who was made subordinate or enslaved.

Sharma further argues that the unequal distribution of wealth between the chief and priest led to social inequalities. The process of assimilation of non-Aryans into the Aryan tribe also resulted in the division in the society. The aboriginal non-Aryans were reduced to the lowest position in society. Eventually, the tribal society was divided into three occupational groups: warriors, priests and common people. The Sudras, the fourth division, appeared at the end of the Rig Vedic period.

Senior Lineage and Junior Lineage: *Viś* and *Rajanya*

Romila Thapar argued that the period impacted other aspects of social life. She referred to this change as the lineage system. The Vedic *jana* incorporated a number of *viś* (clan). At the time of Rig Vedic period, *viś* was divided into *viś* and *rajanya*. The *rajanya* constituted the ruling family. This bifurcation suggested the division into the senior lineage of *rajanya* and lesser or junior lineage called *viś*.

She argued that there was a close relation between *viś* and *rajanya*. The clan lands were held in common by both the lineage, but worked by the junior lineage, the *viś*. She explained that the large extended families of the Rig Vedic times encouraged the elder lineage in the family to exploit the younger members. *Viś,* as the junior lineage, provided dues to *rajanyas*. *The rajanyas* redistributed these as *dana* and *dakshina* to the Brahmanas as oblation offered at *yajna* ritual.

2.3.3.2 Religious Practices

Historians argue that the Aryans found it difficult to explain natural phenomena. They, therefore, personified these natural forces and attributed human or animal qualities. Upinder Singh identified this as naturalistic polytheism. She insisted that the gods were worshipped as an anthropomorphic form, that is, having a physical form similar to the humans.

The *Rig Veda* asserted that there are 33 gods associated with sky and earth, but the actual reference to the number of gods was even more. One of the features of Vedic religious belief is that there is no fixed order of importance to the gods. According to Tripathi, the Rig Vedic gods were broadly classified as (i) Terrestrial gods like Prithvi, Soma, Agni; (ii) Atmospheric gods like Indra, Vayu, Marutus, Prajana; (iii) Heavenly gods like Varuna, Dyaus, Asvins, Surya, Savitri, Mitra, Pushan. Some of the major gods who represent different forces of nature in human form were as follows.

The most popular divinity was *Indra*. He was called *Purandara* (breaker of forts) and was considered a warlord. Two hundred and fifty hymns in *Rig Veda* are addressed to Indra. He is also treated as the rain god with a fondness for feasting and drinking *Soma*. It often mentions *Indra* as *Vritrahan* which is 'slayer of *Vritra'*. The *Gandharvas* (heavenly musicians) were his servants. Their female counterparts were called *apsarasas*, who were beautiful and seductive.

The next prominent god was *Agni*. The word *Agni* means fire. He acted as an intermediate between gods and men. The *Rig Veda* testifies to two hundred hymns devoted to him. *Varuna* was the third important god next to *Indra* and *Agni*. *Varuna* was the upholder of the cosmic order (*rita*). *Soma,* considered the god of plants, was closely associated with *Indra* and *Agni*. In the later hymns, *Soma* was identified as Moon. *Marutus* personified the storm. The solar deities include *Surya* (the sun), *Savitri* and *Pushan* (guardian of roads and straying cattle). *Surya* drove away the darkness and was picturised as driving a chariot. The *Ashvins* are the twin gods associated with war and fertility.

Vishnu was a minor god and was mentioned infrequently. Some Vedic hymns were associated with *Rudra*. *Rudra* was later assimilated as *Shiva* in the later Vedic phase. The early Indo-Aryan gods included *Dyaus*, who was the father god. *Dyaus* lost its prominence in the later Vedic period. The *Rig Veda* gives some references to female goddesses, including *Ila, Aditi, Ushas* (dawn). *Ushas* is mentioned 300 times in the *Rig Veda* and there are twenty hymns focused on her. The word *Aditi* means freedom. *Aditi* gave freedom from sickness, harm and evil. Other minor goddesses were *Prithvi* (earth) and *Sarasvathi*.

The funerary practices mentioned in the *Rig Veda* consisted of both cremation and burial. They believed in life after death.

In this context, the evidence of heavenly paradise and hell were mentioned in the Rig Vedic text. However, the later Vedic texts presented a more detailed description of heaven and paradise. The dominant mode of worship was through prayers and sacrifices. There are references to several sacrifices, both domestic and public sacrifices in the *Rig Veda*. Prayers and sacrifices were offered to God by the entire tribe.

Recap

- Tribal conflicts occurred between Aryans and non-Aryans
- The Chief of a clan was known as '*rajan*'
- There was no hereditary succession of kingship
- The tribal assemblies checked the authority of the *rajan*
- *Bali* was the voluntary offering to the *rajan*
- The Rig Vedic polity was a tribal polity
- Early Vedic society was semi-nomadic in nature
- Cattle were an important form of wealth
- Agriculture was at a rudimentary level
- *Dana-dakshina* determines the relationship between patron and chief
- Social organisation was based on kinship
- Slavery was familiar among the Aryans
- Women enjoyed a respectable position
- Only two varnas: *Aryavarna* and *Dasyus varna*
- *Varna* in Rig Vedic period was not caste and it denotes colour
- They worshiped natural forces
- Goddesses were also worshiped

Objective Questions

1. What is *Panchajana*?
2. Which book mentioned the Battle of Ten King or *dasarajna*?
3. Who is *Raja*?

4. Which are the epithets of Rig Vedic *rajan*?

5. Which are the tribal assemblies?

6. Which was the council of an elder member of the tribe?

7. What was *samiti*?

8. Who assisted *rajan* in administration?

9. What is *bali*?

10. Who led *kulapas* and *graminis* to battle?

Answers

1. Five tribes

2. Book VII of *Rig Veda*

3. Tribal chief

4. *Gopa, gopathi* and *janasya gopathi*

5. *Sabha, samiti* and *vidatha*

6. *Sabha*

7. General assembly

8. *Purohita* and *senani*

9. Voluntary offering

10. *Vrajapati*

Assignments

1. Examine the role of the tribal chief (rajan) in Rig Vedic society. Discuss the different interpretations of his power and authority as proposed by historians.

2. Analyse the functions and significance of the tribal assemblies in Rig Vedic times.

3. Discuss the evolution of leadership and governance in the early Vedic period. How did the concept of the raja or chief change over time according to historians

4. Discuss the sources of wealth in Rig Vedic society, focusing on the roles of bali, war booty and cattle raids

5. How did the concepts of varna and the division between arya and dasyu influence the emergence of social inequalities and the eventual formation of a caste-based society?

Suggested Reading

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4 UNIT

PGW Sites and Material Culture

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the diversity of PGW levels

♦ understand the significance of PGW material culture in social formation

♦ examine the features of urbanism

♦ understand the uniqueness of the PGW pottery

♦ get awareness of the distribution of PGW sites

Prerequisites

Historians have been able to correlate the PGW iron phase with the material culture as reflected in the Vedic texts. This correlation helps us study in detail the nature of society and economy of the Indo-Gangetic divide and upper Gangetic plains.

The precise identification of the specific PGW sites had been crucial in making a realistic assessment of the geographical extent and the cultural context of the later Vedic phase. Therefore, understanding the geographical extent of the later Vedic phase is essential to locating various PGW sites.

It is estimated that the later Vedic texts were composed in the Kuru-Panchala region. The Kuru-Panchala region comprises western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and a portion of Rajasthan. Geographically, these areas cover the Indo-Gangetic divide and upper Gangetic plains. The archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of many Harappan and Painted Grey Ware settlements in Indo-Gangetic and upper Gangetic plains.

Keywords

Painted Grey Ware, Black and Red Ware, Iron, Pottery, Technology, Agriculture

Discussion

2.4.1 Later Vedic Sources

Historians unearthed later Vedic people's history from archaeological evidence and literary works. The later Vedic sources like Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda and the Brāhmaṇas were compiled in the upper Gangetic Basin from 1000-500 BCE.

During the period, archaeologists conducted numerous explorations and excavations in these sites for further history. They studied nearly 700 inhabited sites. These sites were called Painted Grey Ware sites because the majority of the artefacts were those of PGW pottery. This unit will discuss the nature of PGW pottery and material culture with the help of archaeological evidence.

2.4.2 Archaeology and The Study of Past

Archaeology is the study of the human past through material remains. The material remains include structures, artefacts, inscriptions, sculptures, coins, pottery etc. Archaeologists use this evidence to understand human behaviour. An archaeological site has deposits formed due to natural or cultural processes. The successive layers of deposits are called strata. The main focus of the archaeologist is to expose the stratigraphic layers around the site. Hence, archaeologists apply different techniques such as excavations and explorations to understand the cultural levels.

What does the term culture signify? Historians, archaeologists and anthropologists use the term 'culture' to explain something that includes the behaviour and ways of thinking of a group of people. Material cultures are the physical remains or objects excavated. In short, this forms the key source of information about the past. Historians have utilised these archaeological excavations and explorations to scientifically uncover the material culture of the past. Hence, the systematic excavations of PGW sites helped them to analyse the form, pattern, date and culture of the later Vedic phase.

2.4.3 Painted Grey Ware Pottery

The later Vedic people were aware of four types of pottery. These include the Black and Red Ware (BRW), Black Slipped Ware, Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and Red Ware. According to R.S. Sharma, the Red Ware pottery was the most popular among the four types because it had been found fairly all over western Uttar Pradesh. However, the Painted Grey Ware Pottery of the period was the most distinguishing pottery. It consisted of bowls and dishes.
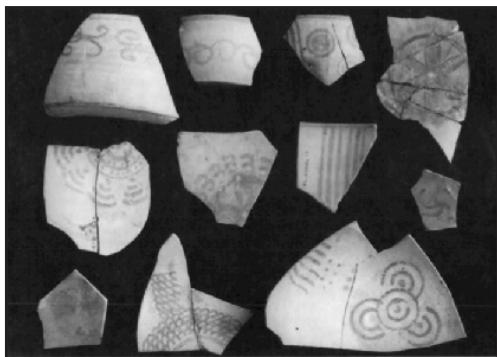
Fig. 2.4.1. PGW shreds
Source: B.B. Lal, Painted Gray ware culture of Iron age

The Painted Grey Ware was a thin, smooth, even coloured pottery. The colour of the pottery ranged from soft silvery grey to battleship grey. The pottery was well designed and comprised geometric patterns. These were simple geometric designs painted in black. Sometimes, swastika symbols also occurred. The floral images and naturalistic images were less common.

Fig. 2.4.2. Straight sided bowl
Source: Arunima Sinha, PGW Ceramic Assemblage of
Karsola, Haryana

The uniform colour of the pottery indicated the use of a refined firing technique. Upinder Singh contended that the potters might have employed uniform high temperatures in the kiln to get an even grey colour. Otherwise, the pot was fired due to the presence of black ferrous oxide in the clay. While some PGW pots have a reddish core, these could be the result of using local clay.

2.4.3.1 Dating

The dating of the PGW artefacts matches that of later Vedic texts. Some archaeologists push back the date of the PGW and iron levels based on carbon 14 dating from Atranjikhera from 1000 BCE to 500 BCE. However, Sharma observed that the dating pattern of other sites suggests that we cannot place the advent of iron in northern India before 1000 BCE. According to him, the date of appearance of the PGW may not be necessarily associated with that of the advent of iron. Because, in the other four PGW sites, the excavated pottery was associated with the 'Harappan' tradition and certainly did not have any association with iron. From the archaeological evidence, Sharma suggests that the PGW phase marked by iron in the upper Gangetic and Indo-Gangetic divide can be dated to 1000-500 BCE.

2.4.3.2 Painted Grey Ware Sites

The excavations at the PGW sites establish the presence of a settled life. Based on the thickness of the material, Sharma estimates that most of the PGW settlements must have lasted from one to three centuries. The dating of PGW pottery ranges from 1100 to 500 BCE. The sites in the northwest were perhaps earlier than those in the Ganga valley.

Sharma argued that there is nothing like an exclusive PGW culture because the sites also have artefacts belonging to black and red ware, black slipped ware, red ware and plain grey ware. He insisted that the PGW potteries were not predominantly prominent in any place. Hence, the PGW sites represented a composite culture comprising the Aryan and non-Aryan elements.

The epicentre of the PGW culture seems to be the upper Ganga and Sutlej basin. Widespread sites were discovered in western UP and Delhi (Kuru-Panchala region), Punjab and Haryana (especially in the areas of Madra kingdom) and Rajasthan (Matsya region). Of the total discoveries, archaeologists suggest that around 500 sites belong to the upper Gangetic basin. Sharma stated that around 700 PGW sites had been located in these regions.

The PGW pottery was first discovered at Ahichchhatra (UP) in the 1940s. However, the significance of the pottery was inferred only after the excavations at Hastinapur. The main concentration of the PGW sites is in the Indo-Gangetic divide, Sutlej basin and upper Ganga plains. The vital evidence of the PGW material culture is evident from sites like Hastinapur, Alamgirpur, Ahichchhatra, Allahpur, Mathura, Kampil, Noh, Jodhpur, Bhagwanpura, Jakhera, Kaushambi and Shravasti.
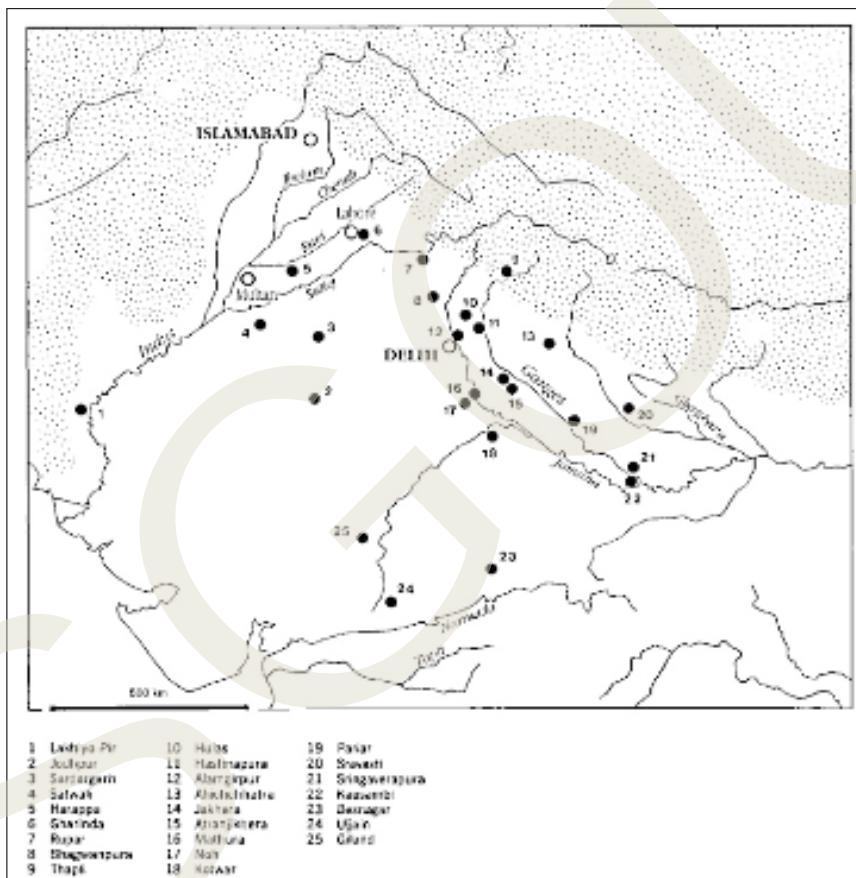
Fig. 2.4.3. Distribution of PGW sites

Source: B.B.Lal, Painted Grey Ware Cilture of Iron Age

Upinder Singh is of the opinion that the PGW occurred in four kinds of stratigraphic contexts. The sites like Rupar (Punjab), Daulatpur (Haryana) and Alamgirpur (UP) are preceded by a late Harappan level. Secondly, the sites including Bhagwanpura (Haryana), Dadheri, Katpalon and Nagar (Punjab) showed the overlap between the PGW and the Harappan phases. Thirdly, at Hastinapur and Ahichchhatra, the PGW

phase was preceded by the OCP culture (Ochre Coloured Pottery). Fourthly, the sites like Atranjikhera (UP), Noh and Jodhpur (Rajasthan) have the PGW phrase preceded by the BRW phase (Black and Red Ware).

2.4.4.Material Culture

Historians suggest that the excavations at the PGW sites indicate a subsistence economy based on rice, wheat and barley cultivation. R S Sharma opined that the PGW people had practised field agriculture, but iron implements were not used efficiently. So far, only one iron ploughshare has been discovered from the PGW levels.

The PGW levels at Atranjikhera yielded evidence of rice and wheat besides barley. However, bean, sesamum and millet have not been discovered from the PGW sites. The people might have grown two crops a year. There is no particular evidence of an irrigation system, but a few circular deep pits have been found from Atranjikhera. The site of Jhakera has yielded sickle, hoe and ploughshare. The PGW people have probably used wooden ploughshare instead of iron for agricultural purposes. Therefore, the peasants could not produce enough for others who engaged in other professions. Hence, the peasants could not contribute much to the rise of towns. R.S. Sharma, therefore, remarked that the PGW settlements do not clarify their character as urban. It can be better characterised as 'proto-urban'.

The PGW sites have also yielded evidence of bones of cattle, sheep, pigs and horses. The animal bones discovered from Atranjikhera and Hastinapur indicate that they consumed meat. Sharma mentioned that the evidence of animal bones does not signify animal sacrifices because there is no evidence of a sacrificial altar. The cattle killing can be considered as a trace of pastoralism, not for sacrifice. Though the remains of a horse have been found at Hastinapur, it is not clear whether it is used for food. Sharma has also mentioned that the remains of the horse have not been retrieved from any other PGW sites.

The PGW period is well-known for the use of iron. Sharma concluded that the earlier phase of the PGW did not use iron on the basis of excavations conducted at Bhagwanpura (Haryana). However, the PGW sites in the Indo-Gangetic divide and upper Gangetic plains revealed the link with iron implements. The artefacts include spearheads, arrowheads, hooks etc. This suggests that the use of iron was restricted to making weapons.

Sharma insisted that based on the discovery of iron objects from Punjab, Haryana, western U.P. and areas of Rajasthan which belong to the period from 1000 to 500 BCE, we cannot substantiate the use of iron in handicrafts and agricultural activities. According to the archaeological excavations, the evidence of axes, hoes and sickles is rare and there is no evidence of iron ploughshare. Hence, the PGW phase was primarily an age of iron weapons and not of iron tools.

Why is iron not widely used by the people? Sharma explained this by citing two major possible limitations. Firstly, the rich sources of iron in south Bihar were unknown to the people of the upper Gangetic and Sutlej basins. Secondly, the people might have used the iron ores found in Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, Patiala and Kumaon hills in Uttar Pradesh. However, these ores were not rich in deposits and were located in inaccessible areas. These

two reasons could have limited the people from accessing the metal.

From the technological point of view, H.C. Bhardwaj conceived the period 1000 to 600 BCE as that of primitive iron. The metallurgy was in a rudimentary stage. It can also be noted that the weapons were produced in limited numbers and probably under the possession of the chiefs. The wide range of iron objects excavated from the PGW levels of Atranjikhera and Jakhera showed that the iron industry was well developed.

Fig. 2.4.4. Potsherd of PGW with
concentric circular paintings
on the surface

Source: National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities,

Ref.No.CAC- CCA-PL-1209427

The PGW phase is relevant for the variety of pots discovered. The pots might have been used for serving food, cooking and ritual purposes. Tripathi insisted that the PGW seemed to have been a luxury used by the wealthy people. The two main pots were bowls and dishes. Historians infer the purpose of these PGW pots and dishes from the size of the hearths and ovens that have been discovered. The rows of hearths excavated from Atranjikhera show evidence of communal feeding. Also, a potter's kiln has been discovered from the PGW levels of Atranjikhera.

The later Vedic phase is marked by elaborate sacrificial rituals. However, Sharma insisted that the archaeological evidence to substantiate the ritual activities were scarce at the PGW levels. The circular fire pits that have been discovered from Atranjikhera might have been used for sacrificial purposes.

Sharma suggests that the analysis of the structural remains of the PGW sites indicated that they lived in wattle and daub and mud huts. However, unbaked bricks and one baked brick were excavated from Hastinapur. Jakhera, in the meantime, yielded large baked bricks, which suggests that these might have been used for ritual purposes. The excavations in the PGW sites also indicate the evidence of artefacts made of stone, bone and terracotta. Chert and Jasper weights were found at Hastinapur. Beads of semi-precious stones like agate, lapis lazuli and carnelian have also been discovered from different sites.

Recap

- The PGW phase could be dated to 1000 to 500 BCE
- Iron objects discovered comprised mainly weapons and armoury
- The PGW pottery had simple geometric designs
- The PGW phase can be considered a proto-urban phase
- The iron implements were scarce in agrarian and handicraft activities

Objective Questions

1. Where was the PGW pottery first discovered?

2. Which site has yielded baked bricks?

3. Which site has the evidence of chert and jasper?

4. Which site has fire burnt bricks?

5. From where did potter's kiln excavate?

6. From where Chert and Jasper weights were found?

7. Which period, H C Bhardwaj conceived the period as primitive iron?

8. Which PGW site yielded evidence of rice and wheat besides barley?

Answers

1. Ahichchhatra

2. Jakhera

3. Hastinapur

4. Bhagwanpura

5. Atranjikhera

6. Hastinapur

7. 1000 to 600 BCE

8. Atranjikhera

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of Painted Grey Ware (PGW) pottery in understanding the later Vedic period

2. Analyse the different archaeological techniques used to study PGW sites

3. How do the presence of both Aryan and non-Aryan elements challenge or support the notion of an exclusive PGW culture?

4. Evaluate the technological advancements during the PGW period, particularly in metallurgy and pottery

5. Discuss the role of animal bones and the evidence of animal consumption in PGW settlements. How does this reflect the economic practices and social structure of the PGW people, according to R.S. Sharma?

Suggested Reading

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5 UNIT

Raja, Brahmana and *Vis*

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand and locate the later Vedic Aryans

♦ identify the changes in the economy, society, polity and religion

♦ understand the transition from pastoralism to agriculture

♦ learn the evolution of the fourfold division of society

Prerequisites

The history of the later Vedic period is primarily derived from later Vedic texts, such as the Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda, the Brahmanas and the Upanishads, along with archaeological evidence from key sites. This period, which spans approximately from 1000 BCE to 600 BCE, marks a significant phase of transformation in Aryan society. It was during this time that the Aryans not only composed the core Vedic texts but also underwent profound changes in various aspects of life, including social, political, religious and economic spheres.

Geographical references in the later Vedic texts suggest that the Aryans were well-acquainted with the Gangetic valley, indicating that they had expanded beyond their original homeland in the 'Sapta Sindhava' region (the area around the Indus River) and migrated eastwards to the fertile lands of the upper Ganga valley. This migration was pivotal in reshaping Aryan society. The upper Ganga valley became a new cultural and political center, where the Aryans encountered and integrated with local populations, leading to the emergence of new social structures and economic practices.

The period also witnessed the crystallisation of the caste system, the development of iron tools and the rise of powerful kingdoms and chiefdoms, marking a shift from the tribal structure of earlier times. Additionally, religious practices became more elaborate, with the establishment of sacrificial rituals as central to Vedic religion. The composition of the Upanishads during this period further reflects a shift in spiritual thinking, moving towards philosophical exploration and metaphysical questions, which later influenced Indian thought for centuries to come.

Keywords

Agriculture, Iron technology, Crafts, Rastra, Assemblies, *Varna* system, Ashramas

Discussion

Let us begin our discussion with a story-the story of the king Prithu Vainya. Prithu is considered the first consecrated ruler of the ancient period. According to the *Bhagavata Purana* and *Vishnu Purana,* the King Vena was killed by the rishis, who were regarded as evil kings who neglected the Vedic rituals. This led to the kingdom without an heir; thus, the kingdom suffers from anarchy. So the rishis decided to churn Vena's body. At first appeared a dark dwarf hunter, which symbolised evil. Further, Prithu emerged from the right arm of the Vena's body. He then chased earth to get milk and fruits to end famine. This story depicts the evolution of man from hunter-gatherer to a settled life with agriculture and cattle rearing as their main occupation.

2.5.1 Material Life

The introduction of iron technology brought significant development in the material life of the later Vedic period. The later Vedic literature speaks of *syam ayas* and *krishna ayas*, which probably refer to the iron. According to Sharma, towards the end of the later Vedic period, the knowledge of iron spread in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha. The excavation from the two archaeological sites, Atranjikhera and Noh (Uttar Pradesh), confirms the use of many iron tools. However, the archaeological evidence suggests that most iron implements were used for defence purposes. Though the evidence of iron implements for agriculture was few, there is no doubt that agriculture was the chief means of revenue for the people.

The later Vedic Aryans followed a settled life, domesticated animals and practised agriculture on an extensive scale. D.N. Jha mentioned that the desire to increase cattle wealth still persists. However, the livelihood was mainly cultivation oriented, with cattle rearing

continued as the secondary activity. Agriculture slowly became the chief means of livelihood by the later Vedic phase.

The later Vedic texts also have evidence of ploughing. The ploughshare was made of wood and copper. There is no evidence to substantiate that the iron ploughshare was used regularly. The textual evidence from *Atharva Veda, Satapatha Brahmana* and *Taittiriya Samhita* suggests that the land was ploughed with the help of oxen. The *Satapatha Brahmana* speaks about the ploughing rituals. According to the legends, the king of Videha, Janaka assisted in ploughing. This means that the kings and princes did not hesitate to perform manual labour. Another example can be inferred from Balarama, who is called Haladhara or wielder of the plough. All these references suggest that ploughing was one of the major agricultural activities. Buffalos were also tamed for agriculture.

The later Vedic literature displayed clear evidence of the cultivation of the three major kinds of cereal, wheat (*godhuma*), barley and rice (*vrihi*). Rice (*vrihi*) is cited for the first time in the later Vedic period. The PGW site from Hastinapura yielded rice remains, which validated paddy cultivation. Beans and sesamum were also known. Jha insists that the expansion of agriculture does not imply the total disappearance of pastoralism. Pastoralism continued along with agricultural activities. The evidence of cattle bones and verses in *Satapatha Brahmana* refers to the existence of pastoral life. But, the growing importance of agriculture might have undermined the importance of the pastoral economy, which could not feed the increasing population of the period.

The *Satapatha Brahmana* gives evidence of the four main stages of agriculture. These include ploughing, sowing seed, harvesting and threshing. The *Taitreya Samhita* has the reference to different seasons and crops to be cultivated during these seasons. According to the text, barley (*yava*) was sown in winter and harvested in summer. We can also see that the idea of private possession of land gradually developed during this time. Thapar viewed that the decline of the clan in the later period led to the demarcation of the field, which directed the division of land among the families.

2.5.1.1 Crafts and Arts

The transition from pastoral to the agricultural economy also prompted the evolution of several new arts and crafts. The craft activities mentioned in the later Vedic texts include smelting, carpentry, weaving, leatherworking, jewellery, dyeing and pottery. The *Vajasaneyi Samhita* enlisted 19 artisans and professionals in the context of *Purushamedha* sacrifice. The specialisation of crafts was also an important feature of the period.

The later Vedic people were familiar with four types of pottery. These include Black and Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Painted Grey Ware and the Red Ware Pottery. The Red Ware pottery was the most prevalent type of the period. The Red Ware type was primarily found all over western Uttar Pradesh. However, the Painted Grey ware pottery (900-500 BCE) was a distinctive pottery. The Painted Grey Ware got its name because of its greyish colour and the exterior painting of the pot. The PGW pottery was first discovered at Ahichhatra (Uttar Pradesh).

Along with crafts and art, the later Vedic text refers to sea and sea voyages. This indicates the progress in the economic activities and the beginning of rudimentary commerce, in which the *vaishyas* might have been involved.

Money lending was first mentioned in the *Satapatha Brahmana*. The text mentions the lender of money as *kusidin*. However, Jha insists that there is no evidence of the use of money. The term '*nishka*' has sometimes been taken to mean a coin, but the evidence of coins cannot be ascertained. Thapar conceived '*nishka*' as the measure of value, perhaps in gold.

The pastoral and semi-nomadic means of subsistence reduce its importance with the increase in agricultural and artisanal activities. R.S. Sharma insisted that the people might have lived in houses made of mud bricks or in 'wattle and daub houses, erected on wooden poles. Ovens and cereals, including rice, were discovered from the site, pointing to the fact that the Painted Grey ware people were agriculturalists and led a settled life. They produce agricultural products for their subsistence as well as for the priests and chiefs. Since the peasants used wooden ploughshare, the surplus production was not adequate for the consumption of those people engaged in artisanal activities. Hence, Jha and Sharma opined that the peasants could not contribute much to the growth of the cities and towns.

The cities were described as *nagara*. Historians considered '*nagara*' as the beginning of urbanisation, which flourished towards the later Vedic period. Towards the end, we could find Hastinapur (Meerut) and Kaushambi (Allahabad) emerged as primitive towns. Sharma calls these towns 'proto-urban towns'. Sharma and Jha therefore, viewed that the beginning of urbanisation can be seen only towards the end of the later Vedic period. The activities of the later Vedic people suggest a significant advance in the material life of the people. The nomadic or semi-nomadic life of the Rig Vedic period matured into agricultural and settled life. The economy developed with the progress of diverse arts and crafts.

2.5.1.2 Territorial Identity

Historians like D.N. Jha, R.S. Sharma, Upinder Singh and Romila Thapar viewed that the social and material changes of the period brought significant changes in the political order. Kingship experienced changes during the later Vedic phase. The tribal character of the early Vedic period weakened with the growth of new political entities, which came to be identified as territorial units. Kings now ruled over specific territories and not the nomadic people who moved from place to place. These changes were marked by the gradual decline in the notion of the clan (*vish*) electing their *rajan*. Thapar insists that the decline of authority implies the subordination of the *vish* in the later period.

Jha suggests that the *Atharva Veda* referred to the word '*rastra*', possibly meaning that the notion of territory first appeared in this period. Hence, the formation of wider kingdoms enhanced the authority of the ruler. He says that the territorial notion of kingship can be validated by referencing ten forms of government (*dasha-purusham rajyam*) that prevailed in different parts of the country. He acknowledges this form of government as a 'territorial monarchy'. This means that kings now ruled over specific territories. The tribal authority of the Rig Vedic period gives way to the territorial authority of the ruler. Sharma comments that the later Vedic period did not experience a monarchical system, but it can be called a 'proto-state'.

2.5.1.3 Notion of Kingship

The development in social, economic and religious spheres illustrates changes in polity notions in the later Vedic period. The pastoral society of the early Vedic period eventually got converted into a settled agricultural society in the later Vedic period. Changes follow this transformation in the political organisation. The tribal chief of the early Vedic age, *'gopati'* became *'bhupati'* in the later Vedic period, signifying the changes in the agricultural society. With this, wars were fought for the land instead of cows. The king gradually acquired power and the kingship became hereditary. The ruler sustained the right to collect gifts and enjoy the privileges by making his office hereditary with his family. This means that the post of the king generally goes to the eldest son. The earlier notion of kingship based on election was ended. Therefore, it became clear that the kingship became hereditary.

Scholars like Romila Thapar and D.N. Jha has closely studied how kings derived their support. According to historians, the king derived their ideological support from the *brahmana*. The textual reference suggests that the king and the learned *brahmana* together would uphold the *dharma*. The *Atharva Veda* indicates that the king is conceived as the protector of the *brahmanas*. Jha insisted that the textual inferences could indicate the cooperation between the warrior and the priests. Historians like Thapar, Jha and Sharma are of the view that these Brahmanas legitimised the authority of the raja through elaborate rituals. These rituals were attributed to the *raja* with divine qualities.

The rising royal aspirations and the ambitions of the priest led to the development of sacrificial cults. The later Vedic texts provide evidence of new royal sacrifices and instructions. The authority of the king increased with the performance of the sacrificial rituals *like rajasuya, asvamedha* and the *vajapeya*. Romila Thapar has argued that these ceremonies were performed to place the raja close to God and the raja eventually came to be accepted as appointed by the God.

D.N. Jha thinks of the *rajasuya* as the coronation ceremony of the ruler. The *Aswamedha* sacrifice lasted for three days. Four officials, four wives of the king and their 400 attendants participated in this ritual. According to this ceremony, a specially consecrated horse was set free to roam for a year. The horse was carried back to the capital by the king. The horse sacrifice confers unchallenged control over the area where the royal horse ran undisturbed. The *Vajapeya* sacrifice lasted for seventeen days to a year. This ritual raised the ruler from 'raja' to a 'samrat', which allowed him to control several kings.

2.5.1.4 Assemblies

In the later Vedic phase, the Rig Vedic tribal assemblies lost their importance when the royal power increased. It is important to note that the *Vidatha* disappeared entirely from the political scene of the later Vedic period. Though the *sabha* and *samiti* had been identified in the *Rig Veda*, both these terms were frequently mentioned in the later Vedic literature. The *Sabha* and *Samiti* of the early Vedic period continued to exist, but their character was changed. The chief and nobles now controlled these organisations.

The sabha and samiti checked the growing authority of the later Vedic raja.

Historians initially thought there was only one assembly, the *samiti*. And the place where the assembly is held is known as *sabha*. However, the description of *sabha* and *samiti* as the 'twin daughters of *prajapati'* proves that both these are separate assemblies.

Thapar felt that *sabha* acted as an advisory body, in which *raja* was the final authority. Warriors and *Brahmanas* dominated the *sabha*. According to Ranabir Chakravarti, *Sabha* was a place of recreation. *Samiti* was attended by the ruler as well as the people in general. *Samiti* discussed matters of war and political aspects.

The character of the assemblies changed gradually. Either chiefs or wealthy individuals attended the meetings of the *sabha* and *samiti*. Women were not permitted to partake in the meetings of *sabha* and *samiti*. Thus, historians viewed *sabha* and *samiti* as becoming aristocratic with the beginning of kingship.

2.5.1.5 *Ratnins*

Other probable measures to check the power of the *raja* come from the *ratnins*. *Ratnins* were close associates of the ruler. The term *ratnin* was translated as 'recipients of treasure', but the term originally meant 'recipient of gifts'. According to the *Vedic Index*, the term *ratnin* is "applied to those people of the royal entourage in whose houses the *ratnahavis* (rite) was performed during *rajasuya* ritual".

Thapar holds that the *Ratnins* supported the raja's office on both symbolic and functional levels. During

the later Vedic period, we come across the name of twelve *ratnins*. The list given in the *Taittiriya Samhita* include *purohita* (*bramana*), *rajanya*, *mahishi* (chief wife), *vavata* (favourite wife), *parivrkti* (discarded wife), *senani* (commander of army)*, suta* (charioteer), *gramini* (village headman), *ksattar* (Chamberlin)*, samgrahitar* (officer in charge of royal treasury), *bhagadugha* (collector of tax) and *aksavapa* (superintendent of dicing). Thapar insisted that the twelve *ratnins* remain within the domain of the clan. It is difficult to consider *ratnins* as regular office bearers because there is little reference to the periodic assessment and collection of taxes. Some scholars hold that *ratnins* were forerunners of the ministers in the subsequent time.

2.5.1.6 Prestation and Taxation

The territorial monarchy established its strength from taxation, which began during this period. The settled life and agriculture resulted in adequate surplus production. The king collected the excess revenue in the form of voluntary presents like *bali* from his people called *vish*. The later Vedic literature contains references to terms like *bali, bhaga* and *sulka*. The text denotes these terms as various imposts or revenue demands of the king. The term *bali* in the *Rig Veda* denoted voluntary offering to the chief, while the later Vedic text denotes *bali* as an obligatory payment to the ruler. Thapar conceived *bali* as a present, which is different from the normal revenue demand. However, the rate of *Bali* is nowhere mentioned.

The taxes generally were paid in grain and cattle. However, the revenue collection was not done regularly. The *Satapatha Brahmana* mentions the king as

'*vishamatta*', which means the consumer of the people. The taxes were collected by an official called *bhagadugha*. He collected the royal share of the produce. The collected taxes were deposited with *Samgrahitri*, who was the officer in charge of the royal treasury.

2.5.2 Social Organisation

2.5.2.1 Varna system

Ranabir Cakravarti argues that the later Vedic text provides a social change from a simpler society to a more complex social organisation with strong differentiation. These changes were motivated by the agrarian milieu. The later Vedic text shows the differentiation in the *varna* status. The later Vedic society was divided into four *varnas*- *brahmanas*, *rajanyas* or *Kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and the *sudras*. The *Purushasukta* in the *Rig Veda* (10 *mandala*) offers evidence of four *varnas*. It narrates that the *brahmana* was born from the mouth, the *Kshatriya* from the arms, the *vaishyas* from the thighs and the *sudras* from the feet of the *Purusha*. Scholars argue that the settled life led to the formation of the four-fold division of society.

Upinder Singh has revealed the uncertainty about the position of the higher varna. The *Panchavimsha Brahmana* placed *Rajanya* (Kshatriya) first, followed by the *Brahmana* and *Vaishya*. The *Satapatha Brahmana* arranged the *varna* as *Brahmana, Vaishya*, *Rajanya* and *Sudra*. Singh states that the real ordering of the varna according to the brahmanical custom became fixed from the time of *Dharmasutras*.

The *Brahmanas* claimed social and political privileges to help their patrons (*Kshatriyas*) to legitimise their position. In the beginning, there were only sixteen classes of priests, but gradually the *Brahmanas* overpowered the rest of the priests. They conducted rituals, sacrifices and officiated festivals. They conducted prayers for the success of their patrons in wars. In return for their services, the king granted special privileges, including protection and exemption of taxes.

The *Kshatriyas* emerged as the second important varna, which evolved from the *rajanya* of the Rig Vedic period. The *Kshatriyas* were the warrior class and were regarded as protectors. The rulers were often chosen from the *Kshatriyas*. The prince who belongs to the *rajanya* category tried to assert power over all the three other varnas. The *Aitareya Brahmana* suggests that the relationship between the prince and the *brahmana* is that of a "seeker of livelihood and an acceptor of gifts".

The *Vaishyas* constituted traders, agriculturalists, craftsmen and the common people who engage in production activities. R.S. Sharma believes that the *vaisyas* were the actual wealth-producing section and the *sudras* were the labour groups. He also insisted that towards the end of the later Vedic period, the *vaishyas* began to engage in trading activities.

Sharma feels that the higher varna extracted revenues to establish dominance over the lower varnas. The *vaishyas* paid *bali*, while the *sudras* had to give their labour. The *brahmana* and the *Kshatriyas* enjoyed the fruit of production without engaging in actual production activities. Hence, he asserted that the *vaishyas* were the taxpaying class or the tributary to another, while *rajnya* was the tribute accepter from the *Vaishyas*. The *sudras*

serve the higher three varnas and form the labouring masses.

2.5.2.2 Religion

With the growth of royal power, the period witnessed significant development in the sacrificial cult. The later Vedic text conveyed elaborate instructions and rules for the performance of the sacrifices. *Vajapeya, rajasuya* and *Ashvamedha* were some of the common sacrifices. The complexity of these rituals increased in the later Vedic period.

The intricate sacrificial rituals weakened the importance of the Rig Vedic gods. We could find that some of the Rig Vedic gods disappeared completely. The Rig Vedic gods, *Indra* and *Agni* lost their prominence. Instead, *Prajapathi*, the creator, became prominent. Some of the minor gods of the Rig Vedic period also became superior to the later Vedic pantheon. These include *Rudra* (god of animals) and *Vishnu* (preserver and protector of people). Furthermore, the later Vedic people began to worship symbolic objects. It can also be noticed that the four varnas have their deities. *Pushan*, who looked after cattle, came to be regarded as the god of *Sudras*.

The mode of worship in the later Vedic period changed. Prayers were recited, but it was not the common method. Sacrifices became more prominent. Sacrifices include both public and domestic character. The Public sacrifices involve the king and the community in the tribe. At the same time, the private sacrifices were made by individuals in their houses. Sacrifices involved killing animals on a large scale. Among the animals, the cattle were sacrificed prominently. The evidence of cut marks on animal bone found from Atranjikhera (UP) suggests cattle slaughter practised on a wide scale.

The priest officiated sacrifices with *dakshina* or a gift for their service. The literary evidence suggests that cows, gold, cloth and horses are donated as *dakshina*. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* suggests that the priests were given a portion of territory as *dakshina*. This helped the priests to accumulate power gradually.

Historians hold that towards the end of the later Vedic period, there was a strong reaction against the priestly domination, cults and rituals, especially in Panchala and Videha around 600 BCE. The philosophical texts criticised the rituals and emphasised the value of right belief and knowledge. They propagate the idea of self or *atman*. The relation of *atman* with the *Brahma* was given priority. Eventually, Brahma emerged as the supreme being.

2.5.2.3 Family

The family became more and more patriarchal. Household (*griha*) became an important unit. *Grihapati* controlled the resources of the household. The birth of a son was more loved-for than that of a daughter. The daughter was often considered miserable. Hence, the position of women worsened during the later Vedic times. The later Vedic period saw the development of *gotra*. *Gotra* means 'cow-pen' or the place where the cattle belong. However, over time, *gotra* began to represent the descent from a common ancestor.

2.5.2.4 Marriage

The growing varna complexity is clear from the restrictions on marriage. They followed endogamy. This means people

who belong to the same varna can marry each other. Several new regulations in marriage also evolved. The members of higher varnas could marry *sudra* women. Hence *anuloma* marriage, between upper caste men and lower caste, was allowed. However, the *pratiloma* marriage, between the lower caste men and upper-caste women, was not permitted. The Princes could have several wives at a time.

With the development of the caste system, social norms also were subjected to alterations. The marriage between members of the same *gotra* was not allowed. The caste system developed as an exogamous *gotra* group. The strengthening of exogamous nature was due to the continuing consolidation of the *varna* system.

2.5.2.5 Women

The Vedic society was patriarchal. Such a society placed women as secondary to the male members. Sukumari Bhattacharya, an indologist suggests that marriage was an obligation for women in the later Vedic times. The girl was married when she attained puberty and was denied education. Bhattacharya suggests that instead of education, the women of later Vedic times were trained primarily in household chores.

The texts also contained evidence of polygamy, where the husband can have more than one wife. The main duty of the wife was to obey and follow her husband. Scholars suggest that the period, therefore, witnessed the growing dominance of the husband. There is little or no evidence of women participating in popular assemblies like *sabha* and *samiti*. However, some women theologians took part in philosophical discussions.

Historians suggest that the later Vedic period saw the emergence of a system known as **sati.** Scholars validated their argument by referring to the evidence of self-immolation by the widow after the death of her husband. However, we cannot conclude that *sati* has become an established practice since we have references to widow remarriage (*niyoga*).

2.5.3 Four Ashramas and Education

The Ashramas or four stages of life, were referred to in the later Vedic texts. There are four *ashramas*, which include *brahmachari, grihasta, vanaprastha* and *sanyasa*. The *Brahmachari* represents student life, *grihasta* or house holder, *vanaprasta* means partial retirement and the *sanyasa* means complete retirement from life. R.S. Sharma insisted that the later Vedic text has mentioned the first three stages of life. The fourth *ashrama* was not deep-rooted during this period.

The *epithet dvija* or twice-born designated the *Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya varna*. Education was allowed to all *dvijas*. This indicates the fact that education was not allowed to the lower varnas. Education began with the *upanayana* (investiture) ceremony. Sometimes, girls were also initiated for education. The students were trained at the home of a *Brahmana* teacher. The *Chandogya Upanishad* provides the list of subjects learned. Among them, the education of the Vedas was given importance.

Recap

- The later Vedic Aryans followed a settled life
- Their livelihood is oriented to agriculture
- Iron was introduced
- Several arts and crafts evolved
- Major pottery includes Painted Grey Ware Pottery.
- There was the existence of 'proto-urban towns'
- Urbanisation seems to have begun
- Hereditary kingship emerged
- Tribal polity weakened and territorial aspects became important
- The Brahmanas legitimised the power of the king by attributing divine power through performing rituals
- Elaborate rituals practised
- Taxation became prominent
- Tribal assembly vidatha disappeared completely. The sabha and samiti lost their importance
- The King was assisted by ratnins
- The complex social organisation emerged
- The Four varnas existed- *brahmanas*, *rajanyas* or Kshatriyas, *vaisyas* and *sudras*
- The household became important and it became the unit of labour
- Women were subjugated by the patriarchal family
- The early Vedic gods disappeared later

Objective Questions

1. Which are three major cereals cultivated in the later Vedic period?
2. Which PGW site yields the evidence of rice?
3. Which text gives reference to seasonal crops and different seasons?
4. Which word denotes iron in later Vedic text?
5. Which sites yielded iron implements?

6. Which text enlisted artisans and professionals?

7. Where did the PGW pottery first discover?

8. Who collected taxes and royal shares?

9. Who was the officer in charge of the royal treasury?

10. Which were the three main taxes of the later Vedic period?

Answers

1. Wheat, barley and rice	6. Vajasaneyi Samhita
2. Hastinapura	7. Ahichhatra
3. The Taitreya Samhita	8. Bhagadugha
4. Syamayas and krishnayas	9. Samgrahitri
5. Atranjikhera and Noh	10. Bali, bhaga and sulka

Assignments

1. Analyse the impact of the introduction of iron technology on the agricultural and economic life of the later Vedic period.

2. How did the transition from tribal to territorial monarchy affect governance and the role of the king?

3. Evaluate the role and significance of the sabha and samiti assemblies in the later Vedic period.

4. How did agrarian changes influence the social differentiation and the establishment of the four varnas?

5. Discuss the changing status of women in the later Vedic period. How did societal norms, such as marriage, education and family structures, affect the position of women in Vedic society?

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6 UNIT

Eastward Expansion and Formation of Janapada

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the formation of the state

♦ understand the meaning of the term 'janapada'

♦ learn the process of the emergence of monarchy

♦ understand the historians views about the early kingship

Prerequisites

The later Vedic period witnessed significant transformations, including the growing confrontation between clans. This era also marked the emergence of kingship, a pivotal development in the political structure of ancient India. The Vedic people during this time had largely adopted a settled agricultural lifestyle, transitioning from the earlier semi-nomadic existence. Romila Thapar argues that this shift to settled life was crucial in fostering a sense of geographical identity within the clans. As they established permanent settlements, the concept of territorial ownership became more pronounced, leading to the practice of claiming and naming specific territories.

Thapar further suggests that the socio-political conditions in the western Ganga valley during this period played a critical role in what she terms the "arrested development of the state." This region's complex socio-political dynamics resulted in a delayed but gradual emergence of state-like structures. She emphasizes that a growing consciousness of territorial identity was central to the formation of these structures. The polity, in Thapar's view, evolved from the lineage-based ruling

families and over time, this lineage system contributed to the identification of specific territories and the development of political organisations tied to them. This marked the early formation of a more structured and territorially defined political system in the later Vedic period.

Keywords

Eastward expansion, Videha Madhava, *Jana, Janapada, Rastra, Rajan*

Discussion

2.6.1 The Story of Videha Madhava

The expansion of Indo-Aryans towards the east is indicated by the legend mentioned in *Satapatha Brahmana*, that is, the story of Videha Madhava. The passage from the text *Satapatha Brahmana* narrates the journey of a *Brahmana* named Madhava from the banks of river Saraswati to Sadanira. His journey continued until Videha; hence he got the name Videha Madhava. The Satapatha Brahmana further narrates that Madhava carried the sacred fire (Agni), during the expansion. He stopped at river Sadanira as the area was swampy and untouched by Agni. Lord Agni cleared the vegetation on the other side of the Sadanira River so the tribe could settle there. The Sadanira later formed the border between the kingdoms of Videha and Koshala. He had led his tribe to the Ganges plains, which had dense vegetation to the east. This is the Aryanisation Theory of the Videha Kingdom in eastern India.

Thapar stated that the Ganga valley became historically important with the migration and settlement of people from two routes. Videha Madhava took the northern route and the second group followed the banks of Yamuna and Ganga. Sharma identifies these people as *sarasvata* and *darsadvata*.

2.6.1.1 Expansion of the Later Vedic People

The life of Aryans witnessed significant changes from 1000 to 600 BCE when three Vedas- *Sama Veda, Yajur Veda* and *Atharava Veda*, the *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads* were composed. The later Vedic texts show that the Aryans expanded from Punjab over the western Uttar Pradesh engulfed by the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. As mentioned before, by that time, the Kurus became the forerunner of the region. R.S. Sharma opined that they settled initially around the banks of rivers *Saraswati* and *Drishadvati*. Soon, they occupied Delhi and the upper regions of the doab and the area came to be known

as Kurushetra or the land of Kurus. Gradually, they merged with the people of Panchalas, who occupied the central part of the doab. With this alliance, the authority of Kuru-Panchala spread over Delhi, upper and central parts of doab. The Kurus set up their capital at Hastinapur (present day Meerut) and the Panchala kingdom covered the modern districts of Bareilly, Badaun and Farrukhabad.

The migration and settlement along the banks of river *Saraswati* and *Drsadvati* are contained in the *Srauta Sutras*. The development of migration and settlement in the areas around the river can be inferred from the rituals connected with moving from one place to another (*yat-sattras*). In the course of their migration, they encountered two rivers. In the text, the one who proceeded along the banks of Saraswati is called *Sarasvata* and the one who proceeds along the Drishadvati is called *darsadvata*.

Towards the end of the later Vedic period (600 BCE), the Vedic people spread towards the east to Kosala (eastern UP) and Videha (north Bihar). D.N. Jha and R.S. Sharma suggests that they met with people who used the Ochre-Coloured Pottery and the Black and Red Ware pottery during their movement. According to one view, the main line of the Aryan migration was along the Himalayan foothills. This movement was testified in the legend of Videha Madhava mentioned in the *Satapatha Brahmana*. Historians treated this legend as a process of clearing the land by burning for the new settlement.

In the legend, it can be noted that the forest was cleared with the use of fire. Historians like Sharma, Thapar and Jha considered the legend of a *Brahmana* carrying *Agni* as a significant account of

the process of land clearing by burning the forest. This process further led to the foundation of new settlements by migrating warrior priests. The legend also implies that the land far east, including Bihar, was part of the later Vedic period.

Jha further explains that the burning of forests might have been supplemented by using an iron axe to cut forests in some areas. Iron has been discovered in the later Vedic sites like Atranjikhera and Jakhera. As we discussed before, the number of iron agricultural tools is less than that of the weapons and the idea of clearing the land by the later Vedic people during their migration was denied by some scholars. However, later research by historians like Ranabir Cakravarti suggests that the eastward spread of the later Vedic settlement directly relates to the rise of sedentary agriculture in the Ganga valley.

2.6.1.2 *Janapada*

Historians asserted that Rig Vedic society was a tribal society based on lineage. In such a society, kinship bond was considered important. The occurrences of words like *jana, vis, gana, grama*, *grhia, kula, vrata, sardha* in the *Rig Veda* implies its tribal character. According to Sharma, the word *jana* is associated with five tribes and can be regarded as the largest unit based on kinship. He further states that when such units settled down in a territory, it came to be called *janapada*. He defines *janapada* as territorial kingdoms which were under the kshatriya rulers. Sharma considered *janapada* as the most significant political unit of the post-Vedic phase.

According to Thapar, *jana* constitute a group of the clan and the territory where they settled is called *janapada*. Literally,

the term means 'where the tribe places its feet'. She is of the view that *janapadas* constitute territory, incorporating families settled in villages, clans and large units of tribes.

The *janapadas* were named after the ruling clan, which had established control in that area. Thapar maintained that since the economy of *jana* includes hunting and pastoralism, the forest areas adjacent to their settlements could carry the name of the *jana*. For example, she cites the name of Kuru-vana. However, the actual control of such territory is confined to smaller areas of cultivated land. Since the settlement is small, a lineage authority is sufficient for controlling the territory. This indicates that *janapadas* were named after the kshatriya lineage, who established control in these areas.

According to Thapar, *Janapada* could be a single clan, such as Kekeyas, Madras, Kurus and Kosalas. Sometimes, *janapadas* constitute confederacies like those of Panchalas. However, the notion of the specific territory of these *janapadas* was uncertain. Forests, hills, rivers and streams demarcated the boundaries between *janapadas*.

The term *rastra* that was mentioned in the later Vedic phase does not suggest a territory in an absolute sense. Thapar believes that the term *rastra* is used in the sense of realm or sphere of authority. However, the term *rastra* in the post-Vedic period is considered a territory with specific boundaries and absolute control over the area.

2.6.1.3 The Emergence of the Monarchy

Historians viewed that the political units began to change by the 6th century BCE. North India witnessed different political systems like monarchical systems (*rajyas*), oligarchic states (*ganas* or *sanghas*) and tribal principalities. Some of these political systems maintained tribal character, while the others changed to statehood.

The later Vedic text suggests that the Aryans expanded from Punjab to Ganga-Yamuna Doab. During this period, the two prominent tribes, the Bharatas and Purus, combined and formed a new confederacy called the Kurus. The Turvashas and Krivis formed the Panchalas. With time, the Kurus merged with the Panchalas and established supremacy over Ganga-Yamuna doab. Hence, they established their capital at Hastinapur (Meerut).

Supposing from the later Vedic texts, historians insist that the period witnessed the transition from tribal polity based on lineage to a territorial state. Historians argue that the territorial state emerged in the post-Vedic period and not in the later Vedic period. According to Witzel, the Kurus represent the first state. He insists that the Kurus initiated the collection and codification of the Vedic corpus into the canon.

The transition to a state system culminated the political, social and economic process. Upinder Singh argued that the emergence of a monarchical state involves conflict, accommodation and alliances. Therefore, in a monarchical state, the power was concentrated in the hands of the king. In the later Vedic period, the term '*rajan*' is the protector of the people and the leader in the battle. Subsequently, the notion of hereditary kingship evolved.

The emergence of kingship was supplemented by the origin of political institutions and the efforts to legitimise

those institutions. Historians like Thapar, Sharma and Jha insisted that the *Brahmanas* approved the authority and power of the king, either sanctioning divine power to the ruler. The later Vedic text, like *Satapatha Brahmana,* also attested to the close connection between the king and the god. Thapar analysed that the various ritual ceremonies attested the raja is at par with the god and subsequently, the raja came to be accepted as divinely appointed.

Historians believe that rituals like *rajasuya, ashwamedha* and *vajapeya* reinforce the growing power of the *rajan.* In the later Vedic period, these rituals symbolised power and authority. Another aspect of rajan's growing power was his acquisition of more significant productive resources. The change in the character of *bali* from a voluntary offering to an obligatory offering implies the growing power. Hence, *rajan* was also called *vishamatta,* which means the eater of the *vish,* people. Upinder Singh argued that the extraction of *Bali* from people does not imply an organised taxation system.

Recap

♦ The legend of Videha Madhava indicates the eastward expansion

♦ During the movement, the land was cleared using fire

♦ The rise of sedentary agriculture in the Ganga valley

♦ The iron implements for agriculture were scarce

♦ The janapada is the place where people set their foot

♦ Historians conceived the janapada in terms of territory, incorporating families and clans

♦ *The rastra* in later Vedic people does not imply the territory in an absolute sense

♦ Thapar explained *rastra* in terms of the realm

♦ The transition from tribal polity to a territorial state

♦ The king gained the legitimisation of his authority

Objective Questions

1. Which legend indicates the eastward expansion?

2. Which text has the story of Videha Madhava?

3. Where did Madhava stop his journey?

4. What constitutes janapada?
5. Which is the single clan in janapada?
6. Which janapada are the confederacies of the tribes?
7. Who said that the Kurus represented the first state in the Indian subcontinent?
8. What is *bali*?

Answers

1. Story of Videha Madhava
2. *Satapatha Brahmana*
3. Sadanira
4. Territory, family, clans and tribes.
5. Kekeyas, Madras, Kurus and Kosalas
6. Panchalas
7. Witzel
8. Voluntary offering

Assignments

1. Discuss the expansion of Indo-Aryans towards the east as described in the Satapatha Brahmana
2. Examine the changes in Aryan society from 1000 to 600 BCE, particularly in relation to the migration of the Vedic people.
3. Analyse the concept of 'Janapada' as a political unit in the post-Vedic period
4. Analyse the transformation from tribal polity to territorial state in North India during the later Vedic period
5. Discuss the emergence of kingship in the later Vedic period, focusing on the role of the raja as both a political leader and a divine figure.

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BLOCK 3

Second Urbanisation

1 UNIT

Sixteen Mahajanapadas

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the historical significance of the Mahajanapadas (6th Century BCE – 3rd Century BCE) in ancient Indian history.

♦ analyse the transition from the Vedic Age to the Mahajanapada period, highlighting key political and social developments.

♦ differentiate between the features of monarchical and non-monarchical kingdoms of this period.

♦ explore the socio-economic conditions, including trade, agriculture and urbanisation, that shaped the Mahajanapada era.

♦ evaluate the role of the Mahajanapadas in the rise of new religious and philosophical movements such as Jainism and Buddhism.

♦ examine the geographical distribution and strategic importance of the 16 Mahajanapadas in shaping political dynamics.

Prerequisites

We often associate the concept of 'city-states' and the roots of democracy with Ancient Greece, the cradle of early democratic governance. However, during a similar timeframe, from the sixth century BCE to the third century CE, a remarkable political and social phenomenon was unfolding in India—the era of the Mahajanapadas. These sixteen powerful kingdoms, centred around the fertile Gangetic plain, showcased unique forms of governance and societal organisation that were progressive for their time.

Each Mahajanapada stood out with its distinct identity, demonstrating advancements in administration, trade and culture that rivalled contemporary civilisations. This period, often referred to as the "second urbanisation," marked a transformative chapter in Indian history, characterised by the growth of cities, the rise of complex economies and the emergence of influential ideas like Buddhism and Jainism. The Mahajanapadas were more than just political entities; they were vibrant centres of innovation, interaction and cultural evolution, setting the stage for India's rich historical legacy.

Keywords

Janapadas, Mahajanapadas, Monarchy, *gana sanghas*, Second Urbanisation, NBPW, Punch Marked Coins, Magadha

Discussion
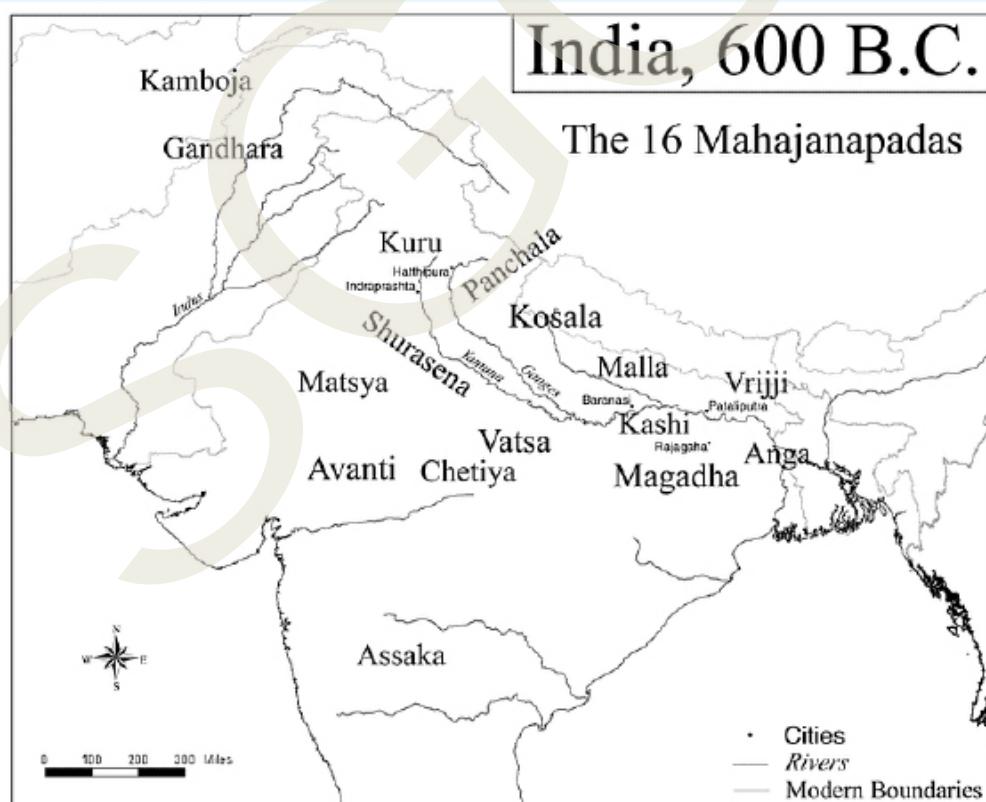
Fig. 3.1.1.

3.1.1 Origin & Evolution of Mahajanapadas

As illustrated above in the given picture, towards the beginning of sixth century BCE the communities that dominated the Indo-Gangetic plain, middle-Gangetic plains and other northern regions of India became dominant and gave rise to political formations. These *'padas'* or groups of people which they refer to here are about a particular type of tribes or tribal groups having their own ethnic background in India in those days. They were mostly semi-nomadic in nature, however, towards the end of the Later Vedic period they transformed themselves into minor principalities known as *janapadas,* meaning the places where the people have established their control since this is evident by splitting the word into two where *'jana'* means people and *'pada'* means foot. These political units or states came to be known as *Mahajanapadas*.

Mahajanapadas simply means the great kingdoms where the people have control and, in this case, it was by various tribal communities. In the beginning there were actually twenty-two *Mahajanapadas* based on socio-economic status in the society. In course of time, there emerged 16 strong powerful kingdoms when they were at their peak.

The territorial consciousness gave birth to attachment to a fixed territory which set in motion the required novel social changes. In this scenario the community divided itself into families with each one having its own separate leaders belonging to their own tribes. This can be equated with the formation of *Kulas* or highly elite families as stated in the records pertaining to this period. This condition necessitated defence and warfare which prompted them to form military groupings which gradually became ascendant and proved influential in establishing Janapada state. As per the works of Panini, stages of evolution of Janapada can be summarised as follows:

1. *Jana* (tribal stage)

2. *Kula*(family stage)

3. *Janapadin* (Stage of Military Grouping)

4. *Janapada* Stage

In the middle of the sixth century BCE, political Janapadas, some with highly distinguishable boundaries, came into being with their own headquarters supporting more than one urban settlement. Even though its emergence was from the middle Ganga plain, it soon spread to other parts of India and became a universal phenomenon by the end of fourth century BCE. Thus, the newly emerged Mahajanapadas can be considered as a proto elite institution showing traits of a systematised kingdom. However, in the later stages we could see the emergence of Magadha as a full-frontal Kingdom under the reign of its ruler Ajatasatru.

