

**DDCE/History (M.A)/SLM/Paper-11**

**Politico-Social and Administrative History  
of**

**Ancient India**  
**(1st Cent. B.C to 8th Cent. A.D)**

**By**

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The compiler owes many thanks to all the reputed scholars on Ancient Indian History whose work is being used here for the sake of making the students understand the subject. I have copied, collected, and made use of the scholarly works of great scholars whose work has been mentioned in the further reading section of each chapter.

The compiler of the present material claims no authority and originality on any topic of the materials cum textbook. As already been mentioned above the work is a compilation of already existing works of great scholars among whom name of a few have been mentioned at the end of each chapter. Besides the SLM of IGNOU and other Distance Education Institutions have been also consulted and used for preparation of this material for that I duly acknowledge those textbooks.

Would be grateful by receiving suggestions and comments to improve this material cum textbook, from the students, teachers and also the practicing professionals

**Binod Bihari Satpathy**

**Unit-1**  
**Chapter-I**  
**FOREIGN INVASION AND RULES**  
**Indo-Bactrian, Indo-Parthians and the Scythians:**  
**Impact and Significance of Foreign Intrusion into India.**

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### **1.1.0. Objectives**

The chapter discuss the political history of the north-western India on the eve of post Mauryan age. After learning this lesson the students will be able to explain

- *the arrival of the Indo-Greeks in north-west India and their subsequent political history.*
- *the origin and establishments of the Indo-Parthian or Pahalava rulers in India..*
- *foundation of Scythian or Saka kingdoms in India their political history.*
- *Growth of Indian economy, culture and religion under the foreign rulers in India between B.C 200 to A.D 200.*

### **1.1.1. Introduction**

The Mauryas had done much for Indian unity by bringing the greater part of the country under one umbrella, by defending it against the generals of Alexander and Seleukos, by establishing a uniform system of administration, by using Prakrit for official purposes throughout the length and breadth of the empire and attempting to knit together the different sections of its composite population by the strong tie of a common Dharma. With the fall of the dynasty Indian history for the time being loses its unity. The command of one single political authority is no longer obeyed from the snowy heights of the Hindukush to the fertile plains of Bengal to Mysore. Hordes of outlanders pour through the north-western gates of the country and establish aggressive monarchies in Gandhara, Western Malwa and neighbouring regions. The Punjab is seized by foreigners and the Deccan by local dynasties. There now arose a number of competing power centers in different regions of India. The imperial monarchy was replaced by regional monarchies, and a centralized bureaucracy by regional bureaucracies. These changes had little effect on the continuing hold of the idea of absolutist kingship. Numerous royal eulogies, called prasastis, from the various regions, endowed the respective monarchs with superhuman qualities. Many regional monarchs had Central Asian origins, but they too in time conformed to the notions of kingship that had been maturing since late Vedic times and which reached their apogee in the Mauryan period. All monarchies, whether of foreign or indigenous origins, subscribed to the Brahmanic notions of caste and the fourfold *varna* system, although Buddhism provided a relatively easier route for foreigners to become adjusted to the Indian social system. The political diffusion in the post-Mauryan period and the emergence of monarchies with foreign roots, described by one historian as 'chaotic darkness', might be seen as signs of regression from the heyday of Mauryan imperialism; but, in reality, both the economy and the culture showed dynamism. With this background we can proceed to know the importance of the so called outlander as mentioned above in the polity of post Mauryan India and their contribution to the growth of Indian culture. The outlander about whom the chapter discuss in brief are the Indo-Greeks or Yavana, The Parthians or Pahlava and the Scythians or Shakas.

### **1.1.2. Indo-Greeks or Yavana**

The rule of the Indo-Greek kings in the northwest including parts of Central Asia, the whole of Afghanistan, and the Indus Valley, is known from sketchy references in the Greco-Roman literature and the study of innumerable surface finds of their coins. Although king-lists have been prepared on the basis of the royal names on these coins, the nature of their successions and geographical territories is by no means precise. The situation has been further complicated by the tendency of Western scholars to seek a permanent imprint of the Hellenistic civilization on Indian numismatics, art, iconography and philosophy, which is contrasted by the Indian scholarly tendency to trace the impact of Indianisation on these Indian kings of Greek origin. A vast amount of literature, mostly coin catalogues, has accumulated on this problem which virtually tried to underline the whole thing as a march of Western civilization in the northwestern part of the subcontinent.