The evolution of cities and states are a result of socio-political, economic and technological developments that came forth over a period of 1500 years. This long duration witnessed a series of changes, like simple villages developing into towns; towns into cities and then finally cities into metropolis. This was a huge transformation, finding it difficult to be codified in one stretch; hence, as per archaeological and literary data available pertaining to this period, major turning points and their timelines are stated as follows:-

1. Stage – I: Janapadas, Villages and Towns (1800 – 800 BCE)

2. Stage – II: Cities and Mahajanapadas (800 – 400 BCE)

3. Stage – III: Metropolis and Empire (400-100 BCE)

Our area of focus is mainly on the second stage, as compared to that of other two phases, where one can witness the real transformation taking place in the Janapadas constituting villages and towns into the second stage, where it gets transformed into Mahajanapadas comprising of cities which usually remained more or less the same from 800 to 400 BCE. After this time period, it goes on with its next phase of transformation, which is from 400-100 BCE, where it embodies all the characteristics of an empire and shows its unequivocal presence in our sub-continent for the very first time in Indian history.

These newly emerged states better known as Mahajanapadas made significant progress in the field of art, architecture, technological advances, scientific knowledge, medicine, statecraft, administration, social life, cultural progress and in the economy. These Mahajanapadas were namely, (1) Kasi (2) Kosala (3) Anga (4) Magadha (5) Vajji (6) Malla (7) Chedi (8) Vatsa (9) Kuru (10) Panchala (11) Matsya (12) Surasena (13) Asaka (14) Avanti (15) Gandhara & (16) Kamboja.

3.1.2 Sources

In order to recreate any period in history, sources play an important role, the major ones being from literary and archaeological sources. Speaking about the literary sources, some useful hints are given by Pali and Sanskrit texts where they vividly describe places like Kausambi,

Sravasti, Sringaverpur, Ayodhya, Kapila vastu, Varanasi, Vaishali, Rajghir, Patali putra and Champu.

Similarly, while works like *Anguttara Nikhaya* mention all 16 *Mahajanapadas*, another work *Ashtadhyayi* by name mentions only about 9 of them. Later, this contradiction or lack of clarity was resolved with the help of archaeological evidence from these places that once again confirmed the fact there were altogether sixteen of them in those times.

'Prithvi Sukta' of *Atharva Veda* provides a fascinating description about various janapadas speaking different dialects, religious rites and enjoying worldly pleasures without any obstruction. Similarly, in the Mahabharata also, we find references to these political formations where they mention the rule of Prithu and the prosperity which the people experienced throughout his reigning period.

3.1.3 Characteristic Features of Mahajanapadas

Use of Iron: One of the major changes that happened in the society that led to the development of janapadas to Mahajanapadas from sixth century onwards was the widespread use of iron especially in and around the regions of the eastern side of present-day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other regions adjacent to them spanning over the entire north, north-western and middle gangetic plains of India. Availability of water resources in the form of lakes, rivers etc., along with the presence of fertile soil, climate and better geographical conditions contributed much to the growth of urban centres and lifestyle in these regions. Tools, weapons and other accessories were built using

iron and subsequently many forests were cleared to start agrarian activities with the effective usage of ploughshare.

Growth of Agriculture: Favourable factors helped the growth of agriculture and surplus production to flourish in an unprecedented manner. This in turn has had a direct impact on the economy as trade and commerce also increased simultaneously with the growth of agriculture and other related activities. Fortified cities with standing armies were built in the Mahajanapadas to safeguard themselves from the attacks or invasions from their neighbouring kingdoms.

Monarchies and Republics: An upgradation of these units came forth from the sixth century onwards when these regions began to identify themselves as monarchies and republics better known as Mahajanapadas. These newly formed territorial units did fulfil the criteria of a full-frontal state as per the *saptanga* theory propounded by Kautilya in his magnum opus work *Arthasastra* which necessitates the significance of variables in state apparatus like 'king', 'minister', 'country', 'fortified city', 'army', 'treasury' and 'ally'. Cities like Ayodhya, Kasi, Kausambi, Pataliputra, Vaishali, Ujjain, Taxila, Shravasti etc., emerged as the main epi-centres of trade and commerce thereby boosting up the economic condition of these state formations.

***Chathurvarnaya* System:** The social condition of this period was such that the same varna system that was predominant in the society continued in this time period as well, with some changes happening to certain castes like the *Kshatriyas* and the *Vaishyas*. The merchant class better known as *vaishyas* became prosperous due to ongoing trade and other agrarian

activities which made the *kshatriyas* or the then ruling class to tax them heavily thereby filling the treasury. Similarly, specialisations of job created *jatis* such as cultivators, traders, craftsmen, labourers etc, which came inside the four-fold division of society better known as *chathurvarna* system. While *varnas* were categorised based on ritual status considered in the then system, *jatis* were based on the occupational functionalities which they were supposed to perform as a community where factors like wealth, land, status, military etc. played a predominant role in its emergence and growth in this particular time period. As per the sources pertaining to this phase there were eighteen number of *jati* as compared to the four varnas prevalent in these regions. According to the *Dharmasastras*, exogamous marriages were prohibited among *jatis,* while some kinds of *anuloma* marriages were permitted among the varnas.

Condition of Women: There were disparities in the cultural life of people in the northern region as opposed to its southern counterpart. In some of the Mahajanapadas especially those near to the Gangetic valley the condition of women was deplorable since they were not treated on par with men and were obliged to obey the patrilineal laws without questioning or protesting against it. The practice of *swayamvara*, choosing one's own bridegroom by bride herself was prevalent in certain principalities; meanwhile, some others entirely banned such activities from their kingdoms altogether.

The System of Slavery: The system of slavery was practised where persons from different categories were made slaves like criminals, captives, debtors, etc. In this system they were considered as a property to be sold and bought for specific purposes.

From this statement itself it is clear that their human rights and personal freedom were violated in the process. There were rare occasions as well in which they were presented as gifts to the higher authorities including the ruler himself. Their freedom from the master was only possible through appeasing his master or by paying off the money to them.

Education: Education was restricted to the Brahmans and other higher castes alone. Brahmans were supposed to be well versed in all kinds of ancient scriptures including the Vedas, the Puranas, grammar, science, mathematics, literature, logic, philosophy etc. They discouraged written manuals or handwritten copies and encouraged orally written knowledge passed over from generation after generation. People of the lower castes were given permission to practice cattle breeding, agriculture and trade as per their caste traditions. Taxila and Kashi used to be main centres of learning during those days.

Property Ownership: Property was divided among groups rather than individually and hence it was passed on from generation to generation in a collective manner. This doesn't mean that they never enjoyed their individual freedom, as a matter of fact they did in all other private aspects of their life. However, when the time came to act collectively as a group in war and peace, they stood together and worked as a single cohesive unit glued together by communal urges and feelings of brotherhood.

Territorial Mobility: Mahajanapadas emerged from *janas,* often characterised by territorial mobility and pastoral culture. When the transformation occurred they began to chase the system based on the territories they have acquired. They preferred a settled form of life with their own territorial expansionist policies. These tribes never left their pastoral activities altogether and tried to assimilate that to their newly emerging way of life, yielding high results in the process.

Growth of Trade: They concentrated more on agrarian and trade related activities both inside their territory as well as outside of it and thus to enhance its possibilities they found new trade routes, commercially enabling them to emerge as a dominant kingdom. When the wealth accumulated so did their culture and standard of living. They began to fortify their cities and most of them lived there which is referred to as *pura* in the literary works that belonged to this age. Rulers or republicans who ruled over this place possessed a standing army of their own using the opportunities of iron and other sources available to them in this respect.

Gana-sangha: As discussed earlier there were monarchical kingdoms as well as non-monarchical kingdoms that existed during this period better known as *gana-sangha* or republics. Here the power was distributed among a group of people where we term the way of administration as that of oligarchic in nature. These gana-sanghas were composed of two fold social-strata, the *Kshatriya Rajakula* identified with the ruling elite and *dasa-karmakaras* consisting of slaves and workers. *Ganapati* better known as *gahapati* as they were mentioned in scriptures were in control of these regions. The *Kshatriya Rajakula* was the binding force that held together their clan while others did their own work and held allegiance to them. We could also understand that the hereditary monarchical system was absent at that time.

Monarchy: The monarchies that were persistent at this time were in contrast to the functionalities of non-monarchical

ones where the control passed on from generation to generation with a ruler reigning over that particular region. There was absolutely no role for oligarchies or the collective clan system there. They functioned more or less like a state with fortified cities and standing armies protecting their subjects and possessions. They believed in expansionist policies to enhance their territorial boundaries and hence maintained a well-equipped military for the same purpose. The entire system was based on a clearly defined set of moral and social codes that were binding on its citizens.

Legal System: There were village guards and a legal apparatus present in order to maintain peace and order in the monarchical kingdoms. There was no mention of a standing naval force in those times. However they used four fold divisions of forces – foot soldiers, charioteers, cavalry and elephant corps in times of war with neighbouring kingdoms. The Mahajanapadas, like Magadha and Kosala gave utmost importance to the maintenance of the army on these grounds as they were always driven by an urge to expand their territories further which obviously involved warfare. This was the first time India witnessed an organised form of forces and warfare tactics deployed from the side of kingdoms. Officials like *Rathikas* (governors), *Thapathi* (chamberlain), *Rajabhatas* (royal officers), *Bhandhanagarikas* (jailors), *Kammakaras* (daily-wage workers) *dasas* (slaves) etc. helped the King to perform his day to day duties for his subjects without fail. They all feared the anger and punishment of the ruler so that the final decision made by him was final on any matter concerning the state.

Revenue: Revenue for this system to function well came from agrarian activities and trade related activities alongside the work of professionals like physicians, scribes, craftspersons, artisans, artists etc. Agrarian activities and their profits were well documented by Panini where he called the tilled land as *Suhali* and stated that rice was the main crop which they used in those periods along with wheat and sesame. The land was usually fertile and the people knew the ways to exploit it for their own benefits.These changes ultimately provided the ruling elite with the population as well as the taxes to run their kingdom in an urban model with all the facilities as demanded by such a system. The economy was sound and a whole new system was ushered in reflecting its progress in all areas pertaining to urbanisation.

Second Urbanisation: People began to witness the emergence of another urbanisation encompassing all the qualities of the cities and towns that used to be in here during the time of Harappan civilisation. This particular phase is often termed the 'second urbanisation' as the long lost town culture before the arrivals of the Aryans to India came back with all its intrinsic details.

Growth of the population, emergence of towns and cities, increased productivity, trade, agricultural surplus and an efficient administrative system were the hallmark of the second urbanisation during the period of Mahajanapadas. The main site of this urbanisation was in and around the Ganga valley having striking similarity with the Indus Valley Civilisation which emerged on the banks of the river Indus. As discussed above agrarian activities and its productivity were high in most of the places resulting in high population

and professionalism of activities. The Mahajanapadas like Magadha, Kasala, Kausambi and Sravasti emerged as political power centres, while others like Ujjain, Varanasi, Surasena, Champa, Rajagriha, Asmaka, Kashi, Gandhara etc. facilitated trade activities and acted out as commercial hubs and pilgrim centres.

Professionalized Occupations: These situations helped in the thriving of professionalized occupations like carpenter (*palaganda*), metalsmith (*kammara*), vehicle maker (*yanakara*), goldsmith (*suvannakara*), reed worker (*nalakara*), potter (kumbhakara), scribes (*lekh*), actors (*nata*), dancers (*natant*), acrobats (*langhik*), drummers (*kumnhathunika*), physicians (*bhishaka*) etc. in these kingdoms. They not only provided the services and products, but also helped to transform these places into commercial places and centres of financial growth and progress.

Town Planning: Town planning and fortifications of this period in the Mahajanapadas were well laid all throughout the length and breadth of the kingdoms with a perfect laid-out plan. Ramparts and moats were extensively used as is testified by findings from this place. Historians also point out to the persistence of *grama* (village); *nigama* (market town) and *nagara* (city) in these principalities serving its own purpose for the general public in the then time frame. The Buddhist sources also give an account about the existence of cities categorised as *mahanagras* and *agganakaras* based on their stature and its use besides the normal fortified ones. Fortified towns were called *durga* which acted out as the primary line of defence against predators and other kinds of natural calamities affecting these places from time to time.

Towns and Cities: There were clear distinctive boundaries between towns and cities. Facilities provided over these Mahajanapadas to its inmates or subjects were a well organised drainage system; houses made of burnt bricks; ring wells, soakage pits etc. Furthermore, rest houses and roads were also present here facilitating better travelling facilities for people. According to Romila Thapar, those houses that opened towards the street from this time period bear resemblance to that of a modern shop. Similarly, artefacts and other historical remnants that were found as part of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) culture and Punch-marked coins also shed some light on the way of life they used to have in this specific phase. Art and architecture also reached its zenith of development as the rulers patronised it and some had keen interest and talent in it.

3.1.4 Sixteen Mahajanapadas

These political entities emerged between the sixth century and third century due to various reasons. They had a uniform type of characteristics, but they were also unique with respect to the kind of ruling elite reigning over that particular kingdom, geographical conditions, climate and the policies they adopted. They all didn't emerge as prominent kingdoms, all of a sudden from nowhere; rather, it was a gradual process that spanned over centuries where some caught up with those changes earlier while others took time to adapt to the same. Let us now discuss in detail about the sixteen Mahajanapadas and their peculiarities that made them unique and distinguishable from others:-

Vrijji/Vajji

This can be considered as one of those Mahajanapadas that upheld the values of democracy and the involvement of people in statecraft and political formations. It is a republic as compared to other Mahajanapadas which were monarchical ones. In fact, we could find references to them as *ganasanghas* mostly in the Buddhist texts meaning rule by the assembly of tribes. The term Vajji simply means "a confederacy of pastoral nomadic people". The three main rivers surround its boundaries, such as Ganga in the north alongside Gandak and Kosi on either side of this place. They were ruled over by a confederacy of eight clans better known as *attakula* of which four were most powerful: Lichchavis with Vaishali as their capital; Janatrika with Kundagram as their headquarters; Videha with Mithila as the main centre of activity. These clans which ruled over this region did have their own identity, existence and interests which didn't go in contrast with each other. From the available sources of this period, they were often described as Kshatriya clans due to their life patterns and the administrative procedures adapted were like that of the ruling classes. Oligarchy was the main form of governance practised here as it is evident from the existence of assemblies headed by clan chiefs.

Mallas

Mallas was yet another republic and a neighbouring state of Vajji, ruled over a system dominated by nine clans of equal importance. Rivers like Tapti, Gandak and Ganga adorned its boundaries. The famous city of Kushinagara (modern day Kasia) is related to this place and also served as one of its capitals, while the other one was Pava (Present day Pawapuri). These

places were in modern day Bihar. It had a good rapport with Vajji and other adjacent kingdoms. Similarly, it also made great progress in the field of trade and related activities. They were wealthy and hence, others always had an eye on them and finally it became a part of Magadha when it was annexed as a part of its expansionist policies.

Chedi

This is one kingdom where we can find reference to the epic of *Mahabharatha* relating to the story of the Lord Krishna and Sisupala where the latter was killed due to constant sins conducted, crossing the limit in the process. As per the *Mahabharatha* story, Sisupala was the ruler of Chedi region during the time of the feud between the Pandavas and Kauravas for the throne. River Yamuna and Ken flowed through this region making it more fertile and apt for agrarian and domestication activities. They maintained cordial relations with neighbouring kingdoms like Kashi and Matsya. Similarly cities like Tripuri and Airakani, were well known during those times pertaining to the trade related activities and prosperous life they lead as a result of it.

Avanti

The Avanti kingdom encompassing present day Gujarat and Malwa regions had rich tracts of fertile soil supporting agrarian activities. This region was also rich in iron deposits and hence supported iron extraction related activities as it is evident from the remnants of fortified cities and towns solely meant for this work. One of the specialities of this kingdom was that it was adorned by two capitals namely Ujjain founded by Achchyutguni in the north and the other one Mahishmati towards its southern part. Avanti reached

its peak of prosperity in the sixth century BCE, facilitated by trade and agrarian related activities.

Vatsa

Vatsa kingdom is often associated with the Kuru clan where we find references to the epic of *Mahabharatha* as well. As per the ancient records it is understood that they migrated from Hastinapura to this region due to natural calamities. Kausambhi was the capital of this kingdom adorned by rivers of Yamuna, Chambal and Ganga. Moreover it can be considered as a confluence centre of all these rivers, which supported all kinds of activities that supported their growth and progress in a desirable manner. This is evident from the archaeological excavations conducted here where remains of iron objects, tools, pottery and walls made of burnt bricks were extracted. Kaushambi is one of those cities after Harappan civilisation where one could trace the existence of a well-fortified city with perfect town-planning and security system in those times. Most of the archaeological findings unearthed from here dates back to the sixth century BCE. One of the main rulers that finds reference to this kingdom is Udayana who was married to Pradyota's daughter from the Chedi kingdom.

Kuru

The Kuru kingdom as per the Buddhist records was ruled by kings of Yuddhitthila gotra which in turn is identified with the family of Yuddhishtira, the eldest among the Pandavas from the epic of *Mahabharata*. This place did have two capitals which are identified as Hastinapura (*Asandivant*) on the banks of the river Yamuna and Indraprastha (modern day Delhi). It encompassed regions of modern day Uttar Pradesh, especially the Ganga-Yamuna doab region. There are references about them in the *Arthasastra* where they are referred as 'Rajsabdopajivinah' who entered into matrimonial alliances with the clans of Bhojas, Panchalas and Yadavas. After an unpredictable flood, their clan had to migrate to Kausambhi, making it their new capital.

Panchala

Panchala lies adjacent to the Kuru kingdom, adorned by the rivers of Ganga and Sarayu, having twin capitals of Ahichhatra to the north and Kampilya to the south. They covered the modern regions of Bareilly and Farrukhabad in Uttar Pradesh. There are references about this place and their conquests in *Ramayana* as well as *Mahabharata* where they mention rulers like Chulani and Drupada reigning over this place in varying historical timelines. It also finds place in ancient scriptures as the birthplace of Draupadi, the wife of Pandavas who later came to be known as Panchali due to her hometown, which is none other than Panchala itself. Like Kuru, it also started as a monarchical kingdom but later changed to republic and became one among the gana sanghas.

Surasena

Surasena is a kingdom mostly ascribed to the Yadava clan who are again divided into sub-sects such as Vrishris, Mahabhojas andhakas etc. The story of Lord Krishna swirls around this region where we see mention of the highly advanced city of Mathura.This kingdom lies to the west of Yamuna. The ancient Greek accounts also mention the cities and towns of this region alongside ancient scriptures from India.

Mathura was the capital of Surasena.

As per *Ashtadhyayi* written by Panini, Mathura acted as a conjunction zone between Indian trade routes, mainly divided into two, namely as Uttarapatha, the northern route and Dakshinapatha, the southern route. It connected people from the north to the Deccan and to the west coast. It acted out as a connecting link between the Gangetic plains and Malwa Plateau, the two economic sectors where people met for trade and other purposes thereby becoming the main centre of cultural exchange alongside their usual activities.

Matsya

One can find references to the kingdom of Matsya again from *Mahabharata* where their capital of Viratnagara is mentioned. It is stated as a place with a weaker political and economic set up named after its founding ruler by name, Virat. This is the place where the Pandavas spend the last year of their exile in disguise thereby completing their whole thirteen years of expulsion from their kingdom by their cousins, the Kauravas. Geographically speaking, the Matsya kingdom encompasses the regions of Bharatpur, Alwar and Jaipur districts in present-day Rajasthan. Surasena was one among its neighbouring kingdoms. Sahaja and Virata are the two main rulers who find their place in the epic of *Mahabharata* from this region. It finally merged as a part of Magadhan Empire.

Asmaka or Asvaka

This is one of those Mahajanapadas that fell outside the belt of middle gangetic plains better known as *madhyadesas*. The river Godavari adorned its boundaries with twin capitals, namely Pratishthana and Potali. As per the records Pratishthana was the abode of trade and commerce so that much of the trade related transactions took place in this region which is substantiated by the availability of punch-marked coins from this region which was unearthed as a part of the archaeological excavations. Mostly, it facilitated such activities to the north of its region.

Gandhara

This particular kingdom covers the modern day regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is situated in the lower valley of the Kabul river. This *Mahajanapada* and its unique characteristics are vividly described in epics like *Mahabharata* where they mention a queen by name Gandhari married to the king of Hastinapur by name Dhridharashtra. The name 'Gandhari' itself signifies belonging to this region.

Archaeological excavations including punch-marked coins, clay coins, tools, artefacts, ivory, bellow, dice, glass, copper, bronze ivory combs, earrings, anklets, semi-precious stones, gold etc. from this place bear testimony to the existence of brisk trade activities and a luxurious form of lifestyle adopted by the people who lived at that point in time. The city of Taxila is identified with this *Mahajanapada* where we can trace the convergence of trade routes from north India; Kashmir; West Asia and Central Asia occur facilitating contact and trade between these regions without any hindrance.

Kamboja

Kamboja, which spans over modern Pakistan, North -West Frontier Province and Hindukush, is often mentioned as an uncultured place in the ancient scriptures and *Arthashastra* written by Kautilya. It was a republic (*varta-sastropajivin samgha*) with much less development happening in various sectors due to less exposure to their neighbouring kingdoms and lack of

utilisation of available resources in their region. Absence of efficient monarchical rulers is considered as yet another reason for under-development.

Magadha

Magadha was the most powerful among the Mahajanapadas owing to rich deposits of iron ore available in this region and the fertile agricultural land that facilitated agrarian activities, especially in the southern part of the modern day Bihar. Trade activities further contributed to its financial well-being from time to time. Rivers like Gandak, Son and Ganga contributed much to the growth of Magadha as a leading monarchy under the reign of great rulers like Bimbisara who reigned from 544-492 BCE. They then expanded their kingdom and attained control over present day regions such as Patna, Gaya, Bhojpur etc. Bimbisara expanded his empire mainly through conquests and matrimonial alliances. He conquered weak kingdoms but at the same time entered into matrimonial alliances with the kingdoms like Madra, Lichchavis and Kosala.

Anga

One could trace back the existence of this Mahajanapada from Monghyr and Bhagalpur districts of eastern Bihar with its capital city at Champa. Pataliputra functioned as its capital and the main centre of all its activities. This city was considered as the abode of commercial activities in those days as it had its strategic position set on the busy trade routes of those times. Possibilities of rivers like the Champa and the Ganga were also used by Anga for its development and progress. Archaeological excavations further state that the presence of fortifications all around this city acts as an indicator of an efficient town planning and an efficient administrative system present in this kingdom in sixth century BCE.

Kashi

This region is identified with places in and around the eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Shahabad regions. Its easternmost border was Son river, while the Magadhan empire shared its western boundary. The legend has it that a king by name Kash established the rule of Chandravamsa in Varanasi region and from then on it came to be called as Kashi as a tribute to the ruler who founded an empire on this city. The Buddhist literature, especially Jatakas, provides information about this *Mahajanapada* as having constant rivalry with its neighbouring Kingdom of Kosala. It is one of those monarchies that attained political distinction at an earlier stage of development.

Kosala

The kingdom of Kosala functioned under an efficient administration divided into two capitals by the name Shravasti and Kushavati. The capital of north Kosala was Shravasti, while the southern portion was controlled by Kushavati. In the beginning it was a small state which with the aid of Videha had emerged as a powerful one during the phase of Mahajanapadas. It covers the modern day regions of Gonda, Faizabad, Lucknow and Baharaich of Uttar Pradesh and Orissa regions.

The Mahajanapada period came to an end by the beginning of the third century BCE, where we can see most of the states becoming part of bigger empires like Magadha. Details of the emergence of Magadha as a powerful empire and the reasons for the decline of the Mahajanapadas will be discussed in detail in the upcoming units.

Recap

- Mahajanapadas emerged due to socio-political, economic, cultural and technological changes.
- Iron usage played a transformative role in society.
- They shared common traits but maintained unique, independent identities.
- Religious ideals of Buddhism and Jainism significantly influenced this period.
- Known as the second urbanisation, it marked remarkable changes since the Harappan era.
- Large cities and towns with distinct features were a hallmark of this era.
- Mahajanapadas had independent policies on trade, administration, culture and expansion.
- Expansionist ambitions shaped political and economic aspirations.
- Constant wars led to the decline of Mahajanapadas.
- The Magadha Kingdom rose to dominance, ending the Mahajanapada era.

Objective Questions

1. Which is the metal that played a major role in the development of Mahajanapadas?
2. What is the other name of the Mahajanapada Phase?
3. Which is the most powerful among the Mahajanapadas?
4. Name the two religions that emerged during the Mahajanapada period.
5. Who established the Kingdom of Kashi?
6. In which period did the Mahajanapada almost end?
7. Who was the author of *Arthashastra?*

Answers

1. Iron
2. Second Urbanisation
3. Magadha
4. Buddhism and Jainism
5. Kasha
6. Third century BCE
7. Kautilya

Assignments

1. What socio-political and technological factors contributed to the rise of the Mahajanapadas and how did iron play a key role?

2. How did the monarchical and non-monarchical systems in the Mahajanapadas influence their governance and societal structures?

3. In what ways did the 'second urbanisation' of the Mahajanapadas foster economic growth and the spread of new religious ideas?

4. Analyse the factors that made Magadha a powerful empire among the janapadas.

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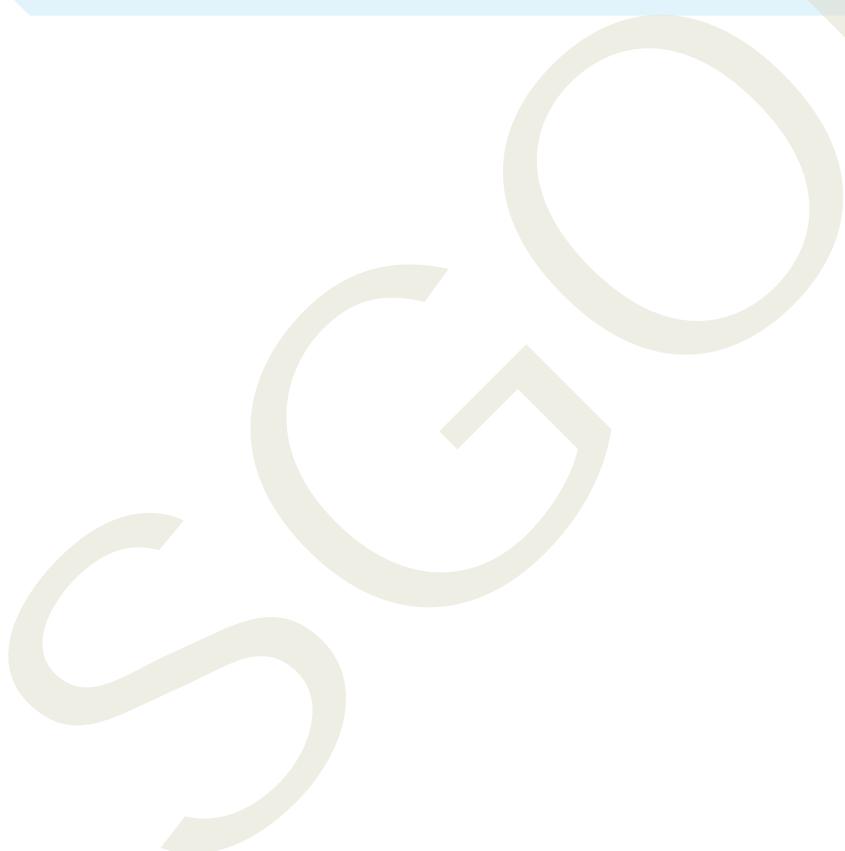
2 UNIT

NBPW Culture

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the key features of the Materialistic Phase in ancient India.

♦ explore the various types of unique pottery cultures that existed in this period.

♦ examine the role of the NBPW Culture in initiating the second urbanisation.

♦ analyse the societal changes influenced by the premium material culture of NBPW.

Prerequisites

Pottery holds a significant place in human history, representing one of the earliest material expressions of human creativity and development. Alongside the discovery of fire and the invention of the wheel—two key milestones in human evolution—pottery marks a crucial step in our journey towards civilisation. The wheel, in particular, revolutionised daily life, enabling the creation of not only pottery but a range of essential tools and materials. Pottery, as a result, became a symbol of progress, reflecting humanity's ability to move from one stage of development to another.

In the context of ancient India, pottery culture can be classified into four major types: OCR, BRW, PGW and NBPW. Of these, the NBPW (Northern Black Polished Ware) stands out for its exceptional quality and its profound impact on societal transformation. The NBPW culture is particularly noteworthy for its role in facilitating the second urbanisation, marking a period of significant change in India's social, economic and cultural landscape. This period saw the rise of complex urban centres and the NBPW culture became a hallmark of this transformative phase.

Keywords

Materialistic Phase, Pottery Cultures, NBPW, Second Urbanisation

Discussion

3.2.1 Materialistic Phase: A Beginning

In the history of Ancient India, the sixth century was very phenomenal due to various aspects, such as the rise of Mahajanapadas, use of iron, rise of cities and towns, settled form of agricultural activities, etc. Archaeological evidence did play a major role in re-creating this part of history and many historical artefacts were excavated out that were supposed to belong to this period. These findings when closely examined provided the existence of a culture which later came to be known as Northern Black Polished Ware Culture (NBPW) that involved both Later Vedic as well as Mahajanapada period. It is often considered as the major indicator of urbanisation in those days.

People in this period mostly turned to the materialistic aspect and were into the work of producing more touching aspects of their life. This phase is given the name as the Northern Black Polish Ware since pottery was a major indicator of the change in those days and this was skillfully used by many archaeologists and historians to find more about different phases of evolution and major changes in the history of humanity not only in India but the world over. There is often a misconception heard about the name of this phase, stating it's all about pottery and its related findings; however, archaeological excavations

and studies have shown that it embodies almost all the changes that influenced a particular phase.

One can find that its period started even before the use of NBPW wares as is testified by the fact that there were other cultures that were based on the dating fixed by archaeologists based on pottery cultures. Ochre Colored Pottery, Black Red Ware, Painted Grey Ware, Ahar Culture, Jorwe Culture are, to name a few, identified from ancient India so far. While meticulously studying about this we could understand that all others except Northern Black Polished Ware culture belonged either to Harappan, Post- Harappan, Vedic or Later Vedic Period depicting the peculiarities of their corresponding periods.

The Northern Black Polished Ware, in contrast, falls in the timeline of the emergence of Buddhism, Mahajanapadas, Magadha and even continues up to the period of the Mauryas. Let's know more about the pottery-based cultures that existed prior to NBPW to get a clear picture about the same.

3.2.1.1 OCP, NBW, PGW Pottery Cultures

The whole process of archaeological excavations to unearth pottery culture was influenced by the activities of a famous archaeologist and Egyptologist by name Flinders Patrie. As per the works of archaeologists and other literary works,

the whole of pottery culture in Ancient India is divided into four namely:

1. Ochre Colored Pottery (OCR Culture)

2. Black-Red Ware (BRW Culture)

3. Painted-Grey Ware (PGW Culture)

4. Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW Culture)

We already discussed OCR, BRW, PGW in Block 1. Now, let us know more about the NBPW phase.

3.2.1.2 NBPW Culture and Second Urbanisation

The Northern Black Polished Ware as it is stated in various texts is not actually as its name denotes, since not all potteries belonging to this phase are black in colour or polished. Furthermore, excavation shows us that they are not confined to the northern region alone. The NBPW pottery can be considered as a fine ware usually thin and made of high quality made with intrinsic designs. The shapes of this culture as found from the un-earthed items are bowls with conventional, curving, pointed and grooved sides; dishes with incurved rims and convex sides, dishes, lids, carinated handis and small vases. It had a glossy surface with a dark light texture often caused either due to the extensive use of ferruginous compound or magnetic oxide. Some others state that it is caused due to the application of oils or plant juices after which they were set on fire while they were still hot for the mud to get hardened. They were not usually painted but possessed designs such as bands, wavy lines, dots, concentric and intersecting circles and semicircles usually painted on yellow and light vermillion.

The remains of this culture were excavated for the first time in the year 1913 from Taxila which was followed by its presence in various places in and around Gangetic plains. In this manner, more than 1500 sites were identified so far, stretching from Taxila and Charsada in the northwest to Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh and from Patan in Gujarat to Tamluk in Bengal. Similarly, many artefacts belonging to this phase were excavated from places like Rupar in Punjab; Raja Karna ka Quila and Daulatpur in Haryana; Bairat, Noh and Jodhpur in Rajasthan; Hastinapur, Atranjikera, Kaushambi and Shravasti in Uttar Pradesh; and finally from Vaishali, Patna,and Sonepur in Bihar. In some places like Haryana, Rajasthan, Western Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Bihar, it is found that there is an overlap of this culture with other phases, such as that of PGW and BRW, indicating parallel cultures being practised in the same timeline in similar places.

Many theories related to the exact period of the NBPW generate confusion among people, as some state it as falling between 700 – 300 BCE, while some others claim it as between 600 – 300 BCE, based on the findings related to this culture. Let us take it as a time period falling between the seventh century BCE and the second century for a better understanding about the period falling in this culture which includes the Buddhism era, Mahajanapada period and even the Mauryan empire phase of ancient times. In this period we could witness the emergence of second urbanisation characterised by the usage of iron and wood for construction, making tools and weapons which may aid humans in their progress and development.

Trade during this time was facilitated through the money and barter system.

Artisans and merchants organised themselves into guilds with their own headmen having ultimate control over them. Long distance trade activities were promoted for profit as well as for the welfare and well being of the people. Cattles were also sometimes used as a medium of exchange in some places. One of the significant features of this period was the emergence of punch-marked coins usually made of copper and silver metals which were also used for exchanging goods and services as rightfully testified by Pali texts. All these facts point to the affiliation of people towards materialistic aspects of life even though Buddhism and Jainism had its influence over this phase.

The *Sulvasutras* provide clear information related to the sophisticated measurement system which may have helped in the demarcation of fields and houses. Art and architecture also developed during this period showing the beginning of many art forms as we see today. Kausambi was one of the most popular sites of the NBPW phase from where iron ores, tools made of iron, knives, razors, nails, sickles etc. have been discovered.

Peasants in those days were supposed to pay a tax of one-sixth of their production which was directly collected by royal agents for administration, revenue and maintenance of a standing army of their own. A new class of rich peasants with the name *Gahapathi* who were treated on par with that of the Vaishyas was the hallmark of this period. The term *shali* is found in the Pali, Prakrit and the Sanskrit texts indicating paddy cultivation and transplantation that began during the age of Budhha itself. As per records, besides paddy they also cultivated and produced pulses, millets, barley, cotton and sugarcane.

Monarchs or kings, as usual, enjoyed the highest official status in society. Even though there were suggestion bodies to help him make the right decisions pertaining to his subjects, his decision was final regarding any matter and others were obliged to obey the same without resistance. Higher officials better known as *Mahamatras* performed various functions alongside the minister or *mantri* and the commander (*Sena Nayaka*). There were also other officials like judges, accountants and other royal officials who executed things based on his order. They maintained officials like *Ayuyktas* who were deployed in the state possessing the same functions as of those in the centre of administration. Similarly, in the village level also, the whole thing was looked after by *Gramini* who were bestowed with huge responsibilities and functions. They also functioned as the leader of the tribal regiments and as the time went on this position was transferred to that of a village headman in the pre-Mauryan period. They were known by different names such as *gramini, bhojaka, grama bhojaka, gramika* etc. in those days and in this way almost 86,000 *'gramikas'* were said to have been summoned by Bimbisara as per the records available from that time period.

Large standing armies were maintained which went in direct proportion with the extent of one's kingdom. The Magadhan kingdom is said to have possessed a very efficient cavalry and elephants during this period. Furthermore, we could also witness that the fiscal system was established here on a firm base controlling their society. The Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas were exempted from taxation, but peasants and other common men had to pay a compulsory tax by name *bali* which was directly collected by *bali sadhakas*

themselves. Likewise tolls were also present in those days which the people were obliged to pay to *Shaulkika*. The old assemblies like *sabhas* were replaced by *Parishads* consisting of Brahmins to act as an advisory body for rulers. In the republics as discussed in the previous unit, the power vested mainly in the hands of tribal oligarchies.

One can trace the origin of the Indian legal and judicial system to this period where criminal and civil laws were formulated for the very first time based on the four-fold division of the society.

Their laws were based on *Dharmasutras* and punishment was based on a revenge system having resemblance to the Code of Hammurabi which came into existence in a much later stage of human development in Mesopotamia.

The above stated facts can be considered as the major hallmark of this period alongside the changes that were visible in certain areas like coinage, rise of new classes and administrative set up which will be discussed in detail in the upcoming units of this block.

Recap

- ♦ The NBPW culture reflects advancements in craftsmanship and technological skills.
- ♦ Pottery from this era showcases evolving artistic and functional needs of society.
- ♦ The second urbanisation, influenced by NBPW, marks a shift towards more complex urban centres.
- ♦ Social stratification and urban planning began to take shape during this period.
- ♦ The NBPW culture provides insights into the interconnections between trade, economy and politics.
- ♦ Human evolution begins with a materialistic phase marked by pottery culture.
- ♦ Pottery cultures like OCP, BRW, PGW and NBPW serve as indicators of human development.
- ♦ The NBPW culture played a key role in the second urbanisation.
- ♦ An analysis of NBPW reveals significant insights into this period.
- ♦ Drastic changes in social, economic, political, cultural and other sectors are reflected in the NBPW culture.

Objective Questions

1. Which is considered as the most luxurious among the pottery cultures of India?

2. What is the name of the book that deals with the most sophisticated measurements?

3. Name the officials who assisted the king in his administration during the second urbanisation period.

4. Which period coincides with that of the second urbanisation?

5. What does the term *Shali* mean?

Answers

1. NBPW Culture

2. *Sulvasutras*

3. *Mahamatras*

4. Mahajanapada Period

5. Paddy cultivation and transplantation

Assignments

1. Examine how different types of pottery serve as indicators of human development and progress across time and space.

2. Discuss the significance of studying various pottery styles and the cultures associated with them in understanding Ancient India.

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3 UNIT

Gahapathi, Gramani and Sethi

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ identify and evaluate the factors behind the emergence of new societal positions.

♦ understand the rise and impact of wealth-based classes like Gahapathi, Gramani and Sethi.

♦ explore the roles and functions of these newly emerged classes within society.

Prerequisites

In southern India, systems like the Nattukuttam, with the influential role of the *Nattamai* as chief village headman and Kerala's *Marumakkathayam* system, where the *Karanavars* held significant authority within family setups, illustrate the evolution of societal structures. Similarly, during the Mahajanapada period, certain roles emerged that transcended caste restrictions, highlighting wealth, status and functionality as key determinants of social hierarchy. Prominent among these were the *Gahapathi*, *Gamani* and *Sethi*.

The *Gahapathi* represented a wealthy family member, influential within both the family and the wider community, while the *Gamani* served as the village headman, ensuring smooth governance and organisation. The *Sethi*, on the other hand, stood out as wealthy merchants who financed rulers, supported standing armies and invested in public welfare while securing profitable ventures. These positions reflected a significant societal shift, where wealth and contribution to the community began to hold greater value than rigid caste boundaries.

This period marked the first instance in Indian history where individuals were recognised and respected for their contributions beyond traditional caste roles. These newly emerged classes embodied the economic, administrative and social characteristics of their time, making them pivotal figures in the history of the Mahajanapadas.

Keywords

Mahajanapada, *Gahapathi*, family, *Gramani*, village Administration, *Sethi*, welfare measures

Discussion

3.3.1 Changing Social Patterns in the *Mahajanapada* Period

The period of Mahajanapada, as we have discussed earlier, was influenced by two conflicting religious patterns, with the Brahmanical religion on one side and Buddhism alongside Jainism on the other. The most prominent castes that existed at that point in time were the Kshatriyas, Brahmins, Vaishyas and the Shudras. Among this the first three were considered *uthama* castes enjoying privileges in the then society. Meanwhile, the last *shudras* were supposed to do the menial works for the other three castes. The Brahmins took to teaching professions; the kshatriyas were into ruling and administrative procedures and the Vaishyas were the business owning group of that period. The Shudras were doing jobs pertaining to their status, which was to assist the other three castes in their works. This

was the scenario that persisted prior to the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism in the *Mahajanapada* period.

This situation changed from the sixth century onwards when people embraced these newly formed religions with the hope of releasing themselves from caste rigidity followed in that time period. This created various changes in society as the Kshatriyas tried to attain more prominence over the Brahmanas. New wealthy classes emerged due to trade related activities who were better known as *Sethi* which we will discuss in this unit later. New system demanded professionalism from the people, creating professional classes called as jatis who were well versed in their desired profession and contributed much to the economy of the society as it involved specialisation in various sectors. The need of the society was yet another reason that facilitated the emergence of new classes as they were moulding themselves into independent principalities both as a

kingdom and also in the village level or city level administration which demanded someone to finance, administer and to supervise their activities making sure that everything is going in a disciplined way. This particular phenomenon did have its own vices. Similarly, we could also see the decentralisation of administration giving rise to *Gramani,* who fulfilled the duties of a village headman and the same was reflected in the case of *Gahapathi* as well where everything about an established estate type of a household was controlled by him. These changes and many others began to provide a new identity to the society in the way of its existence and functionality. Let us discuss in detail about the three concepts which make up this unit.

Gahapathi

We find the term *Gahapathi* being used for the very first time in the Pali texts indicating a wealthy person resembling the *'Karanavar'* system being followed by the Nair families in southern India or to a feudal lord in the medieval period. *Gahapathi* in this context was the sole owner of everything from land, agriculture, slaves, guards, domesticated animals, inmates of the family etc. His decisions were irreversible and were binding on each and everything that came under his jurisdiction. People who came under him gave him respect and status as he deserved in the then society. Wealth was the determining factor in the case of this particular class. *Gahapati, often* equated with *Grahapathi,* literally meaning head of the household, had vast powers bestowed on him.

Gahapati had vast amounts of property and land and hence most of the people were dependent on him for their livelihood. In works like *Dighanikhaya,* it is clearly stated that the *Gahapathi* employs labourers, slaves, servants and other professionals to do work for him. It is through him that they met their needs for food, accommodation and wages. Besides agriculture, he also did cattle rearing and related activities which further made him richer. He was the one who provided dairy products to the neighboring villages and others who were in need of them. He also maintained *go-palakas* or cowherd to look after this business as well.

According to the ancient records, *Gahapathis* were highly influential in the society and played a predominant role in the spread of Buddhism and Jainism among the masses. Similarly, they also added to the economy of the society through taxation procedures and other ways that could help the ruler in running the administration in an efficient manner. They provided their help through material and men whenever the ruler was in need. Some sources also speak about *Gahapathis* providing military help to the king to deal with internal as well as external issues. As a family being the basic unit of the society, the role of *Gahapatis* was remarkable in building up its influence in the society and vice versa.

Gramani

Gramani is the name given to the village headsman during this phase, the reference of which can be traced back to the Brahmanical scriptures as well as from Buddhist scriptures. Classification of the Kingdom into *grama, nigama* and *nagara* is well described in Buddhist sources stating the travel experiences of monks travelling all throughout the kingdom for various purposes. *Grama* was the name given to the villages or countryside;

nigama was the market centre and *nagara* was the towns in which it was called as *mahanagaras* in the case of big cities. Village life in those days came under the administration of *Gramani* or village headman who looked after the welfare of his fellow villagers or subjects. This position is all related with village administration and its related activities.

Law, defence and welfare policies for the corresponding villages were associated with the functionalities of *Gramani* as is testified in the Hindu scriptures and *Manusmriti*. He was considered as the abode of justice and made decisions on any disputable issues by consulting with the council consisting of elder members of the villages often known as *Grama Vridhas*. His decisions were final and were executed in no time with the help of volunteers and guards which that position used to have for maintaining peace and order. Similarly in times of emergencies also, he deployed his troops to protect the villages from chaos and horrendous outcomes. Irrigation, public works, construction and other welfare policies were also undertaken under the village headmen as per their needs and necessities. The details pertaining to these mostly come from Buddhist sources such as *Mahaparinibbanasutta*. They were supposed to report to the king in times of bigger issues and they also played a predominant role in executing the orders of the ruler at the village level. The existence of this position and its influence was such that it inspired the village administration in the later stages of Indian historical timeline like that of Cholas, Mauryas, Guptas, Chalukyas etc. Most of the villages acted as commercial as well as exchange centres which was again done under the supervision of *Gramani* who made provisions for such activities by

facilitating the same. Some scholars even state that the most wealthiest, powerful and highly influential family adorned this position and the position was hereditary in nature, though there is no ample evidence to prove that theory as a true one so far. Similarly, as per some evidence, the prototype of the same position and its functionalities is said to have existed in our neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka.

Sethi

Sethis formed the business class that performed different functions such as investing, financing and sales of goods and services. They became highly rich and influential through the passage of time through these activities. They were mostly found in *nagaras* and *mahanagaras* like Vaishali, Varanasi, Mathura, Rajagraha etc. According to the sources from this timeline they became preachers of Buddhism knowingly or unknowingly. They can be seen as the leaders of the urban community. Their wealth was so much that even kings took help from them in times of financial crisis. Their activities aided in the flourishing of trade related activities. Guilds were formed and some among them even controlled them. Art and architecture flourished with the aid and assistance of this rich class. *Sethis* who were highly rich were sometimes preferred to the post of *Gahapathi* as well based on the public opinion and the activities of that person with respect to the welfare of the society.

They were conferred a high position in the society and did play a predominant role in transforming the people's lives in this period. In fact they controlled the commercial centres and even influenced the activities in the trade routes connecting *uttarapatha* and *dakshinapatha*. Their

activities were a great boost for the *Mahajanapada* economy which thrived on trade, agriculture and cattle rearing for sustenance. Rulers and their activities were also influenced by the opinions or suggestions of *Sethis* as their help was an unavoidable ingredient in terms of administration and other welfare measures initiated by the ruling elite.

Socially, as stated above they enjoyed a very high position in the society despite their caste or religious affiliations. Buddhism and Jainism played a major role in the growth of classes like that of the *sethis* and to enjoy social privileges and status in the society as these religions never supported caste system or such other social evils. Even though they never backed up the notion of consuming material wealth, *the Sethi* class made it their priority by using the other possibilities of the *sramana* religions and their principles.

Recap

- ♦ The needs of society of the time facilitated the emergence of a new set of classes
- ♦ *Gahapathi* represented as the head of the family who administered every activity inside and outside his family
- ♦ *Gamani* performed the functions of a village headman
- ♦ Sethis were a rich wealthy class of financiers and investors who aided the economy in times of needs and emergencies
- ♦ Changing perspectives of development, administration and functionalities of the *Mahajanapada* society is clear through understanding these concepts

Objective Questions

1. Which two religions influenced the society of *Mahajanapada* ?
2. Who was the head of the family in this period?
3. Who performed the duties of a village headman?
4. Who were the wealthy financiers and investors of this historical timeline in ancient India?
5. Who were considered as *uthama* among the Brahmanical caste system?

Answers

1. Buddhism and Jainism
2. *Gahapathi*
3. *Gramani*
4. *Sethi*
5. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.

Assignments

1. How did the emergence of new social classes, such as the Gahapathi and Sethi, impact the structure of society in the Mahajanapadas?
2. Discuss the role of trade and economic activities in shaping the social hierarchy of the Mahajanapadas.
3. How did the transition from tribal to state-based societies in the Mahajanapadas reflect broader social changes?

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4 UNIT

Punch - Marked Coins

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the barter system in ancient India before the advent of coinage

♦ familiarise with Punch-marked coins, India's first traditional currency and their usage

♦ analyse the societal transformations brought about by the introduction of Punch-marked coins.

Prerequisites

As history students, you may be intrigued by the origins of coinage, especially considering that the barter system was the primary mode of exchange in most parts of the world before currency came into being. Historical records show that the first known currency, the 'Shekel,' emerged in Mesopotamia nearly 5,000 years ago. Evidence also suggests that mints were used to produce coins in the Asia Minor region around the sixth century BCE. In India, a similar system of coinage—known as Punch-marked coins—appeared around the same time as in Asia Minor. This innovation marked a significant shift from the barter system, which was limited by the availability of goods and lacked standardised exchange values. The introduction of Punch-marked coins brought transformative changes to society, particularly in trade, commerce and the economy. It also enhanced administrative efficiency compared to the previous system based on the exchange of goods and services. A deeper exploration of these coins can provide valuable insights into the periods in which they were used, offering information that is otherwise not widely available in the mainstream historical narrative.

Barter System, Society, Punch-marked Coins, *Ratti,* transformative changes

Discussion

3.4.1 Coinage

Coinage, weights and measures did have a great role in transforming the transaction system between human beings to a whole new level portraying uniformity and uniqueness. Prior to the coinage system we already know that our ancestors made transactions especially through the barter system whereby they exchanged one product for another and the same went on in the case of service as well. This was a need of the then society as all people were not having everything and there was a kind of inequality, inappropriateness and insufficiency that began to reflect in their day-to-day life. Thus, in order to balance this condition, they invented or rather came up with a solution that facilitated the growth of the Barter system.

This was only a temporary relief for people in those days since there were still remnants of inequality and diversity that existed making life difficult. Moreover, it was difficult for the population to find the exact product or service to exchange by travelling long distances without proper modes of transportation. Then they began to think about a way where people can come to a certain place to get the products or services they want with a uniform form of exchange system having its own value system as given by the then society. This was the beginning spark of the discovery of coins, trade, sales, markets etc. This concept made life much easier for humans and has shown its reverberations in various regions of earth.

In India, it took the form of the origin of Punch-Marked Coins, usually made in Copper or Silver, making its entrance into the Indian economy during the period of Mahajanapada. Let us now discuss straight away about Punch Marked Coins itself where we can find from the evidences that they possessed their own nomenclature based on units called *'ratti'* where they are mostly excavated from places like Kuru, Panchala, Magadha, Surasena, Gandhara and from many places in and around Indo-Gangetic plains usually issued between sixth century BCE to first century CE. These coins got their name from the manufacturing technique involved in the making where they used to punch them with symbols of animals, plants, Gods, Goddesses, emblems, some auspicious signs etc., having their own value in this newly discovered system. The coins thus formed were called by different names such as *Karshapanas*, *Puranas, Ahat,* or as *Pana*.

Punch-marked coins have been excavated from various sites from which it is clear that they had different shapes such as circular, oval, square, rectangular and even in some other unidentified irregular patterns. Archaeologists came to the conclusion that they started minting such coins from the sixth century onwards

having one or two punches in the initial phase, which however increased over time. The exchange value of these coins stood stable both in the internal as well as external transactions as it is substantiated by corroborative evidence found from places like Taxila, Rajagriha, Varanasi and Hastinapura. Joe Cribb, a numismatist, made some pretty interesting findings about punch-marked coins when he studied about it from Gandhara regions and made phenomenal discoveries pertaining to some specific symbols being used in coinage of certain regions. For example, in Saurashtra region, humped bull was the symbol most frequently used, while in Magadha it was a variety of plant and animal symbols that found its place among punch-marked coins. And in Dakshina Panchala, it was the symbol swastika that stood predominant among others used in those times.

Fig. 3.4.1
Karshapana- Asmaka Janapada

Its making as mentioned in *Manusmriti*, *Ashtadhyayi* and in Buddhist *Jataka* stories states that either silver or copper bars were used which were made into irregular shapes with specific weights by dissecting them in the initial stages and then by finally cutting through the edges of the coin. They were then hammered using a punch and were made ready for the symbols to be marked in it. They were the traditional form of Indian currency, in fact the first of its kind having an amorphous nature.

The Greek and Achaemenid coinage in the later stages is also said to have used punch-marked coins as is testified from the findings of the same from Kabul, Taxila, Pushkalavati etc. during this period. The metallic parts of these coins thus made were stamped with the symbols as we discussed earlier. They were then measured in *ratti* units in transactions which weighed around 0.11 grams. It was popularised by the Magadhan administration going up to the period of Mauryans where they used 50-54 grains of silver for its making and used 32 *rattis* as weight value for them. Furthermore, they were flatter than their predecessors from the *Mahajanapada* period. Similarly, around 450 additional symbols began to be used besides the usual ones. These unique coins were ultimately replaced by caste dye struck coins from the post-Mauryan period.

One of the major areas that was impacted by the punch-marked coin was trade and commerce. Society benefited much from a sense of uniformity and appropriateness achieved with this coinage as opposed to the earlier system based on transaction of items. The next one being the creation of new professions related with this currency like money minting, money-lending etc.

This newly discovered system changed the social structure and functioning and helped in executing political decisions with ease, especially those related to finance, agriculture, trade, cattle rearing etc. People began to enjoy a sense of freedom as well as security while interchanging things for day-to-day needs. Chaotic experiences during the barter system abruptly ended making way for the availability of goods and services in regional or commercial centers where people would get what they want by paying for them through punch-marked coins. The coins greatly helped in doing trade with foreign

countries like Greece which in turn helped in the overall progress of kingdoms in this specific period. Standard and value of the Indian economy was established through this system which became a real forerunner for further developments in the coinage system.

Recap

- ♦ Barter System was the primary exchange method
- ♦ Punch-marked coins were India's first currency
- ♦ They were made of silver and copper
- ♦ Coins' weight was measured in ratti
- ♦ Punch-marked coins transformed societal transactions
- ♦ Introduced during the Mahajanapada period
- ♦ Continued through the Mauryan period
- ♦ Replaced by cast die-struck coins later

Objective Questions

1. Which system existed prior to the introduction of the currency system in the world?
2. Name the first traditional currency of India?
3. In which period were Punch-marked coins introduced for the very first time?
4. Which two metals were used for the creation of punch-marked coins?
5. What is the unit of weight used in those days?

Answers

1. Barter System
2. Punch-marked coins
3. Mahajanapada Period
4. Silver and Copper
5. *Ratti*

Assignments

1. Discuss the role of Punch-marked coins in the transition from barter to currency-based transactions in India.

2. Explain the technological advancements in coin minting in ancient India and their influence on economy and administration.

Suggested Reading

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5
UNIT

Rise of Buddhism and Jainism

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ examine the social and political context that facilitated the rise of Buddhism and Jainism

♦ compare the philosophies and teachings of Gautama Buddha and Mahavira

♦ understand the impact of Buddhism and Jainism on the religious landscape of ancient India

♦ explore the spread of Buddhism and Jainism beyond India and their influence on other cultures

♦ investigate the causes for the decline of Buddhism in the subcontinent

Prerequisites

In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, several religious sects emerged in the mid-Gangetic plains, with records mentioning as many as sixty-two. These sects were often rooted in regional customs and rituals followed by different communities in north-east India. Among them, Jainism and Buddhism stood out as the most influential, emerging as significant reform movements. Both religions challenged the Brahmanical dominance, focusing on addressing the concerns and needs of the common people during that period.

Keywords

Jainism, Buddhism, Caste system, *Ahimsa*

Discussion

3.5.1 Major causes for the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism

Varnashrama dharma, or the fourfold division of the caste, enabled the first two castes, namely the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas, to attain power and status in society and to subdue other castes. They came out with a new set of rules and regulations that ensured that other castes never became free from caste rigidity imposed by them. Even though the whole concept was founded to ensure the smooth running of society, it was fabricated to fit into their selfish needs and agendas. In fact, they demanded special privileges like exemption from taxes and punishments.

Professionally speaking, the Brahmins did the temple duties and acted out as teachers and advisors to the rulers; the Kshatriyas or the rulers governed over their subjects and protected them from external attacks and internal rebellions. It was the duty of a *kshatriya* ruler to ensure that his subjects were living in a happy or prosperous environment under his kingdom. The Vaishyas, the third Varna, were merchants who sold products and became the centre pillar of the economy. The Shudras, the last and final caste, worked as domestic slaves, agricultural slaves, craftsmen and hired labourers in post-Vedic times. They were described as cruel, greedy and thieving in their habits and some of them were treated as untouchables. The higher the varna, the more privileged a person was; the lower the varna of an offender, the more severe was the punishment prescribed for him or her.

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

The spread of a new agricultural economy in north-eastern India developed during the sixth century BCE. Before these areas were colonised on a large scale, they were densely forested and could not be easily cleared without the aid of iron axes. Although some people lived in these areas prior to the sixth century BCE, they used implements of bone, stone and copper and led a precarious life on the banks of lakes and rivers and river confluences where land was opened to settlement through the process of erosion and flooding.

Extensive use of iron tools, especially in the mid-Gangetic plain alongside the fertility of soil necessitated both agriculture and related trade activities; this can be considered as yet another reason for the rise of new classes who embraced the new religions to make an identity of their own.

The decreasing number of cattle among the people due to constant use of these beings for sacrificial purposes in northern India and for food in southern India adversely impacted the economy dependent on agriculture and cattle rearing. The impact was directly felt on the economy, lifestyle, diary products, culture and family lives of people. These things also prompted people to think about an

alternative other than the Brahmanical religion, most possibly a religion that could propagate *ahimsa* and save the lives of both cattle and men who depended on them either directly or indirectly.

One could see that around 500 BCE, there was a drastic rise of cities like Kaushambi near Kushinagar (in Deoria district of UP), Varanasi, Vaishali Chirand (in Saran district), Taradih in Bodh-Gaya, Pataliputra, Rajgir and Champa in Bhagalpur district. Both Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha were associated with these cities. This in turn helped the rise of Vaishya classes who accumulated large amounts of wealth through trade and other businesses from these cities. It acted as a hub for trade and other kinds of activities boosting up the economy.

Last but not the least, the disparities and discrimination offered by the Hindu religion dominated by the Brahmanical laws and perspectives was unbearable and intolerable for common people who condemned the system from within, even though the protest did not take a violent turn physically. As they were searching for a change from this pathetic situation, they were ready to new religions like Jainism and Buddhism without any reluctance. In fact, they found it as a way of enjoying the so far denied "forbidden fruits of freedom".

Buddhist and Jain monks were asked to forego the good things of life; were not permitted to touch gold and silver. They were allowed to accept only as much from their patrons as was sufficient to keep body and soul together.

3.5.1.1 Spread of Jainism

According to Jain tradition, Jainism is

a religion propagating simplicity, *ahimsa* and piety all at the same time. Even though it is identified with Vardhamana Mahavira, they consider him only as a twenty-fourth *Thirthankara* or religious leader. They adamantly believe that prior to him they had 23 such religious leaders of which Rishabh Dev was the first one and Vardhamana the last and most influential among them all. In the initial stages it was spread among the regions in and around UP and Bihar. Parsvanatha, the direct predecessor to Vardhamana attained *Samadhi* in Bihar after which Vardhamana himself took this religion to new heights of development and progress.

Vardhamana Mahavira was born in 540 BCE in a village near Vaishali, which is close to Basarh in Vaishali district of north Bihar. His mother Trishala was the sister of the Lichchhavi lord Chetaka, whose daughter was married to Bimbisara and his father Siddhartha was the head of a renowned kshatriya dynasty. Because of their ties to the Magadha royal line, Mahavira was able to contact princes and other nobles with ease as part of his spiritual mission.

Mahavira began his life as a householder, but at the age of 30, driven by his search for the truth, he left his home and transformed into an ascetic. He spent twelve years travelling, never spending more than a day in a village or five days in a town. It is believed that throughout his twelve-year journey, he never changed his clothing and eventually gave them up when he reached omniscience (*kaivalya*) at the age of 42. He overcame happiness and sadness through *Kaivalya*. Because of this conquest, he is known as Mahavira or the great hero or *jina,* that is, the conqueror and his followers are known as Jainas. He spent thirty years preaching his

religion, travelling to Koshala, Magadha, Mithila, Champa and other places. In 468 BCE, he died at the age of 72 at Pavapuri, a place near present-day Rajgir.

However, archaeology does not verify his presence in the sixth century BCE, when it is believed that he died in 527 BCE (born in 599 BCE, as per this version). He was affiliated with cities and other communities that did not exist until 500 BCE.

3.5.1.2 Principles of Jainism

Jainism taught five doctrines: (i) do not commit violence (*Ahimsa*) (ii) do not tell a lie or not to utter any falsehood (satya or sunrita) (iii) do not steal (*asteya*) (iv) do not hoard or non-possession, to call nothing one's own (*aparigraha*) and (v) observe continence *(brahmacharya)*. It is said that only the fifth doctrine was added by Mahavira, the other four were taken over by him from previous teachers. Jainism attached the utmost importance to *ahimsa* or non-injury to living beings.

It occasionally had absurd outcomes, as some Jain rulers ordered the punishment of those responsible for animal cruelty. Mahavira advised his disciples to remove all clothes, in contrast to Parshva, who had instructed them to cover both the upper and lower parts of their bodies. This suggests that Mahavira urged his disciples to live a simpler lifestyle. As a result, Jainism subsequently split into the shvetambaras—those who wore white clothing—and the digambaras—those who stayed bare—sects.

Jainism did not reject the varna system as did Buddhism, but it did acknowledge the existence of the gods and put them below the jina. According to Mahavira, a person's crimes or virtues from a previous incarnation determine whether they are born in a high or lower varna. Even in a chandala, Mahavira searches for human values. According to him, individuals of the lower castes might gain emancipation by living a pure and honourable life. The primary goal of Jainism is to achieve independence from worldly bonds. For such liberation, no ritual is required. It is attained through right knowledge, right belief and right action. These three are considered to be the three jewels or *triratna* of Jainism consisting of right faith (*samyag-darshana*), right knowledge (*samyag-jnana*) and right conduct (*samyag-charitra*).

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

Mahavira established an organisation of his followers that welcomed both men and women in order to disseminate the teachings of Jainism. He delivered his sermons in the language of the common people, Prakrit. It is said that he had 14,000 followers, which is a small number. Jainism failed to draw in the public because it could not distinguish itself from the brahmanical religion very effectively. Nevertheless, Jainism slowly took root in south and western India, where the brahmanical religion was not as strong. Chandragupta Maurya (322–298 BCE) is credited with bringing Jainism to Karnataka, according to a late legend. The emperor renounced his throne, became a Jaina and spent his last years in Karnataka as a Jain ascetic, although no other source supports this account.

The famine in Magadha 200 years after

Mahavira's death is regarded as another reason for the expansion of Jainism in southern India. Twelve years of famine were experienced and in an effort to protect themselves, many Jains moved to the south under the direction of Bhadrabahu, while the others remained in Magadha under the direction of Sthulabahu. Jainism was introduced throughout south India by emigrant Jains. After the famine was over, they went back to Magadha, where they had disagreements with the native Jainas. Those who had returned from the south asserted that they had adhered rigorously to the religious tenets even during the famine. Additionally, they said that the Magadha-based Jain ascetics had broken the norms and were now lax. A council was called at Pataliputra, modern-day Patna, to resolve these disagreements and assemble the core principles of Jainism, but the Jains who had returned from the south boycotted it and refused to accept its decisions. From this point forward, the Magadhans were referred to as svetambaras and the southerners as digambaras. The story that attributes the reason to the drought dates from a later era and is regarded as dubious. The division of the Jains into two factions is undeniable, although the earliest epigraphic evidence for its growth in Karnataka dates to the third century CE. Many Jain monastic institutions, known as basadis, grew established in Karnataka in succeeding years, notably after the fifth century and were provided by the monarch for their upkeep.

In the fourth century BCE, Jainism spread to Kalinga in Orissa and in the first century BCE, it was supported by the Kalinga ruler Kharavela who had vanquished the princes of Andhra and Magadha. It also appears to have spread to the southern areas of Tamil Nadu between the first and second century BCE. Jainism spread to Malwa, Gujarat and Rajasthan in subsequent centuries and today these regions still have a sizable Jain population who are mostly involved in trade and business. Even while Jainism did not initially have as much state patronage as Buddhism and did not grow as rapidly, it nevertheless has sway in the regions where it did. However, Buddhism has virtually vanished from the Indian subcontinent.

3.5.1.3 Contribution of Jainism

The ritualistic Vedic religion and the evils of the varna system were first seriously addressed by Jainism. The early Jains abandoned the Sanskrit language, which was primarily used by brahmanas. Instead, they chose to communicate their beliefs in Prakrit, the language of the common people. Their religious literature was composed in Ardhamagadhi and the books were finally compiled in Gujarat's Valabhi, a renowned centre of learning, in the sixth century AD.

The Jains' adoption of Prakrit contributed to the development of this language and literature. From Prakrit, many regional languages emerged, most notably Shauraseni, which gave rise to the Marathi language. The first significant works in Apabhramsha were written by Jains, as was its first grammar. The Jain literature includes novels, theatre, Puranas and epics. A significant portion of Jain texts still exist as unpublished manuscripts, which may be discovered in the Gujarati and Rajasthani Jain temples. The Jains extensively used Sanskrit and produced a large amount of works in it throughout the early medieval period. They wrote considerably in Kannada, which contributed to the growth of Kannada language.

Like Buddhists, Jains did not practise image worship at first. Later, people started to worship Mahavira and the 23 tirthankaras. For this reason, beautiful and even enormous pictures in stone have been carved, particularly in Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan and MP. Though not as prolific as its Buddhist equivalent in the past, Jainism made a significant contribution to art and architecture in the Middle Ages.

3.5.2 Gautama Buddha and Buddhism

Mahavira lived at the same time as Gautama Buddha, also known as Siddhartha. He is said to have been born in 567 BCE (567 BCE, according to some versions) into a Shakya kshatriya family in Lumbini, Nepal, near Kapilavastu, at the foothills of Nepal. The father of Gautama, who led the Shakya republican clan, appears to have been elected king of Kapilavastu. His mother was a Koshalan dynasty princess. Thus, Gautama came from a great family like Mahavira. He also received certain egalitarian views from his republican birthplace.

Gautama exhibited a contemplative mindset as a young child. He got married young, but he had little interest in marital life. He was affected by human suffering and looked for a way to end it. He left home at age 29, like Mahavira. He spent nearly seven years travelling until being enlightened at the age of 33 in Bodh-Gaya under a pipal tree and he started to be referred as the Buddha or the enlightened one.

The first sermon given by the Buddha was at Sarnath in Banaras. He travelled a great distance while spreading his message. He could walk 20 to 30 kilometres every day because of his strong physique. For forty years he continued to walk, preach and meditate, only taking a break during the yearly rainy season. He faced many ardent adherents of competing groups, especially the brahmanas, during this protracted period, but he vanquished them in discussions. He made no distinctions between man and woman, the high and the low, or the affluent and the destitute in his missionary work. At the age of 80, Gautama Buddha passed away in 487 BCE (483 in some versions) in Kusinagara, which is also the name of the village of Kasia in the eastern UP district of Deoria. However, similar to Vardhamana Mahavira, there is no archaeological evidence to establish the presence of Gautama Buddha in the sixth century BCE. It wasn't until the fifth century BCE that the Buddha visited the cities of Kaushambi, Shravasti, Varanasi, Vaishali and Rajgriha.

3.5.2.1 Doctrines of Buddhism

The Buddha established himself as a reformer who was aware of the realities of the day. He avoided the pointless debates that occurred at the time about the soul (atman) and Brahma in favour of focusing on practical issues. He asserted that individuals suffer as a result of their aspirations and that the world is full of sufferings. Nirvana, or being free from the cycle of life and death, is realised when desires are vanquished.

Gautama Buddha recommended an eightfold path *(ashtangika marga)* for the elimination of human misery. This path is attributed to him in a text of about the third century BCE. It comprised right observation, right determination, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness and right concern. If a person follows this eightfold path, he would free himself from the machinations

of priests and would reach his destination. Gautama taught that a person should avoid an excess of both luxury and austerity and prescribed the middle path.

The Buddha also laid down a code of conduct for his followers on the same lines as those of the Jain teachers. The principal tenets are: (i) do not commit violence, (ii) do not covet the property of others, (iii) do not use intoxicants, (iv) do not tell a lie and (v) do not indulge in sexual misconduct and adultery. These teachings are common to the social conduct ordained by virtually all religions.

3.5.2.2 Features of Buddhism and the Causes of its Spread

Buddhism denies the existence of both god and the soul. Early Buddhism attracted the common people because it was not mired in the jargon of intellectual debate. It also gained the support of the lower classes since it opposed the varna system. The Buddhist order accepted people without taking into account their caste and women were also given admission in the sangha, putting them on an equal footing with males. Buddhism was more liberal and democratic than Brahmanism.

Buddhism particularly appealed to the people of the non-Vedic areas where it found virgin soil for conversion. As they were despised by the orthodox Brahmanas, the people of Magadha were eager to embrace Buddhism. Magadha was exiled from the holy Aryavarta, the Aryas' homeland that encompasses modern-day Uttar Pradesh. The ancient custom still exists and the residents of north Bihar prefer not to be cremated in Magadha, south of the Ganges.

Buddhism was disseminated as a result of the Buddha's character and the strategy he used to propagate his faith. He didn't want to be provoked by slander and abuse and instead tried to overcome evil with righteousness and hatred with love. He handled his opponents with wit and presence of mind as he maintained his poise and calm in difficult situations.

The usage of Pali, a form of Prakrit that first appeared approximately around 500 BCE, assisted in the diffusion of Buddhism. It made it easier for average people to adopt Buddhist beliefs. In addition, Gautama Buddha established the sangha, a religious institution whose doors were open to everyone, regardless of caste, creed, or sex. Slaves, soldiers and debtors, however, were not permitted entry. The rules and regulations of the sangha have to be strictly adhered to by the monks. They were required to take the vow of chastity, poverty and faith after they were accepted as members of the Buddhist church. Buddhism's three main components are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Buddhism advanced quickly even during the lifetime of the Buddha as a consequence of structured preaching carried out under the guidance of the sangha. This religion was accepted by the inhabitants of the monarchs of Magadha, Koshala and Kaushambi as well as by a number of republican governments.

The renowned Maurya ruler Ashoka adopted Buddhism 200 years after the Buddha's passing. By introducing Buddhism through his missionaries to Central Asia, West Asia and Sri Lanka, Ashoka made it a universal religion. Even now, Buddhism is practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Tibet and portions of China and Japan. Although Buddhism is no longer practised in the country where it originated (except for the present Union

Territory of Ladakh), it is still widely practised throughout South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia.

3.5.2.3 Causes of the Decline of Buddhism

By the eleventh century, Buddhism had virtually disappeared from India. In Bengal and Bihar, it had persisted in a modified form up to the eleventh century, but disappeared later. What led to this? We see that while every religion begins with the intention of reforming, it gradually gives in to the rites and ceremonies it first condemned. Buddhist thought changed in a similar way. It lost the battle against the evils of Brahmanism that it had waged at first. The brahmanas changed their faith in response to the Buddhist challenge. They emphasised the significance of protecting the cattle and provided assurances of heaven for women and shudras. Buddhism, however, underwent negative alteration. The Buddhist monks gradually lost contact with society; they switched from Pali, the language of the people, to Sanskrit, the language of intellectuals. They engaged in extensive idol worship beginning in the first century and were the recipients of various gifts from followers. Monks had a pleasant existence due to the plentiful offerings and significant royal grants to the Buddhist monasteries. As many as 200 villages contributed to the revenue of some monasteries, like Nalanda.

By the seventh century, corrupt activities that Gautama Buddha had forbade had become prevalent in the Buddhist monasteries, which were now governed by those who valued ease. The Vajrayana branch of Buddhism was the new school. The monks' tremendous wealth and rising sexual activity contributed to further deterioration. Buddhists started seeing women as lustful objects. The Buddha is reported to have said to his favourite disciple Ananda: 'If women were not admitted into the monasteries, Buddhism would have continued for one thousand years, but because this admission has been granted, it will last only five hundred years.'

The Buddhists are alleged to have been oppressed by the Brahmana monarch Pushyamitra Shunga. Persecution occured often between the sixth and seventh century. Mihirakula, the Huna monarch and a devotee of Shiva, murdered a large number of Buddhists. The Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gaya, where Buddha had attained enlightenment, was cut down by the Shaivite Shashanka of Gauda. Thousands of monks and lay followers were slain and Hsuan Tsang claims that 1600 stupas and monasteries were demolished; this may or may not be true. Some pantheons exhibit the Buddhist response by having Buddhist deities step on Brahmanical deities. Both the Shaivites and Vaishnavites bitterly opposed the Jains and Buddhists in early medieval times in south India. Such conflicts may have weakened Buddhism.

The monasteries were particularly prized targets of the Turkish conquerors' greed because of their wealth. In Bihar, the Turks massacred several Buddhist monks, however some of them managed to flee to Nepal and Tibet. In any case, Buddhism had all but vanished from the country where it originated by the twelfth century.

3.5.2.4 Significance and Influence of Buddhism

Even if Buddhism as an organised religion is no longer practised, its

influence on Indian culture and business remains. From the beginning of 500 BCE, the Buddhists displayed a strong knowledge of the issues that the common people of north-east India were facing. The traders and aristocrats were able to amass money due to the iron ploughshare-based agriculture, commerce and usage of currency. Sharp social and economic disparities were inevitably produced by all of this. As a result, Buddhism advised people not to amass wealth. Poverty, it is said, breeds hatred, cruelty and violence. To combat these evils, Buddha taught that farmers should be given grain and other resources, traders should be given wealth and the unemployed should be given work. These measures were proposed in order to eradicate global poverty. Buddhism also taught that by giving alms to the monks, the poor would be born wealthy in the next world.

The monks' code of conduct represents a reaction to the material conditions of north-east India in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. It limits the monks' food, clothing and sexual behaviour. They were unable to accept gold and silver and were unable to engage in sales and purchases. These rules were relaxed after the Buddha's death, but the early rules suggest a return to a primitive communism, a feature of tribal societies in which people did not practise trade or advanced agriculture.

Although Buddhism attempted to mitigate the evils brought about by the new material life, it also sought to consolidate the changes in people's social and economic lives. The rule that debtors were not allowed to join the sangha aided the moneylenders and wealthy members of society, from whom the debtors could not be rescued. Similarly, the rule that slaves could not join the sangha helped

slave owners. Without a doubt, the goal of Buddhist teaching was to secure individual salvation, or nirvana. Those who found it difficult to adjust to the breakdown of the old egalitarian society and the rise of gross social inequalities due to private property were given a way out, but it was limited to monks. There was no way out for the lay followers, who were taught to accept the situation as it was.

Buddhism had a significant impact on society by welcoming women and shudras. Because Brahmanism classified women and shudras in the same category, they were neither given the sacred thread nor permitted to read the Vedas. Their conversion to Buddhism liberated them from such stigmas. Manual labour was not condemned in Buddhism. Buddha is depicted ploughing with oxen in a second-century sculpture from Bodh Gaya.

Buddhism, with its emphasis on nonviolence and the sanctity of animal life, increased the country's cattle wealth. *Suttampata,* the earliest Buddhist text, declares cattle to be givers of food, beauty, strength and happiness (*annada, vannada, balada,* s*ukhada*) and thus appeals for their protection. This teaching came at a time when non-Aryans slaughtered animals for food and Aryans slaughtered animals for religious reasons. The brahmanical insistence on the sacredness of the cow and nonviolence appears to have been influenced by Buddhist teachings.

Buddhists created a new language called Hybrid Sanskrit in the first three centuries of the Christian era by combining Pali and Sanskrit. Buddhist monks' literary activities continued into the Middle Ages and they wrote some famous Apabhramsa writings in east India. Buddhist monasteries evolved into great centres of learning, which have been

referred to as residential universities. Nalanda and Vikramashila in Bihar, as well as Valabhi in Gujarat, deserve special mention.

Buddhism left its imprint on ancient Indian art. The Buddha's statues were most likely the first human statues worshipped in India. Faithful followers of the religion carved the various events in the Buddha's life in stone. The panels in Bodh-Gaya, Bihar and Sanchi and Bharhut, MP, are excellent examples of artistic activity.

Panel images of Gautama Buddha were created beginning in the first century. Gandhara art was developed by Greek and Indian sculptors who collaborated to create a new form of art on India's northwestern border. Images created in this region reveal both Indian and foreign influences. Rooms were hewn out of the rocks for the monks' residence and thus cave architecture began in the Barabar hills in Gaya, as well as in western India around Nasik. Buddhist art flourished in the Krishna delta in the south and in Mathura in the north.

Recap

♦ Jainism promotes simplicity, ahimsa (non-violence) and piety.

♦ Its five core principles: (i) non-violence, (ii) truthfulness, (iii) non-stealing, (iv) non-hoarding, (v) chastity.

♦ Mahavira established an order with both male and female followers.

♦ Gautama Buddha gave his first sermon at Sarnath, Varanasi.

♦ Buddhism teaches: (i) non-violence, (ii) not coveting others' property, (iii) avoiding intoxicants, (iv) truthfulness, (v) abstaining from sexual misconduct.

♦ Both religions rejected the ritualistic practices of Brahmanism.

♦ Buddhism focuses on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

♦ Jainism emphasizes self-discipline, renunciation and liberation through right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.

Objective Questions

1. Where did Gautama Buddha deliver his first sermon?

2. Who was the direct predecessor to Vardhamana?

3. In which language Mahavira preached his teachings?

4. What were the three principal elements of Buddhism?

5. What is the meaning of the word *jina?*

6. In which language is the Jain religious literature written?

7. Who cut down the Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gaya where Buddha had attained enlightenment?

8. What is called *basadis?*

Answers

1. Saranath in Benaras

2. Parsvanath

3. Prakrit

4. *Buddha, dhamma* and *sangha*

5. Conqueror

6. Ardhamagadhi

7. Shashanka of Gauda

8. Jain monastic establishments

Assignments

1. Evaluate the contributions of Buddhism and Jainism to intellectual and cultural development.

2. Discuss the impact of Jainism and Buddhism on social reform in ancient India.

3. Assess the role of Jainism and Buddhism in challenging the prevailing Brahmanical social order.

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6 UNIT

Conflict between Monarchies and Republics

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ trace the origin and rise of the Magadha Empire

♦ examine the efforts of various rulers in expanding and strengthening the Magadha Empire

♦ understand the significance of Magadha in ancient Indian history

♦ analyse the political, economic and cultural contributions of Magadha to ancient India

Prerequisites

Magadha, located in the southern part of Bihar, encompasses the districts of Patna and Gaya. It was bordered by the Ganges and Son rivers to the north and west, the Vindhya range to the south and the Champa river to the east. The earliest capital of Magadha was Girivraja, also known as Rajagriha, near Rajgir. The city was referred to by several names, including Magadhapura, Brihadrathapura, Vasumati, Kushagrapura and Bimbisarapuri. This unit explores how Magadha rose to prominence and became a significant landmark in ancient Indian history.

Keywords

Magadha, Buddhism, Jainism, Puranas, Monarch

Discussion

According to H.C. Raychaudhuri, "The early dynastic history of Magadha is shrouded in darkness. We have occasional glimpses of war-lords and statesmen, some probably entirely mythical, others having more of a leader. The history commences with the famous Bimbisara of the Haryanka Kula." There is a reference in the *Rig Veda* to a territory called 'Kikata' which was ruled by a chief named of Pramaganda. Kikata is described as a synonym for Magadha. There is a prayer in the Atharvaveda that may refer to Magadha. The Yajurveda refers to the bards of Magadha.

3.6.1 The Brihadratha Dynasty

According to the *Mahabharata* and the Puranas, the earliest dynasty of Magadha was founded by Brihadratha, the father of Jarasandha and son of Vasu. According to the *Ramayana*, Vasu himself was the founder of Girivraja or Vasumati. We come across in the Puranas, the lists of the kings of this dynasty. The number of the future Brihadrathas is given as 16, 22 or 32 and the total length of their rule is fixed at 723 or 1,000 years. The chronology of the kings as given in the Puranas and the order of their succession may not be true and there is no corroboration of the same. However, it is stated that the Brihadrathas had passed away when Pulika or Punika put his son Pradyota on the throne of Avanti or Ujjain. As Pradyota was a contemporary of Buddha, it is presumed that the Brihandratha dynasty came to an end during the sixth century BCE.

Controversy: There is one controversy with regard to the dynasty which ruled Magadha after the Brihadratha Dynasty. According to the Puranas, the Sisunaga Dynasty was founded by a king named Sisunaga. He was succeeded by Kakavarna, Kshemadharman and Kshemajit or Ksatraujas, Bimbisara, Ajatasatru, Darsaka, Udaya or Udasin, Nandivardhan and Mahanandin. According to *Matsya Purana*, the Sisunagas ruled for 360 years. V.A Smith accepts the chronology of the Sisunagas as given in the Puranas as correct, although he does not accept the duration of their reigns as given in the Puranas.

However, the critics of this view point out that according to Asvaghosha, who is an earlier authority than the Puranas, Bimbisara was the descendant of the Haryanka dynasty and not the Sisunaga dynasty. According to the *Mahavamsa,* Sisunaga himself was the founder of another dynasty which succeeded that of Bimbisara. It is also stated in the Puranas that the Sisunaga "will take away the glory of the Pradyotas" who were the contemporaries of Bimbisara. If the above view of the *Vayu Purana* is correct, Sisunaga must come after Chand Pradyota Mahasena who was a contemporary of Bimbisara. It is stated in the Puranas that Vaisali and Varanasi were included in the dominion of Sisunaga. These territories were acquired by Bimbisara and Ajatasatru and under these circumstances the Sisunagas must be placed after them and not before them. KalAshoka, the son and successor of Sisunaga, is stated to have ruled at Pataliputra. Udaya is stated

to have been the founder of the city of Pataliputra. Under the circumstances, it is presumed by scholars like Raychaudhuri, Majumdar and Mookerji that Bimbisara was the founder of the Haryanka dynasty and Sisunaga was the founder of another dynasty which came after that.

3.6.2 The Haryanka Dynasty

There is no definite date regarding the origin of the Haryanka dynasty. Bimbisara was not the founder of the dynasty as it is stated in the Mahavamsa that he was anointed king by his father when he was 15 years of age. According to the Puranas, the name of Bimbisara's father was Kshemajit, Hemajith, Kshatrauja or Kshetroja.

3.6.2.1 Bimbisara

Bimbisara was an ambitious king and he added to the prestige and strength of Magadha by his policy of matrimonial alliances and annexations. One of his queens was the sister of Prasenjit, the ruler of Kosala. She brought with her a village in Kashi yielding a revenue of a hundred thousand for bath, perfume and money. Another wife was called Chellana and she was the youngest of the seven daughters of Chetaka, the ruler of Vaishali. According to a Tibetan writer, Bimbisara has another wife called Vasavi. These matrimonial alliances must have helped Bimbisara to extend his influence both eastwards and westwards. Bimbisara had many sons and they gave him a lot of trouble. According to the Jain writers, the sons of Bimbisara were Kunika or Ajatasatru, Halla, Vehalla, Abhaya, Mandisena and Megha Kumara.

Conquest of Anga

Bimbisara conquered and annexed the kingdom of Anga after defeating Brahmadatta. The conquest of Anga is proved by the evidence of the *Digha Nikaya* and *Mahavagga*. According to Hemachandra, the Jain writer, Anga was governed as a separate province by the Crown prince, who had his headquarters at Champa. The conquest of Anga must have added to the material prosperity of Bimbisara. It is stated that Champa was one of the six cities of the Buddhist world. The territory of Bimbisara included 80,000 villages and covered an area of 300 leagues. A number of republican communities under the Rajakumaras were also included within the territory.

Administration

Bimbisara had an efficient system of administration and that must have contributed to his success as a ruler. He exercised rigid control over his public. While he rewarded the efficient, he dismissed those who were inefficient. The *Rajabhatas* or high officers of Bimbisara were divided into four categories, viz *Sambhatthaka* or officer in charge of general affairs, *Sena-Nayak Mahamattas* or generals, *Vyavaharika Mahamattas* or judges and *Mahamattas* who were responsible for the levy of tithes on produce. Rough and ready justice was given to the criminals. The punishment was harsh. There was a provision made for the imprisonment of criminals in jails and also their punishment by scourging, branding, beheading, breaking of ribs and cutting the tongue.

Religion of Bimbisara

There is no unanimity of opinion with regard to the religion of Bimbisara and the Jain and Buddhist writers give different versions. According to the *Uttaradhyana*

Sutra, Bimbisara visited Mahavira, at Mandi Kukshi Chaitya and "together with his wives, servants and relations, became a staunch believer in his law". According to Hemachandra, "When the country was under a blight of cold, the king, accompanied by Devi Chellana, went to worship Mahavira."

The Buddhist writers refer to two meetings of Bimbisara with the founder of Buddhism. When Bimbisara met him for the first time, Gautama had still not got enlightenment. The second meeting took place after Gautama had become Buddha. A park was donated to Buddha and his *Sangha*. Bimbisara appointed his own physician Jivaka as the physician of Buddha and his followers. He remitted the ferry charges for ascetics out of regard for Buddha. The Brahmanas also claimed that Bimbisara was a follower of Brahmanism.

Death of Bimbisara

There are different accounts with regard to the death of Bimbisara. According to the *Avashyaka Sutra* of the Jains, Bimbisara decided to appoint Ajatasatru as his successor in preference to his other sons. However, Ajatasatru became impatient and imprisoned his father. As per this version, Bimbisara committed suicide by taking poison.

According to *Vinaya Pitaka*, Ajatasatru was incited by Devadutta, a cousin of Buddha who appears as a malignant plotter and wicked schismatic, to kill his father. It is also stated in the *Mahavamsa* that Ajatasatru killed his father 8 years before the death of Buddha. It is stated in the *Mahavamsa* that Bimbisara ruled for 52 years and R.K Mookerjee fixed the same from 603 to 551 BCE. According to V.A Smith, Bimbisara ruled for 28 years from c. 582 to 544 BCE.

3.6.2.2 Ajatasatru

Ajatasatru is stated to have ruled from about 551 to 519 BCE. It was during his reign that the Haryanka dynasty reached its high watermark. Ajatasatru added to the prestige and glory of his dynasty by his conquests.

A war took place between Kosala and Magadha. There were many ups and downs in the war. It is stated that on one occasion the king of Kosala was defeated and he had to run away to his capital. On another occasion, Ajatasatru was defeated and captured. However, the king of Kosala agreed to marry his daughter, Vajra, to Ajatasatru and gave the village of Kashi to her. It is further stated that the king of Kosala was ousted from his throne by his commander-in-chief who put prince Vidudabha on the throne. The king of Kosala decided to seek the help of his son-in-law and set out for the capital of Magadha but unfortunately he died outside the gates of the capital of Magadha due to exposure.

Ajatasatru had to fight against Vaisali. It is stated by the Jain writers that Bimbisara gave to Galla and Vehalla, his two young sons, his elephant called Seyanaga or Sechanaka and a large necklace of 18 strings of jewels. Halla and Vehalla were born from Queen Chellana, the daughter of king Chetaka of Vaishali. When Ajatasatru became the king after the death of his father, he asked Halla and Vehalla to return the elephant and the necklace. They refused and Ajatasatru put pressure on Chetaka to hand over Halla and Vehalla to him but he refused to do so. Under these circumstances, war started between Magadha and Vaisali.

It is also stated that Ajatasatru was instigated to start war against the

Lichchhavis by his wife Padmavati. The war against the Lichchhavis lasted for at least 16 years. The Lichchhavis were at the height of their power and prosperity. Vassakara, a minister of Ajatasatru, pretended to have quarrelled with his master and took refuge with the Lichchhavis. After winning over their confidence, he tried to create dissensions among them. This he was able to accomplish within three years and when the attack was made by Ajatasatru, the Lichchhavis were defeated. It is stated that Ajatasatru was very bitter against the Lichchhavis. He constructed a new city and fort before starting the war. Thus, the foundations of Pataliputra were laid.

It is stated that when Ajatasatru decided to attack Vaisali, Chetaka of Vaishali summoned the 18 Gana Rajas of Kashi and Kosala together with the Lichchhavis and Mallakis and asked them whether the demands of Ajatasatru be accepted or battle be given to him. It appears that all of them advised to offer resistance and actually helped Vaisali. It is stated that Ajatasatru used the *Mahasilakantaga* and *Rathamusala*. The *Mahasilakantaga* was a kind of catapult which hurled big pieces of stone on the enemy. Although the war was a prolonged one, Ajatasatru was ultimately the victor.

Ajatasatru had to fight against Avanti. The King Pradyota of Avanti made preparations to avenge the death of Bimbisara. It is stated in the *Majjhima Nikaya* that on one occasion Ajatasatru had to fortify his capital as he was afraid of an invasion of Pradyota. It is not clear whether the invasion actually took place or not. However, the fact remains that Ajatasatru was not able to conquer Avanti.

Religion: According to the Jain writers, Ajatasatru was devoted to Jainism. It is stated that Ajatasatru visited Mahavira many times along with his queen and followers. He praised the work of the Jain monks and declared that the path of true religion had been found by Mahavira alone.

However, the Buddhist also claim that Ajatasatru believed in Buddhism. It is stated that Ajatasatru started as a bitter enemy of Buddha on account of the influence of Devadatta. However, there was a change in the attitude of Ajatasatru towards Buddhism later on. It is stated that on one occasion Ajatasatru made a visit to Buddha and expressed remorse for the murder of his father. He asked Buddha to accept his confession of sin. According to the Mahavamsa, Ajatasatru constructed Dhatuchaityas around Rajagriha. He repaired 18 Maha Vihara. He helped the Buddhist monks to hold their first Buddhist Council under his patronage.

3.6.2.3 Darsaka

According to the *Puranas*, Ajatasatru was succeeded by Darsaka and he ruled for 25 years. According to Geiger, it is a mistake to say that Ajatasatru was succeeded by Darsaka as it is definitely stated in Pali literature that Udayi-bhadda was the son of Ajatasatru and probably his successor also. In the *Kathakosha* and the *Parisishtaparavan*, Udaya or Udayin has been mentioned as the son of Ajatasatru and also his immediate successor. It is stated in the *Svapna-Vasavadatta* that Darsaka was a ruler of Magadha and a contemporary of Udayana. D.R Bhandarkar identifies Darsaka with Naga-Dasaka, who is mentioned in the Ceylonese chronicles as the last king of Bimbisara's line. It is to be noted that the Divyavadana does not mention the name of Darsaka in the list of the Bimbisara.

3.6.2.4 Udayin or Udayabhadra

According to the *Mahavamsa*, Udayabhadara ruled for 16 years. The *Katha Kosha* describes him as the son of Ajatasatru by his wife Padmavati. According to *Parisishtoparavan* of Hemchandra, Udyain founded a new capital on the banks of the river Ganges and it came to be known as Pataliputra. The *Gargi Samhita* and the *Vayu Purana* also state that he built the city Kusumpur or Pataliputra in the fourth year of his reign. It is stated in the *Parisishtaparavan* that the king of Avanti was an enemy of Udayin. The war of nerves begun in the time of Ajatasatru must have continued in the time of Udyain also.

According to the *Avasyaka-Sutra*, Udyain was responsible for the construction of a *Chaityagraha* or a Jain Shrine in the heart of the capital. He also observed fast on the eighth and fourteenth days. On one of those days, a teacher came to his place to give him a discourse. He was accompanied by a novice who murdered the king with his dagger. It is stated that the king of Avanti was responsible for the plot which resulted in the death of Udyain.

3.6.3 Sisunaga

It is stated in the *ceylonese chronicles* that Sisunaga was an Amatya and was acting as a Governor at Banaras. He was put on the throne of Magadha by the people who revolted against the dynasty of parricides from Ajatasatru to Naga Dasaka. He had a second royal residence at Vaishali which ultimately became his capital. Sisunaga reestablished the city of Vesali (Vaishali) and fixed in it the royal residence. From that time Rajagaha (Rajagriha-Girivraja) lost her rank of royal city which she never afterwards recovered.

The most important achievement of Sisunaga was that he destroyed the glory of the Pradyota dynasty of Avanti. The dynasty must have been humbled in the time of king Avantivardhana. The victory of Sisunaga must have been helped by the putting of Aryaka on the throne of Ujjain.

The Puranas seem to be wrong in making Sisunaga a predecessor of Bimbisara and Ajatasatru. It is stated in the Puranas that Sisunaga destroyed the fame of the Pradyotas of Avanti and also started living at Girivraja after placing his son at Banaras. The hostility between Magadha and Avanti dates from the time of Ajatasatru and not that of Bimbisara. Banaras was conquered by Ajatasatru and was a part of Magadha under Sisunaga. All this fits in properly only if we put Sisunaga after Bimbisara and Ajatasatru and not before them as contended by *V.A Smith* on the authority of the Puranas.

3.6.3.1 KalAshoka

According to the *Puranas*, Sisunaga was succeeded by Kakavarna, but according to the Ceylonese chronicles, he was succeeded by KalAshoka. It is suggested by Bhandarkar, Jacobi and Gelger that *Kakavarna* and *KalAshoka* are one and the same person. The second Buddhist council met at Vaishali in the time of KalAshoka. He also transferred his capital finally to Pataliputra.

Most probably, the successors of KalAshoka were his ten sons who ruled simultaneously. According to the Mahabodhivamsa, their names were Bhadrasena, Korandavarna, Mangura, Sarvanjaha, Jalika, Ubhaka, Sanjaya, Koravya, Nandivardhana and Panchamaka. The Puranas state that while the Saisunagas and their predecessors were reigning in Magadha, 32 kings ruled in Kalinga at the same time.

3.6.4 The Nandas

The Nandas were the successors of the Sisunaga dynasty.With the foundation of the Nandas, an epoch in the history of India started. It was for the first time, an empire, which went beyond the boundaries of the Gangetic basin.

The Puranas refer to 9 Nandas who ruled for 100 years. The Jain texts narrates how the first Nanda king was the son of a barber and a concubine. Curtius, a Roman historian, calls the first king of the Nanda dynasty as the son of a barber. R. S. Tripathi arrives at the fact that irrespective of the authenticity of the above legends, Mahapadma Nanda belonged to the lower caste. Several scholars and literary texts attributed different claims about the lineage of Nandas. While the Maha Bodhi Vamsa calls the first Nanda by the name of Ugrasena, the Puranas call him by the name of Mahapadma or Mahapadmapati. *Matsya Purana* claimed that Mahapadma ruled for about 88 years.

Mahapadma Nanda

Mahapadma Nanda has been described in the Puranas as the destroyer of all the Kshatriyas (Sarva Kshatrantaka). He has been described as a second Parsurama or Bhargava and the sole sovereign (*Eka-rat*) who brought the whole earth under one umbrella of his authority (*Eka-chchhatra*). He defeated the Ikshvakus, Panchayats, Kasis, Haihayas, Kalingas, Asmakas, Kurus, Maithili, Surasenas, Vitihotras, etc. The Jain writers also refer to the extensive territory of Mahapadma Nanda. The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharvela refers to the constructive activity of Nanda Raja in Kalinga and his conquest of some place in that country of the removal of some sacred object. It is possible that

Mahapadma was responsible for the conquest of Asmaka and other regions lying further south. It is also possible that his dominion covered a considerable part of the Deccan. According to Curtius, the first Nanda king kept 20,000 cavalry, 2,00,000 infantry, 2,000 four-horse chariots and more than 3,000 elephants.

Dhana Nanda

According to the *Mahabodhivamsa*, Dhana Nanda was the last king of the Nanda dynasty. It is suggested that he should be identified with the *Agrammes* or *Xandrames* of the classical writers. He collected riches to the amount of eighty kotis in a rock in the bed of the river (Ganges). Having caused a great excavation to be made, he buried the treasure there. Levying taxes, among other articles, even on skins, gums and stones, he amassed further treasure which he disposed of similarly.

It is stated that Alexander got information regarding the military strength and unpopularity of the last Nanda king. The King Porus stated that the king of the Gangaridai was a man of worthless character and was not held in respect. He was considered to be the son of a barber. Plutarch tells us that Androkottos or Chandragupta Maurya had stated that the Nanda king was hated and despised by his subjects on account of the wickedness of his disposition and the meanness of his origin. It is possible that the cause of the unpopularity of the Nandas was their financial extortion.

3.6.4.1 Administration of Nandas

Information regarding the rule of the Nandas is scanty. Historians have alluded

to the Greek references of Nomarchs and Hipparchus. The officials including *Mahamatras, rajukas, rashtriyas and pradeshikas* were tended to matters of administration in the kingdom.

The empire extended to incorporate peripheral regions of the Indian subcontinent. Certainly, it did not include the Indus basin and the regions of South India. The Nandas were inspired by the policy of their predecessors to expand territorial boundaries. R. S. Tripathi argues that though they were ambitious in conquering several territories, the *Nandas* gave autonomy to some extent as they could not effectively control these provinces.

The traditional view found in historiography is that the people belonged to different religious sects including Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Since the *Nanda* kings favoured Jainism and appointed ministers who adhered to the Jain religious tenets, J. L. Mehta argued that *Nanda* kings conformed to a policy of religious tolerance. The *Nanda* kings thereby invited the disapproval of Brahmins for which they were called *adharmika* or those who did not respect religion. Another characteristic feature of the *Nanda* rule was the lack of rigid social divisions and the availability of opportunities for the lower castes to empower themselves.

3.6.4.2 War with Chandragupta Maurya

The Puranas refer to a dynastic revolution by which the Nandas were overthrown by the Mauryas. A detailed account of the same is given in the Mudra Rakshasa. According to *Milinda-Panho*, "There was Bhaddasala, the soldier in the service of the royal family of Nanda, and he waged war against the king Chandragupta Maurya. This obviously refers to the bloody fight between the Nandas and the Mauryas.

The Puranas refer to the Nandas as irreligious. It appears that they had their leanings towards Jainism. The Nandas had ministers, who followed Jain religion. It is stated that minister Kalpaka was instrumental in the execution of the programme of the extermination of all the Kshatriya dynasties of the times. The other ministers were his descendants. Sakatala was the minister of the ninth Nanda. It is stated in the Mudra Rakshasa that Chanakya selected a Jain as one of his chief agents.

The Nandas are also stated to have possessed a lot of wealth. A reference has already been made to the riches of Dhana Nanda. Hiuen Tsang tells us that the Nandas had five treasures. The Katha-Saritsagar also says that the Nandas had 990 millions of gold pieces. There are similar references in the accounts of the classical writers.

Recap

♦ Magadha, located in the southern part of Bihar, includes Patna and Gaya

♦ Its first capital was Girivraja (Rajagriha) near Rajgir

♦ Brihadratha founded the earliest dynasty, according to the Mahabharata and Puranas

♦ Bimbisara enhanced Magadha's strength through matrimonial alliances and annexations

♦ Ajatasatru (551-519 BCE) expanded the Haryanka dynasty's power

♦ Ajatasatru's conquests increased the dynasty's prestige

♦ Sisunaga's major achievement was defeating the Pradyota dynasty of Avanti

♦ The Nanda dynasty succeeded the Sisunagas, with nine rulers over 100 years

♦ Dhana Nanda was the last Nanda ruler

Objective Questions

1. Where was the second Buddhist council held?

2. Who were the successors of the Nandas?

3. Who was the ruler of Magadha during 551 to 519 BCE?

4. Which was the capital of Magadha?

5. When did the Brihandratha dynasty come to an end?

6. Who wrote *Parisishtoparavan?*

Answers

1. Vaishali

2. Sisunaga dynasty

3. Ajatasatru

4. Girivraja or Rajagriha

5. Sixth century BCE

6. Hemachandra

Assignments

1. Analyse the factors that contributed to the rise of the Magadha Empire.
2. Evaluate the role of Magadha in shaping ancient Indian political and cultural history.
3. Evaluate the factors that led to the decline of the Nanda Dynasty.
4. Discuss the role of Buddhist literature to reconstruct the history of the Magadha Empire.

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4

India During the Mauryas

1
UNIT

Political Situation before the Mauryas

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ trace the political condition of the period prior to the formation of the Mauryan state

♦ become familiar with the reign of the Nanda Dynasty in India

♦ analyse the significance of the Alexandrian invasion of India

♦ know about the impact of Persian invasion

Prerequisites

In the sixth century BCE, northwest India became part of the Achaemenid Empire. The northwest India became Iran's twentieth province, comprising 28 satrapies and it included Sindh and Punjab. Historically, this was to be a region with changing suzerainties, shifting between north India and Afghanistan and Iran. During this time, the region experienced conflicts among principalities like the Kambojas, Gandharas and Madras. During this period of political instability, Darius, the Achaemenian king of Persia, invaded northwest India in 516 BCE. He captured Sindh and Punjab, located west of the Indus River. Herodotus mentions that Gandhara was the twentieth satrapy, counted among the most populous and wealthy in the Achaemenid Empire. The Indian satrapy contributed significantly to Iran's economy, providing a large tribute in gold, which accounted for one-third of Iran's revenue from its Asian provinces. Indian provinces supplied mercenaries to Persian armies fighting against the Greeks.

Keywords

Alexander, Porus, Hydaspes, Gandhara, Persian Invasion, Kharoshthi, Alexandrian Invasion

Discussion

4.1.1 Persian Invasions

There was no political unity in North-West India in the sixth century BCE, in contrast to North-East India, where smaller principalities and republics joined with the Magadha empire. Small principalities like the Kambojas, Gandharas and Madras engaged in conflict with one another. This, together with the country's fertile land and abundance of natural resources, drew the attention of its neighbours and most likely convinced the Persian rulers to seek territorial expansion into the north-western portion of India. In 516 BCE the Persian ruler Darius invaded northwest India and seized Sindh and Punjab to the west of the Indus. Darius I's son Xerses and his successors appear to have maintained some degree of authority over the Indian provinces, which provided troops for their army. Until Alexander of Macedonia defeated Darius III and went on to capture the entirety of his realm, it appears that India was a part of the Iranian empire.

Cyrus(558-530 BCE)

The Achaemenid Empire (an Iranian Empire) was founded by Cyrus the Great. He was the first conqueror to enter India while leading an expedition. In India, he focused on the Gandhara region and annexed the areas to the west of the Indus River, following which all Indian tribes surrendered to him and paid homage. Cambyses, his son, was too busy to focus on India.

Darius I (522–486 BCE)

In 518 BCE, Darius I, the grandson of Cyrus, invaded the Indus valley and incorporated Sindh and Punjab. This area was designated as his empire's 20th Satrapy. It was the Achaemenid Empire's most populated and productive province. To investigate the Indus, Darius launched a naval expedition led by Skylas.

Xerxes(465-456 BCE)

Xerxes made use of his province in India to fortify his power. He sent cavalrymen from India to attack the Greeks. However, they turned back when Xerxes suffered losses in Greece. The Achaemenians were unable to pursue a forward strategy in India after this disaster. However, they were still in charge of their Indian provinces.

4.1.1.1 Results of Persian Invasion

Expansion of Indo-Iranian Trade: The expansion of Indo-Iranian trade was boosted by the Persian invasion. About 200 years were spent in communication between India and Iran. By bringing India into contact with the West, the Persians sparked her trade and commerce with the West. The cultural outcomes were more significant.

Introduction of Kharosthi Script

The Persians introduced a new script, Kharosthi. Ashoka used Kharosthi, in several of his inscriptions in North-Western India and elsewhere. The Aramaic alphabet, which was widely employed in the Achaemenid Empire (558-338 BCE), is the source of this script. Similar to Arabic writing, this script is written from right to left. Kharoshthi was not particularly well-liked after the third century CE. The preamble of Ashokan

edics and a few sentences also display some Persian influences. Both the word *dipi* for a script and the word *nipishta* for written are obviously Indianised versions of Persian vocabulary.

Impact on Indian Art

The monolithic pillars of Ashoka and the sculptures found on them show the impact of Persian art on the art of the Mauryas. Iranian influence can be seen in both the concept of Ashoka giving edicts and the phrasing that was utilised. The Persian relationship with India was more successful than the transient Indo-Macedonian relationship.

4.1.2 The Eve of Alexander's Invasion

On the eve of Alexander invasion, there was no prevailing power in the region and the North-Western India was divided into a number of small principalities. Even against a foreign foe, these 109 principalities lacked the will to ally with each other. The Abhisaras and Porus were at war with Taxila's monarch, Ambhi. The independent tribes like the Ksudrakas and the Malwas were foes of Porus and the Abhisaras. Because of the conflicts among small republics, Alexander did not encounter a unified opposition. Because of his hostility towards his neighbours, some of these rulers, like Ambhi of Taxila, welcomed him with open arms.

4.1.2.1 The Invasion of Alexander

Alexander's reign is well-documented through various sources, including *histories* by Arrian and Curtius Rufus, Plutarch's biography, Diodorus Sirculus' *Bibliotheca* and Strabo's *Geography*. Scholars have uncovered credible and useful information about Alexander's reign in India, including Arrian's account and *Indike* Arrian, a soldier, based his seven-book, *History of Alexander,* on accounts from Ptolemy, Aristobulus, Nearchus and Eratosthenes, who were eyewitnesses and sometimes active participants in Alexander's campaigns. *Indike*, on the other hand, focuses on India and Alexander's fleet voyage in the Southern Ocean, based on sources like Eratosthenes, Megasthenes and Nearchus.

Alexander invasion of fourth century BCE, was the first ever invasion waged by a western power in India. After his father Philip passed away in 334 BCE, Alexander succeeded him to the throne of Macedonia. By defeating Darius III in the Battle of Arbela in 330 BCE, he took control of all of Persia. He also engaged in wars with Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and several regions of the Persian Empire, during the period between 336 BCE and 330 BCE. He also intended to reclaim the Persian Satrapy of India, which had been lost and expand his conquests eastward.

It was in 327 BCE, that Alexander moved through the Hindu Kush mountains through the Khyber pass. Under the Nanda dynasty that controlled several parts of the Indian subcontinent, many provinces were allowed a fair share of autonomy for which they enjoyed a sense of independence. Therefore the rulers of Nanda dynasty did not keep a strict watch on preventing foreign incursions in provinces especially the outlying territories. Since the loss of independence was a matter of concern for such provinces, these tribal republics and monarchies waged wars against the Alexandrian invasions. The armies of Alexander found it difficult to cope with the pressure of these wars with the tribal republics.

Alexander and his army fought wars with the tribes of Assakenoi, Adrastai etc. and eventually reached Taxila. It was there that the ruler of Taxila, Ambhi surrendered before Alexander without any resistance and was willing to offer him assistance in further conquests. King Ambhi requested the assistance of Alexander's army in the war against another tribal republic ruled by a king named Porus. Raychaudhari points out that it was the first time in Indian history that an indigenous king had enlisted foreign support to defeat his contemporary. Greek chronicles alluded to Ambhi's betrayal of his kinsmen to help Alexander to carry on with his conquest.

Battle of Hydaspes

In the Battle of Hydaspes (River Jhelum), the army of Porus confronted the armies of Alexander and Ambhi. With indomitable courage and determination, Porus fought against Alexander and Ambhi. He was defeated by the superior military tactics of Alexander and surrendered. Plutarch refers to how the Indians fought valiantly and their defeat was due to leadership qualities exhibited by Alexander and other unforeseen situations. Appreciative of the resistance put forth by King Porus and his army, Alexander restored the territories captured from Porus and those he subsequently conquered. Alexander established two Greek settlements in the kingdom of Porus, namely Nikaia and Bucephalus.

As Alexander proceeded, his armies were exhausted from the succession of wars and were affected by illness. They realised that they could not defeat the formidable armies of Dhanananda. Out of empathy for his soldiers, Alexander ordered them to retreat back to Greece. Alexander built twelve altars on the banks of river Beas in memory of his military conquests and as a mark of his territorial boundary. Despite their plan to retreat, they met with resistance from other tribes including that of Siboi, Aglassoi, Mallois, Oxydrakai, Abastanoi, Xathroi, Ossadioi, Sogdi, Mushikas, Sambosa and Patala. Unfortunately after a series of successive wars, Alexander and several of his soldiers died of swamp fever at Babylon in 323 BCE.

The Alexandrian invasion made them understand the problems in administration and military organisation they faced. Moreover, the invasion dismantled the prevailing political structure of north western parts of India. This triggered a harsh reaction against the foreign invaders thus paving way to a movement for political consolidation. R. K. Mukherjee believes that Alexander was the forerunner of the Mauryan empire in the north-west.

4.1.2.2 Impact of Alexandrian Invasion

The invasion transformed the system of administration that prevailed in north-west India. Nilakanta Sastri refers to how Alexander brought about a unified political structure by consolidating conquered territories into a single unit. As Alexander's invasion threatened their independence, the Indian natives resisted their attempts and recognised the need for a central government that possessed an organised administrative structure of their own. The invasion ushered in the establishment of commercial relations between India and the Western world. Subsequently, traders, merchants, missionaries and workers arrived in India to trade and preach religious principles to the people of India. Alexander's invasions resulted in the formation of Greek settlements in several regions of the

Indian subcontinent. These settlements transformed into towns and cities where goods were traded and marketed. In the fields of art, science and technology, Greek influences are evident. The Greeks invited artists and sculptors from Greece to Gandhara to construct buildings and produce magnificent works of art. This has been instrumental in the establishment of the Gandhara school of art which was instrumental in popularising Mahayana Buddhism. The popularity of Greek knowledge systems among the Indians resulted in remarkable innovations by Indians in fields of astronomy, metallurgy and numismatics.

Recap

♦ Alexandrian invasion-4th Century BCE (327 BCE)
♦ Attacked tribes- King Ambhi of Taxila and King Porus
♦ The Battle of Hydaspes- defeated Porus-Alexander's troops retreated
♦ Impacts of Alexandrian invasion
♦ Emergence of Greek settlements
♦ Flourishing trade and commerce with the Western World
♦ Growth of Gandhara School of art and sculpture

Objective Questions

1. Who was the last king of the Nanda dynasty?
2. In which year Alexander invaded India?
3. On the bank of which river the Battle of Hydaspes was fought?
4. Name the rulers who fought the Battle of Hydaspes.
5. Name the Greek settlements established by Alexander in the kingdom of Porus.
6. When did the Persian ruler Darius invaded northwest India?
7. According to whom Alexander brought about a unified political structure by consolidating conquered territories into a single unit?
8. Which school popularised Mahayana Buddhism?
9. Which event resulted in the formation of Greek settlements in several regions of the Indian subcontinent?
10. Who believes that Alexander was the forerunner of the Mauryan empire in the north-west.

Answers

1. Dhanananda
2. 326 BCE
3. Jhelum
4. Alexander and Porus
5. Nikaia and Bucephalus
6. 516 BCE
7. Nilakanta Sastri
8. Gandhara school of art
9. Alexander's invasions
10. R. K. Mukherjee

Assignments

1. Discuss the political scenario during Alexander's invasion.
2. Explain the impact of Alexander's invasion.
3. Discuss the significance of Battle of Hydaspes.2
4. Prepare a note on the topic 'impact of Persian art on the art of the Mauryas'.
5. Discuss the significance of the reign of Nandas in India.
6. Discuss the political situation before the Mauryans.

Suggested Reading

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2 UNIT

Arthashastra and the 'Kautilyan' State

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ◆ generate awareness about the sources of the Mauryan period
- ◆ get familiar with the administrative structure of Mauryan empire
- ◆ explain the significance of Arthashastra and Indica
- ◆ evaluate the social and economic condition of the Mauryan period

Prerequisites

When Alexander invaded India, the Nanda Dynasty ruled Magadha, the most powerful kingdom of the time. The Nandas are sometimes described as the first dynasty with imperial ambitions, a statement hinted at in the Puranas. They inherited the large kingdom of Magadha and extended it to yet more distant frontier. The Mauryas, who later overthrew the Nandas, ushered in the peak of Magadhan dominance over the subcontinent. The rise of the Mauryan Empire marked a significant turning point in Indian history. For the first time, a unified political entity governed a vast portion of the subcontinent, extending to the Hindu Kush, under the centralised monarchy of Chandragupta Maurya. This unit explores the Mauryan Empire and its historical importance, with a particular focus on the political, economic, and administrative aspects of the Mauryan era.

Keywords

Arthasastra, Indica, *Kumaras, Amatyas, Nagarakas, Kantaka Shodhana,* Mauryan Empire, Provincial Administration, Economy

Discussion

4.2.1 Sources of Mauryan Period

Before we progress to the unit, it is necessary to elaborate the significance of the sources that were available, that furnished information on the Mauryan period. The Mauryan empire marks a remarkable transition in Indian historiography as details pertaining to the Mauryan kingdom are furnished by a wide variety of available sources. Romila Thapar refers to how Indian history witnessed an abundance of information on the Mauryan period, available in western classical accounts, indigenous works and edicts. These have been supplemented with a host of epigraphic sources which belong to a class of its own, the Ashokan inscriptions.

Ashoka's edicts inscribed on rocks and pillars are found over several parts of the Mauryan empire. There are cave inscriptions too. These inscriptions issued by provincial governors and officials of the Mauryan empire offered insights into the polity, economy and society in several regions of the Mauryan empire. The edicts were broadly classified into rock edicts, pillar edicts and cave edicts. The rock edicts comprise major rock edicts and minor rock edicts, while the pillar edicts are further divided into major pillar edicts and minor pillar edicts.

Religious sources, including Buddhist chronicles, were also of great value in the study of the Mauryan period. Romila Thapar points out how the *Jatakas* offered details on several aspects of the economy and society of the Mauryan period. The two Ceylonese chronicles, *Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa*, written in third and fifth century CE, respectively, narrates the role played by Ashoka to propagate the principles of Buddhism and how Buddhism spread in Ceylon. Legends revolving around Ashoka are furnished in the work, *Divyavadana*. The Mauryan period is also alluded to by Lama Taranatha in the work, *History of Tibet.*

A secular literary work that referred to the Mauryan empire and the kings was Kautilya's *Arthashastra.* It is believed that Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta Maurya authored this treatise and since many terms used in *Arthashastra* were found in edicts of Ashoka, Romila Thapar mentioned that the rulers of Mauryan empire were familiar with the principles and tenets of *Arthashastra*.

The chronology of the Mauryan kings were found in the Puranas but are not accepted as accurate. An indigenous work of importance was *Mudrarakshasa* authored by Visakhadatta which referred to Chandragupta Maurya's successful victory over the Nanda dynasty. Banabhatta's *Harshacharitha* gives an account of the decline of the Mauryas where the last sovereign, Brihadatha was murdered by Pushyamitra Sunga, leading to the establishment of the Sunga dynasty. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* describes how Kashmir was annexed to the Mauryan Empire.

There were several classical accounts authored by travellers in Greek and Latin in India. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador in the Mauryan court authored *Indica.* The original text was lost and

Greek writers - Strabo, Diodorus, Pliny and Arrian quoted parts of *Indica* in their texts. Hieun Tsang, Fa-hsien and I-Tsing were Chinese scholars who furnished information on Mauryans based on their travels to India.

Romila Thapar argues that as authors wrote biased and exaggerated accounts of the Mauryan period, the literature was not adequate to interpret the history of the Mauryan empire. So historians also used archaeological remains to discover facts about pre-Mauryan history. The sources like edicts, material remains of Northern Black Polished Ware Potteries and coins, provide valuable information about the various aspects of the Mauryan administration. Silver and copper punch marked coins provide insight into trade routes, currency system and other elements of pre-Mauryan economy. The Mauryan empire commenced with the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, who was believed to have consolidated different regions into a single unit. Chandragupta was known to be the first recorded emperor in the history of India and who possessed an empire of great magnitude. It was under Chandragupta, that the regions were politically unified and brought under a unified system of administration.

4.2.2 Origin of the Mauryas

Regarding the ancestry of the Mauryas, different versions are available regarding the origin of the empire. The *Puranas* claimed that Chandragupta was the son of the last Nanda ruler and a Sudra woman named Mura which resulted in the establishment of the Mauryan dynasty. According to *Mahavamshatika* and other Buddhist legends, Chandragupta descended from a Kshatriya clan termed *Mauryas* which ruled in the region Pipphalivana in

Uttar Pradesh. The classical writer Justin argues that Chandragupta was born in a humble background. Kshemendra, a sanskrit historian, called Chandragupta as Purvanandasuta. In many Greek classical works, the names Sandracottus, Sandrokoplos etc were used and it was William Jones, a British orientalist, who interpreted these as the Greek version of Chandragupta.

4.2.2.1 Emergence of Mauryan Empire

It is contented that on account of the policy of annexation followed by the Nanda rulers, particularly the last of the Nanda ruler Dhana Nanda, the kings resorted to excessive tax exactions. Chandragupta could easily use prevailing political discontentment among the people to his advantage. Some historians claim that Chandragupta was a soldier in the Nanda army and had initially tried to attack the Nanda kingdom with the help of an intelligent *Brahmin* named Kautilya, but failed miserably. A major landmark in the career of Chandragupta was his association with Kautilya who also was an enemy of the Nanda ruler. This association changed the destiny of the two as well as Magadha.

With the help of Kautilya, Chandragupta marched forward with his armies to take over the Nanda kingdom. With rigorous military preparations and meticulous planning, Chandragupta overthrew the Nanda dynasty from power and occupied the throne. *Parishishta Parvan* narrates how the Nanda king was imprisoned by Chandragupta, while *Mahavamsa* mentions how the Nanda king was murdered in the battle itself. Conquering northwestern parts of India, Chandragupta continued his conquest of Central India.

There have been several stories revolving around the life of Chandragupta, but one must be cautious in accepting them at face value.

Chandragupta with Seleceus Nikator

Around 305 BCE, Chandragupta confronted Seleceus Nikator who arrived in India to conquer territories to integrate it with the Greek empire. Finding that Chandragupta was stronger, Seleceus Nikator decided to sign a treaty with Chandragupta. Accordingly, Seleceus ceded to the Mauryan ruler the provinces of Arachosia, Parapanisdae, Ariana and Gedrosia and the two families entered into a matrimonial alliance. Chandragupta in exchange offered 500 elephants to the Greek ruler. Moreover, Seleceus sent an envoy, Megasthenese and he was stationed at the Mauryan court. This ultimately brought about cordial relations between Greece and India.

As a result of his series of conquests, Chandragupta's kingdom came to incorporate territories ranging from the extent of Hindu Kush mountains in the west to Bengal in the east and Himalayan ranges in the north to the river Narmada in the south. The empire was controlled by the king from his capital at Pataliputra in Bihar. Details regarding the Mauryan polity will be furnished later in this unit.

Regarding his death, Jain legends claim that Chandragupta practised Jainism and that he travelled to Mysore with a Jain saint, Bhadrabahu when Magadha was ravaged by the outbreak of a famine. He is said to have died in the traditional Jain practice of *sallekhana.* It is held that Chandragupta died in 297 BCE after an illustrious period of twenty four years.

Bindusara

Bindusara was the son of Chandragupta Maurya who succeeded to the throne in 297 BCE. Bindusara had brought about several reforms and was successful in preserving the legacy of his father. Jain legends claim that he was the son of Chandragupta and a woman named Durdhara. He is referred to as *Amitrachates, Allitrochades* in the Greek accounts and *Amitraghata* in Sanskrit. The Puranas claim that Bindusara ruled for a reign of 25 years, while the legends of Burma and Ceylon put the tenure at 27 to 28 years. Nilakanta Sastri attributed the reign of the monarch to be between 301 BCE to 270-265 BCE. The paucity of authentic information on the life of Bindusara made it difficult for historians to work out the chronology.

Several works have alluded to the presence of an official named *Ajiva-Parivrajaka* which provides insights on the importance accorded by Bindusara to the members of *Ajivika* sect. The Fifth Rock Edict of Ashoka points out that towards the end of Bindusara's reign, his children fought against each other to claim their right to the throne and Ashoka claimed victory, regardless of Bindusara's desire to make Susima as his successor. Nilakanta Sastri argues that this story is yet to be proved with an array of valid evidence.

Bindusara's Relation With Greeks

Bindusara seems to have maintained cordial relations with the outside world. He continued the alliance with the Hellenistic world established by his father. The Greek records speak of an envoy named Deimachus sent to the royal court of Bindusara. He also maintained friendly relations with the king of Syria. This has

been corroborated by the Greek writer, Athenaeus in a story where Amitrochates (a name given to Bindusara) requested sweet wine, dry figs and a philosopher in a letter to the king of Syria, Antiochus I. The Syrian king willingly agreed to his first two demands, but refused the request for a philosopher which was forbidden by the Greek law. Bindusara's demand for a philosopher appears to be on account of his regard for philosophy.

4.2.3 Administrative System Under Early Mauryas

Kautilya's *Arthashastra*

Kautilya, the intelligent Brahmin who worked as the advisor of Chandragupta Maurya was known for his work *Arthashastra*. It was a comprehensive treatise on polity, economy, military, elements of a state and society. Divided into 15 *Adhikaran* (chapters), the first five chapters deal with internal administration. This work is prescriptive in nature, giving directions or instructions to the monarch on matters of administration.

Nilakanta Sastri observes how the Mauryan empire was the amalgamation of indigenous political structure that emerged during the Nandas and elements borrowed from foreign kingdoms. Kautilya in his *Arthasastra* advocates the *saptanga* theory of state where he identifies seven elements of a state - *swami* (king), *Amatya* (ministers), *Janapada* (people), *Durga* (fort), *Kosha* (treasury), *Danda* (army) and *Mitra* (allies). He stressed upon the importance of political power that was sanctioned by religious law and based on advice offered by the council of ministers. The welfare and happiness of the population were of greater concern than the comforts and luxuries enjoyed by the king.

Megasthenes's Indica

Megasthenes who was appointed as the ambassador of Seleucus to the Mauryan court has written a diary during the period of his stay in the Mauryan court which was named *Indica*. His account was primarily based upon interactions with the inhabitants of Pataliputra and tales narrated by travellers. He mentioned the political geography, administration and society of the Mauryan empire. The original version of the book has never been found, editions of the work by Diodorus, Arrian, Strabo and Pliny have come down to us. The problem with the editions is that there were differences or variations on several matters discussed in the work. Together the two works of Megasthenes and Chanakya have shed light on the various aspects including administration, society and economy of the Mauryan Empire under Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara.

4.2.3.1 Role Played by King

According to Hindu tradition, the king was considered to be the protector of the law. The king ordered proclamations that were sanctioned by an authentic source of law. The king maintained social harmony by punishing the wrongdoers and ensuring peace across the land. Nilakanta Sastri mentions titles like *Devanampiya* (beloved of Gods) and *Piyadarsi* (one who has a pleasant appearance) were identified with Ashoka with findings by different historians.

In *Arthashastra,* the ruler is referred to as the *Vijigisu*. He is ideally a person of profound mental and physical strength. Honest and shrewd, he should be endowed with all the qualities and skills of a leader. Kautilya insists that the *Vijigisu* (king) be assisted by a council of ministers

called *Mantriparishad* which comprises *Amatyas, Mahamatras and Adhyakshas*. The king should conform to a timetable where he had to receive reports on the military, tend to the matters concerning the population, undertake his personal routine, supervise the remitted revenue, hold consultations with the *Mantriparishad*, oversee the management of elephants and so on. Megasthenes in his work *Indica* comments on the routes of the king and how they were guarded by his militia. Regarding inheritance, Kautilya argues that the successor of the sovereign must be well disciplined in his faculties to inherit the throne.

Pataliputra

Known as 'Palibothra', in *Indica*, the city of Pataliputra was considered the largest city in India. The palace at Pataliputra was built in 'pomp and splendour.' The palace and its surroundings were fortified. The fort was surrounded by a moat filled with waters of River Ganga and crocodiles. The fortifications contained 64 entrances and 570 pillars. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* discussed at length about the construction of a fort and the precautions to be taken in-order to prevent the outbreak of fire. Constructed with wood, the palace was located in the middle of a park decorated with gilded pillars, fish ponds and orchards. Brainard Spooner, an American archaeologist, had excavated the remains of the Mauryan Hall at Kumrahar near Pataliputra in Bihar.