### **1.1.2.1.A Brief History of Bactrian Greek**

The Greeks, especially those from Asia Minor, have been known in India since the period of the Achaemenids who had Greeks in their employ. The Achaemenids entered India in the last part of the sixth century BC. The familiarity increased manifold with Alexander's invasion of India in 327-26 BC and the subsequent presence of the Greeks in Pataliputra and of Greek ambassadors, the most famous of whom was Megasthenes, in the Mauryan court. Asoka makes clear in one of his edicts that the Mauryan power was familiar with all the post-Alexander Greek political powers up to north Africa and the Mediterranean.

What is important in the present context is to note that Alexander established a large number of cities, basically called Alexandrias, in Turkmenistan, Tadjikistan, Afghanistan and in modern Pakistan. Among them only Ai-Khanum at the junction of the Kokcha with the Oxus has been excavated in some detail, showing a Greek city stretched for about 2 km along the bank of the Oxus and complete with temple complex, palace and administrative quarter, theatre, gymnasium and burial area. Many statues, several coin hoards, inscriptions and plenty of pottery reveal that this city founded in the 4th century BC had a close connection with the Greek world and came to an end possibly around the middle of the second century BC. One may safely assume that Ai Khanum was a principal city of the ancient Greek kingdom of Bactria whose capital was Bactra near Mazar-i-Sharif. The ruins of Bactra remain to be properly excavated.

The Bactrian Greek kingdom began as a satrapy of the Seleucid empire carved out of the eastern possessions of Alexander, which impinged on the east on the possessions of Chandragupta Maurya. Some conflict was almost inevitable, although the result of that in about 305 BC was a kind of compromise, with the area south of the Hind Kush going to Chandragupta who was also given the hands of the daughter of Seleucas in marriage. Seleucas received about 500 war elephants in return. Antiochus I Soter, Seleucas's son and Antiochus II Theos were pressed with the affairs in the western part of their territory, and towards the end of Antiochus II's reign, around the middle of the 3rd century BC, Parthia (northeast Iran) under Arsaces and Bactria under Diodotus I seceded from the Seleucid empire. However, under Antiochus III (223-191 BC) the empire had apparently a revival of power, with Antiochus III laying siege to the Bactrian capital and obtaining war elephants from the Indian king Sophagasenus, possibly of the Kabul Valley. According to Polybius, a Greek historian (c. 200-118 BC), Antiochus crossed the Caucasus and descended into India; renewed his friendship with Sophagasenus the king of the Indians; received more elephants, until he had a hundred and fifty altogether; and having once more provisioned his troops, set out again personally with his army: leaving Androstenes of Cyzicus the duty of taking home the treasure which this king had agreed to hand over to him.

The establishment of the Parthian power cut off Bactria's direct contact with the Greek world, and both Diodotus I and Diodotus II joined the Parthians in their struggle against the Seleucid power.

If the overthrow of the Seleucid power by Diodotus I marked the first independent phase of the Bactrian power, the overthrow of the Diodotus dynasty by Euthydemus in 230/220 BC marked its second phase. His power extended beyond Bactria to include Ferghana and Sogdiana or the area of Samarkand in Central Asia. One of his major coin-types shows the diademed head of the king within dotted borders on the obverse, and the reverse shows naked Heracles seated on a pile of boulders. Another of his coin-types shows a prancing horse on the reverse. Euthydemus was attacked by the Seleucid power under Antiochus III, and after losing the battle of Arius against him, he successfully withstood a three-year siege of the capital Bactra, after which Antiochus III came to terms with him and gave his daughter in marriage to Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus, around 206 BC. Traces of Bactrian expansion to the eastern part of Central Asia have been traced as far as Kashgar and Urumchi in Chinese Turkestan. An interesting feature of the IndoGreek coinage of this