4.2.3.2 Provincial Administration

The kingdom was divided into provinces - Magadha, Gandhara, Avanti, Southern Province and Kalinga with their respective capitals at Pataliputra, Taxila, Ujjain, Swarnagiri and Tosali. The provinces were governed by *Kumaras* or princes of the royal family who were accompanied by the feudal chiefs who submitted reports to the Emperor and offered militia in times of war. Each of these provinces were granted provincial autonomy. In spite of the existing provincial units, the Mauryan empire did not fail to bring a uniform system of administration, economy and society in the provinces. The *Kumaras* had *Mahamatras* and other officials to assist them in performing their duties.

Officials called *Rajukas, Pradeshikas, Yuktas* exerted their influence in the empire. The *Rajukas* were considered to be the backbone of rural administration. The *Rajukas* looked after judicial affairs, revenue administration, welfare of the people etc. The *Pradeshikas* were responsible for careful supervision of revenue collection, maintenance of law and order and the conduct of tours to inspect the administration of several regions. The *Yuktas* were subordinate officials to the *Pradeshikas and Rajukas*. They engaged in clerical work which consisted of drafting reports and handling accounts.

4.2.3.3 Village Administration

Villages were collectively organised into groups of five to ten and administration was undertaken by two important officials- *Gopa and Sthanika*. The *Gopa* looked after accounts, registration of lands, conducting censuses of the population and kept records of livestock, income and expenditure. The *Sthanikas* collected taxes and worked in subordination to the *Pradeshikas*. Each village had a group of intermediate officials who worked under the *Gopas*. The headmen of villages administered the collection of taxes, organisation of defence and ensured peace and discipline in the villages.

4.2.3.4 Urban Administration

Regarding the administration of the city, several historians called it municipal administration, while Megasthenes used the term urban administration. Megasthenes in his work *Indica* furnishes details regarding the administration of urban centres which prevailed in several regions of the Mauryan empire. The administration of urban centres was highly developed.

Megasthenes refers to a six-board committee that consists of five members each.

1. The first board controlled matters pertaining to industrial arts. The board supervised artisans, checked quality of goods produced, fixed remuneration for workers and resolved conflicts among workers.

2. The second board kept check on the movements of foreign visitors and controlled the functioning of *sarai*s (rest houses.). In case of death of foreigners, the board made arrangements for the cremation of the deceased and return of their belongings. R.S. Tripathi suggests that this proved the existence of a fairly larger population of foreigners in the empire.

3. The third board was in charge of recording births and deaths in the city.

4. The fourth board was responsible for trade and commercial activities. The exchange of goods and the proper use of weights and measures were also looked into.

5. The fifth board supervised the manufacture of goods. The board prevented hoarding of goods and adulteration in the process of manufacturing. The sixth board supervised the remittance of revenue in the form of taxes and annual produce. If one attempts to evade payment of taxes, the board directs capital punishment for the tax invader.

Maintenance of temples, buildings, ports, sanitation, drainage, supply of water, proper keeping of roads and policing were performed by the officials of urban administration. Kautilya does not allude to the existence of a committee that administered cities and towns. He mentions *Nagaraka and Nagaradhyaksha* under which officials called *Sthanikas* and *Gopas* functioned. The *Nagaraka* were officials that looked after matters of urban governance. They maintained law and order in cities, submitted lists of outsiders, issued permission to travel after curfew, maintained cleanliness, prevented fires and released prisoners on auspicious occasions. The role played by the *Gopas and Sthanikas* were different from that in the provinces. The *Gopa*s recorded particulars of income and expenditure incurred by the residents. The *Sthanikas* handled accounts and collected taxes from residents. It was through *Gopas and Sthanikas* that matters were reported to *Nagarakas*.

Another group of officials were known as *Pulisani and Prativedakas*. The *Pulisani* acted as the agents of the king who gathered public opinion and submitted reports to the king. They provided information on his policies which the king communicated to the people. The *Pativedakas* were special correspondents who directly reported to the king. Spies were appointed by the king to observe ministers, officials and moved around the city in disguise.

4.2.3.5 Military Departments

J. L. Mehta and Sarita Mehta provide a picture of military administration in the Maurya Empire. They claimed that Chandragupta Maurya inherited a massive army of about 7 lakh soldiers comprising 6 lakh infantry, 30 thousand cavalry, 9 thousand elephants and 8 thousand chariots. According to Megasthenes, the military was administered by a department of six boards. Each board functioned with five members each. The first board was responsible for the infantry. The second and third board coordinated the activities of the cavalry and fleet. The fourth board looked after the maintenance of chariots used in the war. The fifth and sixth board looked after the matters of war elephants and the transport of war equipment.

The fortifications built around Pataliputra protected the city from invasions. There were inspections arranged at regular intervals by the *Senapati* and the king. The soldiers were paid in cash instead of kind and equipped with weapons including bows, arrows, swords, shields etc. In times of peace or war, soldiers were paid their full salaries. Discipline was maintained and war animals were used for transporting equipment and weapons to the battlefield. The marching troops were accompanied by physicians to treat the wounded.

4.2.3.6 Mauryan Economy

J. L. Mehta and Sarita Mehta argue that the Mauryan empire relied on agriculture and trade. Agriculture, rearing of animals and trading were employed by the people to generate resources. External and internal forms of trade resulted in the flourishing of the Mauryan economy. Trade with Greece and Burma in goods like spices, pearls, precious stones, animals, etc thrived. The safety and protection of traders was looked after by a set of important officials. The period is characterised by the existence of guilds of merchants called *Srenis.*

4.2.3.7 Revenue and Expenditure

The main source of income was land revenue. Kautilya furnishes details on *Bhaga,* the share of the king. Usually, *Bhaga* was probably one-sixth of the total produce, but this varied according to region and time. Taxes on forests and mines, tolls, custom duties, tithes and fines were collected. The *Sannihata* and S*amaharta* were the officers in charge of collecting revenue and storing it in the royal treasury. The differently-abled, brahmins, ascetics were exempted from paying taxes. *Bali, Pranaya, Praveshya* were the taxes collected by the officials from the public. Expenditure of the kingdom was mainly on the king and royal court, salaries to armies and maintaining defence, payments to craftsmen and other skilled men, donations and charities.

4.2.3.8 Justice

The king had the supreme power in imparting justice to the public. Kautilya speaks of two courts present in the Mauryan empire - *Dharmasthiyas and Kantakasodhanas*. The *Dharmasthiyas* were courts that handle civil and petty disputes pertaining to matters including marriage, dowry, divorce, inheritance, rights to water and property, violence etc. The *Kantaskashodhanas* were courts that dealt with criminal offences. The courts served protection from anti-social activities and employed spies to prevent illegal activities from occurring. The offences addressed in the court were usually theft, murder, rape, hiking prices illegally, violation of caste rules etc.

4.2.3.9 Society

Megasthenes in *Indica* categorises the people of the Mauryan empire into seven divisions. The first category of people, philosophers, were considered to be prominent in society. The philosophers represented the community of Brahmins which comprise of *Udicca* Brahmins and *Satakalakhkana* brahmins. The *Udicca* brahmins conformed to tradition and conservative ideals, while *Satakalakkhana* brahmins were influenced by the worldly ideas. They performed sacrifices and rites in exchange of gifts and donations.

The second group of people were farmers or cultivators who cultivated the land in the Mauryan empire. The cultivator devoted his entire time to the tilling of the land. They constituted the majority of the population and lived in rural areas. They paid revenue in terms of their land to the king and had to remit one fourth of their crops to the royal treasury. The lands were divided based on fertility high, middle and low.

The third division comprised herders who engaged in hunting and rearing animals. They paid tribute to the officials in the form of cattle. The important animals used for performing labour were horses, elephants, cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, camels etc and were not allowed to be slaughtered for meat.

The fourth class consisted of artisans or craftsmen. They were engaged in manufacturing weapons, agricultural implements etc. and received allowances from the kingdom. They were exempted from tax-payment. The artisans were paid allowances in accordance to the work performed and the quality of goods produced. Guilds of woodwork and textiles were the most prominent groups of artisans in the Mauryan empire.

The fifth group comprised the militia. They were paid in cash and were under the supervision of the *Senapati* (commander-in-chief). Megasthenes points out that the soldiers were the second largest group in the society in terms of population.

The sixth group included overseers, who were administrative officers. Diodorus called this group *Episcopoi*. They supervised the work in different departments. According to *Arthashastra* prescription, councillors were to be appointed on the basis of a preliminary investigation of character and merit. The seventh group incorporated councillors and assessors including advisors, officials of treasury, arbitrators, generals, judges etc.

Recap

- ◆ Chandragupta Maurya was the first ruler who unified the region into a unified political unit.
- ◆ Different stories and legends on the origin of the Mauryan empire
- ◆ Chandragupta Maurya with help of Kautilya - fought a war with Seleceus Nikator- ruled from Pataliputra- starved to death by *sallekhana*

- Bindusara- continued to pursue a policy of territorial conquest- Ashoka was sent to quell the revolt at Taxila - Pacific policy

- *Arthashastra* by Kautilya and *Indica* by Megasthenes - insights on administration, economy and society- *Saptanga* theory

- Administration - Provincial Administration - Municipal Administration, Military Departments, Revenue and Expenditure, Imparting Justice

Objective Questions

1. Who was the first ruler of the Mauryan empire?
2. Which literary work claimed Chandragupta as the son of Nanda ruler and a Sudra woman?
3. What did Kshemendra call Chandragupta Maurya?
4. Who called Chandragupta 'Sandrocottus' ?
5. What were the other names by which Kautilya was known?
6. Whom did Chandragupta Maurya defeat in 305 BCE?
7. Which provinces were awarded to the Mauryan empire by Seleceus Nikator?
8. What was the name of the Greek envoy sent by Seleceus to the Mauryan court?
9. Who was known as 'Amitraghata' in Sanskrit language?
10. Which envoy was sent by the King of the Hellenic world to Bindusara's court?

Answers

1. Chandragupta Maurya
2. *Puranas*
3. *Purvanandasuta*
4. William Jones
5. Vishnugupta (Chanakya)
6. Seleceus Nikator
7. Arachosia, Parapanisdae, Ariana, Gedrosia
8. Megasthenes
9. Bindusara
10. Deimachus

Assignments

1. Analyse the importance of *Arthashastra* and *Indica* as source materials to reconstruct the history of Mauryas in Ancient history.

2. Write an assignment on the topic 'Mauryan Trade with the Outside World'.

3. Debate on the authorship of *Arthashastra*.

4. Prepare a map on Chandragupta Maurya's territorial extent.

5. Explain the Administrative structure of Mauryans.

6. Discuss the features of Mauryan Economy.

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3 UNIT

Ashoka and His Dhamma

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ get familiar with Ashoka and his policy of Dhamma

♦ know the changes brought by Ashoka in his administration

♦ explain the role of Dhamma Mahamatras under Ashoka

♦ get awareness Ashoka's relation with Buddhism

Prerequisites

Bindusara was succeeded by Ashoka to the throne of the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka is often regarded by historians as one of the most extraordinary rulers in Indian history. Known for his intelligence and strength, he is credited with transforming the Mauryan Empire through significant reforms and innovations in administration, religion and society. Ashoka is celebrated for his religious tolerance and the promotion of his policy of Dhamma, which emphasised morality and ethical conduct. His ideals, principles and policies were communicated to his people and beyond through the famous Ashokan edicts. Building on the foundation of a well-organised empire established by his predecessors, Ashoka left a lasting legacy with his remarkable contributions.

Keywords

Rajukas, Pradeshikas, Mahamattas, Nagarakas, Pulisani, Pativedakas, Dhamma, Dhamma Mahamatras, Kalinga ware, Buddhism, Administrative reforms, Rock edicts

Discussion

The period of Ashoka was one of the magnificent periods in Indian history. He inherited a large empire from his renowned predecessors, Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara. The inscriptions comprising the rock edicts, pillar edicts and cave inscriptions provide information regarding his activities.

The name Ashoka literally means "free of grief". The term 'Ashoka' is mentioned once in the inscriptions. In the *Maski* inscription, the term *Devanampiya Ashoka* was used. Buddhist texts and the *Puranas* refer to *Piyadasi* and *Ashokavardhana* whose identity was later confirmed as Ashoka. Ashoka was also referred to in the Girnar edict of Rudradaman. The term *Piyadasi Laja Magadha* in Bairat edict was used to refer to Ashoka. In the Ceylonese Chronicle *Dipavamsa,* Ashoka was referred to as *Piyadasi* and *Piyadassana.*

4.3.1 Early Life of Ashoka

We have only a few details about the early life of Ashoka from the traditional sources. Facts pertaining to his policies, administration and kingdom are available in inscriptions and edicts commissioned by Ashoka. *Dipavamsa, Mahavamsa, Mudrarakshasa, Mahavamsa Tika* and Jain traditions furnished information on Ashoka's childhood and youth. *Divyavadana* makes a reference to Ashoka's mother who was called Janapadakalyani, the daughter of a Brahmin based in Champa. She gave birth to two children - Ashoka and VigatAshoka. The Greek classical accounts claim that Ashoka was the child of a Greek princess, the daughter of Seleceus Nikator. But there is no evidence to prove the claim.

The revolt at Taxila became fundamental in bringing about a transition in Ashoka's life. Susima, the eldest son of Bindusara governed the province at Taxila and meanwhile, a revolt broke out. Ashoka, who was sent to deal with the situation at Taxila, crushed the revolt. Ashoka was then given additional charge as the governor at the provinces of Taxila and Ujjain. It has been suggested by traditional sources that Ashoka met Devi, a merchant's daughter whom he married later. She was believed to be the mother of Ashoka's children- Mahinda and Sanghamitta who later advocated ideals of Buddhism.

It is estimated that Ashoka ascended the throne in 273 BCE and that his formal coronation occurred in 269 BCE after four years. The four year interregnum is still a matter of contentious debate. Dr. Vincent Smith calls it "one of the dark spaces in the spectrum of Indian history". While the Buddhist texts spoke of a fratricidal struggle that took place where Ashoka killed many of his brothers, Taranath accounts of how Ashoka murdered six of his brothers to claim the throne. The Ceylonese legends claimed that he killed 99 of his kin except Tissa, his uterine brother.

Kalinga War (264 BCE)

Traditional accounts portray Ashoka as a man who was predisposed to torture and cruelty which later earned him the name ChandAshoka. The Kalinga War of 264 BCE was fought in the eighth year of

Ashoka's accession. The war is discussed by several historians as a turning point in the career of Ashoka.

The region of Kalinga was situated between the rivers Godavari and Mahanadi which had remained outside the Mauryan control for a hundred years. Ashoka was threatened by Kalinga's assertive military capabilities and powers of diplomacy. Kalinga was then conquered by Ashoka. The incident and its after-effects have been narrated by Ashoka in his own words in the thirteenth Rock Edict (Major Rock Edict XIII). The edict narrates how Ashoka conquered the province of Kalinga. Around one hundred, fifty thousand people were deported, one lakh people were killed and several people died of injuries and starvation. Ashoka expressed his remorse after witnessing the people in distress.

4.3.1.1 Ashoka's Ideals and Principles

Ashoka's personal religion, his association with Buddhism and the ideal of *Dhamma* propagated by him were topics of serious debate among historians of all times. In fact, it had been hard for historians to separate the administrative policies of Ashoka and the developments in Buddhism.

Policy of *Dhamma*

The centralisation of the empire was an integral aspect of the Mauryan administration. The policy of *Dhamma* was thereby introduced by Ashoka which he considered to be an instrument to keep the empire intact. The adoption of a new set of principles assisted Ashoka in cementing smaller units into the unified whole. He was also able to influence religious sects with his new policy of

Dhamma. Romila Thapar in *Ashoka and the Decline of Mauryas* refers to the *Pali* word *Dhamma* which means truth or laws of nature. Known as *Dharma* in Sanskrit and *qyst* in Aramaic, *Dhamma* was a general code of morals. In his Pillar Edict II, he describes "*Dhamma as the maximum of virtues and minimum of sins.*" He used edicts to propagate the principles of his new policy to the extent of his empire. Through his edicts, he expounded the concept of *ahimsa*, morality, welfare and religious tolerance. He ordered the ban on animal sacrifices, organisation of gatherings, planting of trees and medicinal plants, showering respect to elders and to the king.

Dhamma Mahamatras

It was in accordance with his new policy that he instituted a new group of officers named *Dharma Mahamatras* and sent them on *Dharma Yatras* to preach the message of *'Dhamma'*. They looked after the welfare of prisoners, women, elders and children. They collected donations received for the upkeep of *Dhamma* and gathered information to report to the king. The officers worked not only in the central regions of the empire, but in the frontier regions and outskirts. The First Separate Rock Edict instituted at Dhauli, Orissa was specifically directed to *Dhamma Mahamatras* at Tosali (Dhauli of modern times). Ashoka's death around 232 BCE. resulted in the weakening of the policy of *Dhamma* and its tenets disappeared in due time. His successors did not make efforts to continue the legacy of Ashoka by uplifting the policy of *Dhamma*.

Buddhists who had been considered as heretics were now acknowledged with due recognition as Ashoka extended support to Buddhism. Romila Thapar argues that as Ashoka understood the practical advantage

of using Buddhism, he employed the religion to achieve his political aims.

Dhamma and Buddhism

Several historians have argued that Ashoka's policy of *Dhamma* was Buddhism. Romila Thapar opines that there is insufficient evidence to prove this view. Both ideologies shared similar principles including pacifism, non-violence, respect to elders, brahmins and other groups of people and the belief in after-life. At the same time, there were dissimilarities among the ideologies. *Dhamma* was not conceived as a religion and was put forth as a moral way of life. But, Buddhism was a religion. Thapar puts forth the view that if *Dhamma* was Buddhism, Ashoka would have declared it openly. Therefore, both concepts need not be necessarily congruent in nature.

Dhamma - A Universal Concept

The concept of *Dharma* was found in both Brahmanism and Buddhism. The Vedas, *Bhagavad Gita* and other religious texts allude to it as the 'universal truth' and 'the carrier of goodness'. In Buddhism, it was considered as a path to Enlightenment and basic teachings of Buddha comprised *Dharma*. Therefore, *Dhamma* was a way of life whose essence was found in several religious teachings.

4.3.2. Ashoka and Buddhism

Taranath claims that Ashoka was engaged in worldly pleasures and violence and that he was called *ChandAshoka and KamAshoka.* It was his conversion to Buddhism that earned him the name *Dharmashoka.* Several historians claim that Ashoka was a practising Buddhist monk for a short period of time. A few historians claimed that Ashoka practised

Buddhist tenets; but he was neither an *upasaka* nor a *bhikkhu.* Contradicting the earlier views, Dikshithar suggested that Ashoka was a Brahmanical Hindu and not a Buddhist. Romila Thapar objects to Dikshithar by stating that from the available evidence, it is clear that he was not a Brahmanical Hindu. Taranath claimed that Ashoka had close relations with Buddhism and he worshipped Mother Goddess. Thapar argues that there was no adequate evidence to prove that Ashoka desired to become a monk while he shouldered the responsibility of his kingdom's administration. His theory of *Dhamma* proved that Buddhist tenets were used by him to enforce social morality. Therefore, Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism is a matter of question.

4.3.2.1 Spread of Buddhism under Ashoka

Ashoka sent envoys to the Greek kingdoms of *Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, Macedonia* and *Epirus* to spread the influence of his policy- *Dhamma.* He also took charge of conducting the Third Buddhist Council in 250 BCE and ordered missionaries to be sent to several parts of the world. He used *Dhamma* and the religion Buddhism to implement political propaganda around the world. Ashoka undertook a voyage to Bodh Gaya to view the Bodhi tree. He declared publicly his belief in *Sangha, Buddha* and *Dharma* in one of his letters. Ashoka was responsible for the third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra under the aegis of Mogaliputta Tissa. The council was believed to have been held in 252 BCE which was attended by 1000 *bhikkhus.* The Council aimed at resolving the conflicts arising between the different sects of Buddhism and authored the third *Tri Pitaka- Abhidhamma Pitaka.*

The *Sthaviravadins* were favoured in the end and missionaries were sent to distant lands to convert people into Buddhism. Majjahantika was sent to Gandhara region, Mahadeva to Mahisamandala, Vanavasi to Rakhita, Dharmarakshita to Aparantaka, Mahadharmarakshita to Maharattha, Majjhima to Himavanta and Sona and Uttara to Suvarnabhumi. Mahinda and Sangamitta were sent to Lankadipa. Devanampiya Tissa and the people of Ceylon were inspired by the teachings of the missionaries and converted to Buddhism. Another embassy was sent by Ashoka to Ceylon comprising a branch of Bodhi tree.

4.3.3 Administrative Reforms

Inscriptions unravelled several aspects of Ashoka's administration. Ashoka desired to create a centralised state established by his forefathers. He maintained the *Mantriparishad,* but its powers were restricted to offer advice to the king instead of exercising powers. The council acted in accordance with the orders of the king and informed king matters discussed in his absence. The king ensured that he was available at all times in spite of his strenuous daily routine. Ashoka retained the divisions into which the empire was divided by his forefathers. Ashoka continuously changed the governors of the provinces in order to prevent them from committing any forms of corruption. He introduced the office of the *Dhamma Mahamatras* and empowered them with enlarged powers to actively propagate the message of *dhamma* in his empire.

Other functionaries called *Ithijakka Mahamattas, Dharma Mahamatras, Anta Mahamattas* exerted control over other aspects of local administration. *Ithijakka*

Mahamattas administered affairs at harems and other departments. *Anta Mahamattas* controlled frontier regions and collected tolls in respective areas. They shouldered the responsibility of establishing cordial relations between the local chiefs and the king, instituting trust. They were in the forefront preventing rebellions occurring among the frontier tribes. The *Pulisani* and *Prativedakas* were responsible for informing the king of suspicious activities taking place in the kingdom.

4.3.4 Ashoka and his Foreign Relations

What was the nature of the foreign relations during the reign of Ashoka? Nilakanta Sastri provided insights on the cordial foreign relations of the Mauryan empire. The Mauryas had friendly relations with Sri Lanka which was referred to in Ceylonese chronicles, *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa*. Tissa, the ruler of Ceylon, had been converted to Buddhism after the arrival of Mahinda. Tissa planted a branch of the *Bodhi* tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment. Ashoka's *Dhamma Yatra* was an important element of foreign relations of the Mauryan empire. There was plenty of evidence that suggested the prevalence of foreign relations between Iran and India. Therefore, several similarities are found between the customs and culture of Iran and India. Ashoka acquired the practice of erecting inscriptions in the Mauryan empire from the Achaemenid empire. The use of Kharosthi script in the Ashokan inscriptions testify to the cordial relations between Iran and India.

The usage of the word *Yonas* in Ashokan edicts allude to the existence of relations between Greece and Mauryan Empire. The arrival of ambassadors including

Megasthenes and Deimachus from Greece prove the fact. Ashoka maintained close relations with Nepal. There are also other references to Ashoka's visit in Nepalese legends.

Regarding the far south regions of India, Ashoka's Minor Rock Edict in Chitaldoorg, Mysore proves that Ashoka was not interested in incorporating southern regions into his empire as he had already established friendly relations with the kingdoms of Chola, Chera and Pandya.

Major Rock Edicts of Ashoka

Major Rock Edict	Content
I	Prohibiting the sacrifice of animals
II	Welfare Measures. Refers to *Pandyas, Satyapuras* and *Keralaputras*
III	Empathetic attitude towards Brahmins
IV	Importance to *Dhamma*
V	*Dhamma Mahamatras*
VI	Welfare of People
VII	Religious Tolerance
VIII	Visit to Bodhgaya.
IX	Morality and prohibition of elaborate ceremonies
X	*Dhamma*
XI	Elaboration on *Dhamma*
XII	Duties of *Mahamattas*
XIII	Victory at Kalinga
XIV	Significance of edicts

Pillar Edicts of Ashoka

Pillar Edict	Contents
I	Duty of a king to protect people
II	Definition of *Dhamma*
III	Avoiding negative emotions
IV	Duties of *Rajukas*
V	Details of prohibition of animal and bird sacrifice
VI	Policy of *Dhamma*
VII	*Dhamma* and religious tolerance

Recap

- Inherited an empire from forefathers- Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara
- Ashoka- Free of Grief- mentioned once in inscriptions- *Devanampiya Ashokasa, Piyadasi, Ashokavardhana, Piyadasi Laja Magadha, Piyadassana*
- *Mahavamsa Tika, Divyavadana*- Tells the story of Ashoka
- Kalinga War of 264 BCE - Resulted in Ashoka's repentance
- Converted to Buddhism- Established stupas- Visits to Lumbini and Gaya
- The Third Buddhist Council- Moggaliputta Tissa- Buddhist missionaries
- *Dhamma*- Inscribed principles of *dhamma* in edicts- *Dhamma mahamatras*
- Edicts- 14 Major Rock Edicts, 6 Minor Rock edicts, 7 Pillar Edicts, 6 Minor Pillar Edicts- Prakrit, Kharoshti, Greek and Aramaic scripts were used.
- Administrative Reforms- Enlarged Empire- Comprising Kashmir, Khotan, Nepal, Bengal- Excluded parts of Assam and South India.
- Officers- *Pradeshikas, Rajukas, Yuktas, Kumaras, Mahamattas, Ithijakka Mahamattas, dharma mahamatras, Anta Mahamattas, Gopas, Sthanikas, Pulisani, Pativedakas, Nagaraka*
- Foreign Relations- Mauryas had relations with Sri Lanka, Iran, Persia etc.

Objective Questions

1. What did the word 'Ashoka' literally mean?
2. Which inscription referred to Ashoka as 'Devanampiya'?
3. Which edict referred to Ashoka as *Piyadasi laja Magadhe*?
4. Which account mentions Ashoka murdering six of his brothers to claim the throne?
5. Which revolt did Ashoka suppress before becoming Mauryan king?
6. Which policy did Ashoka introduce instead of *Bherighosha* after the Kalinga war?
7. Who presided over the Third Buddhist Council held in 252 BCE.?
8. Which *Pitaka* was introduced in the Third Buddhist Council?
9. Who were the missionaries sent to Suvarnabhumi?
10. What was the name of the king of Ceylon who converted into Buddhism?

Answers

1. Free of Grief
2. Maski Inscription
3. Bairat edict
4. Taranath's account
5. Taxila

6. *Dhammaghosha*
7. Mogaliputta Tissa
8. *Abhidhamma Pitaka*
9. Sona and Uttara
10. Devanampiya Tissa

Assignments

1. Critically analyse Ashoka's policy of *Dhamma*.
2. Analyse the religious tolerance of *Ashoka.*
3. Prepare a map of the locations of Ashokan Edicts.
4. Discuss the significance of Kalinga War (264 BCE).
5. Describe the role of *Dhamma Mahamatras* in Mauryans period.

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4 UNIT

Decline of MauryanEmpire: The Debate

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ get awareness with the chronological lists of the Mauryan empire

♦ explain the successors of the Mauryan King Ashoka

♦ understand the causes for the decline of the Mauryan empire

♦ explain how historians substantiated the causes for the decline of the Mauryan empire

Prerequisites

Ashoka's reign was followed by a succession of kings, including Tivara, Kunala, Dasaratha and Samprati, as noted in both indigenous and foreign literature. Historians have proposed varying chronologies of these successors, leading to an ongoing debate. Brihadratha, the last Mauryan ruler, is believed to have been overthrown by Pushyamitra Sunga, the army commander who established the Sunga dynasty. This marked the decline of the Mauryan Empire around 185 BCE. Historians have attributed the empire's decline and disintegration to several factors, resulting in various theories about its downfall. This chapter seeks to explore the reasons and theories behind the collapse of the Mauryan Empire.

Keywords

Kunala, Samprati, Dasaratha, Pushyamitra, Banabhatta, *Brahmins, Dharmavijaya,* Succession, Decline, Ashoka's policy

Discussion

The death of King Ashoka signalled the beginning of the decline of the Mauryan empire. After the death of Ashoka, the empire began to disintegrate, paving the way for the rise of the *Sungas.* Many texts put forth different dynastic lists of the Mauryas which often contradicted each other.

4.4.1 Chronological Succession of Kings

The *Puranas* claimed that Ashoka was succeeded by Kunala, Bandhupalita, Indrapalita and that the kingdom was ruled last by Brihadratha. The *Divyavadana* begins the list of successors with Kunala which ends with Pushyamitra. *Ashokavadana* includes Samprati, Vathaspati, Virasena, Pushyadharman and Pushyamitra in the list of successors. Jain texts confirm that Samprati was the immediate successor of Ashoka. Taranath, a Tibetan historiographer compiled the list of successors, beginning from VigratAshoka. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* claims Jalauka as Ashoka's successor. The Queen's Edict indicates a possibility that Tivara might have been Ashoka's successor. The *Matsya Purana* lists Dasaratha, Ashoka's grandson as his successor. The *Vishnu Purana* lists Suyasas as the successor of Ashoka and Suyasas was another name Kunala was known by Buddhist texts confirming that Samprati was the successor of Ashoka.

Successors of Ashoka

Mahendra, the son of Ashoka was a missionary sent to Ceylon to spread the tenets of Buddhism. Kunala, who was succeeded by Ashoka ruled the country for eight years and he was later succeeded by his son Samprati. This was known from the chronicles of *Vayu Purana.* Kunala was blinded by court intrigues. Samprati ruled the country assuming the name 'Lord of Bharata'. Kalhana in his *Rajatarangini* refers to Jalauka who governed Kashmir after Ashoka. The last king who ruled over the Mauryan empire was Brihadratha who was overthrown by Pushyamitra Sunga, the military commander, paving the way to the establishment of the Sunga dynasty.

Romila Thapar furnishes details about the partition of the empire into western and eastern kingdoms, a consequence of Ashoka's death in 233-232 BCE. Kunala and Samprati ruled over the western kingdom in succession. The eastern empire was ruled over by Dasaratha, Samprati, Salisuka, Devavarman, Satadhanan and Brihadratha. J.L. Mehta and Sarita Mehta claimed that in 185 BCE, Pushyamitra, the commander-in-chief, killed Brihadatha, the last Mauryan king. This paved the way for the establishment of the Sunga dynasty.

4.4.2 Causes for the Downfall of Mauryan Empire - Different Theories

The death of Ashoka paved the way for the disintegration of the Mauryan empire. Several causes were attributed to the decline of the Mauryan empire and various historians substantiated these causes with their own reasons.

The *Puranas* claimed that the Mauryan empire declined as Brihadratha was

murdered by Pushyamitra, who was the military commander of the last Mauryan regent. This theory was advocated by Banabhatta in his work *Harshacharita*. This was considered as one of the important political reasons behind the decline of the empire.

J. L. Mehta argued that the invasions instigated by the Bactrian Greeks in the second century were another political reason that ushered the empire into decline. The Bactrian Greeks attacked India after Ashoka, overthrowing his successors with their martial qualities and military prowess. This was succeeded by foreign invaders who attacked the northwestern regions of the empire.

Romila Thapar attributes the decline of the Mauryan empire to another important reason- weak successors of Ashoka. R. K Mukherjee called them 'pygmies whose shoulders were not fit to bear the weight of his mighty monarchy.' The successors did not make conscious efforts to continue the policies of King Ashoka.

J. L. Mehta argues that the expansive nature of Mauryan empire and ineffective means of transportation and communication resulted in lack of effective control by the central government. In such a troubled situation, the provincial governors attempted to revolt against the sphere of central control.

Romila Thapar advocated the centralisation theory where powers were decentralised for provincial autonomy resulting in the weakening of centralised control. Certain groups formed unwritten contracts of loyalty between each other, resulting in popular opinion against the king and central administration. This paved the way for the decline of the Mauryan empire.

R.S. Sharma put forth another theory behind the decline of the Mauryan empire. The material elements that assisted Magadha's rise to prosperity resulted in the downfall of the empire. The advent of iron and the consistent use of iron implements was a characteristic feature of the period that witnessed the empire's downfall. R. S. Sharma also stressed the financial weaknesses of the Mauryan empire. The expenditure incurred on the army and an expansive administrative structure during Ashoka's reign was relatively higher than that of his predecessors. Ashoka had spent a large sum of money on Buddhist missionaries. This resulted in scarcity of funds in the royal exchequer. The officials were later ordered to melt gold idols, statues etc in order to meet the financial debt of the empire. D.N. Jha also corroborates the economic theory behind the decline of the Mauryan empire.

D.D. Kosambi put forth the economic causes behind the downfall of the Mauryan empire. The empire initiated reforms to increase the taxes which were imposed on a wide variety of items. Evidence regarding the debasement of coins found in punch-marked coins proved the existence of several economic inconsistencies in the economy.

Romila Thapar stressed the loyalty theory which resulted in the decline of the Mauryan empire. The officials who were appointed on the basis of personal favour and recommendation were loyal to the king. But the officials changed loyalties during the time of Ashoka's successors. This instigated revolts which triggered the decline of the Mauryan empire.

The policies initiated by Ashoka also resulted in the downfall of the Mauryan empire. Upinder Singh claims that Ashoka

is to be held responsible for the downfall of the Mauryan empire.

Haraprasad Sastri argued that Ashoka's ban on animal sacrifices directly attacked the Brahmins and this act questioned their superiority. Raychaudhari pointed out that this policy did not attack the supremacy of Brahmins, as in many of his edicts, Ashoka extended the ban to edible animals as well. Sastri argues that the *Dhamma Mahamatras* shattered the power and supremacy of the Brahmins. Raychaudhari questions his argument on the basis of the duties delegated to the *Dhamma Mahamatras* which consisted of tending to the needs of the Brahmins.

Ashoka's policy of pacifism was acknowledged as a cause for the empire's decline. Ashoka adopted the policy of non-violence and *ahimsa* after his repentance at Kalinga war. He replaced the policy of *Dig Vijaya* with *Dharmavijaya.* Raychaudhari argued that Ashoka pursued a policy of non-violence. Ashoka's policy of non-violence and *ahimsa* culminated in the downfall of the empire and reduced the power of the king. This resulted in officials emerging powerful, paving way to revolts. The pacifist attitude of Ashoka towards people and administration resulted in the disorganisation of the empire. Romila Thapar examines the pacifist policy of Ashoka. He ordered that animals should not be slaughtered and in case of sparing the animal, a sympathetic attitude must be expressed. In spite of his publicised policy of non-violence, capital punishment was not banned in his empire. He introduced the grant of exemption of three days to those sentenced to death in his twenty-seventh year of his reign. J.L. Mehta and Sarita Mehta argue that when Ashoka announced that "his policy of *Bherighosha* was replaced with *Dharmaghosha,* he sounded the death knell of the empire".

J. L. Mehta refers to Ashoka's responsibility in cultivating a group of incapable princes to rule the empire. He failed to build a congenial atmosphere to educate, train and carve princes as military commanders, administrators and viceroys to assist them in administering an empire. Ashoka was not interested in training his sons to inherit the throne and therefore, he was blamed by several historians for his indecisiveness in appointing a royal heir. H. C. Raychaudhuri claimed that Ashoka used his powers of persuasion to pursue a policy of *Dhamma* instead of military training.

Another reason for why Ashoka was held responsible for the decline of the empire was the financial debt of the empire. His conversion to Buddhism required surplus financial resources for the propagation of the religion to several places. Ashoka spent money to construct *stupas,* monasteries and Buddhist pilgrimage sites in different parts of the empire and to send missionaries to spread the tenets of Buddhism.

Several historians blamed Ashoka for his abandonment of war policy and his propagation of peace. Consequently, he failed to expand his empire by conquering a number of principalities in his dominion. Instead of bringing them under his authority and control, Ashoka awarded autonomy and allowed the sovereignty of these principalities to remain intact. These principalities comprised the following groups of people: Andhras, Rashtrikas, Bhojas, Nabhapanthis, Pulindas, Kambojas, Yavanas, Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras etc. His death resulted in these principalities gathering unsurpassed power and autonomy.

Romila Thapar cites several other reasons for the downfall of the Mauryan

empire. They consist of absence of feelings of nationalism, loyalty to the kingdom instead of kings and the absence of political institutions.The Mauryan empire failed to incorporate regional economies and central economy. Many factors including Ashoka's responsibility were attributed to the end of the Mauryan empire.

Recap

- ♦ Chronological Succession-Different texts put forth claims- *Ashoka Vadana,* Jain texts, Taranath, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, Queen's Edict, *Matsya Purana, Vishnu Purana*, Buddhist Texts

- ♦ The successors of Ashoka- Mahinda, Kunala, Samprati, Suyasas, Tivara, Dasaratha etc

- ♦ Causes of Downfall- Different Theories - Brihadratha was overthrown by Pushyamitra -Political Theory, Invasion Theory, Succession Theory, Decentralisation Theory, Economic Theories- Financial Weakness, Debasement of Mauryan currency, Increased taxation, Loyalty Theory

- ♦ Responsibility of Ashoka- Animal Sacrifices- *Brahmanical* Theory, Pacifist Theory, Inability to train his Successors, Created financial debt for the empire

Objective Questions

1. Which dynasty succeeded the Mauryan Empire?

2. Who was Ashoka's successor according to *Divyavadana?*

3. Which set of texts claimed that Samprati was Ashoka's successor?

4. Who claimed that Ashoka was succeeded by VigatAshoka?

5. Who was the successor of Ashoka as referred to in the Queen's edict?

6. What was the relation between Ashoka and Dasaratha?

7. Which source listed Suyasas as Ashoka's successor?

8. Which successor was believed to have been blinded by the royal courtiers?

9. Who assumed the name Lord of *Bharata*?

10. Who advocated the economic theory behind the downfall of the Mauryan empire?

Answers

1. The Sunga dynasty
2. Kunala
3. Samprati
4. Taranath
5. Tivara
6. Grandfather and Grandson
7. *Vishnu Purana*
8. Kunala
9. Samprati
10. R.S. Sharma, D.D. Kosambi, D.N. Jha

Assignments

1. Prepare a chart on the chronological lists of successors of the Mauryan Empire.
2. Critically analyse the causes for the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire.
3. Discuss the policies initiated by Ashoka that resulted in the downfall of the Mauryan empire.
4. Critically analyse Ashoka's policy of pacifism.
5. Analyse the contributions of Ashoka's successors.

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5 UNIT

The Iron Age Cultures of Early South India

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ get familiar the Iron Age cultures and the Megaliths in early south India

♦ discuss the typology of megaliths

♦ describe the burial practices of the Iron Age culture

♦ get awareness of the society, economy and political structure of early South India

Prerequisites

After the prehistoric period, several elements mark the beginning of the historical period. These elements are settlements of large-scale rural communities which carry on plough agriculture with the aid of the iron ploughshare, formation of the state system, rise of social classes, introduction of writing, introduction of metal coinage and the beginnings of written literature. Up To the second century CE, the upland portions of the kaveri peninsula were inhabited by people who are called megalithic builders. This period is often referred to as the Megalithic Age(Iron Age Culture) due to the widespread practice of erecting stone structures to honour the dead. These graves are called Megaliths because they were encircled by large pieces of stone. The megaliths included rock-cut chambers, umbrella stones, capstones, dolmens and dolmenoid cists. Burial sites have yielded a diverse range of grave goods, offering insights into the practices of the time. The Iron Age was marked by distinct political, religious, social and cultural dynamics.

Keywords

Megaliths, *Nannangadi, Toppikal, Kudakkal, Pulacchikkal Perumakan, Sangam,* Burials monuments, Trade, Economy

Discussion

The Iron Age culture of South India was one of the extensive cultures in India that extended from Vidarbha to Kanyakumari. The remains of Iron Age Culture were also excavated from Kerala. The excavated remains consisted of burials and funeral remains. Evidence proves that humans inhabited the land from the beginning of 1000 BCE. Due to lack of identification of an Iron Age site, archaeologists have limited knowledge regarding the elements of human culture that prevailed during the period. Therefore, archaeologists find the construction of the chronology of the Iron age a laborious task. Moreover, the burials and funeral remains furnished insights on the crematory practices and how the people conducted the disposal of the dead. The remains also offer details on the ideals and beliefs the people practised in association with the funeral practices. The burials consisted of several accompaniments including agricultural implements, kitchen utensils, sacred objects etc which signified the existence of a progressive material culture.

The remains also signify the prevalence of different descent groups who practised different means of subsistence and belonged to different religious sects. This has been proved by the rock cut caves unearthed by archaeologists. With the archaeological evidence excavated, it can be concluded that the economy prevalent consisted of hunting, gathering, cultivation and rearing of animals accompanied by craft-manufacturing. This has been corroborated with information that scholars obtained from the study of paintings and figurines.

4.5.1 Megaliths

The archaeological remains that characterised the Iron age were known as Megaliths. The Iron age was also known as Age of Megaliths as the practice of establishing high rock monuments in memory of the dead was common. There were also other several funerary remains that were not associated with the Megalithic Age. In spite of the distinction between the remains, there existed several cremation practices of which a few of them were related with the megalithic age. Therefore, the word 'Megalith' was not necessarily associated with the archaeological remains of the Iron Age. In spite of all this, the term 'Megalithic Age' has been commonly used. Upinder Singh puts forth another view on megaliths. Due to the variation in the archaeological remains unearthed, scholars ought to use the term Megalithic cultures rather than a unitary Megalithic culture. Upinder Singh claimed that megalithic remains were widely found in several parts of South India including Adichannalur, Sanur, Tenkasi, Korkai, Muthukar, Arippa, Marayur etc.

Regarding the chronology of the Iron Age, it was believed that the Megalithic Age commenced in 500 BCE to 500 CE. The age witnessed the emergence of expansive agricultural settlements which practised pastoralism and had contacts with the external world.

The megalithic monuments were initially unearthed by the local inhabitants of the region. The inhabitants named these monuments *Patnukuzhi, Muniyara,*

Nannangadi, Toppikal, Kudakkal etc, in accordance with their characteristic features and place of origin. Babington's discovery of burials in the district of Kannur commenced the excavation of megalithic monuments in Kerala. This resulted in the subsequent unearthing of monuments in several regions. The British officials and administrators commissioned a series of excavations which unearthed megaliths. The Archaeological Survey of India and Archaeology departments of other states conducted excavations of megalithic sites. Of the several megalithic remains, the rock cut mounds occupied a prominent position.

4.5.1.1 Typology and Distribution of Megaliths

Megalithic burials consist of urns, pits, mounds, cists, dolmens, menhirs, rock cut chambers, mounds etc. Dolmens and cists with multiple chambers and multiple burials suggest an increased number of people buried at the site. In local nomenclature, these burials were *Kotakkal, Toppikal, Muniyara, Munimata, Guha,* etc. The English terms for these burials were confusing and literally incorrect.

1. **Urns and Pits:** The urns were called *Mancara, Matumakkathazhi, Nannannati and Annanazhikkutam.* The urns were commonly of black and red pottery and were commonly found in these regions. Commonly found in clusters, the urns were found occasionally at certain regions. Stone slabs sealed the urns and were often marked by stone/ cairn circles.

2. **Sarcophagi:** Sarcophagi were generally legged terracotta coffins. These coffins were created in the shape of insects and cattle. Sarcophagi shaped like cattle were found in Thrissur district and a small legged sarcophagi was excavated from Chevayur.

3. **Dolmens and Cists:** Dolmens can be differentiated from cists in a simplified manner. While dolmens are found on top of the ground, cists are excavated underground. These megalithic remains were chambered by granite slabs. The dolmens and cists were generally discovered at regions in high granite concentrations and plains. Dolmens were found in high proportion at Thrissur and Idukki .The Dolmenoid cists were relatively more found than that of dolmens. Found in high ranges and midlands, the Dolmenoid cists were found in Ernakulam, Idukki and Wayanad districts in Kerala. Dolmenoid cists were made of granite slabs.

4. **Umbrella Stones:** Known a*s Kotakkal,* the umbrella stones were a remarkable type of megalithic burial of South India. They are generally found in Kozhikode, Malappuram and Thrissur. The *Kottakkal* assumed the shape of a mushroom or an umbrella. Made of laterite, the monument comprises two parts: stem and umbrella top. The stem consisted of small artefacts related to death.

5. **Cap Stones:** Known as *Toppikals*, the capstones were hemisphere shaped stones used to seal urns. They were generally found in Thrissur district. Usually, a flat stone was used as the lid of the burial. The capstone or *Toppikal* was generally placed above the ground in memory of the dead. Often, a *Kotakkal* was confused with cap stone as many linguists

and translators identify the words incorrectly. Many archaeologists continue to interchangeably use the words *Toppikal* with *Kottakkal*.

6. **Rock Cut Chambers***:* Rock cut chambers were also known as rock shaft graves and rock cut tombs. These chambers were found in Thrissur, Kozhikode, Kannur, Kasaragod and several other parts of South India. The chambers were made of single stones erected into the depths of soil. The chambers are characterised by rectangular shaped or circle shaped openings named portholes. Generally, the rock cut chambers are categorised into two: single chambered and multiple chambered. The Rock cut chambers were also differentiated based on the prevalence of pillars- pillared chambers and non-pillared chambers. Generally, pillars were erected to differentiate several chambers. Upinder Singh advocates that the rock cut chambers were chambered by vertical slabs called transepts. The chambers constituted stone cots, metal implements, pottery including vases and urns. The roof of these chambers were often dome-shaped or rectangle shaped.

7. **Menhirs and Alignments:** Menhirs were used to refer to towering monoliths erected atop burials. Idukki and Thrissur districts in Kerala were surrounded with menhirs. Excavations of a few menhirs unearthed no relics. The excavation of menhirs at Marayur unearthed an urn sealed with a lid situated four feet underground. The urns consisted of grave remains consisting of ceramics, iron axes etc. The menhirs occasionally were found in alignment. The local residents named the menhirs as *Nattukal and Pulacchikkal*. The term *Nattukal* signified a stone erected in memory of the deceased. The word *Pulacchikkal* literally meant a stone erected in commemoration of the fame of the deceased. The Megaliths were distributed across South India on the basis of the number of monuments, place and region. Megalithic monuments were excavated either individually or found in clusters.

4.5.1.2 Nature of Monuments/ Burials

These megaliths often consisted of human bones, ceramics, metal tools, ornaments etc. Burials in Kerala were restricted to fractional burials. A few fragments of human bones were unearthed from the Megalithic burials. Fractional burials refers to burials where the body of the deceased were exposed to nature and the remains were buried.

Archaeological excavations that unearthed charred remains proved the existence of cremation rites in the Iron Age. The number of chambers, pits, urns indicated the number of burials.

4.5.2 Other Material Evidence

Beads of carnelian, glass, wax and bones have been discovered from several megalithic burials. Mortar-pestle, querns, grinding rocks, terracotta animal figurines and animal clay models were also unearthed from these burials. Husks of rice, fragments of human skeletons, animal bones were also found from these burials.

Rock Art

Upinder Singh claims that rock paintings excavated at certain sites portray scenes of fighting, cattle raids, hunting etc. Paintings and petroglyphs engraved on rock surfaces in rock-chambers constituted art of the Iron Age. Engravings in rock shelters at Wayanad and Idukki prove that people during the Iron Age were preoccupied with depicting their lives and culture. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier claim that an association is ascertained based on the close proximity of Megalithic burials and rock art sites. They argue that the age and authenticity of the art could only be ascertained with relative dating of the pigments used in the rock art. Studies to probe further into the relationship between megalithic burials and paintings are being conducted.

Chronology

Several historians and archaeologists have failed to reach a consensus on the period of the Iron Age. Based on available archaeological evidence, scholars tend to acclaim a period from 1000 BCE. to 500 CE. as the period of the Iron Age. Thapar who excavated at Porkkalam concluded the period of Megaliths between 3rd Century BCE. to first century CE. Bridget Allchins and Clarence Maloney conclude that the Iron Age commenced from the beginning of 500 BCE. Satyamurthy contends the above claims by declaring the commencement of the Iron Age from 1000 BCE. Rajan and Chedambath argue that the Megalithic Age of Kerala can be assigned from 500 BCE. to 500 CE with respect to their comparative studies of the Megalithic Age in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier advocate that the above periodisation can be accepted until the discovery of further evidence.

4.5.3 Economy

A general understanding of the means of the subsistence of the people in the Iron Age will help scholars to analyse the material culture that prevailed. People engaged in hunting, gathering, rearing of animals, crafts manufacturing and cultivation. This has been proved with the grave goods excavated from the Megalithic burials.

There are several literary references to the collection and gathering of food. The Tamil Sangam poems allude to the rearing of animals including cattle, bulls, sheep, goats, elephants etc. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier claim that there arose a debate on the prevalence of herding as South India was heavily forested to encourage the domestication of animals. Upinder Singh argued that the paintings excavated from Karnataka prove the existence of hunting of animals consisting of peahens, stags, etc. The Tamil poems suggested the cultivation of crops including rice, sugarcane, pepper, millets, plantains, jackfruit trees etc. Rajan Gurukkal claims that cultivation of rice was not common and was restricted to coastal areas. He refers to the discovery of hoes and sticks from Megalithic burials which proved the existence of the practice of slash and burn cultivation. The agriculturists of the period preferred millet cultivation than other forms of cultivation. The discovery of ploughs, miniature figurines of agricultural implements, bulls and iron tools testified the existence of plough agriculture.

Knowledge and Technology

The people of the Iron age were proficient in arts and crafts manufacturing. Several archaeological materials which proved the existence of artistic knowledge and craft production have been damaged

beyond repair. Therefore, scholars and archaeologists have been unable to address the issue of prevalence of knowledge and technology in the Iron age.

Metal smelting was an integral activity of the period. The artefacts unearthed from burials prove that men who possessed artistic skills and specialised craftsmanship engaged in the practice of metal smelting. Techniques of folding and forging were used in iron smelting. Copper and bronze artefacts unearthed from burials inform the scholars that there existed a possibility that metals were imported. In ancient times, Palestine and other West Asian countries were major sources of copper and bronze. Rajan Gurukkal, Rajendran and Lahiri claimed that the findings of gold ornaments prove ingenious craftsmanship. There arises a possibility of the prevalence of indigenous gold-manufacturing techniques or the melting of Roman gold that arrived with the advent of Indo-Roman exchange. The gold sheets excavated from Arippa and its translucent nature testifies the metallurgical skill employed.

The grave goods comprised several other goods: iron weapons including swords, daggers, spearheads, knives, axes etc, agricultural implements comprising of axes, pades, hoes, sickles and ploughs, miscellaneous objects including lamps, crowbars, rods etc. Few bronze and copper objects were discovered from parts of South India including bowl fragments, ornaments, cutlery etc.

The Iron Age was predominant with the existence of several handicrafts and craft manufacturing. The startling discovery of ornamental beads of glass, wax, bones, precious stones from Megalithic burials testified to the prevalence of a flourishing bead making industry.

Ceramics unearthed from the burials consisted of black and red pottery, red slip, russet coated, all black, painted red, painted black and red, red pottery etc. Aiyappan claims that the pots were occasionally fired with graffiti. Household ware consisting of bowls, dishes, vases, jars were found amidst the burials. Urns were discovered in different types-legged, perforated, pyriform, pointed etc. Deep bowls, hemisphere-shaped bowls, bowls with inward rims etc were unearthed from the burials.

Trade and Exchange Network

The excavation of foreign burial goods indicated the prevalence of an exchange system in the Iron Age. The Tamil Sangam poems and Graeco-Roman classical accounts report the beginning of maritime exchange during the period. This has been proved by the discovery of rouletted pottery, amphora and other foreign pottery at Arikamedu. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier advocated that people from Greece, Palestine, Arabia, Rome and Persia arrived at the Indian coast to exchange goods and thereby, established maritime forms of exchange.

Gurukkal and Champakalakshmi claim that by the third century BCE, South India was characterised by the establishment of internal and external forms of exchange. The need for goods that were not locally available hastened the process of long distance exchange.

Social Organisation

The megalithic burials did not offer insights into the social structure or differentiation that prevailed during the

period, with the exception of huge burials. The burials generally indicated the diverse means of subsistence comprising hunting, gathering, cultivation and craft manufacturing. In spite of having different means of production, the people of the Iron Age were participants of a nomadic and stationary culture. Gurukkal and Varier observe that the multiple differences between the exterior and interior of burials contribute to the heterogeneous nature of the society. Few burials were arranged in an ostentatious manner, while plain burials consisted of a few artefacts. The type, perfection and quality of grave goods indicated the status of individuals.

4.5.4 Political Power

The size and height of the burials determined the nature of individuals interred. The power and prestige of the deceased was indicated by the labour commanded to erect megalithic monuments. Gurukkal and Varier assume that the people of the Iron Age were tribal sects ruled by chieftains. The Tamil Sangam poems refer to *Perumakan,* a term used to describe chiefs of these groups. The historians advocate that these elaborate burials might have belonged to that of chiefs. There is no evidence to prove the existence of a social hierarchy. The strong clan loyalties between the descent groups ruled out the possibility of social stratification. The people relied upon a redistributive system. Gurukkal claims that references made in the Tamil Sangam poems prove that chiefs of the descent groups were awarded urn burials consisting of several grave goods.

Beliefs and Ideology

Megalithic burials represented homage to ancestors, honour to the deceased and belief in afterlife. *Silappadikaram* refers to how the erection of burials were accompanied by rituals and banquets. Several Tamil Sangam poems allude to the worship of *Nattukals.* The burial goods unearthed at the Megalithic sites indicated the practice of Jainism and Buddhism, Shaivism, nature worship, etc. This proved that Megalithism embodied a heterogeneous culture comprising several religious sects. The construction of portholes serves as evidence of communication with the deceased through rituals.

Towards Bigger Chiefdoms

The people of the Iron age relied on several means of subsistence based on the type of regions they inhabited. The descent groups were based on use-value and requirements. The chiefs of the descent groups competed against others and engaged in predatory raids. This resulted in expansion of control over other chiefs paving way for the emergence of chiefdoms. Several chiefs died in this process and burials were erected atop of the deceased. The period of Tamil Sangam poems represented a phase of larger chiefdoms, developed exchange systems, structured society, heterogeneous cultures etc.

Recap

- The Iron Age Culture of South India- Burials and funerary remains
- Megaliths- Chronology- 500 BCE. to 500 CE.
- Typology of Megaliths- Urns and Pits- Sarchophagi- Dolmens and Cists- Umbrella Stones- Capstones-Rock Cut Chambers- Menhirs and Alignments
- Nature of Monuments/Burials- Grave goods- Beads, Figurines, Clay Models, Paintings, Food grains etc
- Chronology- Contentious issue of debate
- Economy- Multiple forms of subsistence- herding, gathering, hunting, shifting cultivation etc
- Knowledge and Technology-Metal Smelting, Craft Manufacturing, Handicrafts, Ceramic Moulding, Architectural Skills
- Trade and Exchange- Beginning of Overseas forms of exchange
- Social Organisation- Heterogeneous nature of society-Burials indicated social status of individuals

Objective Questions

1. What were the other names megaliths were known by?
2. What was the other name *mancara* was known in English?
3. Which megalithic burial were generally three legged terracotta coffins?
4. What stone was used for megalithic chambers and dolmenoid cists?
5. What was the other name of capstones?
6. Name two types of rock cut chambers.
7. What was the term used to describe chiefs of a group?
8. Which material was also used for slabs to seal urns?
9. Which type of burials were commonly found in Kerala?
10. Which techniques were employed in iron smelting?

Answers

1. *Pantukuzhi, Nannangadi, Muniyara, Kotakkal, Toppikal, Kudakkal* etc.

2. Urns

3. Sarchophagi

4. Granite

5. *Toppikals*

6. Single chambered and Multiple chambered

7. *Perumakan*

8. Laterite

9. Fractional Burials

10. Folding and Forging

Assignments

1. Collect pictures of Rock Cut Chambers and prepare a brief note on it.

2. Discuss the salient features of the Sangam Age.

3. Prepare a note on recent excavations conducted by Archaeological Survey of India.

4. Discuss the burial practices of Iron Age cultures of early South India.

5. Prepare a note on Rock Art of Iron age Cultures of early South India

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6 UNIT

Early Tamilakam

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ examine the historicity and chronology of the Sangam period

♦ get awareness of the different types of *Tinais* mentioned in Sangam poetry

♦ explain the role of *Muventar* in Tamilakam

♦ identify the significance of three Sanagam

Prerequisites

The Sangam was a college or assembly of Tamil poets held under the patronage of the chiefs or kings in Madurai. The literature produced in these assemblies were compiled in 300-600 CE. The Sangam literature marked the beginning of a historic era in South India, commonly referred to as the 'Sangam Age.' This period is often regarded as a significant phase during which the renowned Sangam literature was compiled. Notably, it is celebrated as the 'first well-illuminated age' in South Indian history. Hundreds of poets contributed to Sangam literature, offering valuable insights into the politics, society, and culture of the time. While the compositions are widely admired for their brilliance and diversity, debates among historians about the origin, timeline, historicity, and the meaning of the term Sangam persist. In addition to the literary evidence found in Sangam literature, insights have been supplemented by classical accounts, other indigenous texts, and, most importantly, archaeological findings.

Keywords

Thenmadurai, Ettuthogai, Aintinai, Vanpulam, Menpulam, Kurinji , Mullai, Palai, Marutham , Neital, Tamilakam, Sangam, Muventar

Discussion

In order to understand Early Tamilakam, one must inquire into the importance of the *Sangam* Age. The historic period in South Indian history begins with what was commonly known as the *'Sangam* age'. What did the term *Sangam* age literally mean? What importance does it pose to the study of history of South India?

4.6.1 Definition of the word 'Sangam'

Historians and scholars debate on the origin of the word 'Sangam'. While it was contended that the word 'Sangam' originated from the word *Sangha,* referring to the Buddhist monasteries, others traced the word to *Changam* which literally meant *Thugai* or collection. The Tamil hero poems of ancient times do not refer to *Sangam*. The terms including *Avaiyam, Punar Kuttu* etc in the poems indicated a body of scholars who censored literature. The term *Sangam* appears in *Iraiyanar Akapporul* of *Manimekhalai* and references are made to three Sangams which lasted for a period of 9990 years. It was assumed to be an assembly of poets or scholars assigned with the task of critical scholarship.

The Story of Three Sangam

The work *Iraiyanar Agapporul* alludes to the existence of three Sangam.

Thenmadurai was believed to have been the venue of the first Sangam presided by Saint Agastya. The second Sangam was organised at Kapadapuram under the auspices of Saint Agastya. Both the cities were submerged into the sea. Madurai was then designated as the new capital. Most historians believe that the dates of the early two Sangams periods are mythical. Legendary dates do not always correspond to historical dates. Scholars are having a difficult time determining the exact date of the Sangam period. Historians prove the existence of the third Sangam as it was during the last Sangam that works including *Ettuthogai* and *Pathupattu* were compiled. The Sangam literature encompassed meticulously classified 2279 poems of different lengths which were composed by 473 poets. The poems are composed of notes referring to the poet and the year of its composition. Therefore, it was concluded that the task of compiling and editing the poems were assigned to the assembly of scholars.

Concept of Tamilakam

Tamilakam refers to a large geographical territory inhabited by the ancient Tamil people, which included virtually all of today's Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and areas bordering Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. It even included the Indian Ocean islands of Lakshadweep and Sri Lanka.

These territories used to be part of a single cultural-linguistic zone in Tamil literature.

Is the term 'Sangam Age' misleading?

The phrase Sangam age should only be used with extreme discretion. According to Nilakanta Sastri, the entire corpus of literature was compiled over hundreds of years. This requires historians to conclude that the Sangam age was not a concise span of time, but a period of numerous generations stretched over several centuries. As a result, we are unable to assign a particular chronological period to the Sangam age.

Certain historians, such as Rajan Gurukkal, have contended that the name Sangam age is a misnomer in and of itself. The Sangam period should not be seen as a single epoch; rather, the literary works reflected multiple periods or epochs. It spanned millennia and reflected many degrees of material cultural settings. As a result, it cannot be considered a "particular period of time."

The initial phase of the Sangam era was represented by *Ettuthogai* and *Pathupattu*. The *Tolkappiyam* ushered in the following phase by introducing speech and writing norms, syntax and grammar, resulting in a significant shift in the way literature was conceptualised. The epics *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekhalai* symbolised the end of the 'Age of Sangam.'

4.6.1.1 Different Perspectives on the Period of Sangam

As previously indicated, the period during which the *Sangam* literature was produced and collected is still an issue of contention. Historians, linguists and scholars are still debating on the age of the Sangams. The *Sangam* literature is dated to the first three centuries, according to V.A. Smith and Krishnaswamy Ayyangar. The first three or four centuries are attributed to the Sangam era, according to Prof. Nilakanta Sastri, whereas Ramachandra Dikshitar and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar attributes the period between 500 BCE. and 500 CE. According to N. Subramanian, the period of the *Sangam* spanned the first three centuries of the Christian era.

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, on the other hand, dates the era of the Sangam between 5th to 6th Century C.E. Therefore, historians tend to conclude the period between 500 BCE. to 500 C.E. during which Tamil poetry was composed and compiled.

4.6.2 *Aintinai*

The Tamil terms *Ain* and *Tinai* refer to the number five and landscape, respectively. The *Aintinai* is the term given to a group of five *Tinais. Kurinji, Mullai, Palai, Neital and Marutham* were the five.

1. ***Kurinji:*** *Kurinji* is the first and most important *Tinai*, with deep woods and massive mountains. There were three major tribes: *Kuravars, Vetars and Kanavars*. They used to hunt animals and harvest forest food such as honey, pepper and spices. They struggled to cultivate crops of their own choosing due to overwhelming topography and geographical constraints. They worshipped Lord Muruga, their favourite god.

2. ***Mullai:*** The *Mullai tinai* is made up of verdant, luscious areas of land that are mostly suitable for pastoralism. The tribes *Itayar* and *Ayar* were common in this area and they found time to participate in both animal husbandry and agriculture. Cattle ranching was their primary source of income,

although they also engaged in terrace agriculture. They were not nomads like the *Kurinchi* people and were self-sufficient. Lord *Mayon* was revered by them.

3. **Palai:** The *Palai Tinai* consisted of dry, rocky areas of land that were difficult to farm. *Maravar, Kallar and Vettar* tribes discovered desolate plateaus suitable for pillage and fighting. The people enrolled to battle for chieftains who possessed resources, but could not develop them since the land was unproductive. People from neighbouring *Tinais* were afraid to pass through *Palai* since this sparsely populated *Tinai* was known for being a sanctuary for plunderers. They were considered the least socially advanced of the tribes and they frequently prayed to Goddess *Kottavai* before attacks or plundering.

4. **Marutham:** The *Marutham Tinai* consisted of wet, swampy areas suitable for agriculture. *Uzhavars* and *Vellalars*, the locals, used ploughs designed to plough the entire area with ease, cultivating rice and other food crops. They were more self-sufficient than other *Tinais* and they worshiped *Indra*, the god of gods.

5. **Neital**: Last but not least, *Neital,* the fifth *Tinai*, was ranked higher than the others. This *Tinai* helped Tamilakam produce food and commodities were exchanged. *Neital Tinai* engulfed the coastal districts, which were framed by beautiful backwaters. *Parathevars, Valayars, Minavars, Nulayars, Umanars* and others worked in the salt industry, diving for pearls, collecting fish and sailing boats.

For items they could not produce,

the *Tinais* relied on one another. *Mullai* provided dairy, ragi and horsegram to *Marutham* residents. The inhabitants of *Kurinchi* relied on pulses, honey and meat. The *Neital* exchanged fish, salt and pearls to the people of *Kurinchi, Mullai* and *Palai*. The *Tinais* co-existed with one another and as a result, the *Aintinai* was changed into a single landscape with five units.

Menpulam and Vanpulam

In *Tamilakam,* land was divided into two categories, *Vanpulam* and *Menpulam,* similar to the *Tinai* classification. The *Mullai* and *Kurinchi Tinais,* which produced pulses, grains and other foods, were referred to as *Vanpulam. Vanpulam* was generally seen as a less fertile region and to obtain resources, the inhabitants resorted to villages and raids. *Marutham,* which produced paddy and sugarcane, was part of *Menpulam.* It consisted of fertile terrain where people were frequently involved in agricultural cultivation, allowing them to become self-sufficient.

4.6.3 Polity, Society and Culture in Early Tamilakam

What was the lifestyle of Tamilakam throughout the early historic period? How did they come to choose a chieftain to look after their needs? Man discovered that living in a group allowed him to acquire resources and satisfy his wants. Rajan Gurukkal described how people obtained produce through plundering or raiding. They formed an order based on kinship, from which they picked *Kilar* as their head. The *Kilar* was in charge of distributing the resources among the group. The *Velir* were the next rank of chieftains, with more riches and authority than the *Kilar*.

The most powerful of them all took on the title of *Ventar,* a conqueror who enslaved others by invading their countries. They built their domains of authority by enslaving others, banishing those who broke the law and pursuing regions through marital alliances.

The Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas, afterwards known as *Muventar,* were the three most powerful *Ventars.* At Tamilakam, the *Muventar* concurrently commanded several people in various locations. There existed no concrete concept of *Muventar* hierarchy. It wasn't a well-thought-out or methodical power structure.

Muventar

The three principal chiefdoms- Chera, Chola and Pandya are referred to as *Muventar*. They got the upper hand in Tamilakam, the geographical zone that comprised most of modern-day Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

1.Cholas

Even after the time of *Sangam* poetry, the Cholas remained one of the most powerful chiefdoms in South India. They ruled over a large region from Uraiyur, their capital. The lion was their symbol.

Karikala Chola was the most renowned monarch of the Chola Dynasty. After defeating the Cheras in the Battle of Venni and nine chieftains in the Battle of Vahaipparandalai, he was triumphant. He directed that forest land be reclaimed and that irrigation be made possible. He was well renowned for building the Kallanai dam over the Kaveri River.

2. Pandyas

The Pandyas had established an environment that allowed the Sangam literature to thrive and reach new heights. The Pandyan monarch Nedunjeliyan defeated the Chera-Chola coalition at the Battle of *Talaiyalanganam.* Madurai was their capital. Their symbol is a fish and their deity is Meenakshi, who has fish-like eyes.

3.Cheras

Who were the Cheras? Was there any link between them and modern-day Kerala? The Cheras ruled over large regions of Kerala as well as Tamil Nadu. The Cheras were much too powerful, causing everyone to tremble in terror. Its capital was typically Vanchi and their symbol was a bow and arrow. The *Patittupattu* was a collection of 10 sets of ten songs about the Chera leaders, each set beautifully capturing each chief's great achievements.

4.6.4 Traditional Historical Perspective

Traditional historians like Sreedhara Menon offer their perspectives on the age of Sangam*,* which are replicated below. In terms of polity, it was more than a collection of clans and lineages with its own distinct trading systems based on kinship, plundering invaders and resource allocation.

Hereditary monarchy was the term used by several researchers to describe the political structure of chiefdoms. The power was transmitted from father to the son through the *Makkathayam* (patrilineal system) System.

The wife of a chieftain who was respected by society was affectionately referred to as *'Perumtevi'.* There are no references to polyandry, however polygamy was widely

practised. Girls were seldom pushed into early marriages and widows were allowed to remarry. The women of Sangam era had the freedom to select who they wanted to spend their lives with.

The economy was a mixture of several economic activities taking place in Tinais at the same time. The people of *Kurinchi* practised hunting, foraging and shifting agriculture, whereas people in *Mullai* performed livestock rearing. People of *Palai* practised pillage and robbery, while those in *Marutham* practised farming. The inhabitants of *Neital* practised salt production, fishing and gathering of pearls. The chieftains were effective in controlling individuals from various professions, such as salt merchants, pearl divers, fisherman and farmers and they worked hard to keep them free from danger. Labour was based on kinship in ancient times and it seldom extended to members of other tribes or lineages.

The Sangam texts contain allusions to burial customs and how they cremated the deceased. The chieftains welcomed death in a variety of ways, including *Vadakkirikkal*. In ancient times, death on the battlefield was common. The people of Tamilakam believed that death on a battlefield opened the gates to a pleasant afterlife. The death of a loved one affected the womenfolk as well. Widows shaved their heads, put away their jewellery and lead their lives gravely till death.

4.6.5 Modern Views

Historians of the modern age including K.N. Ganesh, Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier have assessed the Sangam period using anthropological tools. The Sangam era was a mixture of various economic, political, cultural and social contacts among individuals from various *Tinais*. Despite having a unified culture, the period of Sangam saw the emergence of diverse economies. People from various *Tinais* preoccupied themselves in collecting, cultivating and producing a variety of goods. In *Tamilakam*, agriculture and animal rearing were predominantly the most frequent means of livelihood.

People were divided into groups depending on their lineage or descent. These clans or kinship groupings, known as *Ur*, formed from these groups. These *Ur* relied on kin labour to satisfy their needs and eventually became self-sufficient. As a result, throughout this time period, no formal concept of social stratification existed. Along with these clans, there were the Brahmins, who had their own manufacturing system and relied on non-familial labour. As a result, Tamilakam observed the simultaneous existence of many types of manufacturing.

Rajan Gurukkal makes a clear distinction between fiction and reality. The chieftains who were portrayed as kings in poetry had little in common with the real-life chieftains. The *Muventar* were recognised as rulers by *Pathittupattu* and they possessed the characteristics of the Vedic gods. Traditional historians have attempted to create an image of the Chera kings as having large tracts of land, strong armies and being supported by an effective administration based on the information furnished by bardic poems. Gurukkal, on the other hand, claims that the polity was that of tribal chiefdoms owing to a lack of periodic exaction of resources, an organised army and political institutions and that they had little chance of establishing a state.

K. N. Ganesh reminds us that the people were segmented into *Adiyor* and *Melor* groups. While the *Melor* comprised the higher classes, the *Adiyor* comprised the marginalised. The *Adiyors* relied on *Ayirameen* (a type of fish) with white rice they received in exchange for salt that they sold. *Unchoru*, a meat and rice meal, was a delicacy relished by *Melor*.

According to Gurukkal, society was categorised into two groups: *Uyarntor* (highly privileged) and *Ilipirappalar* (impoverished). On the basis of resource distribution, another division has evolved, with *puravalar* owning surplus resources and *Iravalar* who relied on the *puravalar* for survival.

With respect to the caste system, Gurukkal cites a Sangam poem in which four clans—*Panan, Paraiyan, Tutiyan and Katampan*—are mentioned as the elements of the caste system. The *Parappar, Aracar, Itaiyar and kuravar* are the four castes, according to a commentator on Sangam poetry. *Antanar, Aracar, Vanikar and Velar* are also listed in the *Tolkappiyam-Porul*, although they do not correlate to the castes described above. According to Gurukkal, many historians confirmed the presence of caste system in the 'Age of Sangam,' since surnames of descending groups were misconstrued as caste names.

In terms of craft production and other elements of the economy, Gurukkal believes that the inhabitants of Tamilakam were skilled in smelting, pottery, cloth-weaving, glass-making and other crafts. The Sangam poetry and classical sources both mention craft-production. The unearthing of graves, rock-cut caverns and stone furniture demonstrates their architectural expertise. Their capacity to engage in craft production has been validated by the existence of cooking items, farming equipment and pots.

Literature offers insights into the varied skills of the people of the age of Sangam. According to Gurukkal, chieftains who commanded authority over resources were able to procure labour. People who worked in specialised labour, such as smelting and pottery, had significant roles in society and their professions became hereditary. *Maravars (warriors), Panars (bards), Tutiyars* (those who played the *Tuti,* a tiny drum) and other hereditary vocations were among them. The rise of *ventars* to prominence eased the necessity of hereditary vocations, resulting in societal divides.

How did people in the Sangam era exchange goods? The economy did not exclusively rely on the exchange of gifts. There was no profit involved in the transaction. These early forms of commerce evolved into larger forms of exchange in which *Tinais* traded items for the goods they required. The main feature of this economy was reciprocity based on use value. In Tamilakam, Gurukkal stresses the lack of tangible forms of market or commerce.

Recap

- The Sangam Age-Concept and views
- Story of three Sangam
- The Concept of Tamilakam- Cultural- Linguistic Zone
- Historians put forth several views on the chronology of the Sangam era.
- Divisions of Tamilakam:

    1. *Aintinai- Kurinchi, Mullai, Palai, Marutham, Neital*

    2. *Vanpulam* and *Menpulam*
- Polity, Society and Economy of Early *Tamilakam*
- Chieftains- *Kilar, Velir, Ventar*
- Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas- *Makkathayam*
- The concept of *Vadakkirikkal*
- Social Divisions
- Condition of Women
- Disposal of the dead
- Economy- Redistribution, production and distribution- use value system- craft production

Objective Questions

1. What event was considered as the beginning of the historic period of South India?
2. Which Tamil work refers to the term 'Sangam'?
3. What was the name used to refer to a large geographical territory inhabited by the ancient Tamil people?
4. What was the term used to refer to five *Tinais*?
5. Who was the favourite god of *Kurinji?*
6. Which *Tinai* was known for its pearl manufacturing?
7. Which division of Tamilakam was *Marutham* a part of?

8. Name chieftains, who were predominant in *Tamilakam.*

9. Who was *Muventar*?

10. What was the term used for hero-stones in Tamilakam?

Answers

1. Composition of Sangam poems
2. *Iraiyanar Agapporul*
3. Tamilakam
4. *Aintinai*
5. Lord Muruga

6. *Neital*
7. *Menpulam*
8. *Ventar, Velir, Kilar*
9. Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas
10. *Virakals*

Assignments

1. Prepare a note on the contents of Sangam Poems.
2. Debates on the historicity of period of Sangam poetry.
3. Prepare a note on Aintinai.
4. Discuss the role of *Muventar* in Tamilakam.
5. Discuss the significance of Three Sangam.

Suggested Reading

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5

Post Mauryan Period
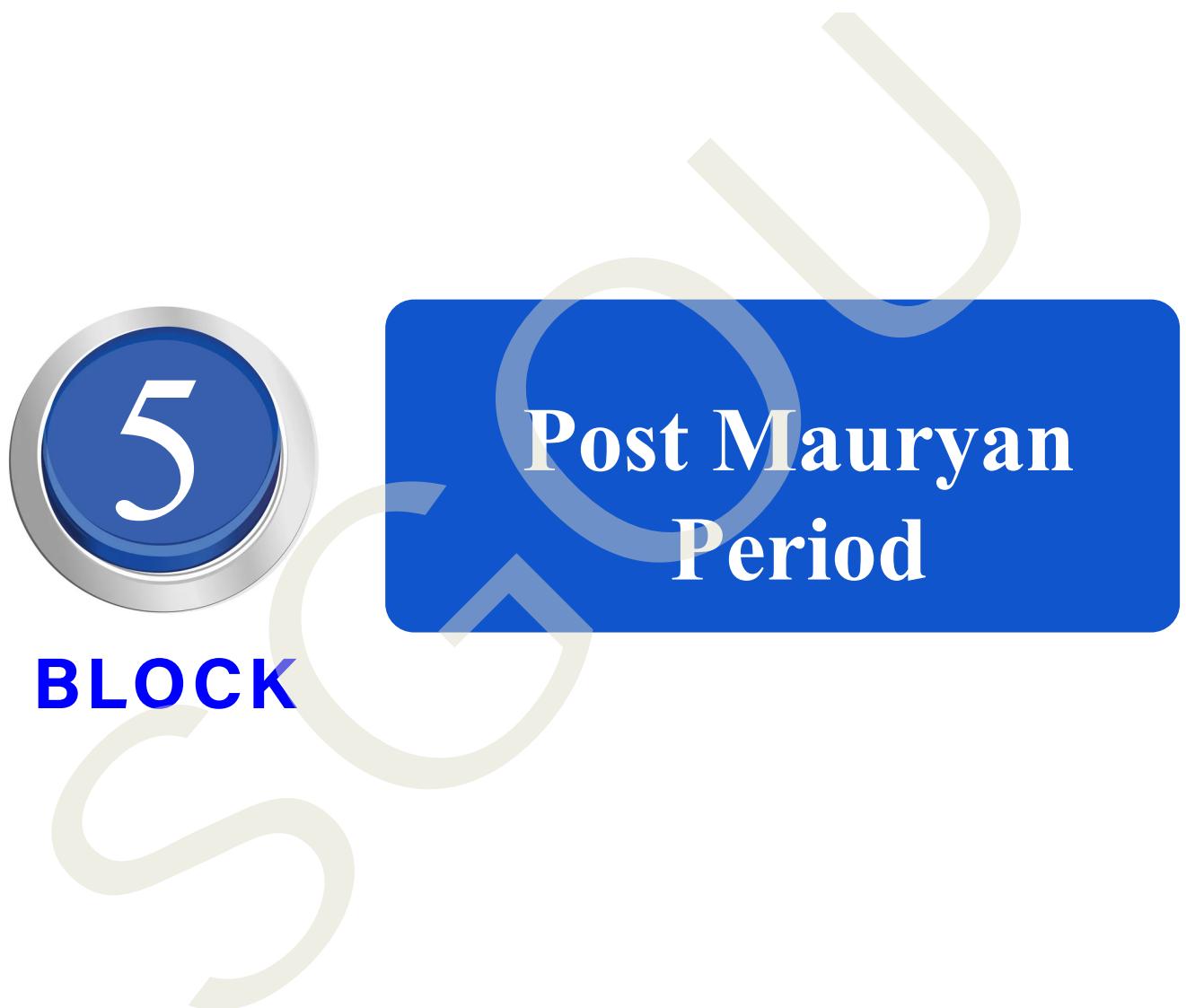
1 UNIT

Sungas and Kanvas

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be:

♦ understand the significant administrative and political changes that occurred between 187 BCE and 30 BCE

♦ examine the relationship between the Sungas and foreign powers and the nature of their encounters and interactions

♦ gain insights into the religious beliefs of the Sunga rulers and their stance towards Buddhism

♦ explore the cultural contributions of the Sungas, particularly in art, architecture and inscriptions

Prerequisites

The Mauryan Empire, as discussed in the previous unit, was a vast and unified empire, spreading across much of the Indian subcontinent and extending into Kandahar, in present-day Afghanistan. However, around 187 BCE, this monumental empire disintegrated and the region entered a new phase, which was characterised by political shifts, regional assertions and growing external influences.

Following the decline of the Mauryan Empire, South and Deccan India began to assert their identities and began to establish independent states. Meanwhile, North India experienced widespread instability, influenced by events in Central Asia. These external interactions introduced new cultural elements into Indian society. As different peoples came into contact through trade, migration and warfare, new ideas and practices ranging from art and religion to technology began to take root in India.

Between the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire and the rise of the Guptas (approximately 200–300 CE), a series of dynasties rose to power. Although these rulers lacked the expansive reach and authority of the Mauryas, their contributions to Indian history are to be noted. Dynasties such as the Sungas, Kanvas, Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Parthians and Kushanas emerged during this time. While these dynasties didn't wield the same power or control as the Mauryas, they still shaped the history and culture of their time. However, their contributions are often overlooked in the historical narratives, overshadowed by larger empires.

It was a time of constant change and interaction. For instance, Indo-Greek rulers blended Hellenistic and Indian traditions and engaged in creating unique artworks and coinage. The Kushanas, meanwhile, helped strengthen trade networks that stretched as far as China and the Roman Empire. This was a time when art, religion and technology began to blend in new ways and opened the door to some of the ideas and practices that would flourish in later periods.

As you read through this section, think about the quieter stories behind these dynasties. How did they maintain influence despite lacking the vast power of their predecessors? What did their interactions with Central Asia bring to the Indian subcontinent? And, in the bigger picture, how did these centuries of change set the stage for the Gupta Empire, known for its cultural and intellectual achievements?

This period of Indian history, often overshadowed by the larger empires that followed, is borne with the seeds of transformation. By exploring it, you'll get a clearer picture of how ancient India was not only shaped by its own people but by the larger world around it. In this unit, let us focus on the Sungas and Kanvas in detail.

Keywords

Sungas, Kanvas, Post-Mauryan, Administration, Brahmanism, Patronage, Buddhism, Religion, Vidarbha War, Greek Invasion, Asvamedha, Bharhut Stupa, Sanchi Stupa, Coins, Trade, Economy, Art, Architecture

Discussion

5.1.1 The Sungas

After the disintegration of the Mauryan empire, Northern India witnessed central Asian invasions and the emergence of various regional political entities and rulers. Thus, several regions were brought to light during the post–mauryan period.

The Puranic lists of dynasties and rulers and the inscriptional sources help to reconstruct the Sunga history. Some of the works which mention the post-Mauryan era include *Gargi Samhita*, the *Mahabhasya* of Patanjali, the *Divyavadana* and the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa and the *Harshacharita* of Bana. Inscriptions found from Ayodhya, Vidisa and Bharhut provide certain glimpses of the Sungas.

One among the native successors of the Mauryas was Sungas, who were assumed to belong to Ujjain in Western India. They were initially officials in the Mauryan administration. As per Bana, the court poet of Harshvardhana of Kanauj, in 180 BCE, Pushyamitra Sunga, the Commander in – Chief of the last Mauryan king, Brihadratha, murdered the latter during his inspection of the troops.

The historian R.S Tripathi analyses it as the weakness of Brihadrata as a ruler and the power of Pushyamitra in the army. It marked the end of Mauryan rule in 187 BCE and the establishment of the Sunga dynasty in North India.

Fig. 5.1.1 Yaksa reliefs. Bharhut, Second Century BCE

There is obscurity that exists in the origin of the Sungas. The Puranas refer to the lineage of Pushyamitra to the Sungas. The works like *Malavikagnimitra* represent the lineage of Agnimitra, the son of Pushyamitra, to Baimbika kula of Kashyapa gotra.

5.1.1.1 Political Developments

During the post-Mauryan period, the Sungas took control of the Ganga valley, exclusively Magadha and central India. According to the Puranas, Ayodhya inscriptions and *Malavikagnimitra*, Pushyamitra Sunga ruled for 36 years the erstwhile Maurya empire, including Pataliputra, Ayodhya and Vidisha. Pataliputra continued as his capital. The Buddhist source, *Divyavadana* and the account of Taranatha, the Tibetan historian, indicate that Jalandhara and Shakala in Punjab were also under the territorial control of Pushyamitra Sunga. Pushyamitra Sunga managed the administrative affairs of some of his territories through his viceroys. According to a version of *Vayu Purana*, Pushyamitra assigned all his eight sons to different regions as viceroys. Hence, it is considered almost a feudal classification of the areas under his control.

The Sungas were continuously engaged in wars or clashes with their contemporary political entities or foreign invaders from Central Asia. The work *Malavikagnimitra* articulates the struggle between Pushyamitra and Yajnasena, who was the king of Vidarbha in east Maharashtra and the subsequent triumph of the Sungas. Yajnasena was a relative of the minister of the Mauryan empire, whom the Sungas considered their enemy, especially after the assassination of Brihadratha. Moreover, Vidarbha remained independent from the Mauryan empire following the incidents. Hence, Pushyamitra sought the allegiance of Yajna Sena after his enthronement. However, Madhavasena, a cousin of Yajna

Sena, instructed Agnimitra, the viceroy of Pushyamitra during that time at Vidisha, to overthrow his cousin. These circumstances led to the invasion of Vidarbha. Finally, when the hostilities ended, Vidharbha came under Sunga control.

5.1.1.2 Sungas and Greek Invasion

While the native rulers were trying to assert their territories in the Indian subcontinent, Indo-Greeks, also known as Yavanas, passionately attempted to establish their independent authority in Bactria or Balkh. Furthermore, they began to extend their dominion to Northwestern and Northern India, which ended in a clash with the Sungas. During the reign of Pushyamitra Sunga, India faced the severe threat of the Greek invasions. However, there is a different opinion on whether the Greek Commander of these attacks on India was Demetrius or Menander. Both were influential figures behind the Greek expansion. Pushyamitra Sunga is known to have confronted the Bactrian Greek ruler, Demetrius, without facing any political loss.

Patanjali, a grammarian of the 2nd century BCE and a contemporary of Pushyamitra, mentions this Yavana incursion to Saketa, a place near Ayodhya, Faizabad district of present Uttar Pradesh and Madhyamika, a place near Chittor, Rajasthan. The *Gargi- Samhita* alludes to the Greek invasion of Mathura, Ganga doab, Saketa and Pataliputra. Likewise, the *Malavikagnimitra* mentions the victory of Vasumitra, who subdued the Greeks on the banks of the Indus River.

5.1.1.3 Historical Significance of Besnagar Pillar inscription

Apart from the conflicts, the Greeks were prudent enough to maintain harmony with the Sungas. The Sunga and the Indo – Greek connection is inscribed in the pillar inscription found at Besnagar. It shows the Greek adherence to the Bhagavata form of Hinduism. The Besnagar Pillar inscription is in Prakrit language and Brahmi script, found in ancient Vidisha, near Bhopal. The historical significance of this inscription is in its description of the Greek ambassador, Heliodorus.

It refers to him as an inhabitant of Taxila or Takshashila, near Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Helidorus was employed as an envoy of Antialkidas, an Indo – Greek ruler, to the Court of one of the last Sunga rulers, Bhagabhadra. In this inscription, he represents himself as a Bhagavata, a devotee of the God Vasudeva Krishna. Heliodorus is also known for constructing the garuda pillar as a tribute to the God Vasudeva. There is a mention of 'Kasiputra Bhagabhadra' in the inscription. It is assumed to be either Bhadraka, the fifth Sunga ruler or Bhagavata, the ninth Sunga ruler. The inscription also explains that the Sungas followed the Maurya custom of welcoming the Greek ambassadors into their courts.

5.1.1.4 Religious Beliefs of Sungas

It is presumed that the Sungas were Brahmins by belief. The first Sunga ruler, Pushyamitra Sunga, is known for his two-horse sacrifices, called *Asvamedha Yajna.* It is a Vedic practice which shows the royal grandeur. Regarding the *Brahmin* connection of the Sungas, the grammarian Panini finds their link to *Brahmana*

Bharadvaja gotra. The Vedic texts and the Upanishads, such as *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, also mention some Sunga teachers. The text *Asvalayana Srautasutra* addresses the Sungas as teachers.
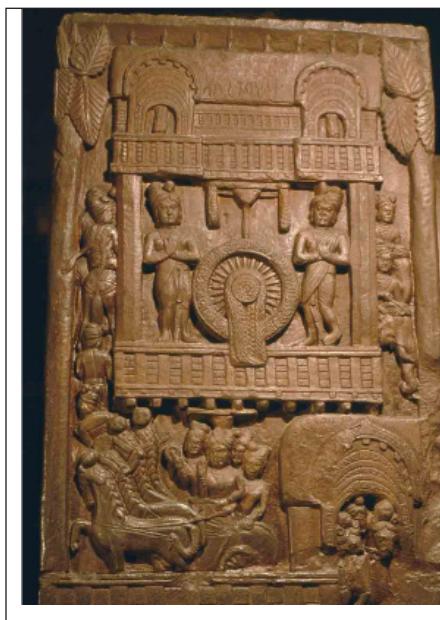
Fig. 5.1.2 Bharhut relief

Pushyamitra Sunga was considered to be an ardent *Brahmin*. Taranath characterises the identity of Pushyamitra as a *Brahmin* and a family priest. *Malavikagnimitram of Kalidasa* and Patanjali also confirm Pushyamitra's *Asvamedha* sacrifice. It portrays his territorial dominance over a large area and his zeal for Brahmanism. Patanjali's words affirm that he acted as the priest in that sacrifice. Ayodhya inscription of Dhanadeva refers to two of the *Asvamedha* sacrifices performed by Pushyamitra. Jayaswal attributes the second *Asvamedha* sacrifice of Pushyamitra as a reaction to the defeat of the ruler Kharavela of Kalinga. However, it is uncertain if these rulers were contemporaries. Vasumitra, the grandson of Pushyamitra, was known for his confrontation with the Greeks as they tried to block the way of the horse of *Asvamedha* yajna performed by his grandfather.

Attitude Towards Buddhism

It is considered that during the post-Mauryan period, the Sungas vehemently attacked Buddhism as they acknowledged Brahmanism as their faith. The Buddhist source *Divyavadana* remarks on Pushyamitra Sunga as the persecutor of Buddhists. He tried to demolish the Buddhist monasteries like the Kukuta Arama monastery at Pataliputra. He was also alleged to have destroyed worshipping places, especially those built by Ashoka. *Divyavadana* also mentions the price which Pushyamitra declared at Sakala for the head of every monk as 100 dinars. However, *Divyavadana* has been criticised as an extravagant work. The Tibetan historian, Taranatha, also accuses Pushyamitra of burning down monasteries.

It is a known fact that during the Sunga- Kanva period, Buddhism faced a minor setback and hardly received any royal patronage as they received from the Mauryas. Nevertheless, the Sunga period witnessed the construction of the Bharhut Stupa in Nagod State in Central India. The Sanchi Stupa was renovated, its size was enlarged and the gateways or Torana and the railings were fixed. Despite the discontent they faced from the Sungas after the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire, Buddhism flourished in other countries by expanding its network of centres. Even if the Sunga rulers were against Buddhism, Buddhism succeeded in creating harmony among the people. The characteristic features of Buddhism influenced foreigners in the social integration into Indian society in those days.

5.1.1.5 Art and Architecture

The characteristics of post-Mauryan art are distinct from the Mauryan art as the former is primarily a social one. In contrast, the latter is mainly considered palace art and imperial. The Post-Mauryan art is mainly depicted in Buddhist images and sculptures. It is engraved on the parts of the Stupas, Viharas and Chaityas. Another feature of this period is the exhibition of the Buddha image in Mathura and Gandhara schools of art. The sculptures were made round and large without a proportionate accuracy. The Yakshas and Yakshinis came under this category.

Fig. 5.1.3 Bronze coin of the Sunga period.

It is found that during the Sunga period, Stupas were renovated and maintained at various places. The previous religious and pilgrimage centres like Bharhut, Bodhgaya and Sanchi were the important pilgrimage sites of the Sungas. In Bodh Gaya, Bihar, where Buddha attained 'knowledge' (*Bodhi*) and hence Ashoka built a *'Bodhi Manda'*, there is evidence of stone pillars erected during the Sunga period. Those remains consist of the railing pillars around the Stupas.
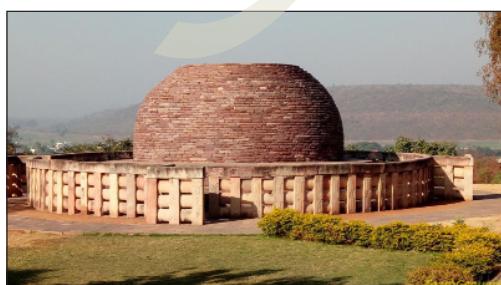
Fig. 5.1.4 Stupa II

In 150 BCE, the Great Stupa at Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh) was enlarged in its circumference. Moreover, the bricks used for the Stupa construction around c.250 BCE, i.e., during Ashoka's reign, were replaced by stones. In addition to these alterations, a *Vedika* and four gates were built around the *Stupa*, one in each direction. There are inscriptions of other regional kingdoms like Satavahanas found on one of the gates. The ivory workers of Vidisha are known to have built an attractive gateway to Sanchi.
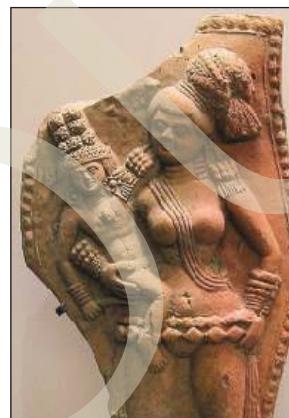
Fig. 5.1.5 Sunga woman with child. Second-first century BCE

5.1.1.6 The Disintegration of the Sunga Dynasty

The *Puranas* mention that the Sunga dynasty continued for 112 years. According to R.S Tripathi, the Sunga dynasty consisted of ten rulers. However, there is no ample evidence of them other than Pushyamitra Sunga. After Pushyamitra died in 148 BCE, his son Agnimitra succeeded him. Kalidasa's work *Malavikagnimitra* refers to Agnimitra as the viceroy at Vidisha. Agnimitra had sufficient experience in administrative matters. However, his rule lasted only eight years. Sujyestha or Jethamitra succeeded Agnimitra and then Vasumitra, son of Agnimitra. Adraka or

Odraka, Pulindaka, Ghosa, Vajramitra, Bhagavata and Devabhuti are the other Sunga rulers who came after Agnimitra.

The disintegration of the Sunga dynasty is considered to have begun during the Sunga ruler, Muladeva. Muladeva was the ruler of Kosala, which was an independent principality. Some coins found at Ayodhya are considered to belong to his period. The Ayodhya inscription mentions Dhanadeva, known as 'Lord of Kosala', as his successor. Devabhuti is regarded as the last Sunga ruler and the fourth ruler of his lineage. He was assassinated by his minister, Vasudeva, who set up the Kanva dynasty. Thus, the Sunga dynasty existed only till 75 BCE. Punjab, which belonged to the Sungas during Pushyamitra's rule, ended up in their successors' hands.

The numismatic evidence from the Upper Ganga-Yamuna basin provides information about the rise of local families to power and the minting of coins by the rulers during this period. It also states that the independent principalities such as Ayodhya, Kausambi, Mathura and Panchala came into being simultaneously. When the Sungas weakened, several economically affluent Kshatriya tribes that existed between the Ravi and the Yamuna declared their independence. They include Audumbaras, Kunindas, Trigartas, Yaudheyas, Arjunayanas, Malavas and Sibis.

5.1.2 The Kanvas or the Kanvayanas

The Kanvas also referred to as the Kanvayanas, reigned for a short period of four generations. The Kanvas were Brahmins. According to Banabhatta, Vasudeva, minister of Devabhuti, the last among the Sunga rulers, murdered him deceitfully through a conspiracy and established the Kanva dynasty, about 75 BCE. There are only some external references available on the Kanva dynasty in the later works. The lineage of the rulers is cited in the Puranas. It is regarded that some of the Kanva rulers issued their coins. The Kanva dynasty consisted of four rulers; Vasudeva, Bhumimitra, Narayana and Susarman. The Kanvas ruled Magadha only for forty-five years till 28 BCE and paved their way to Mitras.

Recap

♦ The Disintegration of the Maurya dynasty

♦ The assassination of the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadrata

♦ Usurpation of Pushyamitra Sunga to the throne and the establishment of the Sunga Dynasty

♦ Greek invasion and Pushyamitra's confrontation with Demetrius

♦ Tussle with Yajnasena of Vidarbha

♦ *Asvamedha* Sacrifice and expansion of territory

♦ The religious belief of the Sungas

♦ Apathy to Buddhism and persecution of Buddhist worship places

♦ Besnagar Pillar Inscription and Indo- Greek connection

♦ Contribution of the Sungas in art and architecture

Objective Questions

1. Who was the founder of the Sunga dynasty?

2. Which dynasty succeeded the Mauryas in North India?

3. What was the primary religious focus during the reign of the Sunga dynasty?

4. Which foreign influence impacted the Kanva dynasty?

5. Which religious tradition did Pushyamitra Sunga strongly promote during his reign?

6. Who was the most prominent ruler of the Sunga dynasty?

7. Who were the Sungas and what was their role in the Mauryan Empire?

8. Which are the insriptional sources that shed light on the Sunga dynasty?

9. What is the significance of Asvamedha yajna?

10. Mention the names of the important Sunga rulers.

11. Who is the founder of the Kanva dynasty?

12. Which ritual did Pushyamitra Sunga perform to legitimise his rule and expand his territory?

Answers

1. Pushyamitra Sunga

2. Sunga Dynasty

3. Brahmanism

4. Indo-Greek

5. Brahmanism

6. Pushyamitra Sunga

7. The Brahmin officials in the Mauryan administrative sytem

8. The Besnagar Pillar inscription at Vidisha and Inscriptions found from Ayodhya and Bharhut

9. A Vedic ceremony shows the ruler's royal splendour and territorial dominance over a large area

10. Pushyamitra Sunga, Agnimitra, Vasumitra, Bhagavata and Devabhuti

11. Vasudeva

12. Asvamedha Sacrifice

Assignments

1. Examine the significance of the Greek invasion under Demetrius and its impact on the Sunga dynasty.

2. Evaluate the Sunga rulers' religious beliefs and their attitude toward Buddhism, supported by historical evidence.

3. Assess the contributions of the Sungas to art and architecture with reference to the archaeological findings such as the Besnagar Pillar Inscription.

4. What literary sources help to reconstruct the history of the Sungas?

5. How does the Besnagar pillar inscription help understand the Indo-Greek connection of the Sungas?

Suggested Reading

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2 UNIT

Rise of Indo-Greeks, Sakas and Parthians

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ understand the emergence and influence of the Indo-Greeks, Sakas and Parthians in the Indian subcontinent

♦ analyse the political and cultural contributions of the Indo-Greeks

♦ evaluate the socio-political systems introduced by the Sakas and Parthians, with a focus on the Satrap system

Prerequisites

The decline of the Mauryan Empire around 180 BCE, following its defeat by the Sungas, marked the beginning of a period of decentralised political authority. This phase saw the rise of smaller, regionally governed kingdoms that replaced the vast and centralised Mauryan administration. The Sungas, who replaced the Mauryas, were one of several emerging dynasties during this time. Political control in this post-Mauryan phase was distributed among various minor ruling families. Each family established dominance over their respective regions.

This era was also featured by interaction with external groups, particularly those migrating from Central Asia and neighbouring regions. The arrival of the Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Parthians and Kushanas introduced new phase to the political

and cultural system of North India. These interactions were not merely political. They influenced trade, religion and technology.

For instance, the Indo-Greeks are known for introducing innovations in coinage and governance, while the Sakas and Kushanas played major roles in facilitating long-distance trade. The integration of Central Asian traditions with indigenous Indian practices led to cultural and technological advancements that shaped the region's history.

Keywords

Post-Mauryan, Indo-Greeks, Sakas, Parthians, Cultural exchange, Central Asia, Trade routes, Polity, Religion, Hellenistic influence, Buddhism, *Milinda Panho,* Siege of Balkh

Discussion

5.2.1 Greek Contact with India

The Greek contact with India goes back to the Alexandrian invasion. Even though he fought for nineteen months, he hardly exerted any influence in Indian society. After Alexander, in 306 BCE, Seleukas Nikator arrived in India. However, four of his significant Satrapies, which belong to Modern Baluchistan and Southern Afghanistan, were seized by Chandragupta Maurya. R.S Tripathi states that although a century later, in 206 BCE, Antiochus III managed to reach the borders, he accepted war elephants as a token of submission from the ruler Sophagasenos (Subhagasena) in India. However, he could not proceed beyond the Indian frontiers as he had to return to the homeland due to the escalating Roman control. Later, between c. 190 and 155 BCE, Demetrius, Eukratides and Menander entered the interior regions of the subcontinent. They ruled for more than a century and established Greek rule in Punjab and adjacent territories.

Contacts with Central Asia were a feature of the post-Mauryan period. Towards the North-western part of India, in the Gandhara region, some inscriptions of the post-Mauryan period written in Kharosthi script are similar to those of documents in Central Asia. The Greek and Latin sources refer to this region, period and its rulers. The Buddhist Pali source, *Milinda Panho*, provides information about the Yavana ruler Menander and Buddhism.

5.2.2 Advent of the Indo-Greeks

The aftermath of the events in Central

Asia in the third century BCE also affected the course of Indian history. From 200 BCE onwards, the North-western border of India was subjected to a series of migrations. First among them was the Greeks of Bactria, who ruled the north-western parts of India between the second century BCE and the early first century BCE. They came to be known as the Indo-Greeks or Indo- Bactrians.

Bactrians were the rulers of Bactria or Balkh, located south of the Oxus River, the north-western side of the Hindu Kush and the Northern part of Afghanistan. Bactria and Parthia were a part of the Seleucid empire. Bactria was termed as 'the pride of Arriana' by Strabo. This highly populated, rich and fertile area was also a significant base of Hellenism in the east. Many Iranians and Scythian tribes lived in this region. Later, after the conquest of Iran, a satrap or a subordinate ruler was appointed to manage the affairs in Bactria. Alexander's followers settled in Bactria and became satraps of the Seleucids of West Asia and the Parthian rulers, the Arsacid.

Meanwhile, after Alexander died in 323 BCE, the Bactria witnessed a struggle for control. This scuffle for supremacy among the Generals of Alexander resulted in the emergence of Seleucus and Antigonus into the rule. However, in 301 BCE, in the battle of Ipsus, Seleucus defeated Antigonus and extended his empire toward India. In 293 BCE, the son of Seleucus, Antiochus I, was crowned as a ruler with his father. Later, in 266 BCE, Antiochus II, son of Antiochus I, ruled Bactria along with his father.

During the reign of Antiochus II, about 250 BCE, Bactria and Parthia rebelled against him for independence. Arsakes, an innovative chief of Parthia, who founded a dynasty in 248 BCE, led the popular uprising. Diodotus I, ambitious Governor of Bactria, led the rebellion from the Bactrian side. However, none of the Seleucids were able to suppress it. Hence, towards the mid – 3rd century BCE, Bactrians began to affirm their authority. Later, Diodotus II (c. 245 -230 BCE), the son of Diodotus I, formed the independent Bactrian Kingdom and they started to spread to other areas.

However, Diodotus was killed by Euthydemus, an adventurer from Magnesia who fought for the throne. Diodotus had continuously confronted Antiochus III (c. 223- 185 BCE) over the latter's attempt to seize his lost provinces. After a prolonged siege of Bactria, peace ensued with the Seleucid ruler accepting the independence of Bactria and Demetrius, son of Euthydemus, entering into a marriage alliance with the daughter of the Seleucid ruler.

The Greeks advanced toward India due to the fall of the Achaemenids of Iran, Alexander's death and the Scythian threat. After the Achaemenids' rule, former generals of Alexander established their control and formed kingdoms such as the Seleucid kingdom, which was connected to the Mauryan empire. Moreover, the Scythians, whose mobility to China was obstructed by the construction of the Chinese wall, confronted the Greeks and Parthians. Towards 145 BCE, the scenario forced the Bactrians to lose their grip over Bactria and pushed them to the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent.

While they entered the subcontinent, the situation which favoured them was the weakness of the successors of Ashoka and the end of the Mauryan empire. They

carried out their expeditions towards the Ganga basin and till the areas of Panchala, Saketa and Pataliputra. They had their control over Sirkap at Taxila. The evidence found from the site mostly belonged to the later Saka-Parthian rule. Upinder Singh refers to a river site Ai-Khanoum, in Afghanistan, found by archaeologists from France in the late 1970s. It belonged to the Bactrian Greeks in 280 BCE and the invaders destroyed it in 145 BCE.

5.2.3 Greek Conquests

5.2.3.1 Euthydemus and Demetrius

Euthydemus conquered a significant part of Afghanistan and increased his control over the Bactrian kingdom. Euthydemus was engaged in a long war with Antiochus of Syria. However, later, after the peace negotiations, Antiochus acknowledged the independence of Bactria. After the death of Euthydemus in 190 BCE, his son, Demetrius led foreign expeditions on a large scale. As mentioned in the section above, even though Antiochus III crossed the frontiers of India in 206 BCE, he returned early to Syria to settle matters in the West. It was only Demetrius who was able to extend his control towards India.

In 183 BCE, Demetrius expanded his territory by occupying a significant portion of Punjab. R.S Tripathi speculates that if he was the *'yavana'* cited in the *Mahabhasya* and the Yuga Purana of the *Gargi Samhita,* then Demetrius invaded Panchala, Madhyamika (Nagari, Chittor) and Saketa (Ayodhya) and endangered Pataliputra possibly during the time of Pushyamitra.

Demetrius is called *Rex Indorum* ("King of the Indians"). He founded a town called Euthydemia, with its capital Euthydemia or Sakala or Sialkot in Eastern Punjab, to commemorate his father. Scholars speculate the origin of the city Dattamitiri to Demetrius. He was the first Greek ruler to issue bilingual coins marked in Kharosthi script with legends in the Greek and the Indian language.

5.2.3.2 Menander

Strabo acknowledges the role of the conquests of Menander and Demetrius that helped the Greeks establish their territory in Ariana and India, especially Punjab and Sind. Even though *Mahabhasya* of Patanjali and *Malavikagnimitram* of Kalidasa mention the Greek invasion, there is no reference to the name of the Greek commander who led these invasions. Meanwhile, the prolonged absence of Demetrius in Bactria weakened his position in his homeland. After the rule of Demetrius I, a long feud began between the ruling families of Euthydemus and Eukratides. Agathocles, Pantaleon and Antimachus were considered the descendants or successors of Euthydemus.

While Vincent Smith considered Apollodotus and Menander to belong to the family line of Eukratides, R.S Tripathi thought them to belong to the family of Euthydemus. Out of the major Indo-Greek rulers, Menander or Milinda is famous. Strabo recognised Menander as a conqueror of "more nations than Alexander." R.S Tripathi agrees by considering the spread of his coins from Kabul to Mathura and Bundelkhand. Menander has been identified as the "Yavana invader" who invaded Madhyamika, Saketa and Pataliputra during the ruling period of Pushyamitra.

Fig. 5.2.1 A single obverse side of a coin issued by Menander

Menander was believed to be crowned in 155 BCE. Menander ruled over parts of both Bactria and north-western India. His capital was Sakala in Punjab and he ruled over the areas from Swat valley to Punjab. He was considered to be a Buddhist convert by a Thera monk, Nagasena. *Milindapanho* is a compilation of his perplexing questions related to Buddhism to Nagasena and the latter's answers. There is numismatic evidence for Menander's faith in Buddhism as some of his coins have the symbol '*dharma -chakra*' and the epithet '*Dhramikasa*'. The *Milindapanho* provides an account of the features of the capital, Sakala, which was well protected with a strong defence. The place prospered with the infrastructural beauty of the buildings, parks, gardens and tanks. The shops of Banaras muslin, jewels and other expensive articles show how prospered they were. Upinder Singh mentions a fragmentary Kharosthi inscription found on a casket at Bajaur in the Northwest frontier of Pakistan identified as a Buddha relic enshrined during the reign of a king, Minedra. It is possibly recognised as the ruler Menander. Menander's justice towards his subjects was very famous. Plutarch remarked that after Menander's death, there was a dispute among his subjects to keep his ashes and build a stupa over them. As per the numismatic evidence, Menander's successors were Strato I and Strato II.

5.2.3.3 Eukratides

Meanwhile, the house of Eucratides consisted of Amyntas, Antialkidas, Archebius and Hermaeus. In 175 BCE, Eukratides, a general and first cousin of Antiochus IV ascended to the throne in Bactria with the assistance of some Greek settlers. The scholars like Justin refer that Eukratides conquered India in 165-6 BCE. While Eastern Punjab, Sind and the nearby regions were under the control of Euthydemus, Eukratides controlled Bactria, Kabul valley, Gandhara and western Punjab. He found a city in Bactria known as Eukratideia.

Eucratides was assassinated right after his Indian expedition. There was a debate among scholars regarding the death of Eukratides. Some believed that Heliocles, son of Eucratides, assassinated him in 155 BCE and dishonoured the corpse as he denied a burial of the body. However, several others dismissed the claim of parricide and the insult of his father's dead body. Nevertheless, another story reveals that Parthians killed Eukratides. Moreover, his reign witnessed the threat of Sakas, who tried to expand toward Bactria. Later, during the period of Heliocles, his son, they occupied Bactria.

Fig. 5.2.2 Greek coin issued by Eukratides I

5.2.3.4 Heliocles

Heliocles, the last Greek king in Bactria, was overthrown by the Sakas, who emerged from Central Asian pastures. Not much information about his successors is known except their names. The Scythians captured Bactria in 135 BCE. Hence, Bactrian Greeks were forced to move to the Afghanistan valley and the Indian border. Besnagar Pillar inscription refers to one of the successors of the Heliocles, Antialkides or Amtalikhita and the extension of his rule up to Taxila. He is said to have deployed his ambassador Heliodorus to the court of Kasi Putra Bhagya Bhadra, who is recognised as the fifth Sunga ruler, Odraka or the last one, Bhagavata. The Besnagar pillar inscription identified Heliodorus as a native of Taxila. Antialkides is known as King of Taxila and as 'Bhagavata- a devotee of Vishnu'. Out of his bilingual coins, one silver coin on the Attic standard indicates Antialkides as victorious.

5.2.3.5 Hermaeus

The last Greek ruler of the border areas and the Kabul valley was Hermaeus, who came to power about the second quarter of the first century CE. Apart from the internal disputes, Hermaeus was affected by the threat of the Kushanas under Kajula Kadphises. Towards the end of the second century CE, the Parthians defeated Hermaeus of the Eucratides house. This defeat declared the end of Greek rule in Bactria and the south of the Hindu Kush area.

Fig. 5.2.3 A silver tetradrachm marked Eukratides I

The Indo-Greek rulers who continued in north-western India were queen Agathokleia and her son Strato. The joint coins issued by the rulers led to the presumption that the queen ruled with her son till he attained age. Upinder Singh presumes Agathokleia as one of the queens of Menander I. The Indo-Greek rule in the Gandhara region and their control over the eastern areas of Jhelum found its end in the latter half of the first century BCE. The reason for their end was the scuffles with the Parthians and Sakas. Finally, they were crushed by a Rajuvula, a Kshatrapa ruler.

5.2.4 Results of Greek Contact

The influence of Greek rulers on Indian institutions is debatable. There are arguments that Hellenism influenced India. Meanwhile, some others deny such an influence. Historians like R.S Tripathi follow a middle path between these two arguments. Historians hardly find much of the Greek impact on Indian society from the Alexandrian invasion or Seleucus expedition. Moreover, none of the accounts belonging to Megasthenes or Kautilya mentions any Hellenic influence on the Mauryan court. Not enough Hellenistic signs were found from the reign of later Greek rulers.
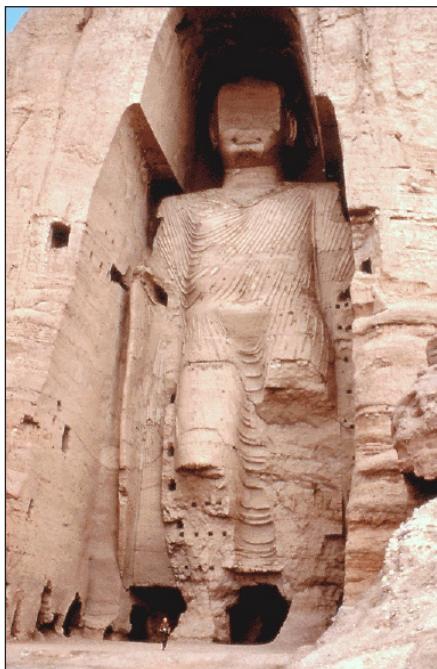
Fig. 5.2.4 Bamiyan Buddha- built by Greek descendants

In literature, some scholars argue that Homer's poetry was translated into Indian languages and that Indians used to sing in their way. However, R.S Tripathi does not find any valid basis for such scholarly claims except for the similarities in the Greek and Indian legends. There were similarities in the main composition of *Ramayana* with that of the *Iliad*. Greek plays were performed in the regions like Sakala and other areas where the Greek was powerful. Nevertheless, there is hardly any concrete evidence that states the influence of the Greeks on Indian drama. An Indian term *Yavanika*, which denotes a curtain of the Greek fabric, resembles a Greek term.

Besides these, Indian astronomy owes much to the Greeks. The works like *Gargi- Samhita*, *Romak* and *Paulisa Siddhantas* mention the Greek influence on Indian astronomy. The *Gargi Samhita* talks about the origin of the science of astronomy with the Greeks, even though

they were considered as barbarians. In Indian astronomy, several Greek terms were used. In the case of astrology, the Indians learned the proper form of the art of foretelling the future through observing the stars.

In art and architecture, some Greek sculptures were found belonging to Dionysius and a child. There are hardly any sculptures unearthed belonging to the period of Demetrius and Menander. However, the Gandhara school found stone sculptures based on Buddha's life and was also influenced by Hellenic ideals. Unembellished walls of houses and a temple located at Taxila with Iconic pillars and classical moulding were discovered belonging to the period of the first quarter of the first century BCE. The Hellenistic style was later modified with the Indian motifs.

Above all, the Greeks were influenced by Indian culture and ideas. There was an impetus for trade and commerce. Likewise, from a religious perspective, Heliodorus converted to Vaishnavism. As described in the Swat vase inscription, Menander or Theodorus converted to Buddhism. These instances reflect the Indian influence on the faith of the Greek rulers. As R.S. Tripathi argues, India converted her military conquerors into her moral and spiritual captives. He further contends that the Indianisation of the Greeks happened through mixed marriages.

The significant Greek impact on the Indians is on the coinage system. Before the Greek advent, coarse punch-marked coins were prevalent in India. The Greeks presented the making of coins stamped in a proper form. Similar to the Greek coins, Indians also started carving Indian legends and using the Kharosthi script on

coins. It reflects that the public was not well-acquainted with the Greek language. Moreover, no Greek inscription was found in India.

5.2.4.1 Coinage System of Indo-Greeks

Fig. 5.2.4 A Hermaeus coin at Gandhara

Coins are one primary source of information on various ruling families of the post-Mauryan period. Those families minted multiple types of coins by inscribing the names of rulers on them. The coinage system of the Indo- Greeks developed with the advancement in polities and trade aspirations. However, tracing their lineage, chronology and territory are difficult since some rulers had the same names. About the names of thirty Bactrian Greek rulers were derived from these coins out of 42 Graeco- Bactrian and Indo-Greek rulers. It suggested the nature of the relationship among them or successive rulers as hostile. It is also presumed from the number of rulers that they ruled concomitantly at times. However, not many details are known from it.

The coins of Graeco- Bactrians were made of gold, silver, copper and nickel-bearing, depicting Greek legends. They are found in the North of Hindu Kush. They followed the Attov weight standard and portrayed their rulers in the obverse and the Greek deities in reverse, including

the name and title of the ruler. Those Greek deities included Zeus, Apollo and Athena.

A significant section of coin hoards found in Afghanistan belongs to the Graeco- Bactrians and the Indo – Greeks. Menander's coin is located in Kabul in the North and Mathura. The Indo-Greek coins found in the south of Hindu Kush were primarily square and made of silver and copper. They bore bilingual inscriptions in Greek and later in Kharosthi and rarely in Brahmi. The Brahmi Inscription was found rarely. The Indo-Greek coins followed an Indian weight standard. Apart from the royal portraits, it included the Indian religious symbols—for example, the portrayal of God Samkarshana Balarama and Vasudeva Krishna in the coin series of Agathocles.

Some of the contemporary local rulers in India were influenced by the Indo- Greek coinage, especially silver ones. These coins found from different areas suggest their extent of circulation as well as their trade connections. There is numismatic evidence for Menander's faith in Buddhism as some of his coins have the symbol' *dharma -chakra* and the epithet *"Dhramikasa"*. Then there was numismatic evidence exhibiting Menander's successors as Strato I and Strato II. His coins were discovered from the North, Kabul to Mathura and in the east to Bundelkhand.

5.2.5 The Sakas or Indo-Scythians

The Sakas overpowered the Greeks in Bactria and the Indian subcontinent. In Indian sources, Scythians were referred to as Sakas and mentioned as the 'foreign barbarians'. They were nomadic tribes that inhabited Issyk-Kul and the river

Jaxartes in Central Asia. They grazed their animals in Western China and ransacked the Chinese empire for the new meadows and prosperity.

In the third century BCE, the Chinese ruler Shi Huang Ti consolidated the Chinese empire. He constructed the Great Wall of China to reduce the threat of nomadic tribes such as Hiung-nu, Wu-sun and Yueh-chi. Later, the successor of Shi Huang Ti, from the Han dynasty, strengthened it further. Hence, they were forced to move towards the South and West. Thus, a series of tribal migrations happened in Central Asia.

According to the Chinese travel accounts, on their way, Yueh- Chi or Yuezhi attacked Scythians and drove them to Bactria and Parthia from their inhabitation in the area west of the Aral Sea and settled there. The Sakas besieged Parthia after the death of Mithridates II in 88 BCE. Then they crossed the Bolan pass and the Indus valley and reached Western India. The Sakas settled down there and then extended their control to Mathura and Gandhara in the North.

5.2.5.1 Expansion of Sakas In India

It is unlike nomadic pastoralists to establish an administrative set-up of a kingdom. However, the Sakas' interaction with various kingdoms influenced them to establish kingdoms and competent rulers emerged among them. They found themselves in Afghanistan, Punjab, Mathura, Western India and Upper Deccan. In India, about 57-58 BCE, the Sakas faced an attack from Vikramaditya, the ruler of Ujjain. Other than the confrontation from Vikramaditya, they hardly faced any resistance from India.

Fig. 5.2.6 A coin issued under Azilises

In Western India, the Sakas held control for a prolonged period. Historians like R.S Sharma observe that they engaged in seaborne trade in Gujarat and issued silver coins.

5.2.5.2 Administration of Sakas and Satrap System

The Sakas ruled the provinces through the military Governor known as *maha kshatrapa*. The Satraps were the governors who had control of the subdivisions of these provinces. These Satraps exercised much independence in their functions. It is observed that they issued their inscriptions and minted their coins. There was a remarkable similarity in the Saka administration with that of the Achaemenids and Seleucids of Iran. Also, they derived titles such as 'Great Kings' or King of Kings' from the Greeks and Achaemenids.

Fig. 5.2.7 The Mathura Lion Capital, made on sandstone

The Kshaharatas and Kardamakas were two important family lines of Satraps. Bhumaka, Nahapana, Aghudaka and Abhedaka were the members of the Kshaharata family. Nahapana ruled Malwa, Gujarat, Saurashtra, North Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the lower Indus valley. He was followed by a ruler from the Kardamaka family, Chashtana. The Andhau inscription refers to Chashtana as he ruled Western India along with his grandson Rudradaman I during the Saka Era 52, i.e., 130 CE.

According to literary and numismatic sources, the first Saka ruler in India was Maues or Moga, who ascended the throne in 80 BCE and established the Saka power in Gandhara. Azes, the successor of Maues, confronted Hippostratos, the last Greek ruler in North India. He is also known to unite a large part of North-Western India. Azilises, the successor of Azes, extended his control to Mathura.

5.2.5.3 Rudradaman I

Rudradaman I (130-50 CE), a famous Saka ruler belonging to the Kardamaka family, ruled Sindh and parts of Gujarat, Konkan, Narmada Valley, Malwa and Kathiawar. He is also renowned for his Junagarh inscriptions belonging to Saka Era 72, i.e., 150 CE. According to the inscription, the Saka power flourished during Rudradaman's reign. He is known for repairing the Sudarshana Lake in Kathiawar and its embankment. He issued a long inscription in Sanskrit, which happens to be the first long Sanskrit inscription. Rudradaman is believed to have defeated Satakarni, the Deccan ruler, twice.

Fig. 5.2.8 A silver drachm issued by Rudrasimha III

The Sakas met their defeat by Indo-Parthian rulers, Gondophernes and the Yueh-chis, who established themselves in Kabul and Kashmir regions. The Saka era, which began in 78. CE was started by the Sakas.

5.2.6 The Parthians or Pahlavas

The Parthians followed Sakas. But, not much information is available on the Parthians. The only source material to glean information about them is coins and inscriptions. The Parthians or Pahlavas were the inhabitants of the Khurasan and the areas near the Caspian Sea. They moved to North-western India during the first century BCE. In many Indian sources, the Sakas were mentioned together with Pahlavas and known as Saka-Pahlavas. It is also stated that they ruled simultaneously.

Fig. 5.2.9 A coin issued by Gondophernes

Vonones is known as the earliest prince of the Parthian dynasty. Gondophernes was the first Indo-Parthian ruler, whose

reign was between 19 CE to 45 CE. He extended his territory from Siestan to the Kabul Valley and Gandhara to Jammu. As per records, St. Thomas from Israel visited the court of Gondophernes during the first century CE to spread Christianity. Gondophernes is mentioned in the Takht-i- Bahi inscription dated 103. The Parthian Kingdom in India shattered into pieces after the death of Gondophernes. The Kushanas later overthrew them under Kujula Kadphises.

Recap

- The Indo Greeks and revolt of Parthia and Bactria
- Popular uprising headed by Arsakes and the foundation of a dynasty (248 BCE)
- The rebellion of Bactria and Diodotus I and assassination of Diodotus II by Euthydemus
- Siege of Balkh and Independence of Bactria
- Conquests of the Bactrian Greeks - Demetrios' conquest of Punjab and Eukratides revolt in Bactria
- Influence on Indian drama and literature
- Greek influence on Indian astronomy
- Development of Indian art and architecture - Gandhara School and Hellenic ideals
- The Sakas, consolidation of the Chinese empire, series of tribal migrations and displacement of the Sakas by Yueh-chis
- Expansion of Sakas in India
- Maues and the conquest of Gandhara region
- Differences and similarities between Sakas and Pahlavas
- Junagadh rock inscription, the conquest of yaudheyas, the defeat of Satakarni and embankment of the Sudarshana Lake
- The Pahlavas or Indo – Parthians
- Visit of St. Thomas to Gondophernes court and the advent of Kushanas

Objective Questions

1. What system of governance was introduced by the Sakas in India?
2. Which school of art reflects the fusion of Hellenic and Indian styles?

3. Who founded a dynasty after leading a popular uprising in Parthia in 248 BCE?

4. Name the inscription that evidences Indo-Greek connections in India.

5. Who invaded India after the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire?

6. Who led the Bactrian revolt?

7. What is the theme of Milindapanho?

8. Which Indo-Greek ruler is famous for his justice among his subjects?

9. Which passes did the Sakas use to reach India?

10. Which Saka ruler is connected with the Junagarh inscription?

11. Who founded the Parthian Kingdom in India?

12. Who is the apostle who visited the court of Gondophernes from Israel?

13. What does the Junagadh rock inscription mention?

14. Who displaced the Sakas from Central Asia?

Answers

1. The Satrap system
2. The Gandhara School of Art
3. Arsakes
4. The Besnagar Pillar Inscription
5. The Indo-Greeks
6. Diodotus I
7. The questions on Buddhism to Nagasena
8. Menander
9. Bolan Pass
10. Rudradaman I
11. Gondophernes
12. St. Thomas
13. Embankment of Sudarshana Lake
14. The Yueh-chis

Assignments

1. Discuss the political and cultural impact of the Indo-Greeks on the Indian subcontinent with special focus on their contributions to art, astronomy and drama.

2. Analyse the significance of the Satrap system .

3. Discuss the role of coins and inscriptions in reconstructing the history of Indo-Greeks, Sakas and Parthians.

4. Evaluate the significance of inscriptions, such as the Junagadh rock inscription, in understanding the history and achievements of the Sakas.

5. Examine the importance of the Gandhara School of Art and its fusion of Hellenic ideals with Indian artistic traditions.

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3

UNIT

The Kushanas

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be:

♦ understand the origins and territorial expansion of the Kushana Empire in the subcontinent

♦ explain the nature of the state under the Kushanas

♦ analyse the Kushana coinage system

♦ investigate the relationship between the Kushana rulers and Buddhism

♦ evaluate the decline of the Kushana Empire

Prerequisites

The history of Kushanas begins far beyond the borders of India, in the third century BCE, with the consolidation of China. Under the first emperor, Shi Huang Ti, China became a single, powerful empire. One of his major projects was the construction of the Great Wall of China. The purpose of the wall was to protect China from nomadic tribes to the north like the Hiung-nu, Wu-sun and Yueh-chi. By restricting these nomadic tribes' access to their traditional grazing lands, the Great Wall forced many of them to look elsewhere. Some moved southward, others westward and it was this movement that set off a series of migrations across Central Asia.

Among the displaced groups were the Yueh-chi, a tribe originally from the north, who found their way into Bactria, an area that today includes parts of Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Chinese historical works of the Han dynasties refer to the events in Central Asia, Bactria and North-West India during the post-Mauryan period, especially the early history of the Kushanas and Yueh- chis.

These tribes, mere nomadic pastoralists, began to consolidate their position and finally established an empire -the Kushanas. By the first century CE, the Kushanas had transformed from nomadic tribes into rulers of an empire that spanned across what is now northern India, parts of Central Asia and beyond. Under their rule, the Kushanas not only promoted trade along the Silk Road but also encouraged the spread of Buddhism. Their influence stretched from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent, where they shaped the course of history for centuries.