period was the use of an alloy made of copper and nickel in the proportion of 75 per cent copper and 25 per cent nickel. The coins made of this alloy were issued by Euthydemus, Euthydemus II, Agathocles and Pantaleon around 170 BC. For instance, a cupro-nickel coin of Euthydeus II shows the laureate head of Apollo on the obverse and a tripod and the royal name in Greek on the reverse. Around 126 BC, the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian visited Bactria and this visit opened up Bactria and the neighbouring areas of Ferghana and Parthia, leading in turn to the development of the Silk Route from the end of the second century BC. Regular contacts with India date from a much earlier period, and during the time of Asoka in the third century BC, some of the Greeks present in his kingdom (Dharmarakshita) even played a role in the spread of Buddhism. Dharmarakshita, for instance, preached Buddhism in Aparantaka or Gujarat and Sind. There were Buddhists in Bactria too. In the second century AD, Clement of Alexandria reported Buddhist Sramanas in Bactria.

#### **1.1.2.2. Demetrius Invasion of India**

Around 180 BC, Demetrius, son of Euthydemus, undertook an invasion of India reaching as far as Pataliputra and laying siege to Saketa and Madhyamika. This fits in with the reading of the Indian version of the Indo-Greek name Dimitra in the Hathigumpha inscription of the King Kharavela, according to which this Indo-Greek king advanced as far east as Magadha but eventually retreated to Mathura. There is no reason to believe in the opinion of some scholars that the Indo-Greek king who advanced as far east as Magadha was not Demetrius but Menander around the middle of the second century BC. The Epigraphia Indica reading of the Indo-Greek name in the Hathigumpha inscription is Dimitra. There is no place for Menander here.

The Gargi Samhita section of the Indian text Yuga Purana of c. 2nd century AD gives some account of the Greek invasion of northern India, corroborating the references in this connection in Patanjali's Mahabhashya: 'the Yavanas conquered Saketa'; 'the Yavanas conquered Madhyamika', i.e. the Yavanas or the Indo-Greeks conquered Saketa or Ayodhya and the Yavanas conquered Nagari (near Chitor in Rajasthan). The Gargi Samhita mentions that 'after having conquered Saketa and the Mathuras, the wicked and valiant Yavanas will reach Kusumadhvaja or Pataliputra'. The fortifications of Pataliputra will be breached by employing tree-like engines or siege-engines. The Yavanas will be powerful but they will retreat from Madhyadesa because of a civil war among them in their own country, Bactria. The general character of this evidence has been borne out by the testimony of the Roman historian Strabo (c. 64/63 BC-AD 24) who wrote on the basis of earlier authors that the Indo-Greeks advanced as far as Pataliputra. Thus, the Indo-Greek penetration, however short-lived, of a large chunk of northern India, is not in doubt. Although there are different readings of the Hathigumpha inscription and different opinions regarding its date, the presence of the word Dimitra in the authoritative version of its text in Epigraphia Indica cannot be wished away, and the sum total of the related evidence, including the fact that Patanjali of c. 150 BC referred to the Yavana invasions of Saketa and Madhyamika in the past tense, will suggest that this Yavana invasion of north India as far east as Pataliputra took place in the first half of the second century BC, i.e. before Menander became an independent king in his own right. The probability is that this invasion took place during the reign of Demetrius.

The elephant scalp shown in Demetrius' coin may symbolise his Indian conquest. He issued an extensive series of coins in gold, silver and copper, one of his gold coins being issued in the name of Antiochus, his Seleucid master. The reverse of this coin type shows Zeus which is his preferred type in place of Apollo preferred by Antiochus. It has to be pointed out that the purely Bactrian or Graeco-Bactrian coins carry legends only in Greek whereas the Indo-Greek coins carry legends in both Greek and Kharosthi (occasionally in Brahmi). The Indo-Greek issues were meant for the area south of the Hindu Kush. This and the other Indo-Greek coins issued by Eucratides demonstrate that he had an extensive kingdom in Gandhara in addition to his Bactrian domains.