Keywords

Kushanas, Yueh-chi, Nomadic tribes, Migrations, Post-Mauryan India, Bactria, Silk Route, Buddhism, Rabatak inscription

Discussion

5.3.1 Territorial Expansion and Nature of State

Kushanas or Kuei-shangs had the lineage of Yueh-chi, a nomadic group of people who ousted the Sakas and the Parthians and settled in the Gandhara region. They were forced to migrate from Western China when the Chinese empire consolidated its power. The Kushanas were one of the five tribes that belonged to Yueh-Chi. However, these tribes had the potential to develop into an empire. Hence, they established themselves in Bactria and captured areas of Afghanistan, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, China and Uzbekistan.

Fig. 5.3.1 A Kushan coin of Kadphises I found in the Bactria-Tokharistan region

The Kushanas established an independent principality around the latter half of the first century BCE. Kujula Kadphasis, the first Kushana ruler, united the five Yueh-chi tribes and established the Kushan Empire. His coins are found in the Hindu-Kush region of the Indian subcontinent. Vima Kadphises, son and successor of Kujula Kadphises, ruled with his father and later became an independent ruler. He confronted the Parthians, captured Kandahar and extended his control over Mathura and Indus Valley.

Some of the Kushana rulers ruled simultaneously and adopted the *satrap* system of administration of the Sakas. The Kushana empire functioned both under the direct control of the rulers and under subordinate rulers who were called *kshatrapas*. The empire consisted of several *satrapies* and a *satrap* was entrusted to each *Satrapi.* There were *kshatrapas* who accepted the suzerainty of the Kushanas by paying them tributes. The subordinate rulers, such as Chashtana, were independent yet accepted the paramountcy of the Kushanas.

The Kushanas' prosperity was connected with their conquest of the Lower Indus region and the Indian Ocean trade through the Makran coast and its port present in this region. Scholars like B.N. Mukherjee connect the decline of the Kushana empire with the decline of trade in this area. The numismatic and archaeological evidence also suggests the socio-political, economic, religious and cultural connection of Kusanas with Central Asia and their commercial contact with the Indian Ocean trade.

5.3.2 Kanishka

Fig. 5.3.2 Statue of Kanishka

Kanishka is the most renowned ruler of the Kushana empire. However, his date of accession is still not clear. Some historians identify 78. CE, the beginning of the Saka Era as the accession year of Kanishka. He extended his rule towards Gangetic Valley in the east and the Malwa region in the South. The capital of the Kushana empire was Bactria. In India, their major political centre was Peshawar (Purushapura) and Mathura. Kanishka expanded his territory towards Afghanistan, Eastern Xinjiang of China and the Northern Oxus River of Central Asia. However, he led an expedition to Central Asia, which was suppressed by Pan Chao, the Chinese General and was compelled to pay tributes.

5.3.2.1 The Rabatak Inscription

The Rabatak inscription found in Afghanistan refers to the extent of territorial control of the Kushana Empire. Most Kushana inscriptions, including Rabatak inscriptions, were written in the Bactrian language. It also mentions a successor, Vima Taktu, who came after Kujula Kadphises and before the succession of Vima Kadphises.

Fig. 5.3.3 Kanishka's Empire

The Rabatak inscription, considered to belong to the reign of Kanishka, contains 23-lines and is written in the Bactrian language and in Greek script. It portrays the royalty and divinity of Kanishka by mentioning him as 'a king of kings and a son of the gods.' Kanishka is considered to bring forth the dominance of the Bactrian language over the Greek language.

The Rabatak inscription refers to the command of Kanishka to build a temple-like structure to install the images of the deities and the goddess Nana. He also ordered an image of himself and his predecessors Kujula Kadphises, Saddashkana and Vima Kadphises. The stone sculptures of Kushana rulers were recovered from the temples of Surkh Kotal (Afghanistan) and Mat. The Rabatak inscription indicates that Kanishka worshipped deities in the temple and considered his year of accession to be the beginning of an era.

This inscription also provided an information on the Kushana genealogy and the extent of the empire of Kanishka as Ujjayini, Kaushambi, Saketa, Kaundinya, Pataliputra and Champa, in which Kaundinya is identified as the Southern border of his empire. There were hyperboles on the inscription claiming that the empire of Kanishka extended all over India.

5.3.3 Kushanas and their Religion

The numismatic evidence belonging to the Kushana period suggests the religious orientation of Kujula Kadphises to Buddhism and Vima to Saivism. According to R.S Sharma, the Kushan rulers worshipped both Shiva and the Buddha, with images of these deities appearing on Kushan coins. Several Kushan rulers were devotees of Vishnu, particularly Vasudeva, whose name is a synonym for Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu.

According to R.S Sharma, Kanishka became a great patron of the Mahayana Buddhism. He convened a Buddhist council in Kashmir, where scholars composed 300,000 words to elucidate the Three Pitakas, the core collections of Buddhist literature. Kanishka had these commentaries engraved on red copper sheets, enclosed them in a stone receptacle and built a stupa over it. If this tradition is accurate, the discovery of this stupa and its inscriptions could provide new insights into Buddhist texts and teachings. Kanishka also built many other stupas to commemorate the Buddha.

Kanishka was known to adhere to Buddhism as he conducted a Buddhist council during his reign. He also followed the Buddhist scholars Asvaghosha and Vasumitra. His religious tolerance is known for depicting motifs of Buddha, Siva, Persian Gods and the Greek deities on the coins. Various scholars remark that the title 'devaputra' was used by the Kushana kings to identify themselves as divine. There is an assumption that the Mat shrine near Mathura is a worshipping place of these Kushana rulers.

5.3.4 Art and Literature

The Kushans were aware that their subjects spoke multiple languages and used different scripts. As a result, they issued coins and inscriptions in Greek, Kharoshthi and Brahmi scripts. Likewise, they used Greek, Prakrit, Sanskrit-influenced Prakrit and, towards the end of their rule, pure Sanskrit. The official recognition of these three scripts and four languages demonstrates the multilingual and multicultural nature of the Kushan Empire. Their use of written communication suggests that literacy levels were relatively high during their time.

Although the Mauryas and Satavahanas primarily patronised Prakrit, some Central

Asian rulers actively supported and cultivated Sanskrit literature. The earliest example of the kavya style can be found in the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman, dated to around 150 CE in Kathiawar. From this period onward, inscriptions in refined Sanskrit became more common, although Prakrit continued to be used for inscriptions until the fourth century and beyond.

Coming to the contribution of Kushanas in art and literature, Kanishka was known as a great patron of literature. His court consisted of scholars such as Asvaghosa, Nagarjuna, Vasumitra and Charaka. Asvaghosa is the author of the Sanskrit work named 'Buddhacharita', which portrays the life history of the Buddha. He also authored the works such as 'Bajrasuchi', 'Saundarananda' and the Buddhist text 'Mahabastu' and 'Divyavadan' in the Sanskrit language. Nagarjuna is a Buddhist scholar and an author of Madhyamika Sutra and Shatasahstrika Prajnaparamita. Charak is renowned for his work on Ayurveda called Charak-Samhita.

Fig. 5.3.4 Head of a Bodhisattva

An art style innovated during the Kushan period was a combined form of the Greek, Roman and Indian art called Gandhara art. The central theme of Gandhara art was Buddhism. As mentioned above, the Kushana rulers patronised the making of sculptures known as Mathura Art. The subjects of Mathura art included Buddha and Jain Mahavira. However, the former was the central subject of this art form.

The foreign rulers became enthusiastic patrons of Indian art and literature, displaying the zeal characteristic of new converts. The Kushan Empire brought together artists and artisans trained in various schools across different regions. This led to the rise of multiple schools of art, including Central Asian, Gandhara and Mathura. Sculptures from Central Asia exhibit a synthesis of local and Indian elements, often influenced by Buddhism.

Indian craftsmen came into contact with Central Asians, Greeks and Romans, particularly in the northwestern frontier of India, in Gandhara. This interaction gave rise to a distinct artistic style, where images of the Buddha were created in the Graeco-Roman style, with his hair styled similarly to Graeco-Roman depictions.

The influence of Gandhara art spread to Mathura, which was primarily a centre of indigenous art. Mathura produced remarkable images of the Buddha but is also well known for the headless, erect statue of Kanishka, inscribed with his name at its lower end. Furthermore, Mathura became a centre for Jain art, producing numerous stone images of Vardhamana Mahavira. Interestingly, its pre-Gupta sculptures and inscriptions do not prominently feature Krishna, despite Mathura being his birthplace and the setting of his early life. The Mathura school of art flourished during the early centuries of the Common era, with its characteristic red sandstone sculptures found even beyond Mathura. Today, the Mathura Museum houses the largest collection of Kushan-era sculptures in India.

5.3.5 Successors of Kanishka

The Kharosthi inscriptions from Hunza rocks reveal the names of Kanishka's successors as Vasishka, Huvishka, Kanishka II and Vasudeva I. The coinage of Huvishka included varietiess of gold and copper coins and some of his inscriptions were found in Mathura and Wardak. Ara inscriptions refer to Kanishka II. The following rulers were Vasudeva, Kanishka III and Vasudeva II. The fall of the empire began during the time of Vasudeva I, i.e., around the mid-2nd century CE. The last of the Kushana rulers was Vasudeva II. Towards the end of the 3rd century CE, the Kushanas in north-western India paved their way to the Sassanid ruler Shapur I of Iran.

5.3.6 Trade Contacts and the Economy

The arrival of Central Asian people established close contacts between Central Asia and India. India received a significant amount of gold from the Altai Mountains in Central Asia. It may have also acquired gold through trade with the Roman Empire. The Kushans controlled the Silk Route, which originated in China and passed through their empire in Central Asia and Afghanistan before reaching Iran and western Asia, regions that were part of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. This route served as a major source of income for the Kushans, who built a large and prosperous empire by levying tolls on traders. Interestingly, the Kushans were the first rulers in India to issue gold coins on a large scale.

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

Technological Advancements

In the field of technology, India benefitted from its interactions with the Central Asians. The Kushan ruler Kanishka is depicted wearing trousers and long boots, indicating Central Asian influence on Indian attire. The introduction of the stirrup in India is also attributed to the Kushans, which significantly improved horse-riding and cavalry efficiency. Furthermore, the practice of making leather shoes may have begun in India during this period.

The Kushan coins in India were modelled after Roman currency. The copper coins minted in India during this period were imitations of Roman coins and the gold coins introduced by the Kushans were also inspired by Roman gold coinage.

There were diplomatic exchanges between Indian rulers and Roman emperors. Embassies were sent from India to the court of Emperor Augustus in 27–28 CE and later to Emperor Trajan in 110–120 CE. These interactions between Rome and India may have contributed to technological advancements in the subcontinent.

5.3.7 The Fall of the Kushana Empire

The Kushana empire was disintegrated into petty principalities. The fall of the Kushanas encouraged the entities whom they suppressed. The Sakas reappeared on the scene in Western and Central India. The numismatic evidence and inscriptions mention the ganas such as the Arjunayanas of Bharatpur and Alwar, the Malavas of Punjab, the Yaudheya gana of eastern Punjab and areas of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The monarchies of North and central India belong to this period, known as Naga kings. The textual and sculptural evidence reveals the prevalence of the worship of Naga or snake deities during the Kushana period. The Puranas also mention these Naga kings. The numismatic evidence of the Kushana period provides information on the regional dynasties of Ahichchhatra, Ayodhya and Kaushambi.

Recap

- ♦ Tribal movements in Central Asia, the movements of Yueh Chi and the displacement of Sakas and Parthians
- ♦ Division into five principalities
- ♦ The amalgamation of five principalities and the foundation of a unified Kushana empire
- ♦ Kushana movement to India
- ♦ Conquest of Kandahar from the Parthians
- ♦ Conquest of India
- ♦ Debate on the date of Kanishka's accession
- ♦ Kanishka's military expedition into Central Asia and defeat and tribute payment to China
- ♦ The extent of Kanishka's empire
- ♦ Satrapal system
- ♦ His religious belief Buddhism and the appearance of deities on coins
- ♦ The Buddhist Council
- ♦ The discovery of a statue at Mat
- ♦ Kanishka's successors
- ♦ The fall of the Kushana Empire and the Persian invasions
- ♦ Rise of monarchies and ganas
- ♦ Gandhara and Mathura Art

Objective Questions

1. Who were the primary tribal movements responsible for the foundation of the Kushana Empire?

2. What was the major contribution of Kanishka to Buddhism during his reign?

3. What system did the Kushanas use for local administration, particularly to manage their empire?

4. Which art form flourished under the Kushana Empire, particularly under the patronage of Kanishka?

5. Who constructed the Great Wall of China to reduce the threat of nomadic tribes and when?

6. Which were the nomadic pastoralists who were a threat to the Chinese empire?

7. Which nomadic group overran the Sakas and Parthians and settled in the Gandhara region?

8. Where did Kushanas establish their empire?

9. Who united the five Yueh- chi tribes and established the Kushana Empire?

10. Which Kushana ruler defeated the Parthians?

11. Which were the places that Vima Kadphises ruled?

12. What inscription found in Afghanistan provides information about Kanishka?

13. The discovery of a statue at Mat is associated with which Kushana ruler?

Answers

1. Yueh Chi
2. He convened the Fourth Buddhist Council
3. Satrapal system
4. Gandhara and Mathura Art
5. The Chinese ruler Shi Huang Ti in the third century BCE
6. Hiung-nu, Wu-sun and Yueh-chi
7. Yueh-chi
8. Bactria, Central Asia, China, Uzbekistan and areas of Afghanistan and India
9. Kujula Kadphasis, the first Kushana ruler
10. Vima Kadphises, son and successor of Kujula Kadphises
11. Kandahar, Mathura and Indus Valley
12. The Rabatak inscription
13. Kanishka

Assignments

1. Examine the role of tribal movements and the displacement of the Sakas and Parthians in the establishment of the Kushana Empire. How did these movements influence the formation of the empire?

2. Analyse the nature of the state under the Kushanas with special focus on their administrative systems and the Satrapal system.

3. Evaluate the religious and cultural impact of Kanishka's rule, particularly his patronage of Buddhism and the appearance of deities on Kushana coinage.

4. Assess the decline of the Kushana Empire, considering the internal factors such as succession issues and external threats like the Persian invasions. What were the key reasons behind its fall?

5. Discuss the relevance of the Gandhara and Mathura Art in the history of Kushanas.

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4 UNIT

Rise of the Satavahanas

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be:

♦ gain insight into the socio-economic, political and religious structures of the Satavahana empire

♦ familiarise themselves with the inscriptional and numismatic sources from the Satavahana period

♦ analyse the relationship between the Satavahanas and other contemporary powers

Prerequisites

After the collapse of the Mauryan Empire, India experienced a time of political fragmentation. The northern and central parts of the subcontinent, once unified under the Mauryas, saw the rise of various smaller states and regional powers. According to Ashokan inscriptions, the Mauryan Empire had extended its influence into the southern Deccan. For a long time, scholars believed that the Satavahanas were the first to rise to power in the Deccan immediately after the Mauryas. However, the discoveries in the fields of numismatics and epigraphy have led to a more nuanced understanding of this period. These findings suggest that there was a pre-Satavahana phase, where local rulers held significant sway in the region before the Satavahanas came to prominence.

The discovery of coins and inscriptions has been crucial in shedding light on the existence of these earlier rulers. Archaeological evidence from places

like Veerapuram, Brahmapuri and Kotilingala points to the fact that there were indeed regional rulers in the Deccan who held considerable power before the rise of the Satavahanas. These rulers were not just minor chieftains but politically important figures. Some of these early rulers are named in the inscriptions, such as Kamvayas, Samigopa, Gobhadra and Narana who adopted titles like 'maharathi' and 'mahabhoja,' which indicate that they held military and administrative power.

It was within this political context, regional rulers that the Satavahanas eventually rose to prominence. The Satavahana dynasty, which would go on to rule much of the Deccan for several centuries, established itself as one of the prominent powers of ancient India.

Keywords

Mauryan Empire, Deccan region, Post-Mauryan period, Naneghat Inscription, Hathigumpha Inscription, Yajnashri Satakarni, Maharathi, Mahabhoja, Numismatic evidence, Regional rulers

Discussion

5.4.1 Origin of the Satavahanas

The Puranas provide a list of rulers belonging to the Satavahana phase. In Puranas, the Satavahanas were referred to as Andhras. The Puranas, including the *Matsya* and *Brahmanda*, mention thirty kings who ruled for 460 years. In *Vayu Purana*, 17 kings were listed, considered to rule for 300 years. Nevertheless, there is a controversy about the origin of the Satavahanas and their chronology. Some scholars call it c. 271 BCE and others consider it c. 30 BCE, even though an approximate period of the Satavahana rule lies between the latter half of the first century BCE and the first half of the third century CE.

The Purana mentions Satavahanas as Andhras and this suggests the possibility of the Satavahanas belonging to the Andhra tribe or emerging from the Andhra region. However, scholars are also sceptical about the place of accession of the Satavahanas, whether it is eastern or western Deccan. Furthermore, Scholars identify the term *Andhra-bhritya* used in the Puranas as the Satavahanas were either the subordinates of the Mauryas or the term could denote the helpers of the Andhras.

The Andhra - Satavahana connection is also confirmed by the numismatic evidence recovered from places in Andhra Pradesh, such as Kotalingala and Sangareddy, the Karimnagar district. It also suggests that they might have emerged from

eastern Deccan, between the rivers of Godavari and Krishna. Meanwhile, some inscriptional evidence from Naneghat and Nashik caves indicates the early days of the Satavahanas were in western Deccan. Another interpretation in this regard is that they appeared in Pratishthana (Modern Paithan) in western Deccan and moved towards the regions of eastern Deccan andhra and coastal areas. Betana or Paithan remained the capital and political centre of the Satavahanas throughout the period.

The Satavahanas identified themselves as belonging to the Brahmana descent and followed the Brahmanical Vedic tradition. The terms used in the Nasik inscription of Gautami Balashri were *Ekabamhana* and *Khatiya-dapa-manamada*, representing Satakarni I as Brahmana and the destroyer of the Kshatriya. The Naneghat cave inscription of Naganika mentions the Vedic sacrifices performed by Satakarni I and their importance in establishing political legitimacy. Hala, a later Satavahana ruler, is known to have composed 700 sensual poems in Maharashtri Prakrit, known as Gatha Sattasai.

5.4.1.1 The Naneghat Cave Inscription

In Naneghat in Pune district, Maharashtra, the remains of eight relief sculptures with names inscribed on the heads in the Brahmi script were found. The engraved names were of kings such as Simuka, Satakarni, queens named Sirimato devi and Nayanika or Naganika and Princes named Bhayala, Haku-shri and the Satavahana and Tranakayira. Most of the parts of this inscription were lost. However, there is an engraving of the life of the Queen identified as Nayanika,

her faith and the *Ashwamedha* sacrifices she attended. However, the part of the inscription mentioning the name of this Queen was damaged. V.V. Mirashi argues that the emphasis on the Queen in the Naneghat cave suggests her significance in the Kingdom. In recent times, a silver coin carrying the names of Satakarni and Naganika was located at Junnar near Naneghat.

5.4.2 The Territorial Expansion of the Satavahanas

The Satavahana rule covered modern Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, eastern and southern Madhya Pradesh and Saurashtra. As mentioned above, controversy exists over the rise of the Satavahana rule. However, the chronology of the rulers is clear to an extent. The founder of the Satavahana dynasty was Simuka. He was followed by Kanha, his brother, who expanded the empire towards the west. Kanha was succeeded by Satakarni I, who ruled, according to one version, for 56 years.
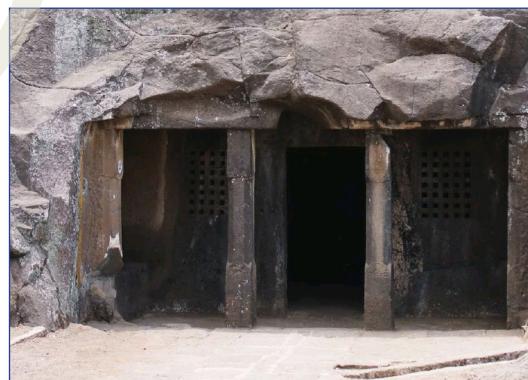

Fig. 5.4.1 Cave No.19 of Satavahana king Kanha at the Nasik Caves

The Hathigumpha inscription mentions that Kharavela encountered the Satavahana ruler Satakarni. He also defeated Rathikas

and Bhojas, who were subordinates of the Satavahanas. Satakarni I appears to control the western Malwa region and the Naneghat inscription refers to him as the lord of Dakshinapatha. Gautamiputra was praised as the one who drank the water of the three seas, suggests the extent of his control over the entire Deccan to the Eastern coast, which confirms his expansive conquest in trans-Vindhyan India. However, B.D Chattopadhyaya describes that even though Satakarni is referred to as Lord of Dakshinapatha, that does not mean that he could control the entire Deccan. As mentioned earlier,

the Maharathis and Mahabhojas were the regional rulers of the pre-Satavahana period and gradually established themselves later. They had matrimonial relations with the Satavahanas.

The Satavahana empire reached its zenith during the reign of **Gautamiputra Satakarni**. He was eulogised in the inscription of Gautami Balashri, his mother, at Nasik and was inscribed during the reign of Vashisthiputra Pulumavi, his son. The inscription represented him as the destroyer of the Indo- Greeks, Sakas,
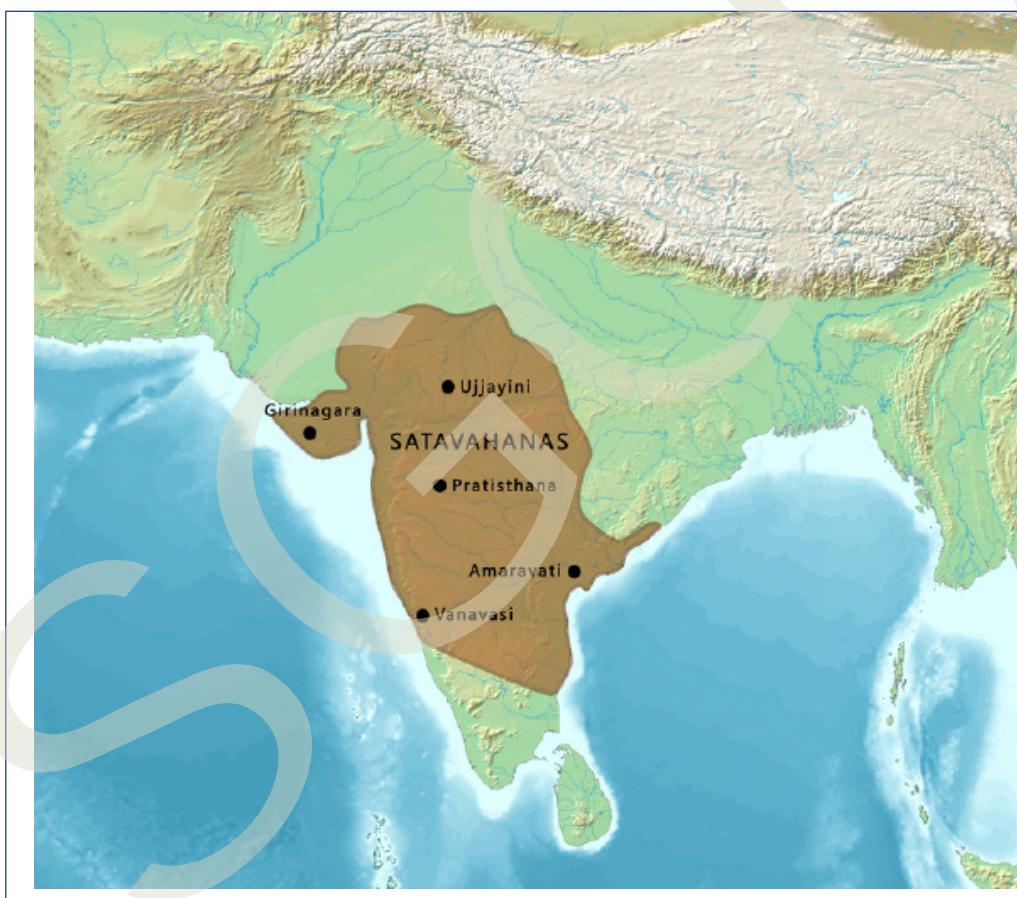

Fig. 5.4.2 Map of Satavahana Empire

Parthians and Kshaharata kshatrapas. It also mentions the territorial extent of Gautamiputra in North, Malwa and Saurashtra to the South, till Krishna and

in East, Berar to the west, till Konkan. However, later he lost the regions he conquered from Kshaharatas to Kardamakas.

The Satavahanas and the Sakas were engaged in continuous scuffles over the ports such as Bhrigukachcha (Broach), Kalyan and Suparaka (Sopara). Gautamiputra had subjugated Nahapana and recovered the Satavahana territories under the Saka control. In the 18th regnal year, Gautamiputra Satakarni donated land earlier under the possession of the son-in-law of Nahapana, Usavadata, to a Buddhist monastery.

Fig. 5.4.3 Coin issued by Vashishthiputra Shri Pulumavi

Yajnashri Satakarni, one of the last powerful rulers among the Satavahanas, encountered the Sakas and controlled eastern and western Deccan. He also brought Nasik and Vidarbha under his control. Gautamiputra Vijaya Satakarni, Chanda Satakarni, Vasishthiputra Vijaya Satakarni and Pulumayi were the successors of Yajna Sri. However, his successors were limited to Andhra Pradesh and the Bellary region of Karnataka.

Fig. 5.4.4 Coin of Gautamiputra Sri Yajna Satakarni

However, the Satavahana dynasty declined in the latter half of the 3rd century CE., i.e., their political domination was reduced during c. 225 CE. The empire's disintegration led to the emergence of the Vakatakas of Deccan, Kadambas of Mysore, Abhiras of Maharashtra and Ikshvakus of Andhra.

5.4.3 The Administrative System of the Satavahanas

The Satavahana empire consisted of administrative units called *Aharas*. Various officials of the empire consisted of *Amatyas*, *Mahamatras*, *Mahasenapatis*, scribes and record keepers. The *Gramikas* were entrusted with the Village administration. *Mahasenapati* was the commander of the army consisting of infantry, cavalry chariots and elephants and was also entrusted with civil duties. The revenue demand of the Satavahana empire was met through the agrarian sector, collection of taxes from crafts and salt production.

Land Grants

The Satavahanas were known for the royal grants of land. The inscriptional sources discovered in the Buddhist rock-cut caves contain information on the grants and donations provided by the Satavahana rulers. The Naneghat inscription discloses the offering of villages as *Dakshina* to priests during the Vedic sacrifices such as *Ashwamedha*. Another cave inscription at Nasik belongs to Usavadata and conveys the offering of 16 villages to the gods and the Brahmanas. The local rulers of the pre-Satavahana period were also considered the donors of the Buddhist monks. The inscriptional evidence suggests that the gifted land or field exercised certain privileges as it were not to be interfered with by the royal troops and officials and not to be disturbed in any manner including for the digging of salt.

5.4.4 Coinage system of Satavahanas

Fig. 5.4.5 A coin of Nahapana restruck by the Satavahana king Gautamiputra

An extensive collection of coins made of lead, silver and copper alloy belonging to the Satavahana phase was found in various places of the Indian subcontinent. The silver coins had images and names of the ruler stamped on them. The numismatic evidence found at Nasik contains the counter struck coins of Nahapana by Gautamiputra. Some of the original coins of Gautamiputra were found in the eastern Deccan region.

There were coins found in Andhra Pradesh belonging to Vasishthiputra Pulumavi or Pulumavi II, the successor of Gautamiputra. The coin of Pulumavi II with motifs of a ship signifies their hold on the eastern coast. The coins of Yajna Sri Satakarni, another Satavahana ruler, portray ships suggesting his power in maritime activities. These ship motifs on the Satavahana coins denote their maritime and commercial activities.

There were coins found which belong to the rulers named Vashishti Putra Satakarni, Yajnasri Satakarni, Vasishthiputra Vijaya Satakarni, Vasishthiputra Sivasri Pulumavi, Vasishthiputra Skanda Satakarni and Madhariputra Pulumavi. One of the features of the later Satavahana coins was that they bore the bilingual legends along with the ruler's name. The information on the later Satavahana rulers is only gleaned from the numismatic sources as they were not mentioned in the *Puranic* lists of Kings.

Recap

♦ Origin of Satavahanas and the controversy on the beginning of the Satavahana rule

♦ Relation between Andhras and Satavahanas

♦ Asvamedha sacrifices and conquests (Naneghat inscription)

♦ Deccan under the Satavahanas

♦ The defeat of the Sakas, Yavanas, the Pahlavas and the Kshaharatas

♦ Coinage system of Satavahanas

♦ Eclipse of Satavahanas and Saka Ksatrapas' role

- Brahmanism and Buddhism, performance of various sacrifices, land grants and donations to Buddhist monasteries
- Flourishment of trade

Objective Questions

1. What was the main feature of the Satavahana coinage system?
2. Which Satavahana king performed the Asvamedha sacrifice?
3. What is the term denoted for the Satavahanas in Puranas?
4. Which inscriptional sources indicate the early days of the Satavahanas in western Deccan?
5. Which religious tradition did the Satavahanas follow?
6. Which are the terms used in the Nasik inscription of Gautami Balashri to represent Gautamiputra Satakarni?
7. Which inscription refers to the Vedic sacrifices performed by Satakarni I to establish his political legitimacy?
8. Who is the Queen mentioned in the Naneghat inscription?
9. Which inscription mentions that Kharavela encountered the Satavahana ruler Satakarni?
10. Which Satavahana ruler was known as 'the lord of Dakshinapatha' in the Naneghat inscription?
11. Which inscription mentions that Gautamiputra destroyed the Sakas, Pahlavas and Yavanas?

Answers

1. Coins depicted rulers and symbols
2. Gautamiputra Satakarni
3. Andhras
4. Naneghat and Nashik cave inscriptions
5. The Brahmanical Vedic tradition

6. Ekabamhana and Khatiya-dapa-manamada

7. Naneghat cave inscription of Naganika

8. Nayanika or Naganika

9. Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela

10. Gautamiputra Satakarni

11. The inscription of Gautami Balashri at Nashik

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of the Naneghat inscription in understanding the Satavahana period.

2. Explain the socio-political and economic system of the Satavahanas.

3. Discuss the rise of the Satavahanas and the debate around it among the scholars.

4. Write a note on the asvamedha practices performed by the Satavahana rulers

5. Explain the role of Satavahana coinage in understanding their socio-economic and political system.

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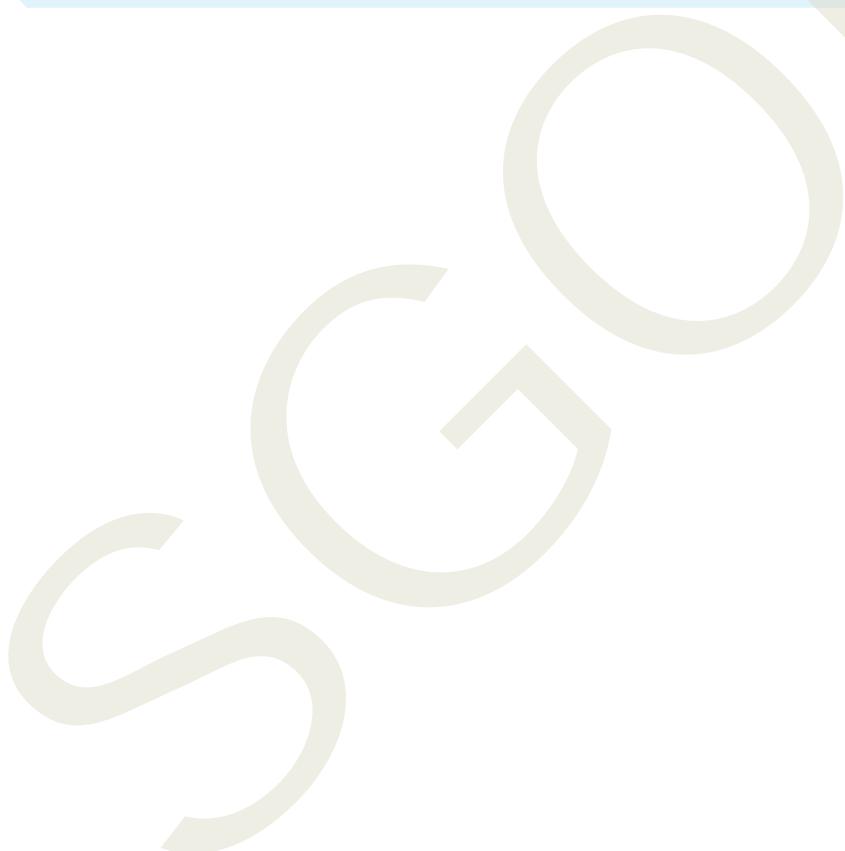
5 UNIT

Tamilakam in the Post-Sangam Period

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be:

♦ understand the socio-economic conditions in Tamilakam towards the end of the Sangam Age

♦ examine the evolution of polity in Tamilakam with special focus on the rise and fall of Muvendar

♦ familiarise with the key literary works of the post-Sangam period and their influence on Tamil culture

Prerequisites

During the early centuries CE, South India was dominated by the powerful Muvendar, who represented the three major Tamil Chiefdoms: the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandyas. These chiefdoms were central to the political and cultural life of Tamilakam. The Muvendar were not just political rulers but also patrons of the flourishing Sangam literature, which gives us a glimpse into the society, culture and values of this time. Through this literature, we can reconstruct the relationships between the ruling dynasties, their territories, their trade networks and their interactions.

As we move towards the third century CE, the once-powerful Muvendar kingdoms gradually lost their dominance due to various internal and external factors. These included the rise of new political entities, shifts in trade routes and the challenges posed by foreign invasions, among other causes. This unit

will examine not only the political developments that followed the fall of the Muvendar kingdoms but also the literary culture of the post-Sangam period.

Keywords

Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas, Sangam literature, Post-Sangam period, Decline, Sangam Age, Tamilakam, Ecological Zones, Polity, Muvendar, Kalabhra Occupation, Brahmin Dominance

Discussion

5.5.1 Sangam Age

'Sangam Age' is regarded as the beginning of the historical period in South India. Sangam literature enriches the understanding of the polity, economy and culture of the period. It was compiled over many centuries by several poets. However, a standing debate exists among scholars on its origin and historicity. Nilakanta Sastri questions the attribution of the Sangam Age to a specific period. He argues that the whole compilation of the Sangam literature took a long time, extending over generations. In comparison, Rajan Gurukkal considers the term Sangam Age a misnomer as it cannot be considered a common age when the literature mentions different phases involving different material contexts.

5.5.2 Sangam Literature

Significant works like *Ettuthogai, Pathupattu and Tolkappiyam* were included in the corpus of Sangam literature. The *Ettuthogai* consists of a collection of 2371 poems in groups such as *Aingurunooru*, *Narrinai*, *Agananuru*, *Purananuru*, *Kuruntogai*, *Kalithogai*, *Paripadal* and *Pattirrupattu*. The *Ettuthogai* and *Pathupattu* were jointly known as *Pathinenkilkanakku*. The *Pathupattu*, includes idylls such as *Thirumurugaruppadai*, *Mullaipattu*, *Maduraikkanchi*, *Kurinjippattu* and Pattinappalai. The *Tolkappiyam* contains poetics, conventions and grammar.

The Sangam poems were divided into *Akam* and *Puram* according to their themes. The *Akam* is connected to moral-ethical values and love and the *Puram* poetry talks about war and death. Other themes of the poems include the description of the Tamilakam from a traveller's point of view. The Akam poems classify the Tamilakam into five eco-spheres and compare them with the phases of human relationships.

5.5.3 Ecological Zones and Mode of Subsistence in Tamilakam

Tamilakam lies between the hills of

Tirupati, Venkatam and Kanyakumari and corresponds to the modern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It also includes Puducherry and parts of Karnataka andhra Pradesh, Lakshadweep and even Sri Lanka. This region, a single cultural and linguistic zone, was divided into ecological spaces known as *Aintinai*. There are five *Tinais* mentioned in the Tamil poetry of ancient India - *Kurinji* (hilly backwoods), *Palai* (arid zone), *Mullai* (pastoral tracts), *Marutam* (wet-land) and *Neital* (sea coast).

In some places, certain *Tinais* dominated and while in other places, some *Tinais* co-existed. The ecological factors determined the subsistence and settlement pattern of the people. The tribal inhabitants of the hilly areas, *Kurinji,* were Vetars and Kanavars. They depended on hunting and gathering for their subsistence.

The people who lived in the dry zone, *Palai,* were *Maravar, Kallar* and *Vettar* tribes, who subsisted on plundering and cattle theft. The *Mullai* inhabitants, *Itayar* and *Ayar* tribes, had pastoral tracts and engaged in animal husbandry and shifting cultivation. The *Marutam*, being the wet area, the inhabitants, *Uzhavars* and Vellalars, involved in agriculture and *Neital,* being the coastal zone, the inhabitants, *Parathevars, Valayars, Minavars, Nulayars* and *Umanars* were engaged in salt production, pearl collection, fishing and sailing boats.

The *Tinais* come under another classification; *Vanpulam* includes *Mullai, Kurinji* and *Menpulam* include *Marutham.* While the former is less productive, the latter is productive and self-sufficient. It is observed that the people belonging to each *Tinais* interacted with others and bartered their resources and products. While the

hilly zones provided forest produce such as honey, pepper, spices, fruits, meat and other wild goods, the pastoral areas had dairy products. Fish and salt were the resources possessed by the coastal people.

Through the interdependence, certain *Tinais* emerged into large eco zones and self-sustenance. The agricultural areas and their productivity determined the division of labour. The less productive areas had clan structures. The political structure of these regions showed a transition from simple clan structures to complex chiefdoms.

Sangam Economy

According to Rajan Gurukkal, the Sangam economy was based on the distribution, redistribution and exchange of resources, voluntary offerings, gifts, reciprocity and mercantile activities. The Sangam period witnessed the exchange of goods with Greeks, Romans, Venetians and Arabs by the Tamilakam. Pepper, spices, pearls, cotton, cloth, diamonds and animal hides were the goods exchanged for gold and silver coins, glass and copper. The inland ports of the Tamilakam during the Sangam period were Muziris*,* Nelcynda, Bacare, Pantar, Balita and Mantai.

5.5.4 The Evolution of The Polity of Tamilakam

5.5.4.1 Chiefdoms in Tamilakam

The clan-chiefdoms were primarily kinship-based and their chief is referred to as *Perumakan or Ko-makan.* Some of the chiefdoms expanded through conquests, marriage alliances of chiefs with other clans. Above all, the wealth and resources determined the power of such chiefdoms. In *Tamilakam*, three kinds of chiefdoms

existed: *Kizar*, *Velir* and *Vendar.* While *Kizar* managed the distribution of resources, Velir owned resources and Vendar invaded new areas and became more powerful.

5.5.4.2 The Muvendar– The Three 'Crowned Kings"

The Cheras, Cholas and the Pandyas, who belonged to *Vendars*, were collectively called Muvendar. They were the powerful chiefdoms of the period in the region who came to be known as the three 'Crowned Kings'. There was no hierarchy between them. The *Muvendar* controlled the most significant agrarian regions, trade routes and towns of the Tamil region. The Cheras possessed Karur and Muziris, an ancient port on the western coast. The Cholas had a stronghold in Uraiyur and Puhar on the Coromandel coast. Likewise, the Pandyas had their capital in Madurai and had a coastal area in Korkar.

Karikala Chola, the mighty ruler among the Cholas, won in the Battle of Venni with Cheras and in the Battle of Vahaipparandalai. He reclaimed the forest land area and constructed a dam named Kallanai over the Kaveri River. The Pandyas encouraged the growth of Sangam literature. The Pandyan ruler, Nedunjeliyan, emerged victorious in the Battle of Talaiyalanganam against the Cheras and Cholas. *Patittupattu, a* compilation of ten groups of ten songs, was all about the heroic activities of the Chera chiefs. The Chera capital was Vanchi. The Cheras controlled areas of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and were the most powerful among the *Muvendar*. The *Cheras* had a navy to fight against enemies overseas. The Pugalur inscriptions also have a reference to the Chera rulers.

Fig. 5.5.1 Tamilakam in the Sangam Period

5.5.5 The Fall of the Muvendar Chera, Cholas and the Pandyas

By the middle of the third century CE, the Sangam age was considered to end. During this period, Kalabhras captured the Tamilakam from the Chera, Chola and Pandyan rulers. Rajan Gurukkal states that the *Kalabhra's* invasion and the disparities that existed in their economy hastened the end of the significant chiefdoms in Tamilakam. There is a difference of opinion among historians on the causes of the fall of the Muvendar and the end of the Sangam period. Gurukkal remarks that hardly any writing in the third century BCE mentions any chieftain associated with the period or any praise on them. Hence, he considers it the closure of the Sangam period.

5.5.6 'Dark Age' – Kalabhra Occupation

The period between, i.e., c. 300 CE and 600 CE, is known as the age of the Kalabhras. The three prominent Tamil chiefdoms- Chera, Chola and the Pandya- vanished in this period due to the occupation of Kalabhras. Hence, the early historians refer to this period as the 'dark age' or an interregnum.

The Kalabhras were tribes and peasants who rebelled against the existing social order. They revolted against granting lands to the Brahmins as they were forced to cultivate on those lands for low wages. Furthermore, the Kalabhras were considered barbarians and portrayed as evil as they killed some Brahmins and exacted taxes from them. Besides the Brahmins, they attacked the ports.

The Kalabhras, who were Buddhists by faith, gradually emerged powerful and began ruling the Tamilakam region from 3rd Century CE. to 6th Century CE. They set up an administrative system. However, their actions instigated hatred among the people towards them. It is observed from the fact that their chiefs were popularly called 'kings of Kali Age'. The Kalabhras destroyed the *Muvendars*-Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. However, later, the Pallavas, the Chalukyas of Badami and the *Pandyas* defeated the Kalabhras.

5.5.7 Brahmin Dominance

The Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers built many temples for the Brahmins during the Sangam period. Moreover, they granted the Brahmins vast land areas and presented jewellery and gold ornaments. Accordingly, they dominated other sections of society. Gradually, the Brahmins began to keep the common land as individual landholdings. Furthermore, they improved their acquaintance in agricultural affairs and mastered proficiency in the Sanskrit language. Above all, they exerted their religious influence on society.

The temples acted as the centres to provide religious education and stewards of gold presented by the people. These Namboothiri Brahmins controlled the temple and its areas, known as *Devaswom*. They were also privileged to accept the *Brahmaswam* land, which the rulers awarded. All these factors improved their position in society.

When the Chera-Chola war happened in the eleventh century, the small landholders and tenants entrusted their properties to the Brahmins. However, in their absence, the Brahmins took control of these lands and

reduced these landholders to *karalars* and *paniyalars*. They were compelled to work for the Brahmins, who became Uralar.

Brahmins knew cultivation and flood control systems and their caste divisions made them create a new form of labour that was not kinship-based, i.e., non-familial labour. It was ascertained that they handled the cultivation of low-lying wetlands with paddy. Kin labour was thus replaced by non-familial labour.

In this context of Brahmin dominance, Kalabhras made their entry to curb it. Some historians argue that the Brahmins were much affected by the Kalabhra occupation. Gurukkal, citing the example of Brahmins in Kerala who were not affected by the Kalabhra revolts, disagrees with the fact that the whole Brahmin community was adversely affected by the Kalabhras. Moreover, the entire socio-political and economic system and Brahmin supremacy led the way to the dominance of the Kulashekhara Perumal and the Second Chera 'Kingdom' in the Kerala region.

5.5.8 Tamilakam in the Post-Sangam Period

Even though the post-Sangam period is also referred to as the 'Dark Age' or an interregnum, no such gap happened in the proliferation of literary works. The most important Tamil epics and anthologies were composed between c. 200 - 600 CE. The five epics which were composed in the post Sangam period were *Silappadikaram*, *Manimekalai*, *Jivaka-Chintamani*, *Valaiya pati* and *Kundalakesi*.

Meanwhile, Jainism and Buddhism gained importance in Tamilakam. Between 600 and 900 CE, Vaishnava and Saiva saints called Alvars and Nayanars profoundly influenced Tamil literature. Many Buddhists and Jainist authors emerged during this period.

Fig. 5.5.2 Sculpture of Ilango Adikal

A collection of eighteen minor anthologies in Tamil literature was written during the Sangam period. *Patiren-kirkkanakku*, or Eighteen Ethical Works, has a remarkable influence on the culture of Tamil society. The most revered, *Tirukkural*, written by Thiruvalluvar, was one among these eighteen minor works.

The recent interpretation identifies the post-Sangam period as a transition period. From the sixth century onwards, Pallavas began to rule in the northern part of Tamil Nadu and the Pandyas in the southern part. Even though initially they patronised Jainism and Buddhism, later they were influenced by the Vedic ideas and Bhakti cults of Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Recap

- The Post-Sangam period saw shifts in polity, economy and society.
- The Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas consolidated power.
- Internal and external trade expanded.
- Jainism, Buddhism and early Bhakti movements gained prominence.
- The Kalabhras disrupted existing power structures.
- Agrarian expansion and land grants became common.
- Literary and artistic traditions evolved with new influences.
- Caste structures became more rigid over time

Objective Questions

1. Which religious movements emerged during the post-Sangam period?
2. Which are the major works in Sangam literature?
3. What are the divisions into which Sangam poems are classified according to the themes?
4. What is the term used to refer to the eco-zones of Tamilakam?
5. Which are the ecological zones into which Tamilakam is divided?
6. Mention some inland ports of Tamilakam.
7. Which are the three kinds of chiefdoms of Tamilakam?
8. Who was called the Muvendar?
9. Which Chola ruler won the Battles of Venni and Vahaipparandalai?
10. Which are the two main sources of reference for Chera rulers?
11. What was the primary cause of the fall of the Muvendar rulers, according to historians?
12. What was the Kalabhra Occupation?
13. How did the fall of the Tamil kingdoms affect the socio-political structure of the region?

Answers

1. Buddhism, Jainism and Bhakti cults
2. *Ettuthogai, Pathupattu* and *Tolkappiyam*
3. *Akam* and *Puram*
4. *Aintinai*
5. *Kurinji, palai, mullai, marutam* and *neital*
6. *Muziris, Nelcynda, Bacare, Pantar, Balita and Mantai*
7. *Kizar*, *Velir* and *Vendar*
8. The Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas
9. Karikala Chola
10. Pathitrupathu and Pugalur inscriptions
11. Kalabhra occupation
12. The Kalabhra dynasty displaced the Muvendar
13. Political fragmentation and rise of new religious influences

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of Sangam literature in understanding the polity, economy and culture of Tamilakam.
2. Explain the ecological zones ('Aintinai') of Tamilakam and their influence on the subsistence patterns of different communities.
3. Analyse the role of the Muvendar in moulding the political structure of Tamilakam.
4. Evaluate the impact of trade and exchange networks on the economy of Tamilakam during the Sangam period.
5. Critically examine the Kalabhra occupation and its consequences on Tamil society, polity and economy.

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6
UNIT

Schism in Buddhism: Hinayana and Mahayana

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be:

♦ understand the foundational principles of Buddhism

♦ made aware of the historical context of its emergence

♦ gain insights into the split in Buddhism, particularly the rise of the Mahayana and Hinayana sects

Prerequisites

Buddhism, which originated in the 6th century BCE, emerged as a response to the existing social and religious order in the Gangetic Valley. The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, laid the foundation for a new philosophical and spiritual path that would eventually spread across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

Buddhism emerged in a period of social, political and religious upheaval. The Gangetic Valley, an area that roughly corresponds to modern-day Bihar, was the heartland of Buddha's life and teachings. Buddha's teachings, focusing on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, offered a new way of life that was in contrast to the prevailing Brahmanical traditions of ritualistic sacrifices and the caste system.

During Buddha's lifetime, his influence spread mainly through the cities of Madhyadesa—a region that corresponds to modern Bihar. Major Buddhist centres such as Kapilvastu, Kusinagara, Sravasti, Lumbini, Vaishali, Pava and Rajagriha

became places of pilgrimage and learning. These cities were central to the spread of Buddhism, yet the teachings of Buddha were largely confined to this region. One reason for this limited reach was the restriction placed on Buddhist monks and disciples from crossing out of Madhyadesa during Buddha's life.

After Buddha's death, Buddhism began to spread far beyond the borders of Madhyadesa. With the patronage of rulers such as Bimbisara and Ashoka, Buddhism grew in both influence and reach. Under Ashoka, in particular, Buddhism saw not only political support but also widespread acceptance across the subcontinent, with Ashoka sending missionaries to various regions, including Southeast Asia.

The spread of Buddhism led to the establishment of Buddhist centres in new areas. Over time, however, differences in practice, interpretation of teachings and approaches to monastic life began to emerge. These differences, along with evolving social and political contexts, led to divisions within the Buddhist community.

In order to address these growing differences, various Buddhist conclaves were held by rulers and prominent monks. These conclaves were meant to resolve disagreements and set standards for Buddhist practices. However, despite these efforts, divisions continued to emerge within the monastic community. As a result, Buddhism split into different sects, leading to the creation of Hinayana (the 'Lesser Vehicle') and Mahayana (the 'Greater Vehicle') sects.

Keywords

Buddhism, Hinayana, Mahayana, Buddha, Gangetic Valley, Madhyadesa, Bimbisara, Ashoka, Buddhist sects, Buddhist Councils, Schism, Kapilvastu, Sravasti, Rajagriha, Post-Mauryan period

Discussion

### 5.6.1 The Buddhist Councils

As discussed, several Buddhist conclaves were held after the death of Buddha. The first council was held in Rajagriha under Ajatasatru, the Magadhan King and Maha Kassapa, a prominent disciple of Buddha, to preserve the Buddhist teachings. It was held immediately after the death of Buddha. The second council was held, after a century, in Vaishali to resolve differences

in the Buddhist practices of the monks. The first division in the sect happened in this council and the sect was split into 18 sub-sects.

The Mauryan king, Ashoka, was believed to be a Buddhist convert and a patron of Buddhist literature. During his reign, many stupas and Buddhist monasteries were built. The stupas in Bodhgaya, Sarnath in Bihar and Sanchi and Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh are also considered to belong to the Mauryan period. Ashoka organised the third Buddhist council under the presidency of the renowned Buddhist monk Moggaliputta Tissa at Pataliputra to reconcile the opposing claims of different sects. The council decided to send missionaries to different regions beyond the Indian subcontinent.

The fourth Buddhist council was held under the patronage of the Kushana ruler Kanishka and was presided over by Vasumitra in 72 CE at Kundalvana, Kashmir. The split among the Buddhist monks was recognised in this council.

5.6.2 Buddhism in the Post-Mauryan period

Many rock-cut caves in western Maharashtra were identified as viharas and initial shelters for monks during the rainy seasons, which later became permanent shelters for them. The worship area was the embellished chaitya caves in these viharas, containing a stupa with a memorial relic. Many icons of Buddha and Bodhisattvas are found in the Chaitya caves at Ajanta, dated 5th-6th century CE and Ellora.

Around 800 rock-cut caves were found in the parts of western Maharashtra, such as Junnar, Karle, Bedsa, Bhaja, Shelarwadi, Nasik, Kanheri, Mahad, Kanheri Kondane

and Ajanta. While Junnar has 184 caves, Kanheri has 100 caves and Nasik and Karle have 20 to 30 caves. These caves contain evidence of donative inscriptions and endowments given to the monks for sustenance.

The post-Mauryan period witnessed a remarkable development of Buddhism with the Satavahanas and western Kshatrapas patronage of Buddhism. Buddhism held a significant position among the Vakatakas. The evidence for the donations provided by the Satavahanas rulers like Gautamiputra Satkarni, his wife Balasri and his son, Vashisthiputra Pulumavi and western Kshatrapa rulers like Nahapana is found in the caves in Nasik and Karle.

Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda were the prominent centres of Buddhist art in the eastern Deccan region. Taxila, Mathura, Benaras and Nalanda were the educational centres of Buddhism.

5.6.3 'Schism' in Buddhism

After the death of Buddha, his followers began to search for an accurate interpretation of the teachings of Buddha. The Theravada sect, centred at Kaushambi, followed the Pali Canon. They followed the early Buddhist tradition and claimed adherence to the original Buddhist teaching. The Sarvastivada sect from Mathura moved to the Gandhara region and central Asia and continued in Sanskrit or 'hybrid Sanskrit'. Gandhari Prakrit was also used to write the canon.

The changes in the needs and context of the societies demanded the reinterpretation of the teachings. The split was recognised by the Fourth Buddhist Council, organised by the Kushana ruler, Kanishka, in the early second century CE. in Kashmir. However, the authenticity of the council remains speculative.

Romila Thapar argues it as a schism beyond any sectarian splits. Thapar discusses that the cause behind the weakening of the Buddhist structure lies in doctrinal differences and the difficulty in accommodating the needs of people from different economic backgrounds.

There exists a debate on the emergence of Mahayana reflecting the schism in Buddhism. However, recent interpretations, like the argument of Heinz Bechert were that the schism in Buddhism is not as similar as the schism in other religions. Among Buddhists, the split happened based on monastic discipline, not on a doctrinal basis. Moreover, there was no sudden split that happened with the emergence of Mahayana.

5.6.3.1 Rise of Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism emerged during c. 200 BCE–300 CE in the Andhra region. Mahayanists refer to Mahayana as the greater vehicle and Hinayana as the lesser or inferior vehicle, which is not accepted by the latter sect. Mahayana Buddhism finds its origin in the Mahasanghika school.

Some Buddhists consider that while Hinayana continued to follow the original teachings of the Buddha, the Mahayana added new interpretations in it. Hinayana Buddhism spread in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other parts of South-East Asia. Mahayana Buddhism was more concentrated in Central Asia and East Asia.

The Mahayana doctrine was also influenced by Buddhist thinkers such as Nagarjuna. He was a convert to Buddhism and adopted the doctrine of Voidness (*Shunyata*), which focuses on emptiness and considers the surroundings as an illusion. The Void was the attainment of *nirvana*, which a Buddhist sought to achieve.

Mahayana Buddhism interacted with other religions such as Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism and adopted the concept of 'suffering saviour'. They considered Buddha Maitreya the saviour of the true doctrine and *Bodhisattva* to save humankind through his despair. Mahayana Buddhism revered Bodhisattvas virtually as deities.

The Chinese travellers, Faxian and Xuanzang, visited India and mentioned that the Mahayana and non-Mahayana saints were staying together in the same monasteries. While Mahayana Buddhism gave priority to icon worship of Bodhisattvas, the symbol worship distinguished the Hinayana faith. Upinder Singh argues that Mahayana was a sectarian movement initially, or it did not create any radical schism in the sangha.

Mahayana sutras were composed in the second century BCE and translated to Chinese at the end of the century. The main content of these texts was the teaching of Buddha. Sanskrit was used in many Mahayana texts. The major Mahayana Sutras are Prajnaparamita Sutras and *Ashtasahasriha*. The writers such as Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga and Vasubandhu mention Mahayana in their writings.

The archaeological evidence, inscriptions and Chinese traveller accounts refer to Mahayana Buddhism. The Bodhisattva of 'wisdom being' concept is highly significant in Mahayana. Buddha was born to be an ascetic and adorned Buddhahood later.

In their early tradition, Buddhists already followed the idea of *Bodhisattva*. While the earlier tradition considers the *Nibbana* attainment and arhat as their chief goal, for Mahayana, it is to follow *Bodhisattva* and attain Buddhahood.

The *arhat* aspires to attain *Nibbana* and disappear from the samsara cycle. The Bodhisattva is the one who attains great wisdom and engages with the world to support others to achieve *Bodhisattva*. *Maha-karuna*, or Great compassion towards others, has to be an essential quality of a Bodhisattva.

The practices to attain Buddhahood were not that different from the early traditions. The perfections to be attained on the path to Bodhisattva were called *paramitas*. Initially, there were six paramitas and later raised to ten.

The paramitas are listed below;

- generosity or *dana*
- good conduct or *shila*
- patient forbearance or *kshanti*
- mental strength or *virya*
- meditation or *dhyana*
- wisdom or *prajna*
- skilfulness or *upaya-kaushalya*
- determination or *pranidhana*
- power or *bala*
- knowledge or *jnana*

The early Buddhist tradition in the Pali canon regards Buddha as a mere human being and a guide. It is considered that Buddha became arhat through the attainment of enlightenment. Upinder Singh argues that Buddha was a *mahapurusha* or great man and a teacher who received salvation. There was only one Buddha and his teachings prevailed at a time. The other one appears after the previous teachings perish. After his death,

Fig. 5.6.1 Ruins of the Nalanda Mahavihara

a Buddha disappears from the samsara cycle.

In the Mahayana ideal, there was a concept of transcendent Buddhas who attain *Nibbana* and *Bodhisattvas* who engage with the samsara. Maitreya, Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri were some of the Bodhisattvas.

The texts of two prominent Buddhist schools, Madhyamaka and Yogachara, represented Mahayana philosophy. Nagarjuna (2nd century CE), the founder of the Madhyamaka school, wrote the work Mula-Madhyamaka-Karika (Root Verses on the Middle). One of the central themes of the work is the idea of *shunyata*, or emptiness. The Abhidharma texts mention dharmas as the fundamental components of mind and matter, which constitute the universe. Some later Madhyamaka school thinkers were Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka, Chandrakirti and Shantideva. The Sutra texts, *Samdhinirmochana* and the *Lankavatara* deal with the Yogachara school, which associates meditation with attaining the highest goal.

While the earlier Buddhist view mentions six types of consciousness, Yogachara adds two more levels- the defiled mind and store consciousness. Bodhisattva attains clarity and knowledge by washing away defilement and illusion. Yogachara school is presumed to have been founded by Maitreyanatha, a monk. Asanga and Vasubandhu belong to the 4th century, Sthiramati of the 6th century and Dharmakirti of the 7th century were the prominent advocates of the Yogachara school.

Recap

♦ Buddhist councils

♦ The split among the Buddhist sects and the emergence of Mahayana and Hinayana sects

♦ Adherence to doctrines of monastic discipline

♦ Mahayana sutras- *Ashtasahasriha* and *Prajnaparamita sutras*

♦ Bodhisatva idea- 'Buddhahood'- attaining *Nibbana*- becoming an *arhat*- away from Samsara cycle – wisdom-*mahakaruna* ideal

♦ Impact of Mahayana Buddhism on the prevalent practice

♦ Images of Buddha and Bodhisatva in the shrines

♦ Mahayana schools- Madhyamaka and Yogachara

Objective Questions

1. Who was the prominent disciple of Buddha who presided over the first Buddhist council?

2. Which Mauryan ruler organised the third Buddhist council?

3. Which Buddhist council recognised the schism in Buddhism?

4. Mention the name of some of the rock-cut caves to provide evidence of donative inscriptions to the monks?

5. Which are the major centres of Buddhist art in eastern Deccan?

6. Name some educational centres of Buddhism.

7. When and where did Mahayana Buddhism emerge?

8. Which school did Mahayanists belong to?

9. Which are the places in which Hinayana Buddhism was prevalent?

10. Which Buddhist thinker was influential in Mahayana Buddhism?

11. What is the central doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism?

12. Which Buddhist council is traditionally associated with the finalisation of the Buddhist canon?

13. Which text is one of the important Mahayana sutras?

14. Who is a Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism?

15. What does the term 'Arhat' mean in Buddhism?

Answers

1. Maha Kassapa

2. Ashoka

3. Fourth

4. Junnar, Karle, Bedsa, Bhaja, Shelarwadi, Nasik, Kanheri, Mahad, Kanheri Kondane and Ajanta

5. Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda

6. Taxila, Mathura, Benaras and Nalanda

7. 200 BCE–300 CE Andhra region

8. Mahasanghika school

9. Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other parts of south-east Asia

10. Nagarjuna

11. The Bodhisattva ideal, aiming for Buddhahood to help all beings attain liberation.

12. The Fourth Buddhist Council

13. The Prajnaparamita Sutra

14. A Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who stays in samsara to help others.

15. An Arhat is a person who has achieved enlightenment and liberation.

Assignments

1. Describe the main causes and consequences of the first Buddhist schism during the reign of Ashoka. How did the differences in the interpretation of the Buddha's teachings lead to the formation of different sects?

2. Explain the rise of Mahayana Buddhism in the post-Mauryan period. How did it differ from early Buddhism and what were its major philosophical contributions?

3. Assess the role of the Buddhist councils in preserving and transmitting the teachings of Buddhism. What were the major debates and decisions made during these councils?

4. Briefly describe the features of Buddhist literature.

5. Discuss the impact of the schism in Buddhism on the spread of Buddhist teachings across Asia. How did the differences between early Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism influence its reception in regions like Central Asia, China and Southeast Asia?

Suggested Reading

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6

BLOCK

Polity and Society: Guptas and Later

1 UNIT

Gupta State and Society

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ explain the emergence of the Gupta Empire

♦ familiar with the administrative structure of the Gupta Empire

♦ describe the socio-economic developments under Gupta rule

♦ discuss the caste system, gender roles and the status of women during the Gupta era

Prerequisites

In the previous block we explored the transformative period following the decline of the Mauryan Empire. This era was marked by the emergence of numerous regional powers and smaller states that significantly influenced the political, social and cultural dynamics of ancient India. Over time, many smaller states either lost prominence or were absorbed by larger political entities as more consolidated powers emerged. The subsequent rise of the Gupta Empire brought about a significant historical transition. The Guptas established a centralised and expansive empire that not only unified vast territories but also introduced enduring changes in governance, art, culture and socio-economic conditions. The unit ahead delves into the foundations of the Gupta polity, the administrative systems they developed and the socio-economic transformations under their rule, which shaped Indian history for centuries.