### **1.1.2.3.Rule of Eucratides I**

The Euthydemid line of kings was overthrown by Eucratides around 170 BC. The last Euthydemid kings were Antimachus I and Antimachus II. Eucratides I ruled from c. 171 to 145 BC and on his silver tetradrachms the legend reads *ī(o)f King Great Eucratides*'. One of his gold coin types was supposedly the largest gold coin minted in antiquity and represents his parents on the obverse. A silver coin type of his shows on the obverse helmeted and diademed bust of king seen from behind with ruled borders around. The helmet is plumed and decorated with the ear and horn of a bull, and the king is shown holding a spear in throwing position. On the reverse is the representation of dioscuri riding prancing horses (prancing right) and carrying spears and palms. Eucratides I possibly controlled a large part of northwestern India, which is proved by the widespread occurrence of his coins in the region. He was defeated by the Parthian king Mithridates I who also came to control the territory between the Indus and the Jhelam. Heliocles I succeeded Mithridates I, but by this time the process of Yuezhi expansion, which happened in Central Asia between c. 176 BC and AD 30 and eventually did away with the Bactrian kingdom, began. Heliocles was the last Bactrian king, and he moved to the Kabul Valley on the eastern side of the Hindu Kush. Some of his descendants continued to hold their territory in this sector, Hermaeus of c. 70 BC being the last notable king. The Kharosthi legend on the Hermaios coins reads *Maharajasa Tratarasa Heramayasa* and it shows a horse prancing right. The Yuezhi controlled Bactria for more than a century and eventually moved to India, setting up the Kushana empire.

The foregoing is the basic frame of the political history of the post-Alexander Greek power in India. The details are filled up by only what scholars think of the many coin finds of about thirty related kings and two queens. The Cambridge History of India volume on Ancient India groups them into three geographical areas: west of the Jhelam, the northwest including the Kabul Valley, and eastern Punjab. Rulers belonging to the house of Eucratides were powerful to the west of the Jhelam whereas eastern Punjab was controlled by the rulers belonging to the house of Euthydemus. Whether the Indo-Greek kings and queens followed straight lines of dynastic successions or followed different lines in different power centres or areas is not particularly relevant because the very nature of sources, which is mostly surface finds of coins, precludes any satisfactory analysis in this regard. The major centres of power were indisputably Sakala/Sialkot in eastern Punjab and Takshasila/Taxila to the west of the Jhelam, but the claim of Pushkalavati west of the Indus or that of other smaller centres in various areas cannot be denied. No major centre has been located yet in Sind but the presence of such a centre there is probable.

### **1.1.2.4.Reign of Appolodotus**

The first Indo-Greek king to rule only in parts of India, i.e. without any control of Bactria, was possibly Apollodotus I who struggled to power from his position as a former general of Demetrius I in about 180 BC or a little later. His coins have been found in Punjab, Sind and Gujarat, and among them, there are many bilingual Indian-standard square coins showing 'elephant with decorative belt' and Greek legend 'of saviour king Apollodotus' on the obverse, and on the reverse, a bull with Kharosthi legend *Maharajasa Tratarasa*, which is the Indian counterpart of the Greek legend. He also issued purely Greek coins like the one with his head on the obverse and 'Pallas Athene' holding Nike on the reverse. On certain coins his name Apollodotus has been given an Indian version 'Apaladatas'.

### **1.1.2.5.Reign of Menander I**

Menander I was a successor of Apollodotus, and came to power around the middle of the second century BC. In addition to his numerous coins, he is known principally from his position in the Buddhist text Questions of Milinda. The association is straight-forward and shows beyond dispute that this famous Indo-Greek king who ruled from Sakala or Sialkot became a Buddhist.



An important epigraphic reference to Menander occurs in Bajaur where a Buddhist reliquary bears a dedicatory inscription which mentions the 14th day of the month of Karttika of a certain year in the reign of Maharaja Minadra (Minandrasa Maharajasa Katiassa Divasa). This was the date on which the corporeal relic of the Sakyamuni, which is endowed with life, was established (Majumdar 1937) at that place. A textual reference to Menander lies in Periplus (chapter 47) of c. mid-first century AD.

To the present-day ancient drachmae are current in Barygaza, coming from this country, bearing inscriptions in Greek letters, and the devices of those who reigned after Alexander, Apollodorus (sic) and Menander. 'Apollodorus' in this case is Apollodotus. The most important textual testimony regarding Menander lies in the 'Questions of Milinda' or 'Questions of Menander', a Pali version of which is Milinda. The Buddhist monk with which the king had carried on his discussions was Nagasena. The king has been mentioned as the king of the Yonakas reigning at Sagala: 'Milinda by name, learned, eloquent, wise and able, and a faithful observer'. That Menander, born at Alasanda (Alexandria which in this case has been assumed to be an island of the Indus), had acquired deep knowledge of Buddhist philosophy to conduct a detailed discussion with a Buddhist monk was in itself a proof that by this time, the Indo-Greeks had converted themselves into an Indian power. Regarding the location of Sagala or Sialkot as the capital city of Menander, what is noticeable is that it was conveniently located for routes coming from Kashmir to this part of Punjab and also for the major trunk route which led from Sialkot to the Ganga plain.

#### **1.1.2.6. Antialcidas : Indianisation of Indo-Greeks**

Menander's concern with Buddhism was matched by another Indo-Greek's devotion to Vaishnavism, the most famous evidence in this regard being the Heliodorus pillar of Besnagar or ancient Vidisha. The Annual Report (1908-09) of the Archaeological Survey of India has published the relevant inscription:

"This Garuda-standard was made by order of the Bhagavata..... Heliodoros, the son of Dion, a man of Taxila, a Greek ambassador from King Antialcidas, to King Bhagabhadra, the son of the Princess from Benares, the saviour, while prospering in the fourteenth year of his reign". On the other side of the pillar, the following inscription is found "Three are the steps to immortality which.....followed lead to heaven, [namely] self-control, self denial and watchfulness".

Because of his mention in this inscription, Antialcidas becomes the third most important Indo-Greek king after Apollodotus and Menander. The King Bhagabhadra, the son of a princess from Banaras, was likely to be a Sunga king, considering the date of the inscription around 110 BC. The fact that the Sunga kings during the last phase of the Sunga rule was in close diplomatic relationship with the Indo-Greek kings of Punjab and possibly elsewhere is noteworthy, but possibly more noteworthy is the fact that by this time the Indo-Greeks were significantly Indianized and had become familiar with the Indian philosophical tenets of 'self-control, self-denial and watchfulness'.

#### **1.1.2.7. Geo-Political Implications of the Indo-Greek Rule**

The Indo-Greek phase of Indian history reveals in great detail the geo-political implications of the areas north and south of the Hindu Kush. Excavations at Ai Khanum have conclusively shown the closeness of relationship between this area and the Hellenism of the Mediterranean world down to the level of the pottery details. At the same, its geographical position ensured its role in maintaining links with, and receiving cultural impulses from, Turkmenistan, Samarkand, Ferghana and Chinese Turkestan or modern Zingziang. In a sense, it was a melting pot of cultural stimuli from various directions. Once the focus of the Greek rule shifts to the Hindu Kush or strictly speaking, the focus of the primary Greek rule over Bactria includes the areas south of the Hindu Kush, the shadow of South Asia looms large in an otherwise Hellenistic assemblage. The coins north of the Hindu Kush are unmistakably inspired by Greece but south of the Hindu Kush, their

round shapes become rectangular and the royal names acquire an unmistakable Indian sound and are expressed in Indian scripts. It is apparent that the issuing kings of this series of coins were trying to cater to the taste and demands of their Indian subjects, without discarding very much the key Greek elements like the representation of various Greek deities such as Apollo, Zeus, Dioscuri and others. It is through these devices that the representations of comparatively new divinities such as those of the Mithraic cults make their appearance in this belt. Through the representations on coins are introduced not merely new concepts of divinities but also new art-motifs. Zeus or Apollo or the royal heads on the coins of the period do not conform to anything that we know of the traditional Indian art styles. There is little doubt that the various glyptic devices that we find on the Indo-Greek coins manifested themselves in what came to be known as the Gandharan art of sculptures and stuccos of the later period. It is through the Indo-Greek period that the Hellenistic classical elements of the Greek kingdom of Bactria continued to survive in the Indo-Iranian borderlands, especially in the sections close to Afghanistan and Central Asia and in the last two areas themselves. This is something tangible, something which one can visually appraise.