Keywords

Gana Sangha, Lineage, *Dharmasastras*, *Varnasrama*, Huna invasion, Inscriptions, Brahmana, Slavery

Discussion

6.1.1 The Gupta State and Polity

The Gupta empire was one of the largest political and military empires in ancient India. The Guptas ruled between the 4th and 6th centuries CE over most of Northern India. The history of the Guptas is mostly reconstructed based on epigraphic and numismatic records, especially the political history. There have been debates about the origin of the lineage of Guptas and some scholars have claimed that they were Vaishyas based on the mention of the name Gupta in *Manusmriti* and *Vishnu Purana*. H.C.Raychaudhuri, S.R.Goyal and some other historians are of the view that they are Brahmanas based on the matrimonial alliances with the Brahmana Vakatakas. But some other scholars have argued that they are Kshatriyas based on their matrimonial alliances with the Licchavis and Nagas who were known to be of Kshatriya lineage. There is no consensus about the lineage as of now among the historians. Similarly, we don't have enough information to assess the geographical origin of the Guptas. Earlier it was thought that the Guptas began ruling a small principality in Magadha but later it was argued that the Western Ganges Plain was their base area.

6.1.1.1 The Gupta Lineage

The Gupta dynasty came into prominence after the accession of Chandragupta I to the throne. But some genealogical records mention Maharaja Gupta and Maharaja Ghatotkacha as the first two rulers, but there is no indication about whether they were independent rulers or subordinates of other kings. Maharaja Gupta is sometimes identified with Srigupta who, according to the Chinese pilgrim I-Tsing, built a temple in Mrigsikhavana for the pilgrims, but as he has stated that he is mentioning "tradition merely handed down from ancient times by old men" there is no verification about its veracity. Inscriptions have given evidence that the Guptas started their roots as an empire from 319 or 320 CE. Their prominent rulers have contributed in various ways to make the empire flourish politically, economically and culturally.

Chandragupta I (309-335 CE)

Chandragupta I was the first important ruler of the Gupta dynasty who developed it from a mere principality and sowed the seeds of the empire. He assumed the title *Maharajadhiraja* and was married to a princess Kumaradevi, a princess from Lichcchavi family who were a prominent *gana sangha* based on North Bihar and later associated with the kingdom of Nepal.

Inscriptions during the time of Samudragupta have used the epithet, "Lichchhavi Dauhitra" (grandson of the Lichcchavis) which evidently attests to this matrimonial alliance. His marriage was immortalised through the coins issued which had the standing figure of the king offering a ring or bracelet to his spouse on the obverse and on the reverse there is the legend of Lichcchavayah and the Goddess seated on the lion. His rule extended over the Ganges heartland based on Magadha, Saketa and Prayaga, which includes parts of modern day Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal.

Samudragupta (335-375 CE)

Chandragupta I was succeeded by his son Samudragupta. He was one of the ablest rulers of the dynasty and was given the sobriquet 'Indian Napoleon' by Vincent Smith, based on his great military conquests, known from Prayaga Prasasti, otherwise called the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, composed by his minister and poet Harisena. The fascinating thing about the inscription is that it contains the information of three different rulers from three different dynasties. Apart from Samudragupta's eulogy, it contains the ethical assertions of Ashoka as it was evidently used at first as his pillar edict and later it was also inscribed by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir.

Apart from following an aggressive policy of conquest, he also put effort into maintaining healthy relations with his bordering and foreign states. There is mention in a later Chinese source that a Sinhala king Meghavarna from Sri Lanka sent presents and requested his permission to build a Buddhist monastery at Bodh Gaya, which he obliged and the magnificent structure was known as 'Mahabodhi Sangharama'. Though he was a follower of Hinduism, he tolerated other religions and allowed them to flourish. He was also known to be a patron of arts and literature and he is portrayed with a *Veena* (lute) in his hand in the gold coins issued by him indicating his interest in music and he is also called 'Kaviraja' showing his interest in poetry as well. He is also one of the rulers who performed the famous horse sacrifice known as *Aswamedha* which is often seen as an indicator of a ruler's interest in *digvijaya* or paramountcy. There were coins issued showing a horse standing before a sacrificial post on the obverse and on the reverse there is the queen and the mention of the legend, 'Ashwamedha Parakrama'.

Ramagupta

Samudragupta was succeeded by his son, Ramagupta, who was defeated humiliatingly by a Saka ruler in war. It is alleged that he was cowardly enough to be ready to surrender even his wife Dhruvadevi to the Saka ruler after the defeat, but she was saved by the intervention of his brother Chandragupta II who killed the Saka ruler. He was later killed by his brother, who ascended the throne after him and is said to have made Dhruvadevi as his queen. Ramagupta's defeat story is mentioned in the lost drama by Vishakadutta- 'Devichandraguptam', fragments of which are preserved in a later work, *Natyadarpana*.

Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya) (375-415 CE)

Chandragupta II was Samudragupta's son by Dattadevi. He was popularly known by the epithet Vikramaditya and also used 'Parama-Bhagavata'. He followed a policy of conquests as well as matrimonial alliances which helped him consolidate his position in the empire already strengthened under the able guidance of his father. His major campaign was against the Sakas which is mentioned in his coins and some inscriptions and was commemorated by issuing silver coins. This campaign helped him extend the Gupta power to the fertile regions of Malwa and Western India and also access to the western sea ports which led to the tremendous growth to overseas commerce.

The famous Mehrauli iron pillar inscription in Sanskrit, mentions a ruler called Chandra and some historians feel that it is a reference to Chandragupta II. It

also mentions his campaign in Punjab and that he conquered a combination of armies of his enemies in Vangadesa or Bengal. He made a matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas by marrying off his daughter Prabhavati to Rudrasena II Vakataka, the Vakataka region being of strategic importance geographically to the Guptas as it lay in the way of the dominion of Sakas and also gave Guptas access to the Deccan. Five years after the marriage the prince died and because he only had a very young son, the queen became the virtual ruler.

Chandragupta II was also known to be an able administrator; he created another capital city, Ujjain apart from the earlier Pataliputra. He divided his empire into provinces called Desas which were subdivided into Pradesas. His coins indicate that he worshipped Goddess Lakshmi. He was well known for his patronage of arts and literature. Ujjain became a centre of literary activities as well. Sanskrit was given a boost during his times. The court of Chandragupta was adorned by illustrious scholars, artists and writers like Kalidas often called the 'Indian Shakespeare', Amarasimha,Vararuchi who were part of the legendary Navaratnas or the nine gems in the court. It was during the reign of Chandragupta II that Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien visited India and left an elaborate account of the life of people.

Kumaragupta (415-455 CE)

Chandragupta II was succeeded by Kumaragupta. He issued various types of coins, like the archer type, swordsman type, peacock type etc and he issued silver coins for circulation in Western India. He also issued an *Aswamedha* coin to commemorate the performance of horse sacrifice. It was during his time that the external threat from the Northwest started to appear. He took up the title of *Vyagra bala parakrama* which meant displaying the prowess of a tiger which is interpreted by some historians as him trying to penetrate the tiger infested forest beyond the Narmada.

Skandagupta (455-467 CE)

Skandagupta, the successor of Kumaragupta resisted a Hun invasion as attested to by the Bhitari pillar inscriptions. Skandagupta also followed a policy of religious toleration like his predecessors. Although he was a devotee of Lord Vishnu, he did not interfere in any religious practices of his subjects. He issued three types of gold coins, that is, archer type, Lakshmi type and horseman type. Silver coins were issued for use in Western India and Central India.

After the invasion of Huns, he had to use alloys of gold and silver to issue coins. There have been debates about how successful his resistance against the Hunas was. Vincent Smith opined that the empire of Skandagupta succumbed to the repeated Huna attacks. It was during the reign of Baladitya II that there was a second Huna invasion. Historians like R.K.Mookerji and R.C.Majumdar have also praised Skandagupta's successful resistance against the Hunas. The successors of Skandagupta were weak compared to him; this slowly led to the disintegration of the empire which was paralysed by frequent foreign invasions and internal aggressions.

6.1.1.2 Administration

The Gupta kings were known to be able administrators and had a strong central government, but there was also a fair amount of local control. The king was at

the apex of the administration and adopted pompous titles such as *Parameshvara*, *Maharajadhiraja*, *Parama Bhattaraka* etc and they also used epithets often ascribing God-like characteristics to themselves like *Parama-daivata, Parama-bhagavata* etc. The Gupta administration had similarities with the Mauryan bureaucracy.

The *Mantri* (chief minister) was the head of the civil administration and the commander in chief was called the *Mahabaladikrita.* There was a council called *Mantriparishad* consisting of princes, high officials and feudatories and its duty was to advise the king on important matters. The great poet Kalidasa has referred to *Mantriparishad* in his work and, according to him, *Kanchuki* or Chamberlain acted as an agent between the king and the council. He has also mentioned three kinds of ministers who were in charge of foreign policy, finance and justice who were expected to be experts in their area of work. And he has also said that the offices were often hereditary.

Different civil officials, like *Rajapurusha, Rajaputra, Rajamatya, Mahasamanta* were appointed to look after the administration of the state. Other high imperial officers include *Mahadandanayaka* who was the General and *Mahapratihara* who was the Chief of the palace guards. The commander in chief controlled a staff of subordinate officers such as *Mahashvapati* (chief of cavalry), *Mahapilupati* (officer in charge of elephants), *Senapati* and *Baladikrta.* The Gupta records also mention *Sandhivigrahika* who is similar to a modern foreign minister and was in charge of the conduct of relations with other states, including starting the war, concluding alliances and treaties.

The empire was divided into provinces called *Deshas* or *Bhuktis* headed by *Uparikas* directly appointed by the kings who were also in charge of district administration and town board. The provinces were subdivided into districts or *Vishayas* headed by *Vishayapatis*. There were councils in each *vishayas* to help with the administration of *Vishayapatis*. The *Vishayas* were again divided into *Vithis* and *Vithis* into villages. There is evidence about local administration available from inscriptions; accordingly there was a municipal board, *Adisthana Adhikarana* which had representation from major local communities; the *Nagarasresthi*, who was the guild president, *Sarthavaha*, the chief merchant, *Prathama Kulika,* who was the chief artisan and the chief scribe, *Prathama Kayastha* were among its members.

Villages were headed by the village headman, called *Gramadhyaksa* or *Gramapati* and there were other officials called *Dutas* to assist them. Above the village administration there was a rural board, *Asthakuladikarana*, a board of eight members comprising village elders *Mahattaras*, village headman and the householders, *Kutumbin*. The land transactions in villages were controlled by such supervising bodies and they also settled the village disputes with the help of *Grama-Vriddhas* or *Mahattaras*(village elders). Apart from this, there were *Simakaramakaras*, or boundary-makers, *Lekhaka* or the scribes and *Dandika*, the chastiser.

The town administration was under the control of the council called *Paura* headed by the mayor, called *Purapala* or *Nagararakshaka*. The *Paura* also included the president of the city corporation, chief representative of the guild of merchants, a representative of the artisans and the chief

accountant. There was also the *Parishad* to govern the city. There was a special officer called *Avasthika* who acted as the superintendent of *Dharamshalas*, the resting place for travellers. As opposed to Mauryas, whose city committee was appointed by the government, the Guptas allowed it to function as a body of local representatives. The most important source of revenue was the *Udranga* or the land tax, *Uparika* which was the tax levied on cultivators who had no proprietary rights on soil, *Vaishtika* or forced labour and *Dasaparadha* or fines for offences committed. There are some inscriptions that mention villages being made tax free.

The governors of the provinces were usually appointed from the members of the royal family. There were assistant officials appointed for the governors called *Kumaramatyas*. The *Kumaramatyas* were part of the personal staff of the emperor and they served as the link between the central and provincial administration under the Guptas. The *Kumaramatyas* also functioned as part of the revenue department. There was also a post called *Ayuktas*, who were also high ranking officers like *Kumaramatyas* and had the task of restoring the wealth of kings conquered by the emperor and also was in charge of districts and metropolitan towns.

The strength of Gupta army cannot be properly gleaned from the records available and it is known that the king's standing army was supplemented by the forces supplied by the feudatories. The Guptas did not enjoy a dominant force of elephants and horses which also led to the increasing dependence on feudatories which led them to wield considerable authority on the fringes of the empire. Horse archery was a prominent part in military tactics and thus the cavalry came to the forefront of the military, pushing the chariots into the background. There is also mention in the records about *Bhatashvapati* who was the commander of infantry and cavalry. *Ranabhandarika* was in charge of the military exchequer. *Dandapasadhikaranika* was the chief of the police and *Vinayastithi Sthapaka* was the minister of law and order. The army was paid in cash and there was a form of tax called *Senabhakta*, which meant it was the responsibility of the people to feed the army whenever it passed through the countryside. The needs of the army were looked after by an officer called *Ranabhandagarika*. *Vishti* or forced labour was practised as part of the royal army. There is also scarce mention in some inscriptions about officials called *Chamupa* and *Vanapala*, but there is no detail available about their exact function.

The judicial system was clearly defined and demarcated as the civil and criminal law. Theft and adultery came under the criminal law whereas disputes regarding properties formed the body of civil law. Laws were based on the varna hierarchy. Kalidasa has mentioned a court called *Dharmasthana* which may have existed in the capital of the king. He also refers to *Dharmadhikaras* which meant that those associated with the judiciary were required to be well-versed in the scriptures of *dharma* and had to maintain the order in the states. The king acted as the head of the justice department and he decided on all disputes and punishments. He was assisted by the *Mahadandanayaka* or the Chief justice. Inscriptions mention an official called *Mahakshapatalika* who was probably the Great keeper of records. *Uparikas* and *Visayapatis* were in charge of their respective territorial jurisdiction. Likewise the guilds of merchants and artisans were governed by their own laws.

Fa-hsien, the Chinese pilgrim who visited during the Gupta period, reported about the absence of Capital Punishment, but this view has been refuted by historians who have pointed out that other records show that there were very harsh punishments. For instance, in 'Mudrarakshasa' of Vishakadutta he has described the method of executions in the Gupta period, one of which was the infliction of death by elephants. There is also mention about other cruel punishments like the scooping out of the eyes of the condemned person.

6.1.2 Socio-economic Conditions

6.1.2.1 Development of the Economy

The comparatively efficient system of administration during the Gupta period gave stability to the economy. Agriculture was given special attention by the government and facilities were provided by the state to encourage it as it was the economic base of society. *Amarakosha* and *Brihatsamhita* mention different types of crops like rice, barley, wheat, peas and oilseeds. Irrigation was made available to the agriculturists and wells were also constructed throughout the country. Public works were undertaken by the state and the case of Sudarsana Lake is often mentioned as an example for the same. It was built by Chandragupta Maurya, but when it burst in the province of Saurashtra, the repair was undertaken by Governor Parnadat and his son Chakrapala during the reign of Skandagupta.

Industries flourished during the period and some of them were given patronage by the rulers themselves. The mention

of weapons in the inscriptions and the case of Mehrauli iron pillar points to iron industries. Ship building industry developed during the Gupta period and it helped in trade and conquest as well. There was also a flourishing silk industry as seen from a reference to a prosperous guild of silk weavers in Dasapura and it is even said that the Roman ladies of those days were much attracted to Indian silk clothing. Various inscriptions have mentioned the existence of guilds of different types.

Trade flourished both internally and externally and the main articles of internal trade were cloths, grains, spices, salt and precious stones. Inland trade happened through roads as well as rivers. Trade with Rome seems to have happened through the ports of Kalyan, Chaul, Broach and Cambay in Western India and Tamralipti was an important port in the east.

There was also trade with China, Sumatra and Java. In the South, Ghantasala, Kaveripattanam(Puhar), Tondai and Muziris were important ports. Lighthouses were built and maintained by the state during the period to keep the sea routes safe and free from piracy. In external trade, important export items were mainly pearls, ivory, perfumes, indigo, coconuts and import items were gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, corals, dates and horses.

6.1.2.2 Social Conditions

Fa-hsien travelled extensively to visit Buddhist sites in India . He has stated that the Gupta administration was liberal and they did not interfere in the internal affairs of the people. He has stated that the public servants were paid in cash and there were *Dharamshalas* for the travelling public to stay. He has also praised the beauty of the

city Pataliputra where people of Buddhist sects lived and propagated their ideas and Buddhist monks were respected. The city has two important Buddhist monasteries and according to him about six thousand monks lived there.

Despite all the glorious achievements ascribed to the Guptas, it cannot be forgotten that the caste system got more rigid during their times. The Hindus were divided into four castes: *Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. There was also the following of the *Varnasrama dharma* during the period and there was four *ashramas* or stages of life that men of a Hindu household had to pass through namely *Brahmacharya* or student life, *Grihastha* or householder, *Vanaprastha* or forest dweller and *Sanyasa* (renouncer). The king was considered as the upholder of the social order and had to prevent mixing of castes according to *Varnashrama dharma* but some texts have mentioned how different castes indulged in occupations not assigned to them. Varahamihira says in his *Brihad Samhita* that there were different quarters in the city assigned to different castes. The *Brahmanas* sometimes became soldiers, traders and even did agriculture.The *Sudras* sometimes occupied the role of trader, artisan and agriculturist.

The *Brahmanas* and *Kshatriyas* were given the highest status in society. The relation between the two higher castes was usually cordial. *Brahmanas* were divided into different *Shakhas* or classes based on the Vedas they studied like *Yajurvedin Brahmanas* or *Rigveda Brahmanas*. There were also the *Yogi Brahmanas* who practised *Dhyana* or contemplation for the purpose of achieving *Moksha* or salvation and self-fulfillment. There was also a section of *Brahmanas* called *Munis*

who practised extreme penance and their main concern in life was devotion to God.

The *kshatriyas* also gained respect as they were also *Dvija* or the twice born caste and enjoyed the privilege of *Upanayana* or sacred thread ceremony just like the *Brahmanas* and could also study Vedas. The *Vaishyas*, though not as highly respected as the first two castes, still enjoyed privileges. The *Sudras*, according to *Varnasrama dharma,* were supposed to be the servants of the twice born but it was not fully put in practice. Some of the *smritis* also allowed them to be traders, artisans and agriculturists. Many of them also became soldiers in the army. Then there was the section called outcastes which included *Chandalas* who performed the task of carrying unclaimed dead bodies and executing criminals.

There were also tribes like the *Pulindas, Sabaras* and *Kiratas* who lived in the forest of the Vindhyas and inscriptional evidence suggests that some of these areas were conquered which may have led to a change in lifestyle and status for the tribes. Some of these tribes are mentioned as 'mlechhas' and it is mentioned that they have been incorporated as a caste and even became participants in origin myths of some dynasties.

Women were required to live under the protection of a male family member at every stage which was prescribed in the *Smriti* texts as well. They were idealised in literature to conform to the male ideals, reducing them to a subordinated position in reality. Parents had to arrange for the marriage of the girl before she attained maturity. Upper caste women had the right to education but could not study the Vedas. They were not allowed to enter any professions. Various scholars have debated whether widow remarriage was allowed

as sources vary. The *Sati* system had begun but was not the norm. Only a small number of women could move away from the 'norms' of society and choose a life different from the ideal house holding life prescribed in the texts of the period. Few of them chose to become nuns and some became courtesans or joined performing groups. A woman was generally expected to serve her husband during his lifetime and the husband had complete authority over his wife. Men could remarry easily, citing reasons such as his wife being stupid, or could not bear children or if she bore only girls.

Women had limited access to property and inheritance and the norms for it varied according to caste, class or region. Though *Yajnavalkya Smriti* recognised the right to inherit property, most texts are silent on the matter, so there was no conclusive evidence to assess the conditions that actually existed. It is to be noted that there were differences in the *Smriti* text on matters regarding women. For instance, *Manu Smriti* from the earlier period condemns the practice of *Niyoga* where the widow had the right to get a son through the brother of her deceased husband, but *Yajnavalkya* does not condemn it and it seems to have formulated the laws according to the changing conditions in the Gupta period. Social practices differed as there were both matrilineal and patriarchal systems existing during the times. There were also changes in the treatment of women based on the social and professional background of the families.

When it came to marriages, endogamy was preferred. But *Anuloma* marriages or inter-caste marriages where the bride was of a lower caste and the groom of a higher caste often took place. But as the Gupta period progressed, the inter-caste marriages dwindled in number, but still continued for some centuries. *Pratiloma* marriages or marriages where the bride is from a higher caste and the groom is from a lower caste were considered taboo. There is also evidence to suggest that there were cross-cousin marriages among some social groups to maintain the caste purity and status quo, but marriages within certain degrees of relationship were prohibited. Vatsyayana, who wrote the famous *Kamasutra,* considers the *Gandharva* form of marriage as the ideal as it was based on love. It was the kind of marriage where a couple who are in love can start living together without the need for anyone's consent including their parents. *Dharmasastra* texts frown upon marriage with men of humble birth, those who are very old or with men addicted to gambling. Joint families were the norm and *Smriti* texts disapproved of the partition of families.

There was the existence of slavery in society and they were drawn commonly from lower castes. The *Dharmasastras* of the period mention the treatment of the slaves and there is also mention of hired labour, indicating that the slavery that existed was not as wide as the other areas of the world. The *Brahmanas* generally did not become slaves, according to *Katyayana Dharmasastra*. Prisoners of war, bonded labourers in debt, children of slave women and also a *Ksatriya* or *Vaisya* apostate who revoked their vow of asceticism/renunciation also were made slaves according to sources. Though a large number of slaves were used in domestic work, caste restrictions prevented the untouchable castes from being employed in the same and were reduced to a class of permanent landless labourers as well. During acute famine, people voluntarily sold themselves as slaves to the rich.

Recap

- Gupta Empire rose as a significant political and military power from the 4th to 6th century
- Debate exists on Gupta lineage: Vaishya, Kshatriya, or Brahmana origins
- Chandragupta I established the empire; his marriage to Kumaradevi strengthened alliances
- Samudragupta, the "Indian Napoleon," expanded the empire through conquests and diplomacy
- Chandragupta II strengthened trade and culture; his court hosted the *Navaratnas*
- Administration included central government, provinces, districts and local councils
- Revenue came from land tax, forced labour and trade tariffs
- Military used cavalry, infantry, archery and regional feudatories for war efforts
- Trade flourished through ports in eastern and western India, boosting commerce
- Social hierarchy solidified the caste system and *varnasrama dharma*
- Women had restricted rights in education, property and marriage; practices like sati rose
- Buddhism coexisted with Hinduism, with Buddhist sites flourishing, noted by Fa-hsien
- Economic stability fostered agriculture, industries and public works
- Pataliputra and Ujjain became cultural, trade and governance centers
- Slavery existed but was limited, often involving lower castes or war captives
- The empire declined after Huna invasions and weak successors following Skandagupta

Objective Questions

1. Who was the first important ruler of the Gupta empire?
2. Who was called 'Indian Napoleon' by the historian Vincent Smith?

3. Who was the Gupta ruler whose court was adorned by the 'Navaratnas' or the Nine gems?

4. Which Gupta ruler successfully resisted the invasion of the Hunas?

5. Who was the Chinese pilgrim who visited India during the Gupta period?

6. What were the four ashramas prescribed for the upper caste Hindu male?

7. Who was the author of the Allahabad pillar inscription which describes the exploits of Samudragupta?

8. Which *Dharmasastra* text took a more liberal approach compared to *Manu Smriti* based on changes in the Gupta period?

9. What was the term used for the council that looked after the town administration?

10. Who was the Sri Lankan king who sought permission to build a monastery and sent presents to Samudragupta?

Answers

1. Chandragupta I
2. Samudragupta
3. Chandragupta II Vikramaditya
4. Skandagupta
5. Fa-hsien

6. *Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*
7. Harisena
8. *Yajnavalkya Smriti*
9. Paura
10. Meghavarna

Assignments

1. Discuss the emergence of the Gupta Empire.
2. Discuss the administrative structure of the Gupta Empire and compare it with the Mauryan administration.

3. How did the Gupta administration contribute to the stability and development of the economy during their rule? Provide examples.

4. Analyse the condition of women during the Gupta period

5. Assess the significance of the cultural and literary contributions of the Gupta period, citing examples of art, literature and architecture.

6. Explain the contributions of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II to the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta Empire.

7. Discuss how the caste system was consolidated during the Gupta period. How did this affect social mobility?

8. Analyse the Gupta Empire's foreign relations and trade networks. How did these contribute to the empire's prosperity?

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2 UNIT

Golden Age: Myth or Reality?

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ explain the debates surrounding the concept of the Gupta period as a "Golden Age"

♦ explore the developments in art, literature, architecture, sculpture and science during the Gupta period

♦ describe the growth of Hinduism and its influence on religion, society and culture

♦ discuss the coexistence and patronage of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism under Gupta rulers

Prerequisites

The Gupta Empire, as discussed in the previous unit, marked a turning point in Indian history, with its rise and consolidation setting the stage for a golden era in politics, culture and society. Beginning as a small principality in the 4th century CE, the empire expanded to encompass much of northern India under the rulers like Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. Their strategic conquests and diplomatic alliances laid the foundation for a period of peace and prosperity that would influence Indian civilisation for centuries. This unit delves into the historical, cultural and socio-economic framework of the Gupta period, often described as a "Golden Age." The discussion highlights the significant advancements in administration, trade, art, literature and science, alongside the social dynamics that defined the era. While the Guptas were instrumental in fostering cultural achievements and religious tolerance, the period also saw increasing caste rigidity and socio-economic disparities. Through an exploration of the cultural developments and religious influences of the Gupta Empire, this unit provides an in-depth understanding of its lasting legacy and the debates surrounding its classification as a "golden period."

Keywords

Golden age, Classical period, Brahmanism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Kalidasa, Puranas, Ajanta, Buddhism, Jainism

Discussion

The Gupta period was called the 'Golden Age' by some scholars who followed the nationalist historiography in their writings. It was mainly due to the growth of art, literature, religion and culture during the period. The upsurge in cultural activities was often linked to the flourishing economy during the Gupta period as well. Scholars have looked at how there were particularly impressive standards achieved in the cultural field which continued to influence the later periods as well. The period is also called an age of 'Brahmanical renaissance' due to the patronage given by the Guptas to Hinduism through building of temples, land grants etc. All these developments have been widely discussed and debated and there are many polarised opinions about whether the epithet golden age can be used for the period or whether the term itself is obsolete as well.

The period has been compared to the 'Augustan age' which was a period of cultural and literary resurgence in Rome when Emperor Augustus spent a significant amount of money on artistic activities. It has also been compared to the 'Periclean age' in Greece when political hegemony, economy and culture flourished and Athens became a centre of learning and art. The general meaning of the term, 'golden age' is a time of peace, prosperity and happiness and when cultural activities reach their zenith. This is precisely the reason why some scholars criticise the term as they are not sure that all these developments will reach the grass root level and will be felt by all the population during the particular period and area.

To look at the reasons for the naming of the period, we need to examine the cultural developments of the period.

6.2.1 Religion

The Gupta rulers were followers of Hinduism but tolerated and patronised religions like Buddhism and Jainism. The period preceding the Gupta period saw the decline of the Vedic Brahmanism and the rise of Puranic Hinduism. Puranic Hinduism emerged by incorporating local sects and cults into the Hindu pantheon and thus absorbed diverse groups of people into the religion.

Puranic Hinduism emerged with the composition of the texts called Puranas that were composed around the 3rd Century CE. to the 4th Century CE. The growth of Puranic Hinduism is also closely tied to the land grants called *Brahmadeyas* given to the *Brahmanas*, who helped in the assimilation of local people and practices in the cult of Hinduism as well.

There were also changes in the rituals and there were more collective modes of worship and image worship in temples with the increase in the proliferation of the same. There was also the beginning of the pilgrimages to holy places of worship which are mentioned in the Puranas as well. The three main groups of Puranic Hinduism that emerged were Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism, all of them with increased absorption of local cults and practices during the period.

Vaishnavism has its roots in the Vedic period, where there is mention of Vishnu as a God. Vaishnavism, like the other cults, assimilated local cults and practices into its fold, which included Narayana, Jagannatha etc. The ten popular incarnations of Vishnu are seen by some scholars as the proof of the inclusion of local cults into the fold of Vaishnavism. The attempt to include Buddha as one of the incarnations is also indicated as an effort to include Buddhists by some scholars. Vaishnavism was popularised through the two most important incarnations of Vishnu, namely Rama and Krishna. Rama gained prominence through the epic *Ramayana* and Krishna through *Mahabharata*.

The epithet 'Parama Bhagavata' used by the Gupta rulers was seen by some scholars as an indication that they were followers of Vishnu. Also there was the figure of Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, used in many coins of the Guptas. This view has been criticised by the likes of Dikshitar who has opined that the Guptas worshipped all the Hindu Gods without difference and that a particular God was invoked according to the circumstances of worship. Accordingly, Goddess Lakshmi was worshipped as she represented wealth and prosperity in the Hindu pantheon and her images represent the wealth of the empire.

Shaivism has a long history of assimilation in the sub continent. During the Gupta period, it was particularly prominent in areas around Kashmir, where it was developed into two schools- Spanda founded by Vasugupta and Prayabhijna founded by Somananda. Shiva was a powerful God in several Puranas of the Gupta period and in the Vedic texts itself there was the God Pasupati who is often identified with Shiva. The local cult was absorbed by adding the prefix 'Isha' or 'Ishvara' with the name of the Gods as in Maheshwara. The children of Shiva are also popular gods in the Shaiva pantheon and they are seen as symbols of local Gods assimilated into the Puranic fold for acceptance and popularity among various groups of people. The son of Shiva, Skanda, worshipped by the Guptas as Karttikeya was part of the local cult in Tamilakam and was worshipped as Murugan. Curiously, the other son of Shiva, Ganesha, is not mentioned in the Gupta records.

Shiva's attire and his association with the mountains as well as the cremation ground are also pointed out by scholars as indications of how Shaivism had absorbed a variety of local cults to popularise itself among the common people. Most of the images of the Gupta period worshipping Shiva is in human form, but there are also images that combine the phallic form of *Shivalinga* with the human form like *Ekamukha-linga* and *Chaturmukha linga*. Mathura was an important centre of Shaivism as Shaiva sculptures were found there.

Shaktism or the worship of Shakti, was based on the worship of the female mother Goddess. In Brahmanical Hinduism, she had three forms, as the consort of the three Gods. So she was worshipped as Saraswathy, the consort of Brahma and the Goddess of learning,

as Lakshmi, Goddess of prosperity and consort of Vishnu and as Parvathy, the consort of Shiva. The worship of the Mother Goddess was part of many local cults and was part of the Tantric form of worship, thus Shaktism later became a popular religious tradition. Though the Goddess was usually depicted only as the part of male deities, she is mentioned in many Puranas. Like the different forms of Shiva were assimilated into Shaivism, the different Goddesses were also absorbed into the cult of Shaktism, the concept of *Saptamatrikas*(worship of divine mothers) is an example. There are Gupta coins that depict Durga seated on a lion, Saraswathy and Goddess Ganga, indicating the reverence of the Goddess cult by the rulers.

The worship of the prominent Gods is part of the strengthening of Puranic Hinduism during the period. The Puranas were composed and revised during the Gupta period. The Puranas helped to popularise Hinduism with its simple style of writing compared to the Vedas and thus the message of the religion reached more people. Puranic Hinduism simplified the religious practices and rituals as opposed to the Vedic sacrifice which was accessible only to a limited section of the society. The importance of pilgrimage centres increased and Ganga got an important place as a holy river, while Prayaga was considered a holy place where death was considered auspicious.

The Gupta kings granted lands and even entire villages to the *Brahmanas*, which helped the cause of spreading Hinduism. But this doesn't mean they neglected the other religions. It was supposedly during the Gupta period that two Jain councils met, one at Mathura and another at Valabhi under the famous Jain teacher, Nagarjuna. Jain religious writings were compiled and edited at these councils.

Many commentaries were also made by the Jain teachers on the existing sacred texts of the Jains. Places like Mathura, Valbhi, Udayagiri, Pundravardhana, Mysore and Kanchi developed as important centres of Jainism during the Gupta period. The Jain monasteries were patronised and endowed by the rulers and the Jain community flourished under the patronage. Some scholars have said that because of the rich patronage Jains received, they became lazier and the monks started having a materialistic lifestyle compared to the ascetic life usually followed.

When it came to Buddhism, both Mahayanism and Hinayanism flourished. Kashmir and Gandhara in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka or Ceylon became the centres of Hinayanism and the famous Buddhist texts, *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* were written during the Gupta period. It is to be remembered that the Buddhist king of Sri Lanka, Srimeghavarman, maintained diplomatic relations with the Guptas and sent monks. There were commentaries written by Buddhist scholars as well to the already composed texts like the 'Tripitakas'. Vasubandhu was a famous Buddhist scholar during the period who wrote the famous work, 'Abhidharmakosa', which explains the fundamental principles of Buddhism.

Mahayanism also became stronger, mainly because of the great scholars like Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga and Dignaga. Their philosophy reached the common people as well. Mahayanism again split into two schools, namely Madhyamika and Yogachara. The patronage given to Buddhism can also be seen in the development of Buddhist art during the Gupta period. Fa-hsien, the famous Buddhist monk who visited during the period, reports seeing a lot of Buddhist monasteries and monks in areas like Kashmir and Punjab. Saranath was also

an important centre of Buddhism where a lot of Stupas and statues have been found. Bodh Gaya also became an important pilgrimage centre of the Buddhists during the period.

6.2.2 Art, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting

Architecture, sculpture and painting reached a high point during the period of the Guptas. According to a famous art scholar, Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Gupta art is at once abstract and sensuous, reserved and passionate. The Gupta art was glorified by a lot of scholars and is one of the main reasons for the nationalist historians to argue that it's a golden period. Mathura, Banaras and Patna became centres of artistic activity during the period. The Gupta art had both religious and secular works. There were painted forms of Gods, sages, kings, queens and the attendants found in their art and Ajanta cave is just one example of their artistic expression. The Fresco paintings during the period were in demand even in Central Asia and China.

Architecture was highly developed during the period, because, unlike the previous periods in history where bamboo, wood, etc were used, the Guptas started using permanent materials like brick and stone for construction. The contemporary inscriptions give a fair idea about the number of temples constructed and also speak of cities of great beauty and grandeur. Even though stone and brick were also used in the Mauryan period, it was during the Guptan age that architecture started to progress at a high pace.

The historical evidence suggests construction of ecclesiastical institutions, royal palaces and elite private houses. The ruined temples, fallen stupas and remains of monastic complexes point to the evidence of grand edifices of the period. Temple construction, in the beginning, consisted of small structures made of stone and brick, but later temples of a much larger dimension started to be constructed with rich decorations. The signature design of the temple included the free standing temple with a sanctuary (*garbha griha*) in which the central cult image was placed. The architects during the period evolved a style inspired by Indian philosophy and mythology. Symbols like conch, *chakra* (wheel), lotus, swastika were used in the architecture while there were *shikharas* (pinnacles) and *mandapas* (halls) added in the construction.

According to historian A.L.Basham, 'the temple was at once voluptuous and austere, rooted in earth but aspiring to heaven'. Brick temples have been found at areas like Bhitargaon in Kanpur district, which is said to possess the earliest true arch in India, Paharpur in Bengal and Sirpur in Madhya Pradesh. The most famous temple during the period is the much acclaimed Dasavatara temple at Deogarh in U.P. which is often described as a masterpiece of workmanship. Other significant temples include the Vishnu temple at Tigawa, Shiva temple at Bhumara, Parvati temple at Nachana Kuthara and remains of a temple in Dah Parbatia in Assam. Among Buddhist constructions, the ruins of stupas and monasteries shed light on their architecture. Among the important stupa ruins were the Dhamekh stupa at Saranath and 'Jarasandha ki Baithak' at Rajgir. Most of the stupas contain three stages, the basement, the drum and the dome.

There is also a unique cave architecture found during the Gupta period. Caves of both Chaitya and Vihara type are

found during excavations. The Chaitya cave number 19 in the Ajanta is said to have been constructed during the Gupta period. Striking Buddha figures used in the chaitya architecture is a contribution of the Mahayana school. The cave temple at Udayagiri near Bhopal is partially rock-cut and partially built of stone. The typical Gupta features include the portico, carved doorway and the pillars. Remains of secular buildings have not survived much but information about the same is available in literary works, paintings at places like Ajanta, sculptural representations at Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda etc. Accordingly, we know that the private houses of rich citizens had well decorated audience halls, picture galleries and concert halls.

Sculptures of the Gupta period show a sophistication which keeps it apart from previous periods. The sculpture of the period shows the influence of the Kushanas. The rich sculptural representations include the symbols like Sankha, Chakra, etc and they include inspirations from mythological stories, religious concepts and social incidents depicted with graceful physical forms. The influence of the epics can also be seen in the representations. For instance, in the Deogarh temple panel reliefs, redemption of Ahalya, departure of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in the forest, mutilation of Surpanakha are depicted from the Ramayana. There are depictions of Krishna's childhood exploits as well. Shiva images were also represented with much artistic flair during the period. The God was sculpted in the form of Ek Mukhi (one face) lingas and chaturmukhi (four face) lingas by the Gupta artists. The half male, half female form of Shiva, Ardhanariswara was also sculpted during the Gupta period.

The Buddha sculptures of Gupta period exude a special kind of charm. There is a seated image of Buddha at Saranath, standing Buddha in the Mathura museum and the copper statue of Buddha at Sultanganj which survives as the testimony to the increased splendour in depiction of Buddha's images. Buddha is depicted in various moods like smiling, contemplation etc during the period. According to A .Ghosh, former Director General of Archaeology, "The Buddhist images of the period recovered from Saranath are characterised by a spiritual inspiration combined with a rare aesthetic feeling".

The art of painting also reached the peak of glory during the Gupta period. The most exquisite specimen of the period includes the paintings found in the wall frescoes of the Ajanta caves and Bagh caves in Gwalior. The Ajanta caves supposedly had paintings in most of the caves, but now we have those paintings only in a few of them. During this period, paintings of Buddha and his life stories became popular. The cave no 17 of the Ajanta is a good example of the same and is often called a 'picture gallery'. This particular cave contains episodes from the birth, life and death of Buddha.

The Bagh caves on the other hand have not survived the test of time fully. The paintings are found on the walls and ceilings and it appears to have been plastered and painted over with a lot of patterns and themes from society and religion of the period. In Bagh, the cave number 4 has been called the 'Rang Mahal' or the hall of colours by the local people where there are visible traces of beautiful scrollwork and decorative friezes which had in the past ran along the faces of the walls.There is also remains of numerous decorative panels which adorned the extensive ceilings and pillars.

According to scholars like A. Ghosh, the paintings of these caves are of supreme importance to Indian art and culture. The paintings at Bagh and Ajanta are unique representations of art and they represent a school of art which exerted a far-reaching influence on the art of not only India and East Asia but of any country in which Buddhism spread.

6.2.3 Literature

The period of the Guptas is well known for the quality of the literature produced. The language Sanskrit flourished in such a manner that it is often called the classical period of Sanskrit literature. It was also the court language of the Guptas. It is to be noted that the earlier Buddhist and Jain literature which was earlier written in Prakrit also started using Sanskrit. Sanskrit attained the status of a *lingua franca* as Prakrit developed and both languages came to be differentiated from each other, according to the scholar Altekar. There were different forms of Prakrit, like Suraseni in Mathura, Ardhamagadhi in Oudh and Bundelkhand and Magadhi used in Bihar, which got a unique form during the Gupta period.

During the Gupta period, even the Mahayana Buddhists accepted Sanskrit as a sacred language. Aryadeva and Vasubandu were important Buddhist writers in Sanskrit and Siddhasena Divakara was an important scholar of Jainism who wrote in Sanskrit during the period. *Kavya*, an important part of Sanskrit literature, gained high maturity during the period according to scholars like G.V.Devasthali and that is evident from the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta and the Mandasor inscription. The Puranas were existent before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature, but during the period it was compiled and made into the present

form. The two great epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* also got their final touches during the Gupta period. The *Smritis* or the law books were compiled during the Gupta period and the Smritis of Yajnavalkya, Narada, Katyayana and Brihaspati were supposedly written also during the period.

The production of secular literature also developed under the patronage of the Guptas. Drama and poetry attained glory by the writings of authors of the Gupta period. Samudragupta, a major Gupta ruler himself was supposed to have been a poet and was called 'Kaviraj' in some sources. His son, Chandragupta II also known as Vikramaditya was famous for the patronage of 'Navaratnas' or the nine gems which included literary geniuses like Kalidasa. The most famous works of Kalidasa include Abijnanasakuntalam, Malavikagnimitram, Meghaduta, Kumara sambava and Raghuvamsa. His works display his knowledge of the Vedas, philosophical systems, Dharmasastras, Kamasutra, Natyasastra and also fine arts like painting, music and drawing. His characters are known to have a freshness and liveliness which made the works engaging to the readers. His literary acumen was so impressive even to Westerners that he is often called 'the Indian Shakespeare'. Shudraka, the famous author of Mricchakatika or 'the little clay cart' supposedly belonged to the Gupta period.

Vishakadutta, the author of *Mudra rakshasa* and *Devichandraguptam*, which throws light on the Gupta lineage, also was a famous author during the period. The popular book of fables named *Panchatantra* written by Vishnusharman is also attributed to the period of the Guptas. Bhatti, who wrote *Ravanavadha* and Bhartimentha, who wrote *Hayagrivavdha,* are also believed to have lived during

the Gupta period, according to some scholars. Grammar also developed during the period. Sanskrit grammar based on Panini and Patanjali developed. The compilation of *Amarakosha*, a monumental Sanskrit dictionary by Amarasimha happened during the Gupta period as well. Chandragomin, a Buddhist scholar composed the grammatical work, *Chandravyakarana* during the period, which we know in the present only from its fragments of Tibetan translation.

6.2.4 Mathematics and Science

During the Gupta period, there were illustrious contributions made in the field of science and mathematics. The discovery of the place value of the first nine numbers, the decimal system of notation and the place value of zero happened during the Gupta period. An inscription of 6th century CE from Gujarat records the date by a system of nine digits and a zero with place notation for the tens and hundreds. This system was afterwards recorded in Syria as well by Severus Sebokht, a Syrian astronomer monk in his writing in the 7th century CE.

The decimal system of notation which is followed in the world is supposed to have originated here according to some scholars. The Arabs are supposed to have learned it through their trade with merchants from the West Coast and it was called, 'Hindisa'. Arab writers like Ibn Washiya, of the 9th century, Al Masudi of the 10th century and Al Beruni of the 11th century have mentioned it as an Indian discovery in their works. The Europens later adopted it from the Arabs. The use of zero and its place value is considered as a milestone in mathematics. The earliest mathematician who emphasised the

implication of zero as *Sunya* and infinity was Bhaskara. Aryabhata also made significant contributions to geometry. He discussed the properties of the circle and also the questions regarding projective geometry. During the period, progress was also made in Trigonometry and Algebra.

In the field of astronomy, even before the Gupta period, there was a field 'Vedangajyotisa' which was used for fixing the day and time for performance of sacrifices. By about the third century CE, the *Paitamahasiddhanta* developed. Later Aryabhata wrote the important works *Aryabatiyam*, *Aryashtasata* and *Dasagitikasutra*. His writings have included the information on the rotation of earth on its axis and method to determine duration of eclipse. He also calculated the Sun's apogee and sidereal period of the moon's nodes. He calculated a year to be 365.2586805 days which is closer to the modern day calculation of 365.256304 days than that calculated by Ptolemy earlier. He also had illustrious disciples like Nissanka, Panduranga Swamy and Latadeva. Among them, Latadeva was more famous and he was known as *Sarvsiddhantaguru* or the expert in the whole science and he is famous for expounding the theories of Paulisa and Romaka Siddhanta.

Another important astronomer during the period was Varahamihira. He has mentioned five astronomical schools- Paitamaha, Vasishtha, Paulisa, Romaka and Surya. Paitamaha, was similar to the *Vedic Vedanga Jyotisha* and it postulated a year of 366 days but the Vasishtha counted it to 365.25 days. Paulisa laid down rules for calculating the lunar and solar eclipse. Romaka is based on the astronomical theories that emerged in the west. *Surya Siddhanta* existed before Aryabhata and

underwent significant modifications by the time of Guptas.

The Vaisesika philosophical school held that nature is atomic and that the atom is eternal, indicating the interest in physics during the period. It also expounded the atomic doctrines and the doctrine of molecules. Nagarjuna was said to be a student of chemistry and metallurgy, though we don't have much literature available on the subject from the period. When it came to medicine, *Charak Samhita* and *Susruta Samhita* were held supreme during the period. A very systematic summary of these texts is present in the *Ashtanga Sangraha* by Vagbhata I. Medical courses were also taught based on these texts and surgery was also practised. The Chinese travellers have also mentioned the maintenance of hospitals in big cities like Pataliputra. Veterinary science was also practised with special attention given to the treatment of horses and elephants. The *Hastayurveda* of Palakapya is written in a comprehensive manner about veterinary science and sources indicate the practitioners of the science were well respected.

6.2.5 Was the Gupta Age a Golden Period?

The Gupta age witnessed developments in art, science and cultural activities. These are usually the reasons used by some scholars to ascribe the term 'golden' as well as 'classical' to a particular period. There is another set of scholars who revised the theory and called it a misnomer. LD.Barnett has argued that the Gupta period is in the annals of classical India what the Periclean age is in the history of ancient Greece. The British colonial historian Vincent Smith has opined that 'the Gupta period was a time of

exceptional intellectual activity in many fields and that it can be compared to the Elizabethan and Stuart period in England'. He has also praised the contributions of Aryabhata and Varahamihira as illustrious in mathematical and astronomical science.

M.A. Mehendale has observed that under the Guptas there was political unity and prosperity, which combined with the strong patronage given to Sanskrit learning, resulted in the flourishing of Sanskrit literature. There was a full development of the Puranas and the last phase of *Smriti* literature and the epics also may have got their final touches during the period according to Mehendale. There were outstanding developments in secular literature. According to him, the period produced the best authors in literature, astronomy and mathematics. He has refuted the theory that there was a revival or renaissance of Sanskrit literature during the period. According to him there was never an eclipse of Sanskrit literature and that there was its influence throughout the centuries preceding the Gupta period. So there was an efflorescence and not a renaissance of Sanskrit, according to Mehendale.

R.C. Majumdar has also praised the period as 'a new chapter in the history of India and that Sanskrit literature reached its peak of glory with dramas and kavyas of Kalidasa and prose literature saw its glorious days in the writings of Bana'. He has also praised the great exponents of Buddhist philosophers was reputed to be under the patronage of Samudragupta. He has called the contributions of the Gupta age in the realm of art as classical and has glorified the Gupta sculpture as one with a ripe maturity blended with robustness.

Apart from the scholars expressing

opinions about art and considering them for the term Golden period, the sphere of religion was also included by many scholars to justify the term 'golden'. The famous Indologist Max Muller called the period 'Hindu renaissance'. But this view was rejected by most scholars because, according to them, during the period between the fall of Mauryas and the rise of Guptas, Hinduism was not stagnant. There were foreigners like Heliodorus of Taxila, Saka Satrapas of Ujjain and some Kushana kings who were influenced by Hinduism.

The Sunga dynasty was known for the strong patronage of Hinduism in the post Maurya period. During the pre-Gupta period, in South India also, Hinduism flourished. So the question of renaissance is obsolete, according to most scholars. And scholars have pointed out how, in the Gupta period there was no persecution of other religions, but even during the Sunga period there are sources that say that Pushyamitra Sunga was described by Buddhists as a persecutor of their religion. There is testimony of Fa-hsien that Buddhism was patronised by the Guptas as well. Coomaraswamy has also stated that the Gupta period saw the culmination and not revival of Hinduism.

R.C.Majumdar is of the opinion that the Gupta empire set a standard in all departments of life and culture, which was the reason for envy and despair for the succeeding ages. According to him, "in letters and science as well as in arts and crafts it evoked the highest intellectual expression India was capable of". He observes that at the root of all this progress was the 'imperial peace' established by the rulers of the period. He says that the only empire that later came close to the strength and duration of the Gupta empire was the Mughals, but it was founded by 'foreign invaders of an alien culture'. Majumdar also opines that even the Mughals did not have the outburst of intellectual activity characterised as a quality of the Gupta period by him. He considers the Gupta period as the 'most important phenomenon in the political history of ancient India'.

R.N.Dandekar has written that the advent of Guptas in Indian history was characterised by great intellectual and material progress which shone brighter than the preceding periods. He describes the empire as essentially 'Hindu' in character. He praises the period as one in which almost every sphere of life was the best and highest of which the ancient Indians were capable. These achievements, according to him, rightfully earned the period the epithet, 'golden period of Indian History'. He also points out how the Guptas kept away the threat of foreign invasions. He further praises the economic stability the Gupta period had and about how it led to the rapid growth of prosperous cities and tremendous developments in trade and industry. For him, Hinduism during the period was 'a significant force in unifying the heterogeneous elements in the country by the common bonds of religion'.

Romila Thapar has said that the Gupta period can be considered a classical age in ancient India if we limit it to the upper classes, who achieved peak living standards like never before and it was mostly applicable to Northern India. According to her, "for historians writing in the early twentieth century the Golden age had to be an Utopia set in the distant past and also it had to be a period in which Hindu culture came to be firmly established." She has suggested that the classicism of the Gupta period was

restricted to Northern India alone as the Deccan and South India saw the evolution of a high level of civilisation only after the Gupta period.

D.N.Jha has observed that calling the Gupta period as one of Hindu renaissance is far from true. He points to the Buddhist images in Saranath, described as one of the highest achievements of sculptures as one of the reasons for the same. He further looks at Ajanta paintings with Buddhist themes also for justifying his reasoning. He also says that attributing all the achievements of the period in astronomy to indigenous tradition is flawed. Jha also criticises the other evidence used for ascribing the term Hindu renaissance i.e. the works of Kalidasa, composition of Puranas and the coins and inscriptions. These materials were used by some scholars, according to him, to wrongly indicate that the Gupta kings patronised mainly the brahmanical sects of Vaishnavism and Shaivism; he says that these two sects had the basic tenets developed at very earlier times. He argues that Kalidasa's writings do not indicate any intellectual rebirth, but only imply a further development of literary forms which evolved in the earlier period. He points out that Puranas also existed before Guptas as a bardic literature and it was only compiled during the period of Guptas.

Another important argument is that the term 'Hindu' itself cannot be used to describe the particular period as it was first used by the Arabs only in the post-Gupta period to describe the inhabitants of 'Hind'. He also disagrees with the view put forward by some earlier scholars who have credited the Guptas with a revival of nationalism because they fought against the Sakas and Hunas. He has pointed out that apart from their own inscriptions, other contemporary sources of the period do not refer to the Guptas but instead some Puranas have described the Guptas as 'barbarous, impious etc'.

Jha also vehemently criticises the views of some scholars that there was never a happier period than the Guptas by pointing out the emergence of serfdom and the resultant economic bondage of the peasantry. He also pointed out how the position of women declined and how they became a property of men and had to live only under the tutelage of men despite their glorification in the art and literature of the period. The most important point he uses to criticise the 'golden era' was the solidification of caste distinction and rigidity during the period. He has used the statement by Fa-hsien about how the Chandalas had to live in the outskirts as further proof for the same argument.

Recap

- Gupta period saw advancements in politics, culture and economics in ancient India
- "Golden Age" debate arises due to advancements in art, literature, science
- Transition to Puranic Hinduism and coexisting with Buddhism and Jainism

♦ Gupta era saw remarkable architectural and artistic achievements in temples and caves like Ajanta

♦ Sanskrit literature flourished, with works from Kalidasa, Vishakadutta, and the finalising epics

♦ Decimal system, zero concept, and astronomy were major developments

♦ A stable administration fostered agriculture, trade, and industrial growth, boosting prosperity

♦ Sanskrit became the common language, with strong support for literature, drama, and poetry

♦ Caste system rigidified, women's rights declined with restricted social and property roles

♦ Scholars note wealth disparities, caste rigidity, and limited cultural reach during the Gupta period

♦ Gupta era compared to the Augustan and Periclean ages for cultural and intellectual achievements

♦ Various theories arguing for and against the concept of 'Golden Age'

Objective Questions

1. Which are the three important cults of Puranic Hinduism that emerged in the Gupta period?

2. Where is the famous Dasavatara temple situated?

3. Which are the two important cave sites famous for their paintings?

4. Which famous Gupta inscription is an example of the kavya genre in literature?

5. Who wrote *Raghuvamsa*?

6. Which are the two important ancient medical texts that were widely used during the period?

7. Which are the five astronomical schools mentioned by Varahamihira?

8. Who was the author of *Mricchakatika*?

9. Who was the famous Indologist who called the Gupta period 'the Hindu renaissance'?

10. Who was the Gupta era mathematician who emphasised the implication of zero as *Sunya*?

Answers

1. Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism

2. Deogarh

3. Ajanta, Bagh

4. Allahabad pillar inscription of Harisena/Prayag Prasasti

5. Kalidasa

6. Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita

7. Paitamaha, Vasishtha, Paulisa, Romaka and Surya

8. Shudraka

9. Max Mueller

10. Bhaskara

Assignments

1. Why is the Gupta period referred to as a "Golden Age" by some scholars? Critically analyse the arguments for and against this term.

2. Discuss the impact of religious developments during the Gupta era on art, culture and society.

3. Assess the legacy of the Gupta period in shaping India's intellectual and cultural identity.

4. Analyse the contributions of the Gupta rulers to art, literature and architecture.

5. Discuss how the stability of the Gupta administration contributed to cultural and economic progress.

6. Examine the long-term impact of the Gupta period on Indian culture, art and administration.

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3 UNIT

Rise of Feudatories and Disintegration of the Gupta Monarchy

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ identify the important reasons for the decline of Gupta Empire

♦ trace the emergence of regional kingdoms including the Maukharis, Gaudas and Maitrikas after the Gupta decline

♦ discuss the lasting impact of Gupta art, science and administrative systems on Indian history

♦ explain how the fall of the Gupta Empire influenced the political, cultural and economic development of early medieval India

Prerequisites

The Gupta period holds great significance in the history of ancient India due to its cultural, political and economic advancements. Often referred to as a "Golden Age," this era saw remarkable achievements in art, literature, science and governance. However, as with any great empire, the Gupta dynasty eventually declined due to a combination of internal and external factors, marking an important transition in Indian history. This unit focuses on the decline and disintegration of the Gupta Empire, examining the socio-political and economic factors that led to its downfall. The period after Chandragupta II's reign saw significant challenges, including internal dissent within the royal family, administrative inefficiencies and provincial rebellions. The rise of powerful feudatories such as the Maukharis and Maitrakas further weakened central control. Additionally, external invasions by the Hunas and other nomadic groups put immense strain on the empire's resources

and military, ultimately fragmenting its political unity. Through this unit, we explore the transition from a unified Gupta Empire to a fragmented landscape of independent kingdoms. The disintegration of the Gupta Empire led to a fractured political landscape, with no single power able to maintain the unity achieved during their reign. This period of transition significantly shaped the course of Indian history, paving the way for new regional kingdoms and cultural shifts. We also delve into the scholarly debates surrounding the causes and consequences of this decline.

Keywords

Guptas, Maukharis, Pushyamitras, Sungas, Hunas, Mihirakula, Toramana, Baladitya

Discussion

The Gupta empire began to gradually decline after the rule of Chandragupta II and collapsed by the end of 6th century CE. according to most scholars. There were many reasons for the downfall of the Gupta empire. The period after Chandragupta II marked the gradual decline of the Gupta empire. Many historians believe that by the end of the 6th century CE. it collapsed completely. After Chandragupta II, Skandagupta could manage the empire against the attacks of the Pushyamitras and Sungas but not without much difficulty though. After his death, the situation became worse and there was a lot of commotion in the empire. As there was no law of primogeniture (the state of being the first born child), there may have been a struggle for the throne. We know that the rulers Puru Gupta, Kumaragupta II and Budha Gupta were relatively important after Skandagupta. But they were not able to check the decline that was setting in the empire.

6.3.1 Revolts

Many chiefs revolted against the Gupta empire. The Maukharis gradually rose to power in Uttar Pradesh and were successful in setting up an independent kingdom towards the middle of the 6th century CE. The Maukhari dynasty of Kanauj was founded by Harivarman. About the year 554 CE, Isanavarman measured swords with the Guptas and probably also with the Huns. He also took up the title of Maharajadhiraja. For about a quarter of a century from 554 CE to about 580 CE, the Maukharis were unquestionably the strongest political power in Northern India. Isanavarman got a large portion of territory from the Guptas. He defeated the Andhras and won a portion of their territory. He also conquered a part of Bengal.

Bhatarka, a chief of the Maitraka clan, established himself in the Saurashtra

region as a military governor with his capital at Valabhi. Dharasena I was his immediate successor. Both Bhatarka and Dharasena I took up the title of Senapati. However, the next successor named Dronasimha took up the title of Maharaja and the same was recognised by the Gupta king. A branch of the dynasty established itself in the Western part of Malwa in the latter half of the 6th century CE and made extensive conquests. Another branch continued to rule at Valabhi. Dhruvasena II of Valabhi married the daughter of Harsha. His son Dharasena IV took up the title of Parambhattarak Parmeshwar Chakravartin. It is clear from above that the Maitrakas became independent of the Gupta Empire and that was bound to adversely affect the fortunes of the Gupta empire.

6.3.2 Later Guptas

The later Guptas (they didn't belong to the Gupta dynasty) ruled Malwa and Magadha between the 6th and 8th centuries CE. To begin with, they were feudatories of the Imperial Guptas and perhaps fought to save the Gupta empire. However, later on, they set themselves up as independent rulers at the same time as the Maukharis did. It was at the same time that Vanga, South and East Bengal, shook off Gupta suzerainty. Vainyagupta ruled East Bengal with the title of *Maharaja* at the beginning of the 6th century CE. Later on, the rulers of Vanga took up the title of *Maharajadhiraja* and struck gold coins in their own names like the Imperial Gupta rulers. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Bengal acknowledged the suzerainty of the Gupta emperors. In the Allahabad pillar inscription, there is a reference to Samatata as a border state. Northern Bengal or Paundravardhana Bhukti was a

part of the Gupta empire in the time of Kumaragupta I. However, the Gaudas rose into prominence in Bengal and shook off the Gupta power in the second half of the 6th century CE. The names of the Gauda kings were Dharamaditya, Gopachandra, Samacharadeva and Jainaga. Sasanka, a contemporary of Harsha, belonged to the Gauda dynasty. The fact that these Gauda kings took up the title of *Maharajadhiraja* shows that they did not acknowledge the suzerainty of the Gupta kings and acted as independent rulers.

It is well - known that the earlier Gupta kings were the patrons of Hinduism. However, some of the later Gupta kings, such as Budha Gupta, Tathagata Gupta and Baladitya, came to have Buddhist leanings. This new development was bound to adversely affect the fortunes of the Gupta empire, according to some scholars. Like the Mauryas after Ashoka, proper emphasis was not put on military efficiency. In the absence of such a thing, it would have been impossible to maintain the integrity of the empire.

6.3.3 The Rise of the Hunas

The Hunas were a band of nomad conquerors. They originally lived in the neighbourhood of China. They advanced towards the West and divided themselves into two parts. One part of them went towards the Volga and the other to the Oxus. Those Hunas who went to Europe were called the Black Hunas and their greatest leader was Attila. Those Hunas who came and settled in Persia and India came to be known as the White Hunas or Ephthalites (Hephthalite). They became powerful in the Oxus valley towards the middle of the 5th century CE. In 484 CE, their king defeated and killed Feroz, the Sasanian ruler of Persia. This victory

added to the prestige of Hunas and, by the end of the 6th century CE, they ruled over a vast empire with their principal capital at Balkh. It has already been pointed out that the Hunas attacked India during the time of Skanda Gupta, but they were beaten back. The defeat was supposedly so crushing that they did not dare to attack India again for a long time.

We do not possess much reliable information with regard to the activities of the Hunas in India. The names of two kings, Toramana and Mihirakula, are known from coins and inscriptions. They are considered to be Hunas but there is no conclusive evidence with regard to their nationality. Song - yun, a Chinese Ambassador to the Huna king of Gandhara in 520 CE, refers to the conquest and occupation of this kingdom by the Hunas two generations before his time. He also gives an account of the country being destroyed by the 'Barbaric Hunas'. Cosmas , a Greek writer, wrote about 547 CE in his 'Christian Topography' as India having the 'White Hunas' with about 2000 elephants and a great cavalry who had a ruler who oppressed Indians and forced them to pay tribute. The same writer says that the river Phison is the river Indus. Towards the close of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century CE, Toramana advanced from Punjab and conquered a large part of Western India. The coins of Toramana testify to his foreign origin and also prove that he ruled over parts of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Kashmir. He was probably connected with the Huna ruling family in Gandhara. A Jain work of the 8th century CE called 'Kuvalayamala' records that Toramana enjoyed the sovereignty of the world and that he lived at Pavaiya on the bank of the Chandrabhaga or Chenab river. He was, probably, converted to the Jain faith.

6.3.3.1 Toramana

About Toramana, Upendra Thakur observes as him being a great conqueror, Toramana was undoubtedly a very wise ruler and shrewd statesman who had revived the lost fortune of the Hunas, built up a vast empire from Central Asia to Pataliputra through his prowess, foresight, cool mindedness, diplomacy and conciliatory attitude. He made no change in the existing administrative pattern and disturbed none unnecessarily. He enticed officers like Dhanyavisnu and left intact not only the old system of provincial administration but also the ancient official families and feudal hierarchy. This foresight on his part naturally facilitated his smooth run of the newly conquered territories without causing bitterness among the ruling families. His conquest of a considerable portion of Northern India within such a short time was rather phenomenal, having few parallels in history. It was a wonderful feat which even Ashoka and Samudragupta would have just envied. He remained tolerant in religious and administrative affairs and stabilised his administration, issued coins and accelerated the pace of the disintegration of the Gupta empire. All that was now left of the empire was a carcass which was soon devoured by political vultures who were always on the look - out for such opportunities. The glory of the Guptas never returned and the following century saw their final exit from the pages of history. The political unity of the country was shattered beyond repair and from 550 CE onward Indian history lost a common string of national and common life. The Hunas also left the political scene by this time, but the old life refused to return, according to Thakur.