The extent to which intangible forms of exchange in the field of ideas were operative in this region is far more difficult to establish. There is no reason why philosophical concepts could not travel from one area to another, but what one can see quite clearly is the imprint of Indian religions on the Greeks who settled on the south side of the Hindu Kush extending up to the eastern limits of Punjab. Taxila could give rise to a Greek royal ambassador who was a worshipper of Vishnu and a believer in three of the fundamental principles of Indian spiritualism and self-denial, self-control and watchfulness'. One may safely assume that by this time, Buddhism too had spread its influence all over the concerned region. The Bajaur relic casket inscription of Menander and the text of the Questions of Milinda provide eloquent testimony in this direction. In fact, in the present stage of knowledge, it is the shadow of Indian religion which seems to be paramount during this period all over the concerned region. The eastward movement of various central, west Asiatic or Hellenic divinities is not yet quite apparent. The numismatic evidence may not be the only dependable category of evidence in this direction. Excavations at Sirkap in Taxila have revealed the shrine of the double-headed eagle dating from c. first century BC. It is so called because of the presence of double-headed eagle on the top of two arches in the wall at the plinth level. One of the niches to the right of the stairs shows the façade of a Greek temple while the other two niches, the ones with eagles, show arches of Indian inspiration. Economically, from the second century BC onward, Central Asia including Afghanistan becomes a major area of interaction between the Chinese world to the east and the Hellenistic world to the west. This leads to the development of 'Silk Route' to which there were feeder routes from India.

The basic political history of the Indo-Greeks is known only in its scaffoldings, and that too mostly on the basis of un-stratified and widely scattered coins. However, the phase itself, as we have noticed, is important in various ways. What is also worthy of note is that the Indo-Greek power under Demetrius who did not sever his links with Bactria and beyond, could lead his army not merely to Saket and Madhyamika but also to Pataliputra. The geopolitics of the middle Ganga plain where Pataliputra is located was apparently linked with the affairs in the extreme northwest. It was under the Kushanas that this geo-political element came clearly in the limelight.

### **1.1.3. The Parthians or Pahalava**

The Parthians, a race of rude and hardy horsemen, with habits similar to those of the modern Turko mans, dwelt beyond the Persian deserts in the comparatively infertile regions to the southeast of the Caspian Sea. Their country, along with the territories of the Chorasmioi, Sogdion, and Arioi (Khwarizm, Samarkand, and Herat), had been included in the sixteenth satrapy of Darius, and all the tribes named, armed like the Bactrians, with cane bows and short spears, supplied contingents to the host of Xerxes. In the time of Alexander and the early Seleucids, Parthia proper and Hyrkania,

adjoining the Caspian, were combined to form a satrapy. The Parthians, unlike the Bactrians, never adopted Greek culture, and, although submissive to their Persian and Macedonian masters, retained unchanged the habits of a horde of mounted shepherds, equally skilled in the management of their steeds and the use of the bow.

#### **1.1.3.1.Sources**

The city of Taxila is thought to have been a capital of the Indo-Parthians. Large strata were excavated by Sir John Marshall with a quantity of Parthian-style artifacts. The nearby temple of Jandial is usually interpreted as a Zoroastrian fire temple from the period of the Indo-Parthians.

Some ancient writing describe the presence of the Indo-Parthians in the area, such as the story of Saint Thomas the Apostle, who was recruited as a carpenter to serve at the court of king "Gudnaphar" (thought to be Gondophares) in India. The Acts of Thomas describes in chapter 17 Thomas' visit to king Gudnaphar in northern India; chapters 2 and 3 depict him as embarking on a sea voyage to India, thus connecting Thomas to the west coast of India. The Hellenistic temple with Ionic columns at Jandial, Taxila, is usually interpreted as a Zoroastrian fire temple from the period of the Indo-Parthians.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea is a surviving 1st century guide to the routes commonly being used for navigating the Arabian Sea. It describes the presence of Parthian kings fighting with each other in the area of Sindh, a region traditionally known at that time as "Scythia" due to the previous rule of the Indo-Scythians there.

An inscription from Takht-i-Bahi near Hada[disambiguation needed] bears two dates, one in the regnal year 26 of the Maharaja Guduvhara (again thought to be a Gondophares), and the year 103 of an unknown era.

#### **1.1.3.2.Indo-Parthian in India**

The earliest of these Indo-Parthian kings apparently was Maues, or Mauas, who attained power in the Kabul valley and Punjab about 120 B. C., and adopted the title Of "Great King Of Kings", which had been used for the first time by Mithridates I. His coins are closely related to those of that monarch, as well as to those of the unmistakably Parthian border chief, who called himself Arsaces Theos. The King Moga, to whom the Taxila satrap was immediately subordinate, was almost certainly the personage whose name appears on the coins as Mauou in the genitive case.

Vonones, or Onones, whose name is unquestionably Parthian, was probably the immediate successor of Maues on the throne of Kabul. He was succeeded by his brother Spalyris, who was followed in order by Azes (Azas) I, Azilises, Azes II, and Gondophares. The princes prior to the last named are known from their coins only.

#### **1.1.3.3.Gondophares & St. Thomas**

Gondophares, whose accession may be dated with practical certainty in 21 A. D., and whose coins are Parthian in style, enjoyed a long reign of some thirty years, and is a more interesting personage. He reigned, like his predecessors, in the Kabul valley and the Punjab.

The special interest attaching to Gondophares is due to the fact that his name is associated with that of St. Thomas, the apostle of the Parthians, in very ancient Christian tradition. The belief that the Parthians were allotted as the special sphere of the missionary labors of St. Thomas goes back to the time of Origen, who died in the middle of the third century, and is also mentioned in the Clementine Recognitions, a work of the same period, and possibly somewhat earlier in date.

Christian writers refer to a king of India named Gundaphar or Gudnaphar and his brother Gad who are said to have been converted by the Apostle St. Thomas and who, therefore, lived in the first century A.D. We have no independent confirmation of the story of the biographer of Apollonios. But the "so-called" Takht-i-Bahi record of the year 103 (of an unspecified era) shows that there was actually in the Peshawar district a king named Guduvhara (Gondophernes). The names of Gondophernes and, in the opinion of some scholars, of his brother Gad, are also found on

coins. Dr. Fleet referred the date of the Takht-i-Bahai (Bahi) inscription to the Malava-Vikrama era, and so placed the record in A.D. 47. He remarked "there should be no hesitation about referring the year 103 to the established Vikrama era of B.C. 58; instead of having recourse, as in other cases too, to some otherwise unknown era beginning at about the same time. This places Gondophernes in A.D. 47 which suits exactly the Christian tradition which makes him a contemporary of St. Thomas, the Apostle."