6.3.3.2 Mihirakula

Toramana was succeeded by his son, Mihirakula about 515 CE. According to Hiuen Tsang, Mihirakula established his authority in Sakala, his capital and ruled over India. He subdued all the neighbouring provinces without exception. At first he took some interest in Buddhism, but later overthrew the law of Buddha and supposedly persecuted the priests as well.

It appears that Mihirakula was a powerful king who overran a large part of Northern India. An inscription of the year 530 CE shows that his authority was extended at least up to Gwalior. Cosmas describes the Huna chief as the lord of India. However, Mihirkula was defeated soon after by Yasodharman of Malwa. Hiuen Tsang gives the account of the defeat of Mihirakula by the Gupta Emperor, Baladityaraja, king of Magadha. When Mihirakula invaded his dominion, Baladityaraja took refuge with his army on an island. Mihirkula left the main part of his army in charge of his younger brother, embarked on boats and landed with a part of his troops on the island.

He was however ambushed by the troops of Baladitya in a narrow pass and was taken prisoner. Baladitya resolved to kill Mihirakula, but released him on the instruction of his mother. Mihirakula found on his return that his brother had gone back and occupied the throne. He therefore sought and obtained an asylum in Kashmir. Then he stirred up a rebellion there, killed the king and placed himself on the throne of Kashmir. He next killed the king of Gandhara, exterminated the royal family, destroyed the stupas and Sangharamas, plundered the wealth of the country and returned. But within a year, he died. It is stated that Mihirakula led an expedition against the ruler of Ceylon.

The exact date of the death of Mihirakula is not known. According to some writers, he died in 540 CE. His coins bear the figures of the bulls of Shiva. It is possible that he was a worshipper of Shiva. In the Gwalior inscription, it is stated that Mihirakula built a Sun temple. He might have been a worshipper of the Sun also. As pointed out already, he was very cruel towards Buddhism. In a record of the Guptas, there is a reference to the proudly stepping array of mighty elephants, belonging to the Maukharis, which were defeated in the battle of the Hunas. It is possible that this victory over the Hunas was won by Isanvarman, the Maukhari king. The Maukharis also issued coins in imitation of the Huna kings. They also ruled over territories formerly in the possession of the Hunas.

6.3.3.3 The Fall of Hunas

The defeat of Mihirakula appears to have finally crushed the political supremacy of the Hunas in India. After that, they did not remain a great power or even a disturbing element in Indian history. The crushing blow given to their central authority on the Oxus by the Turks and the Persians between 568 and 567 CE also ruined their prestige in India. Petty Huna chiefs continued to rule in Punjab and North - Western India. In course of time, the Hunas were absorbed into Indian society.

It is true that the Hunas ruled in India for a short time, but they certainly affected the country in many ways. Politically, the Huna invasions were partly responsible for the decline and fall of the Gupta empire. The resources of the empire were exhausted. The political unity was destroyed and the country was divided into many small States. The invasion

brought chaos and confusion and the people suffered. From the cultural point of view, the Huna invasions proved to be a great curse. They demolished and burnt monasteries and temples. They not only destroyed the best specimens of Gupta art but also burnt valuable records of history.

After the loss of their political power in India the Hunas settled down in the country. They married Indian wives and were ultimately absorbed in Hindu society. According to Smith, one of the 36 so - called Royal Rajput clans, actually was given the name of Huna. Havell says that the Huna invasions also paved the way for oriental despotism. Buddha Prakash says that the Huna invasion of Malwa of the middle - country about 510-511 CE and the brief spell of the rule of Toramana and Mihirakula that followed, brought into bold relief the elements of disintegration that were operative in the body politic of the Guptas. A large number of landlords, local chiefs and regional officers rose up everywhere and some of them like Dhanyavisnu, the erstwhile administrator of Eran under Buddhagupta, transferred their allegiance to the Hunas which resulted in utter chaos and confusion.

Recap

- Dissension in ruling family weakened Gupta administrative stability
- Provincial rebellions and local independence uprisings fragmented governance
- Skandagupta resisted Huna invasions, exhausting financial resources
- Feudatories like Maukharis and Maitrakas declared independence
- Later Guptas failed to prevent empire's disintegration and decline
- Huna invasions caused economic strain and destroyed Gupta unity
- Toramana, a Huna ruler, conquered parts of Northern India
- Mihirakula, Toramana's successor, suppressed Buddhism and expanded control
- Defeat of Hunas by Indian rulers ended their political supremacy
- Huna invasions accelerated the fragmentation of Gupta political structure

Objective Questions

1. Who was the Gupta ruler who resisted the Huna invasion?

2. What was the name given to the Hunas who came and settled in Persia and India?

3. Who threatened the Gupta empire during the time of Kumaragupta I?

4. Who was the founder of the Maukhari dynasty?

5. Who were the two important Hunas who ruled part of North India?

6. What was the title adopted by Isanavarman of the Maukhari dynasty?

7. Which inscription mentions Samatata as a border state under the Guptas?

8. Which Huna king is associated with the construction of a Sun temple?

9. Who was the Chinese ambassador that referred to the Huna king of Gandhara?

10. What name was given to the Hunas who came and settled in Persia and India?

Answers

1. Skandagupta
2. White Hunas or Ephthalites
3. Pushyamitras
4. Harivarman
5. Toramana and Mihirakula

6. Maharajadhiraja
7. Allahabad pillar inscription
8. Mihirakula
9. Song-yun
10. White Hunas or Ephthalites

Assignments

1. Discuss the important reasons for the decline of Gupta Empire.

2. Examine the role of Skandagupta in resisting foreign invasions. How did his efforts impact the Gupta economy?

3. Explain how the rise of feudatories contributed to the disintegration of the Gupta Empire. Provide examples.

4. Analyse the impact of the Huna invasions on the Gupta Empire. How did they weaken the central authority?

5. Describe the significance of Toramana and Mihirakula in the history of the Hunas in India.

6. How did the lack of primogeniture among the Guptas contribute to internal conflicts and decline?

7. What were the cultural and political consequences of the Huna invasions in Indian history?

8. Explain how economic pressures, such as debased coinage and resource depletion, affected the Gupta Empire's stability.

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4 UNIT

Harsha Vardhana

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ discuss the socio-political changes in North India following the decline of the Gupta Empire

♦ examine the rise of the Pushyabhuti dynasty and the emergence of Harsha Vardhana as a prominent ruler during the post-Gupta period

♦ describe Harsha's military campaigns, administrative structure and territorial expansions

♦ identify Harsha's role in promoting religious tolerance and patronising Buddhism alongside other religious traditions

♦ explain the socio-economic policies during Harsha's reign

Prerequisites

The period following the decline of the Gupta Empire witnessed significant political and cultural changes in North India. Several regional powers emerged, including the Maukharis, Gaudas, Maitrakas and the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar. Harsha Vardhana, a ruler from the Pushyabhuti dynasty, rose to prominence during this fragmented era. The ascendancy of Harsha Vardhana, ruler of the Pushyabhuti dynasty, marked a significant transformation in the political and cultural dynamics of North India during the 6th and 7th centuries CE. After the decline of the Gupta Empire, North India fragmented into smaller kingdoms ruled by various feudatories. Harsha's rise to power, following the tragic death of his

brother Rajya Vardhana, involved unifying many regions under his reign and establishing Kanauj as his capital. Known for his military campaigns, religious tolerance and cultural patronage, Harsha left an indelible mark on Indian history. His reign saw flourishing trade, cultural advancements and the elevation of Nalanda University as a world center of learning. In this unit, we learn about the political strategies of Harsha, his contributions to religion and education and his administrative and economic policies, highlighting the interconnectedness of power, culture and society in post-Gupta India. They also explore the lasting impact of Harsha's reign on Indian history.

Keywords

Pushyabhutis, Harshacharita, Hieun Tsang, Ratnavali, Nagananda, Priyadarsika, Nalanda

Discussion

The Gupta Empire lasted for about one and a half centuries, with its extent over North and Western India primarily and left an impact on history that lasted for centuries. After the weakening of the Guptas, North India was divided into several smaller kingdoms. The Hunas were successful in establishing control over regions like Kanauj, Punjab and Western India. Many other parts of North and western India fell into the hands of feudatories who split the regions under the erstwhile Gupta Empire among themselves. It was one of those dynasties from Thaneswar which managed to gain supremacy over the other feudatories and emerged powerful under the leadership of Harsha Vardhana.

6.4.1 Harshavardana's Empire (606 - 647 CE)

Harsha was the son of Prabhakara Vardhana, an important king of the Pushyabhuti dynasty. The Pushyabhutis were earlier feudatories of the Guptas and gained independence after the Huna invasion. Sources mention that he had an elder brother named Rajya Vardhana who became the ruler but was supposedly killed in treachery while trying to rescue his sister's husband Maukharivarman from the attacks of Deva Gupta of Malwa and Sasanka of Gauda. Harsha succeeded in defeating the enemies and also rescued his sister, Rajyasri, who was imprisoned by them. On the way to Kannauj, he met an emissary of the king of Kamarupa, Bhaskara Varman and made an alliance

with the state. Harsha made Kanauj, which was captured from Sasanka, as his capital and ruled from there. Later, he brought most of Northern India under his control and even Orissa and Gauda in Bengal and he took the title 'Siladitya'.

Nausasi copper plates mention his expedition against Valabhi, ruled by Dhruvasena II. Earlier Valabhi was the ally of Harsha but later Malwa became a bone of contention between the two states and this led to his campaign against Valabhi and their defeat and acceptance of Harsha as their overlord. Some records mention that Harsha even gave his own daughter in marriage to Dhruvasena as well. His campaign to the South was stopped by Pulakesi II, the Chalukya ruler of Vatapi/ Badami in Karnataka. Pulakesi II defeated Harsha's army on the banks of the river Narmada. Hieun Tsang has written that Harsha himself marched his troops to fight Pulakesi II. Historian R.C.Majumdar has observed that the empire of Harsha did not extend to the Narmada in the South and hence the battle may have been fought further north of Narmada. He also rejects the view that Valabhi was ever conquered by Harsha.

6.4.1.1 Religious Policy of Harsha

During the period of Harsha, all religions coexisted peacefully according to most scholars, though some of them had prominence in certain areas. There were also various schools of philosophy flourishing during the period. In Brahmanic Hinduism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shakti worship was popular. When it came to Jainism, it was divided into two sects, Svetambaras and Digambaras. Vaisali and Pundavardhana were two prominent

Jain centres. Bana said that Harsha was a Mahayana Buddhist, but inscriptions suggest that he was a devout worshipper of Shiva. Apparently, his sister Rajyasri converted to Buddhism and this had an impact on him. Though there are differing opinions on Harsha's religious beliefs, most sources suggest that he respected all religions and sustained them by extending patronage to their institutions as well. Hieun Tsang in his work, 'Si-Yu-Ki' pointed out that Harsha built numerous stupas for Buddha. According to him, "there were about 5000 monasteries for accommodation of Buddhists". Apart from the prominent sects, Hinayana and Mahayana,there were as many as 18 sects during the time of Harsha's reign.

Harsha organised religious assemblies every fifth year of his reign at Prayag (Allahabad). He held 6 assemblies during his reign. It is said that he used to give a large amount as charity during these assemblies out of the treasury and from even his personal belongings. Around 643 CE, he held a Buddhist convocation at Kannauj which was supposedly attended by around 20 kings and thousands of pilgrims. By 641 CE, after the visit of Hieun Tsang, Harsha sent a mission to China and established diplomatic relations with them. The Chinese in turn responded by sending an embassy with Li Yibiao and Wang Xuanxe who travelled through Tibet and their journey is commemorated by inscriptions at Rajagriha and Bodhgaya.

Caste System

Despite the influence of Buddhism, the caste system was prevalent during the reign of Harsha. The categories like butchers, fishermen and public performers did not live with the ordinary people. These people lived in the outskirts of villages

and towns along with the scavengers. This also points to the practice of untouchability being prevalent during the era. The upper class people were given a dominant position in society and slavery was also practised. They included the Brahmins who mostly performed religious duties and the kshatriyas who were the governing class. The Vaishyas were the traders and merchants.

6.4.1.2 Administration

Harsha maintained the administrative set up of his predecessors according to most records. He was the head of the state and the administrative, judicial and legislative power was vested in his hands. He was also the Commander in chief of the army. He assumed the title of 'Maharajadhiraja' and 'Parama Bhattaraka'. He considered the welfare of his subjects and travelled constantly over different parts of his empire to supervise the condition of his state.

Council of Ministers

He was assisted by a council of ministers or *Mantriparishad* headed by the Chief Minister who advised him in internal administration as well as foreign policy. He appointed provincial governors known as *Lokapalas*, who were posted in different quarters. The territory of the empire was called *Rajya* or *Desa* and the empire was divided into *Bhuktis* (provinces) and then further into Vishayas (districts) and the districts were subdivided into Patakas and villages or *Grama* was the smallest unit of administration. The principal officers of the province, the district and the village were *Uparika*, *Vishayapati* and *Gramika*, respectively. There were also high imperial officers known as *Mahasandhivigrahadhikrita,*

Mahabaladhikrita (commander of the army) and *Mahapratihara*. Avanti was the minister who looked after war and peace, according to Bana.

Military System

The commander of the army was called Singhananda, Kuntala was the head of the cavalry, Skandagupta the head of war-elephants and *Samanta-Maharaja* the head of civil administration who were also feudatories. The high officers were not paid in cash, but instead they were assigned cities or lands in return for their services. He kept a strong standing army at the centre. There were units of cavalry, infantry, chariots and war elephants as part of the army. Hieun Tsang has stated that the army had 60000 war elephants, 50000 strong cavalry and 100000 strong infantry.The commander of the cavalry was called Brihadasvavara and along with the commander of the army he was under the *Maha-Senapati*.

Judicial System

There were a great number of military and executive officers appointed for maintaining law and order and punishments for offences were often severe and included imprisonment for life, banishment and loss of limbs. Ordeals by fire, water etc, were also used to determine whether a person was guilty or not. Despite the punishments, there was no strong law and order as compared to the Gupta Empire, which was stated by Hieun Tsang himself, who was looted of his belongings while travelling through the country.

Economy

Traders and artisans indulged in production activities and produced wealth, though they were denied privileges and

status of the upper classes. During Harsha's reign, Roman trade declined but trade with China and Southeast Asia flourished. The great port of Tamralipti became a prominent trade centre connecting China and Southeast Asia with India. It was also connected with different parts of India by a road network which prospered under the patronage of Harsha. Guilds also flourished under Harsha's reign. Even though they were autonomous, they were governed by rules laid down by orders. Textile industry flourished and cotton, silk and woollen clothing became prominent goods that were traded. Hieun Tsang has also described clay and metal articles manufactured. Banaras, Prayag and Kanauj (earlier known as Kanyakubja) were the big cities during the period and they were also important commercial centres. Agriculture was the backbone of the economy, yet the farmers did not enjoy any special status.

Fiscal System

About the fiscal information also we have to rely on the inscriptions. Land was surveyed, measured and divided into holdings of different sizes with well defined boundaries. There were private lands whose owner's details were entered in the village records and common lands which often had irrigation wells. There are also records of the village censuses. Harsha's administration was characterised by a department of records and archives which had dutiful records showcasing not only the good but also the bad, recorded in official annals and state papers, while the public disasters or calamities were also recorded. Markets and residential places were kept separate at a distance.

The practice of giving land grants to the officials gave a kind of impetus to a feudal system during the times of Harsha. Though the land grant was for a fixed period, over the years it tended to become hereditary. Hieun Tsang mentions that 1/4th of the state land was reserved for the officials of the state and 1/4th was kept for religious purposes and public welfare. The burden of taxation was not heavy comparatively and the primary source of income for the state was land revenue called *bhaga* which was 1/6th of the produce and was to be paid in kind. There were also other taxes like toll tax, sales tax, *Hiranya, Bali* and the feudatories also paid an amount to the emperor. A large part of the income was spent on public welfare works. The main expenditure of the state was the personal expenditure of the king and his household and his palace, the army, the salary of civil officers, public welfare works and charity.

6.4.1.3 Literature and Learning

University of Nalanda

Harsha was also a patron of education and literature. Educational centres were opened along with Buddhist monasteries and other religious centres. Many of them were situated in Kanauj, Monghyr, Manikpur, Gaya etc. He made many endowments to the University of Nalanda and two seals of Harsha were discovered in Nalanda during excavations. He also constructed a towering wall which enclosed all the buildings of the University to defend the institution from any possible external attack. Nalanda became popular even outside India as it reached the zenith of its glory during the reign of Harsha. There were many foreign students enrolled in the university including citizens of China, Korea, Mongolia, Japan, Ceylon. Topics such as religion, philosophy, medical

science etc were taught at the University. Nalanda has often been called the Oxford of Mahayanism by some scholars and was the rival of Kashi. It had many facilities for the students, including huge libraries. There were supposedly three great libraries called *Ratnasagar* (sea of gems), *Ratnodadhi* (ocean of gems) and *Ratna Ranjak* (collection of gems).

Ujjain and Taxila

Apart from Nalanda, Ujjain also became a prominent centre of education where subjects like astrology and mathematics were specialised and taught. Taxila was also an important educational centre during the period. Tradition attributes Harsha as the author of three Sanskrit plays- *Ratnavali*, *Nagananda* and *Priyadarshika*. Banabhatta, his court poet composed *Harshacharita*, considered the first historical poetic work in Sanskrit. He also wrote 'Kadambari'. Bana has also described Harsha as a poet. Some writers like Soddhala of 11th century CE. and Jayadeva of 12th century CE. has ranked Harsha "along with other literary monarchs and even Bhasa, Kalidasa etc".

Literature

Harsha also gave patronage to scholars other than Bana in his court. Jayasena was another great scholar in his court and he was known to be knowledgeable in the subjects of *Hetuvidya, Sabdavidya* and *Yogasastra*. There was also another scholar called Mayura in his court who was the author of 'Suryashtakam'. Some scholars have also opined that Bharavi, the famous author of Sanskrit *Mahakavya* 'Kiratarjuniya', Subandhu, the author of 'Vasavadatta' and Kumaradas, author of 'Janaki Haran' were also the contemporaries of Harsha. The famous scholar Dandin was also the contemporary of Harsha but he wrote his work, 'Dasakumaracharita' and 'Kavyadarsha' after the death of Harsha.

R.K. Mookerji has attributed to Harsha the characteristics of both Samudragupta and Ashoka. H.G. Rawlinson has compared Harsha to Ashoka and Akbar and counts him as one of the greatest rulers India has produced. K.M.Panikkar has criticised the comparison of Harsha with Ashoka and has argued that there are only superficial similarities between both the rulers and that the only point of comparison is probably that they were both patrons of Buddhism. But even in that regard, Harsha only had a dilettante's interest in religious discussions and support of the religion whereas Ashoka had a religious fervour and missionary enthusiasm, according to Panikkar. But Panikkar agreed with the parallel of Harsha with Akbar who had extended tolerance to all religions and also because Harsha was a military monarch for the greater part of his reign. R.C.Majumdar has criticised some scholars for giving Harsha the title of 'Last great empire builder in the Hindu period' and has observed that 'we cannot withhold praise and admiration due to him as a great ruler, a brave military leader, a patron of arts'. Many scholars in the later period have also criticised the usage of the term 'Hindu period'.

Recap

♦ Pushyabhati dynasty emerged after the decline of the Gupta Empire

♦ Pushyabhuti dynasty gained prominence in North India's fragmented polity

♦ Harsha unified territories, including Kanauj, becoming a powerful monarch

♦ Religious tolerance marked Harsha's reign, supporting Buddhism and Hinduism

♦ Nalanda University flourished under Harsha's patronage, attracting scholars from all over the world

♦ Harsha organised grand assemblies and charitable events at Prayag

♦ His administration featured provinces, districts, villages and efficient governance

♦ Military campaigns expanded influence but faced resistance from Pulakesi II

♦ Economic growth included agriculture, trade with China and artisan guilds

♦ Literature thrived, with Banabhatta's works and Harsha's Sanskrit plays

♦ Harsha's rule saw education centers like Nalanda and Ujjain excelling

♦ Diverse religious sects coexisted, reflecting cultural and philosophical richness

♦ Harsha's army was robust, including elephants, cavalry and infantry

♦ The caste system persisted, with untouchability and occupational segregation prevalent

Objective Questions

1. Who was the author of *Harshacharita*?

2. Who was the Chinese pilgrim who visited India during the reign of Harsha?

3. Who was the Chalukyan king who defeated Harsha?

4. Who was the king of Gauda who treacherously murdered the brother of Harsha?

5. Which was the capital city of Harsha?

6. Who wrote the famous work Kiratarjuniya?

7. Which are the three Sanskrit plays attributed to Harsha?

8. What was the prominent trade port during Harsha's reign connecting China and Southeast Asia?

9. Which university flourished during Harsha's reign and reached its zenith?

10. Who were the provincial governors during Harsha's administration?

11. What title was adopted by Harsha during his reign?

12. Name the work written by Hiuen Tsang about Harsha's reign?

Answers

1. Banabhatta

2. Hieun Tsang

3. Pulakesi – II

4. Sasanka

5. Kanuaj

6. Bharavi

7. Ratnavali, Nagananda and Priyadarshika

8. Tamralipti

9. Nalanda

10. Lokapalas

11. Siladitya

12. Si-Yu-Ki

Assignments

1. Discuss the political scenario in North India during the post-Gupta period.

2. Explain the rise of the Pushyabhuti dynasty and its significance in Indian history.

3. Analyse the role of Harsha Vardhana in consolidating the Ganga-Yamuna Doab region.

4. Examine Harsha's religious policy and his role in promoting Buddhism.

5. Assess the contributions of Harsha to Indian literature and culture.

6. Discuss the economic policies of Harsha and their influence on trade and commerce in his empire.

7. Critically analyse the views of historians like K.M. Panikkar and R.C. Majumdar on Harsha Vardhana's legacy.

8. Analyse the administrative and judicial systems under Harsha.

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5 UNIT

Rise of New Powers in South India

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ gain familiarity with the political history of the Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas dynasties

♦ discuss the cultural advancements during the reigns of the Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas, focusing on art, architecture and literature

♦ understand the administrative structures and governance strategies of the Deccan during the early medieval period

♦ explain the rise and fall of these dynasties and their lasting impact on the socio-political and cultural development of South India

Prerequisites

The Deccan region of South India witnessed profound changes starting in the early medieval period. Tamilakam, under the ancient Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms (known as the Muvendar), experienced a significant transformation following the Kalabhra interregnum, a period marked by upheaval and the displacement of established powers. By the 6th century CE, three dominant dynasties—the Pallavas of Kanchi, the Pandyas of Madurai and the Chalukyas of Badami—emerged as influential forces, reshaping the political, cultural and religious landscape of South India. These powers often engaged in conflicts with one another while leaving a lasting legacy through their administrative reforms, artistic achievements and architectural marvels. The Pallavas, in particular, spearheaded rock-cut temple architecture and the Chalukyas expanded their influence to encompass vast territories, including diplomatic and military interactions with other regions. In this unit, we will examine the rise and dominance of the Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas. This discussion will explore

their political and military strategies, cultural contributions and the eventual decline of their empires. We delve into how these powers shaped South India's history, focusing on their achievements, relationships and enduring legacy in the region.

Keywords

Pallavas, Kanchi, Mahabalipuram, Kanchi, Rashtrakutas, Pandyas, Madurai, Chalukyas, Vikramankadeva-charita

Discussion

6.5.1 The Pallavas

Pallava dynasty existed from 275 CE to 897 CE and established themselves as a formidable power in South India from about the 6th century CE in the area between the rivers Pennar and Pellar which included the regions of modern day North and South Arcot, Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Madras. The term 'Pallava' means creeper, which is a Sanskrit version of the Tamil word 'Tondai', which also carries the same meaning. The origin of the Pallavas are shrouded in mystery with some scholars like B.L. Rice and V.Venkataiah linking their origin with the Pahlavas who were of Persian origin and others like D.C.Sircar and K.M.Panikkar rejecting it because no Pallava records mention the word, 'Pahlavas'. There is also an opinion by some scholars that the Pallavas were a tribe or a clan, but others like K.P.Jayaswal have rejected this and instead opined that they were a branch of the Brahmana royal dynasty of the Vakatakas from the North, but the Talagunda inscription states that the Pallavas were Kshatriyas.

There are Prakrit charters which mention kings like Sivaskandavarman who ruled around the 4th century CE.from the river Krishna to South Pennar and the Bellary district. Vishnugopan was another ruler who is mentioned as one of the twelve kings of Daksinapatha defeated by Samudragupta.

Simhavishnu

Simhavishnu was the ruler who started the phase of cultural and political achievements for the Pallava dynasty, probably in the second half of the sixth century. He is credited with the conquest of Cholamandalam and the defeat of Pandyas. These victories extended the Pallava dominion up to Kaveri. He is also supposed to have defeated the Kalabhras who occupied many areas of Tamilakam in the Post Sangam period. He was a patron of the famous poet Bharavi who wrote the phenomenal work *Kiratarjuniya*. The art and architectural works of the Pallavas in Mahabalipuram were started by Simhavishnu. The sculpted reliefs of Simhavishnu and his two queens are also found in Mahabalipuram.

Mahendravarman I (600-630 CE)

Mahendravarman I succeeded his father Simhavishnu and it was during his reign that the Pallava-Chalukya conflict began. According to Aihole inscription, Mahendravarman was defeated by the Chalukya king Pulakesi II and that the former was also forced to surrender parts of Vengi to the victor, which was placed under his brother, Vishnuvardhana. Mahendravarman was known for his passion for art and architecture. In the Sanskrit work attributed to him, 'Mattavilasaprahasana', he mocked some practices of Buddhists and Shaivites. He later became a follower of Shaivism after being influenced by the famous Shiva bhakti poet, Appar. He is credited by scholars as the first king in South India to have started the Rock-Cut temple architecture and the Mandagapattu inscription has mentioned it. He constructed many temples in the areas of Trichinopoly, Chingelpet and Arcot. He built temples to honour the Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He also built a reservoir tank and raised a Vishnu temple in the city named after him, Mahendravadi. The Kudumiyamalai inscription credits him as an accomplished musician as well.

Narasimhavarman I (630-688 CE)

Mahendravarman I was succeeded by Narasimhavarman I who continued the dynastic conflict with the Chalukyas. He defeated and killed Pulakesi II and also succeeded in capturing their capital, Vatapi. He occupied the Southern part of the Chalukya kingdom and took up the title of 'Vatapikonda'. He also sent an expedition to Ceylon and succeeded in the mission which is described in the Buddhist work, *Mahavamsa*. It was during his reign that Hieun Tsang visited the Pallava territory. According to his account, the Pallava capital Kanchi was about 6 miles in circumference and there were more than a hundred monasteries with 10000 monks living in them. Narasimhavarman I started the next stage of Pallava temple construction by building a number of monolithic temples in the town of Mahabalipuram and the most important one being the Dharmaraja ratha. His political and cultural contributions brought glory to the Pallavas and he is often described as the most illustrious ruler of the empire for those reasons.

Paramesvaravarman I (670-695 CE)

During the reign of Paramesvaravarman I, the Pallava-Chalukya conflict again started to flare up. There are disputed records regarding the result of the conflict. Pallavas got a big setback when Chalukya king Vikramaditya I attacked them and captured their capital Kanchi, according to Chalukya records. The Pallava records dispute this claim and mention that Vikramaditya was defeated and that the city of Ranarasika, ie., Badami was destroyed. Paramesvaravarman I was a worshipper of Shiva and built a temple dedicated to Shiva. He also added edifices at Mahabalipuram.

Narasimhavarman II (695-728 CE)

Narasimhavarman II took up the titles of Rajasimha(lion among kings), Agamapriya (lover of sculptures) and Sankarabhakta (devotee of Shiva). He took up many architectural pursuits and was the builder of Kailasanatha temple of Kanchi, the shore temple at Mahabalipuram and Airavatesvara temple at Kanchi. Some sources indicate that he patronised the great poet, Dandin in his court. He also sent an embassy to China and apparently the Chinese emperor also sent an embassy to Kanchi as well, indicating good

diplomatic relations with outside India as well.

Paramesvaravarman II(728-731 CE)

Paramesvaravarman ruled for about eight years and had to face the Chalukya invasion by Vikrmaditya II and the former was forced to pay tribute to the Chalukyan ruler. Some sources suggest that Parmesvaravarman was killed by the Ganga rulers in a battle at Vilande. The Vaikuntaperumal inscription indicates that the kingdom was destroyed after the death of the king and that after a period of anarchy, a 12 year old son of Hiranyavarman, a descendant of Bhimavarman, brother of Simhavishnu came to the throne with support of the people and he was the next ruler Nandivarman II.

Nandivarman II (731 - 795 CE)

Nandivarman II acquired the throne after the Pallavas faced years of gloom after the death of Paramesvaravarman II. The Chalukya king Vikramaditya II invaded the Pallava territory during his reign and captured Kanchi and later Nandivarman recovered it with much difficulty. He also had to face the Pandyas who were defeated. The Rashtrakutas, under their founder Dantidurga, attacked the Pallavas and captured Kanchi. But later diplomatic relations were established after a treaty and a marriage alliance between both dynasties where Reva, the daughter of the Rashtrakuta king, was given in marriage to the Pallava ruler. Nandivarman was also a patron of architecture and he built the Muktesvara temple and Vaikunta temple at Kanchi. It is said that the famous Vaishnava saint and scholar Tirumangai Alvar was patronised by Nandivarman. Nandivarman II was succeeded by Dantivarman and a score of other rulers who could not rescue the empire from its imminent decline.

Aparajitha Pallava (880-997 CE)

The last among the known Pallava kings was Aparajita Pallava who defeated the Pandya king, Varaguna II in the battle of Sri Purambiyam, but was later defeated by the Chola ruler, Aditya by the end of the 9th century. From that defeat onwards, the Pallavas were overshadowed by the Cholas. During the period of decline, the Pallavas fought with the Rashtrakutas and the Gangas. The later Pallava rulers were reduced to the position of feudatories to other rulers in the later period. In some sources, it is stated that the Pallavas were among the first feudatories of Vikrama Chola and they can even be traced as chiefs to 13th century CE.

6.5.2 The Pandyas

The Pandyas occupied the region around the modern districts of Madurai and Tinnevelly, part of Trichinopoly and parts of Travancore. The chronological order of the Pandyas from 7th to 10th century CE. is not clear from historical records.

Kadungon (590-620 CE)

The Kalabhra occupation of the earlier centuries was ended by the Pandya king, Kadungon towards the end of the 6th century CE. There is not much information available about his rule. Most of the knowledge about him comes from the Velvikudi inscription of the Pandya king Parantaka Nedunchadaiyan.

Maravarman (620-645 CE)

Maravarman succeeded Kadungon and he is credited with having laid the foundations for the kingdom. Hieun Tsang visited during his reign and he has talked about the country Malakuta from the information he gathered from his friends at Kanchi. He remarked that

Buddhism was almost extinct from the kingdom and that the ancient city was in ruins. He stated that Jains were present but they were mostly indulging in trade. He mentioned a large number of Hindu temples present in the Pandya territory.

Arikesari Parankusa Maravarman (670-700 CE)

He is identified with the legendary Nedumaran or the Kun Pandya. He won battle over the Cheras and defeated the Pallavas as well. He started the imperial career of the Pandyas and extended the dominion. His successors also followed the active policy of imperial extension. He was supposedly a Jain in the beginning and later was converted to Shaivism with the influence of Thirugnanasambandar.

Ko Chadaiyan Ranadhiran (700-730 CE)

He started his imperial ambitions by defeating an army chief at Maradur, a hill country between Tinnevelly and Travancore near Ambasamudram. He also conquered the Kongudesa (modern Coimbatore and Salem area) and took the title of Kongarkoman. He successfully defeated the Maharathas at Mangalapuram.

Maravarman Rajasimha I (730-765 CE)

He was a powerful king who had to carry on a long war with the Pallavas. In the beginning of the war, he defeated the Pallava king and besieged him at Nandipura and assumed the title of Pallavabhanjana. But later, with the arrival of the Pallava chief Udaychandra, Pallavas gained the upper hand and he rescued the king Nandivarman. He later conquered the area of Kodumudi in the Kongudesam and was also said to have defeated the Chalukya king, Kirtivarman II. He also made a matrimonial alliance with the Western Ganga king by marrying his daughter, Sripursha. The Velvikudi copper plates mention that he renovated the palaces and the fortification of Kudal in Madurai, Vanji, the Chera capital and Koli in Uraiyur.

Nedunjeliyan Varaguna I (765-815 CE)

He is often described as the 'greatest imperialist of the Pandyas'. He had to continue with the war with the Pallavas who had allied themselves with the rulers of Kongu and Chera area and Varaguna defeated them at Pannagadam. He also subdued the Aya chief, the Adigamas of Tagadur and completely conquered the area of Kongu Desa. He is described as the 'supreme master of Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, Salem and Coimbatore and also of Southern Travancore'.

Maravarman Srimara Srivallabha (815-862 CE)

He followed an aggressive policy of conquest like his father, Varaguna. He defeated the confederacy formed by the Gangas, Cholas, Pallavas, Kalingas and Magadhas at Kudamukku in present day Kumbakonam district. The Pallavas, though, didn't give up and continued with the struggle and won against Pandyas at Tellaru near modern day Wandiwash.

Varagunavarman II (862- 880 CE)

He tried to revive the declining glory of his kingdom by invading the Cholas. But he was defeated by the combined forces of the Cholas, Western Gangas and the Pallavas at Thirupurambiyam . This defeat brought much ruin to the Pandya kingdom.

Maravarman Rajasimha II (900 - 920 CE)

He was the son of Prantaka and he tried

to get the help of the king of Ceylon to subdue the Cholas but was defeated in a devastating battle at Vellur. Maravarman had to take shelter in Ceylon and later he settled in Kerala. It was this defeat that led Pandyas to lose their independence and to accept the over lordship of the Cholas.

During the 12th century Pandyas recovered under the leadership of Jatavarman Kulasekhara, who was later defeated by Kulottunga III. Maravarman Sundara Pandya, his successor, was successful in fighting back and defeating Kulottunga III. He also destroyed the Chola areas of Tanjore and Uraiyur. He was succeeded by Sundara Pandya II who had to face the threat of the Hoysalas of Devasamudra. Jatavarman Sundara Pandya succeeded Sundara Pandya II and he subdued the Cheras and the king of Lanka. He was successful in defeating the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati (Warangal) and the Pallava chief Sendamangalam; he also stormed the Hoysala fortress, Kannanur Koppam. The rulers who came after Jatavarman Sundara Pandya were weak and ultimately the Pandya kingdom fell into the hands of Hoysalas and they were reduced to the status of Hoysala feudatories.

6.5.3 The Chalukyas

The Chalukyas were a prominent power in the Deccan from about 6th to 8th centuries CE. and then again from the 10th to 12th centuries CE. The early Chalukyas were in power for about two centuries, from the middle of the 6th centuries CE. to the middle of the 8th Century CE, after which they were ousted by the Rashtrakutas. The province of the early (Western) Chalukyas comprised the area comprising the present day Bijapur district. Their capital was Vatapi also known as Badami. They

should be differentiated from the other branch of Chalukyas in the eastern parts with Vengi as the capital who ruled from the 7th century CE. to 12th century CE. There are also the later Western Chalukyas of Kalyani who overthrew the Rashtrakutas in the second half of the 10th century CE. and continued to rule till the end of the 12th century CE. The origins of the Chalukyas are not very clear. They supposedly had variants of their name as Chalkya and Chalikya, used regionally as well. Some stories have suggested that the family name Chalukya may have been drawn from ancestors named Chalka, Chulika or Chalukya. According to the Handarike inscription, the Chalukyas were born of the Chulka, 'hand hollowed to hold water' of the sage Hariti-Panchasikha when he was pouring out a libation to the God. Another source, *Vikramankadeva-charita* by Bilhana, has mentioned that the ancestor of the Chalukyas emerged from the chuluka of the creator God Brahma to destroy the evil-doers of the earth. Another legend from the records of the Chalukyas of Kalyani claims their origin to be from Manu or the moon and associates it with Ayodhya. Yet another legend claims they descended from Haritiputra of Manavya gotra and that they were nourished by the seven mothers who are the mothers of mankind. Hieun Tsang has written that the famous Chalukya king, Pulakesi II was Kshatriya by birth.

Apart from the myths and legends, historians have also given observations on their origin. V.A. Smith has argued that the Chalukyas were of foreign origin and connects them with Capas, a branch of the Gurjar tribe who emigrated from Rajputana to Deccan. But this theory is not supported by historical evidence or tradition and has been criticised by K.M.Panikkar as the tendency of British historians to believe

and state that anything good in India must have a foreign origin. D.C. Sircar has also criticised the theory of foreign origin of the Chalukyas as 'untenable' and holds that the Chalukyas of Badami represented an indigenous Kanarese family that claimed the status of Kshatriyas. He has also stated that the Sulkis of Orissa had nothing to do with the Chalukyas.

Pulakesi I (540-566 CE)

Pulakesi is regarded as the first prominent ruler of the Chalukyas. He is often described as the real founder of the dynasty and the first to be called 'Maharaja'. He also had titles like Satyasraya, Ranavikrama, Shri-Prithvi Vallabha and Vallabha. He performed sacrifices like Aswamedha, Hiranyagarbha, Vajapeya, Agnichayana etc. Inscriptions compare him with mythical figures like Yayati and they also mention that he is knowledgeable about *Manu Smriti, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata* and the *Itihasas.* He laid the foundations of the Fort of Vatapi or Badami located in present day Bijapur District.

Kirtivarman I (566-597 CE)

Kirtivarman I succeeded his father, Pulakesi I. Epigraphic evidence suggests that he defeated the rulers of Vanga, Anga, Kalinga, Mauryas of the North Konkan, Kadambas of Banavasi and Nalas. He is also known as the 'first maker of Vatapi' indicating that he beautified the town with temples. He is also said to have completed the *Bahusuvarna* and *Agnishtoma* sacrifices.

Mangalesa (597-609 CE)

Kirtivarman was succeeded by his brother Mangalesa. He is described as Paramabhagavata or the devout worshipper of Lord Vishnu (Bhagavata). His much acclaimed feat includes defeating the king Buddha of the Kalachuris and the conquest of Revatidvipa. The struggle with Kalachuris seems to have continued for many years and later Mangalesa captured almost the whole of Central and Northern Maratha country. Later, there was a civil war between Mangalesa and his nephew Pulakesi II, who was the son of the earlier ruler Kirtivarman I on the question of successor for Mangalesa. The war resulted in the death of Mangalesa and accession of Pulakesi II to the throne.

Pulakesi II (609-642 CE)

Pulakesi II was the greatest king of the dynasty. Even before the accession, he had to fight with his uncle and this also led to the severe opposition by the rebels and challenges by the neighbours. The Bijapur region was attacked by two kings named Appayika and Govinda who advanced as far as the banks of the river Bhaimarathi/Bhima. He suppressed the rebels and by following a policy of dividing his enemies, he won over Govinda as an ally and defeated Appayika. He later extended the dominions of the empire by besieging Vanavasi, the capital of Kadambas . Later he forced the Gangas of South Mysore and Alupas of Shimoga to submit. He also made a matrimonial alliance with the Gangas, by marrying the daughter of the Ganga ruler, Durvinta. The Mauryas of Konkan, the Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras were also subdued one by one. It was the march of Pulakesi II into the present day Gujarat region that brought him into contact with Harsha Vardhana of Kanauj. In about 636.CE. Harsha invaded Kathiawad. Pulakesi II allied himself with Sasanka of Bengal and his feudatory Sainyabhitta-Madhavavarman II of Kangoda and also with the kings of Valabhi and Broach. With the help of the alliance, he was able to defeat Harsha

Vardhana. The Aihole inscription mentions that the battle between the two powerful rulers was fought somewhere between the Vindhya mountains and Narmada river. As a result of the battle, Harsha gave up the ambition to conquer the southern regions and returned to the north. Some sources say that the river Narmada was recognised as the frontier line between the empires of the 'Lord of the North' which is Harsha and 'Lord of the South', Pulakesi II.

Many of his feats are described in the Aihole inscription. It states that the Chalukya army marched along the coastal route towards the South. They captured the fortress of Pishtarpur and another fort on the island in Kunala. The ruler of Pishtarpur was removed and the brother of Pulakesi II was left in charge of the new territory. This was also the circumstance that led to the formation of the Eastern Chalukyas later. Pulakesi II was also known for the defeat of the Pallava king, Mahendravarman I and the latter was forced to take refuge behind the ramparts of Kanchi, the Pallava capital. After subjugating the Pallavas, Pulakesi led his army across the river Kaveri and compelled the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas to accept friendly diplomatic relations with him. This alliance made him almost a paramount authority of the Deccan. The celebrated Buddhist monk Hieun Tsang who visited the court of Harsha also visited the Chalukya territory during the period of Pulakesi II. He has written about the benevolence of the king and that his subjects and vassals obeyed him willingly. There are sources that mention how his reputation spread outside the country as well. The Muslim historian, Tabari mentions that Khusru II, king of Persia maintained diplomatic relations with Pulakesi II. One of the paintings of Ajanta caves has the depiction of a Persian ambassador presenting a letter of Khusru to Pulakesi II Pulakesi's defeat of the Pallavas came back against him as they were not fully crushed and also because Pulakesi attacked them again during Narasimhanvarman I. They wanted payback for the capture of their capital earlier and they attacked Badami and captured it. Later in the battle that followed Pulakesi II was killed.

After the death of Pulakesi II, the empire declined. The successor of Pulakesi II, Vikramaditya I had an initial period of political disaster and later consolidated the kingdom after defeating the enemies, but he also suffered defeat under the attack of the Pallava ruler, Paramesvara Varman who pillaged the capital Badami. After the death of Vikramaditya I, his successors retained power for some time but the glory of the empire gradually declined. By the 8th century CE. Rashtrakutas rose to power and this ended the supremacy of the Chalukyas in the Deccan. The Rashtrakuta king, Dantidurga defeated the Chalukya king, Kirtivarman II and this created the eclipse of power for the Chalukyas.

Recap

- Pallava dynasty rose in the Deccan (6th century CE) with Kanchi as capital

- Mahabalipuram sculptures, rock-cut temples and architectural innovations flourished under Pallava rule.

- Simhavishnu conquered Cholamandalam, defeated Pandyas and made significant cultural contributions

- Mahendra Varman I started rock-cut temple architecture; authored 'Mattavilasaprahasana'

- Defeated Pulakesi II, captured Vatapi, initiated monolithic temple constructions in Mahabalipuram

- Kadungon ended Kalabhra rule; later kings expanded territories, notably under Maravarman

- Hieun Tsang noted Buddhism's decline and Hindu temples' dominance in the Pandya territory

- Pulakesi I established the dynasty; legends link their ancestry to Brahma or Hariti sages

- Defeated Harsha; expanded territories; established diplomatic ties with Persia; admired by Hieun Tsang

- Badami region flourished under their rule, leaving behind architectural marvels and inscriptions

- Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas frequently clashed, impacting political stability and cultural exchanges

- Rashtrakutas defeated Chalukyas by 8th century CE, marking a power shift in Deccan

- Pandyas faced defeats from Cholas, leading to a decline in independence and influence

- Dynasties contributed significantly to South Indian religious, architectural and artistic heritage

- Defeated by Cholas, Pallavas became feudatories; their legacy persisted in temple architecture

Objective Questions

1. Which Pallava ruler started the rock cut architecture in temples in South India?

2. Who was called 'Vatapikonda'?

3. Who built the shore temple at Mahablipuram?

4. Which Pandya ruler assumed the title of 'Pallavabhanjana'?

5. Who assumed the title of Kongarkoman?

6. Which Pandya ruler converted to Shaivism by the influence of Tirujnanasambandar?

7. Which inscription mentions the defeat of Harsha Vardhana by the Chalukyas?

8. Who was the Persian king who established diplomatic relations with Pulakesi II?

9. What was the capital of the Western Chalukyas?

10. Which Pandya king defeated the Chola ruler, Kulottunga III?

Answers

1. Mahendravarman I
2. Narasimhavarman I
3. Narasimhavarman II
4. Maravarman Rajasimha I
5. Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran
6. Arikesari Parankusa Maravarman
7. Aihole inscription
8. Khusru II
9. Badami
10. Sundara Pandya

Assignments

1. Discuss the rise and fall of the Pallava dynasty, emphasising its cultural, political and architectural contributions.

2. Trace the military achievements and challenges faced by the Pandyas from Kadungon to Maravarman Rajasimha II.

3. Compare the administrative and architectural achievements of the Pallavas and the Chalukyas.

4. Explain the significance of the rise of the Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas in South Indian history during the early medieval period.

5. Discuss the cultural and architectural advancements introduced by the Pallavas. Provide examples.

6. Examine the factors leading to the decline of the Pandyas and Chalukyas and their impact on the political transformation of South India.

7. How did foreign travelers like Hieun Tsang and inscriptions contribute to our understanding of the South Indian dynasties?

8. Assess the role of Kadungon and subsequent Pandya rulers in reviving the Pandya dynasty after the Kalabhra interregnum.

Suggested Reading

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6 UNIT

Bhakti Movement: Alwars and Nayanars

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

♦ explain the socio-political and religious background of the Bhakti movement in South India

♦ discuss Bhakti movement's association with the emergence and growth of Shaivism and Vaishnavism during the reign of the Pallava, Pandya and Chola dynasties.

♦ identify the prominenet Bhakti saints, including the Alwars and Nayanars and examine their roles in shaping devotional literature and challenging socio-religious norms

♦ describe how the Bhakti movement provided a platform for marginalised communities

Prerequisites

The Bhakti Movement emerged in the socio-political landscape of early medieval South India, marked by significant changes under the Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas. This period saw the rise of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, supported by royal patronage, which gradually overshadowed the existing traditions of Buddhism and Jainism that had flourished during the Post-Sangam era. The movement was further enriched by the influence of Aryanisation and the contribution of wandering saints who preached devotion in simple language, making it accessible to the masses. These saints, including the Nayanars and Alwars, played a crucial role in shaping a popular religious ethos through hymns, poetry and narratives centered on devotion to Shiva and Vishnu. In this unit, we study the origins and evolution of the Bhakti Movement in South India. We learn about its socio-religious impact, the contributions of prominent saints and the devotional literature that emerged during this era. Finally, the unit delves into how the movement provided an alternative path for marginalised sections of society, emphasising love and surrender over rigid orthodoxy.

Keywords

Alwars, Nayanars, Tirunavukkarasu, Sambandar, Sundarar, Manikkavacagar, Nandanar, Kannappan, Periyalwar, Andal, Tirumangai, Tirumalisai

Discussion

The concept of Bhakti was a major development in the field of religion in Early Medieval India (from the 6th to the 9th century), especially in South India. The idea of Bhakti or devotion to a deity, became a factor of emotional intensity and part of a powerful religious movement, as seen from the works of both Shaiva saints or Nayanars and Vaishnava saints or Alwars. These saints travelled extensively to propagate their faith and also debated, sang, composed beautiful poems in praise of the deities and even danced. It was from the south that it spread to other parts of India and later to North India and became an important part of Hinduism there as well.

6.6.1 Origin of Bhakti Movement

The term 'Bhakti' has been discussed much among the scholars. According to Noboru Karashima, the concept of Bhakti can be even seen in earlier north Indian religious works like *Bhagavadgita* in *Mahabharata,* in which Krishna tells Arjuna that Bhakti is also a way to attain salvation. Though there was something similar to the Bhakti cult in the Gupta period, it was during the period of the Pallavas in South India that it took the form of a religious movement, according to Karashima. He also says that there is the influence of Aryanisation from North

and Sangam tradition in the formation of the Bhakti tradition in South India.

According to M.G.S.Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, Bhakti as a movement had the influence of Aryanisation and then the movement spread all over Tamilakam by the 9th century and as it got consolidated by the 10th century and later it started losing its character of reform, protest and dissent. They are also of the opinion that a feudalised monarchy, chartered Brahmin settlements, trade corporations, the emergence of new Shaiva and Vaishnava temples and the devotional literature centred on these Gods was a characteristic of the South just like the Gupta period which may have influenced the Bhakti tradition as well. K.A.N. Sastri has argued that the Bhakti movement arose as an expression of strong reaction by the worshippers of Shiva and Vishnu, against the growing influence of Jainism and Buddhism.

Vijaya Ramaswamy has argued that the period from the 7th to 12th century constitutes the hard core of the 'Bhakti movement' in South India and it created a sacred space for the socially, ritually and economically underprivileged and unprivileged sections of society. The path of knowledge precluded the lower castes and women since they were forbidden to read the sacred texts. The paths of devotion preached by the Bhakti saints

required from the devotees nothing else but love and surrender and therefore provided these oppressed categories with an ideal alternative. They mostly preached in the language of the common people- Tamil. Romila Thapar has observed that the flexibility of Bhakti sects tried to overcome the brahmanical orthodoxy and has suggested that their status was often linked with royal or political patronage and that they emerged out of social requirement. According to Champakalakshmi, in Bhakti hymns, apart from intense devotion, there was a protest against Brahmin orthodoxy and denunciation against Jains and Buddhists. She has also looked at how the Bhakti saints introduced the concept of a sacred geography coinciding with the agrarian and political geography of the Chola period, with the temple as the institutional focus in all these centres associated with these Bhakti saints.

According to tradition, there were sixty three Shaivite saints, Nayanars and the list included a woman, Karaikal Ammaiyar, a lower caste person called Nandanar from Adanur and a general from the Pallava forces, Siruthondar. But the most important and well known among the Shaivite Saints were the trio, Tirunavukkarasu/ Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar, whose hymns are collected together in the *Tevaram*. The name *Tevaram* refers to the first seven volumes of the canonical texts of Tamil Shaivism, *Panniru Tirumurai*, the 12-volume collection of Shaiva devotional poetry of the Tamil region. In the 10th century, during the reign of Raja Raja Chola I, Tevaram palm leaves were found to be abandoned in a locked room of Chidambaram Nataraja temple. Nambiyandar Nambi compiled them all along with other religious texts, like

Sekkilar's *Periyapuranam*, a poem of 4286 verses, dealing with the lives of the 63 Shaiva saints and by writing *Thiruthondar Thiruvandhadhi,* a memoir of the sixty- three great devotees mentioned by Sundarar. The Vaishnavites have twelve Alwars whose chronology is mixed up. Poygai, Pey and Pudam are believed to be the earliest among the Vaishnava saints. The poems by the Vaishnava saints were compiled by a theologian named Nathamuni in a text called *Naalayira Divya Prabhandham* (a collection of 4000 holy songs) in the 9th-10th century CE and he was also instrumental in popularising it by singing it as part of worship in Vaishnavite temples in South India. The Bhakti of the Vaishnava saints is marked by a gentler and simple devotion without any sectarian rivalry as opposed to the Shaivite Bhakti works. K.A.N. Sastri has given a chronology of not later than the 5th or 6th century CE. to the Vaishnava hymns.

6.6.1.1 Nayanars

Nayanars were the Tamil poets of the seventh and the eighth century CE. who composed devotional hymns in honour of the Hindu god Siva. The hymns of Nayanars were preserved in several collections that were finally combined in the 10th century to make up the 12 major canonical texts of the Shaiva Siddhanta system. The hymns remained the favourite expression of popular Bhakti among Tamil Shaivas. It is to be noted that we don't have accurate information available about the 63 Nayanars and only a few have left historical information about their lives, even though in many Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu we find the idols of the 63 saints.

Thirunavukkarasu

Thirunavukkarasu, popularly known as Appar was born in a Vellala family in Tiruvarur and was a Jain in the beginning of his life and joined the monastery at Cuddalore and was known as 'Dharmasena'. He is said to have been converted to Shaivism later in his life because of the influence of his sister, who was an ardent devotee of Shiva. The Trichinopoly inscription of Mahendravarman has mentioned Appar's conversion to Shaivism. Appar has composed 49000 stanzas of lyrical poems praising Lord Shiva and his works constitute the 4th to 6th books of the Shaivite *Tirumurai*. Some traditions say that he lived long enough to the age of 81 and spent many years on pilgrimage, met many saints and among them was Sambandar, another famous poet of the Tevaram trio.

Thirugnanasambandar

Thirugnanasambandar was born as a Brahman in Sikali/Shiyali in Tanjore in the first half of the 7th century CE. Similar to Appar, he is said to have influenced the Pandya king Nedumaran to convert from Jainism to Shaivism.

According to legends, during the period of Sambandar, the Pandya region was dominated by Jainism but the Pandya queen, who was a Chola princess and the minister who were both Shaivas, requested Sambandar to get rid of Jainism from the Pandya country. Sambandar did so by defeating the Jains in debates and he is also said to have miraculously cured the illness of the king. He was supposed to have had a fanatic fervour against the Jains and Buddhists. Some sources have made him responsible for the impalement of and execution of about 8000 Jains, which most

scholars treat as an impossible myth. He is said to have composed about 4181 stanzas praising the Lord Shiva and is said to have attained eternal bliss on his wedding at the age of sixteen, when after the ceremony, the newlyweds and the wedding party were absorbed into the Godhead.

Sundarar

Sundaramurti Nayanar or Sundarar was born in a Shaiva Brahmana family in Tiruvalur on the bank of Ten Pennai River at the end of 8th century CE. According to traditions, he is supposed to have attained Shiva's bliss by having the last journey into Kailasam along with his friend and the famous Chera king, Cheraman Perumal, the former in a white elephant and the latter in a white horse. He was known as Tambirantolan (comrade of the lord) and Vantondar (insolent devotee) due to his devotion to Shiva as an intimate friend in his poetry.

Manikkavacagar

Manikkavacagar was born in a Shaiva Brahmana family at Thiruvathavur on the banks of the river Vaigai. He was the minister of the Pandya king, Arimarttanar, identified by some scholars as Varaguna II and later gave up his career to become a Shaiva poet and saint who performed miracles with the help of God, according to legends. He is among the later saints after Sundarar and his works reflect a mysticism that was the characteristic of the later period and also an inclination towards the Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy. He was known to have debated with Buddhists from Sri Lanka at Chidambaram and defeated them. His magnum opus *Thiruvasagam* (The sacred word) represents the peak of Bhakti poetry, according to scholar Kamil Zvelebil.

Nandanar

Nandanar was born in a lower caste leather making family. He was a strong devotee of Shiva and wished to visit Chidambaram Shiva temple, but always used to postpone it to tomorrow and thus got the name, 'Tirunalaippovar' or 'he who will go tomorrow'. And finally, when his dream came true and he reached Chidambaram, But he was not allowed to enter inside as he was from a lower caste. He wept in front of the temple wall and, according to legends, Lord Shiva himself appeared and asked the temple priests to let him inside. Nandanar had to go inside through a purifying fire to enter the temple and later was absorbed into the sanctum of the temple. The part where he had to enter through the fire is often used as a criticism by scholars to indicate how rigid the casteism was during the period.

Kannappan

Kannappan was born as Tinnan and was a hunter who lived in the Kalahasti area. According to traditions, he became a Shaiva devotee through the influence of a sage. He used to regularly offer the cooked meat of the animals he hunted to the Shivalinga on Kalahasti hills. One day he saw the eye on the Shivalinga bleeding and he plucked his own eye with an arrow and applied it on the Linga. Afterwards the other eye of the linga also started bleeding and as he was about to pluck his remaining eye to offer to the linga, the Lord Shiva himself is supposed to have appeared before him and addressed him as Kannappan, blessed him and restored his eyesight. His unflinching devotion to the Lord earned him a place among the 63 Nayanars.

6.6.1.2 Alwars

The Alwars are the Vaishnava poet-saints of South India with their Tamil hymns full of intense devotional love for Lord Vishnu, singing the mystic glory of the lord. The word 'Alwar' means one who has a mystic intuitive knowledge of god and who has emerged oneself in divine contemplation. It also means one who has dived or one who is immersed. Twelve of them obtained canonical recognition. The collection of hymns of the Alwars consisting of 4000 verses is called *Nalayira-Divya Prabandhan* and is placed side by side with the Vedas by some devotees in the south. These Alwars flourished approximately between 700 and 1000 CE. Some of the Alwars are historically important and give us information about the religious practices about the period they lived.

Periyalwar

Periyalwar is considered as the most famous among the Vaisnava saints. He was born in a Brahmana family in Srivilliputtur in the 9th century CE. and was a contemporary of the Pandya king, Maravarman Srivallabha, in whose court he is supposed to have won debates against scholars of other religions. His hymns are popularly recited in Vaishnava temples. Most of his poetry is themed on the childhood of Krishna, the god in the form of Balakrishna. His poems had influenced the Pandya king as well.

Andal

Andal is one of the few women Bhakti saints in South India. According to legends, she was found abandoned as a baby in Periyalwar's garden and he adopted her as his own daughter. In her poems, there is the portrayal of her intense

love of Krishna. She imagined herself as a bride of the Lord of Srirangam and did not allow herself to be married to ordinary humans. The traditions ascribe her as being accepted by God and absorbed into the idol of her favourite deity at Srirangam. Her hymns are so popular that some of them are recited in the marriages of Tamil wedding ceremonies. She is often worshipped as an idol in some Vaishnava temples as well.

Tirumalisai

Tirumalisai was born in modern day Chengalpet area and is supposed to have been a contemporary of Mahendravarman I. His origin myth says that he was abandoned because he was born a shapeless mass of flesh at birth and was brought up by a Shudra. Traditions portray him as a Jain, Buddhist and Shaivite before becoming a Vaishnava saint. He is said to have had a brother by the name Kanikannan who later became his disciple and Tirumalisai rescued his brother from the wrath of the Pallava king by his worship of Lord Vishnu, according to the legends.

Tirumangai

Tirumangai Alwar was a petty chieftain of Alinadu in Tanjore who later became a highwayman and carried off and married the daughter of a Vaishnavite doctor of high caste and later converted to Vaishnavism according to legends. The most famous myth associated with him is how he stole a golden idol of Buddha from a monastery at Nagapattinam for financially supporting the renovation works at the temple of Srirangam.

There is also a myth about how he met the Shaiva saint Sambandar, but it has been discredited by schools because of the difference in chronology of their existence. His poetry contained attacks on Jainism and Buddhism but did not oppose Shaivism which was also a popular cult during the period, possibly indicating why the story of his meeting with Sambandar was popularised.

Nammalwar

Nammalwar was born in a Vellala family of Alwarthirunagari in modern day Tinnevelly, around the period between the end of the 9th century and beginning of the 10th century. He was born by the name Maran and got the name Sadagopa after the religious initiation ceremony. He is said to have renounced the world at the age of thirty five to attain salvation. He is said to have sat silently meditating under a tamarind tree for sixteen years till he got a divine revelation from the Lord Vishnu himself, according to the legends. His hymns are very large in number and contain deep religious experiences and philosophy, often compared to the Vedas. Another celebrated Vaishnava poet, Madhurakavi, was his disciple.

Recap

♦ Originated in South India, fostering devotion and emotional connection to deities like Shiva and Vishnu

- Emerged during socio-political changes, supported by Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas rulers' patronage
- Aryanisation helped shape the movement, blending northern and Sangam traditions into devotion
- Shaiva and Vaishnava saints promoted devotion, composing poetry and spreading faith among masses
- Bhakti challenged caste barriers, offering accessible paths to salvation through love and surrender
- Nayanars' hymns preserved in Tevaram, foundational texts of Tamil Shaivism and spiritual culture
- Alwars' hymns compiled in Naalayira Divya Prabandham, promoting Vishnu worship and devotion philosophy
- Thirunavukkarasu, Sambandar and Sundarar reshaped Shaivism with devotional songs and spiritual teachings
- Among women saints andal's hymns expressed intense love and devotion towards Lord Krishna
- Minister-turned-saint, famous for mystical Shaivite poetry and philosophical contributions like Thiruvasagam
- Bhakti saints tied devotion to geography, emphasising temples as social and spiritual centers
- Devotion exemplified through self-sacrifice, offering eyes to Shiva, showcasing intense spiritual commitment
- Hymns in vernacular languages popularised the movement, uniting devotees across regions and castes
- Bhakti broke socio-religious barriers, inspiring art, temple culture and inclusive spiritual practices
- Alwars used devotional songs to praise the Lord Vishnu

Objective Questions

1. How many Nayanars are there according to the Saiva Bhakti tradition?
2. How many Alwars are known to us?
3. What was the popular name of Thirunavukkarasu?
4. Which ruler did Appar convert to Shaivism according to popular legends?

5. Who is known as the Tevaram trio?

6. Who is the author of Thiruvasagam?

7. Which Nayanar was known as Tampirantolan?

8. Which Alwar saint adopted Andal according to popular traditions?

9. Which Alwar saint is said to have stolen a golden idol of Buddha to find funds for renovating Srirangam temple?

10. Who was the famous disciple of Nammalwar?

Answers

1. Sixty Three
2. Twelve
3. Appar
4. Mahendravarman I
5. Appar/Tirunavukkarasu, Tirujnanasambandar, Sundarar

6. Manikkavacagar
7. Sundarar
8. Periyalwar
9. Tirumangai Alwar
10. Madhurakavi

Assignments

1. Analyse the socio-political factors that contributed to the emergence of the Bhakti movement in South India.

2. Analyse the role of women in the Bhakti movement, with a specific focus on saints like Karaikal Ammaiyar and Andal. How did their contributions challenge or conform to the gender norms of their time?

3. Examine the contrasting approaches of Shaivite Nayanars and Vaishnavite Alwars in propagating Bhakti. What were the similarities and differences in their ideologies, practices and literary contributions?

4. Examine the impact of Bhakti literature, including *Tevaram* and *Naalayira Divya Prabandham*, on the cultural and religious evolution of South India. In what ways did these texts overcome barriers of caste, language and regional divisions?

5. Critically assess the influence of Aryanisation and Sangam traditions on the Bhakti Movement, as argued by scholars like M.G.S. Narayanan, K.A.N. Shastri and Vijaya Ramaswamy. In what ways did these influences contribute to shaping the movement's course and character?

6. Examine how Bhakti saints challenged religious orthodoxy and fostered social inclusion. Illustrate your analysis with examples from the lives and contributions of saints such as Nandanar Andal and Tirumalisai.

Suggested Reading

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