The power of Gondophernes did not probably in the beginning extend to the Gandhara region. His rule seems to have been restricted at first to Southern Afghanistan. He succeeded, however, in annexing the Peshawar district before the twenty-sixth year of his reign. There is no epigraphic evidence that he conquered Eastern Gandhara (Taxila) though he certainly wrested some provinces from the Azes family. The story of the supersession of the rule of Azes II by him in one of the Scythian provinces is told by the coins of Aspavarman. The latter at first acknowledged the suzerainty of Azes (II) but later on obeyed Gondophernes as his overlord. Evidence of the ousting of Saka rule by the Parthians in the Lower Indus Valley is furnished by the author of the *Periplus* in whose time (about 60 to 80 A.D.) Minnagara, the metropolis of Scythia, i.e., the Saka kingdom in the Lower Indus Valley, was subject to Parthian princes who were constantly driving each other out. If Sten Konow and Sir John Marshall are right in reading the name of Aja-Aya or Azes in the Kalawan Inscription of 134 and the Taxila Inscription of 136, then it is possible that Saka rule survived in a part of Eastern Gandhara,<sup>2</sup> while Peshawar and the Lower Indus Valley passed into the hands of the Parthians. But the absence of an honorific title before the name of Aja-Aya and the fact that in the record of the year 136 we have reference to the establishment of relics of the Buddha in Takshasila "for the bestowal of health on the Maharaja Rajatiraja Devaputra Khushana," probably suggest that the years 134 and 136 belong, not to the pravardhamana-vijayarajya (the increasing and victorious reign) of Azes, but to a period when his reign was a thing of the past (atitarajya), though the reckoning was still associated with his honoured name. The dating in the Janibigha inscription (Lahshmana-senasyaatitarajye sam83) possibly furnishes us with a parallel.

The Greek principality in the Upper Kabul Valley had apparently ceased to exist when Apollonios travelled in India. We learn from Justin that the Parthians gave the coup de grace to the rule of the Bactrian Greeks. Marshall says<sup>2</sup> that the Kabul valley became a bone of contention between the Parthians and the Kushans. This is quite in accordance with the evidence of Philostratos who refers to the perpetual quarrel of the "barbarians" with the Parthian king of the Indian borderland in 43-44 A.D.

With Gondophernes were associated as subordinate rulers his nephew Abdagases (in S. Afghanistan), his generals Aspavarman and Sasa(s) or Sasa(n), and his governors Sapedana and Satavastra (probably of Taxila).

#### **1.1.3.4. Decline of the Indo-Parthians**

After the death of the great Parthian monarch his empire split up into smaller principalities. One of these (probably Sistan) was ruled by Sanabares, another (probably embracing Kandahar and the Western Panjab) by Pakores, and others by princes whose coins Marshall recovered for the first time at Taxila. Among them was Sasa(s) or Sasa(n) who acknowledged the nominal sway of Pakores. The internecine strife among these Parthian prince is probably reflected in the following passage of the *Periplus*:- "Before it (Barbaricum) there lies a small island and inland behind it is the metropolis of Scythia, Minnagara; it is subject to Parthian princes who are constantly driving each other out."

Epigraphic (and in some cases numismatic) evidence proves that the Pahlava or Parthian rule in Afghanistan, the Panjab and Sind was supplanted by that of the Kushana, Gushana, Khushana or Kushan dynasty. We know that Gondophernes was ruling in Peshawar in the year 103. But we learn from the Panjtar inscription that in the year 122 the sovereignty of the region had

passed to a Gushana or Kushan king. In the year 136 the Kushan suzerainty had extended to Taxila. An inscription of that year mentions the interment of some relics of the Buddha in a chapel at Taxila "for bestowal of perfect health upon the Maharaja, rajatiraja devaputra Khushana," The Sui Vihar and Mahenjo Daro Kharoshth Inscriptions prove the Kushan conquest of the Lower Indus Valley. The Chinese writer Panku, who died in A. D. 92, refers to the Yue-chi occupation of Kao-fou or Kabul. This shows that the race to which the Kushans belonged took possession of Kabul before A. D. 92. It is, no doubt, asserted by a later writer<sup>4</sup> that Kao-fou is a mistake for Tou-mi. But the mistake in Kennedy's opinion would not have been possible, had the Yue-chi not been in possession of Kao-fou in the time of Panku. The important thing to remember is that a Chinese writer of 92 A. D. , thought Kao-fou to have been a Yue-chi possession long before his time. The Kushans had established some sort of connection with the Indian borderland as early as the time of Gondophernes. Kujula Kadphises, the Kushan king, who is said to have succeeded Hermaios in the Kabul valley. It appears from numismatic evidence that this Kushan chief was possibly an ally of Hermaios with whom he appears to have issued joint coins. Kadphises seems also to have been at first on friendly terms with the Parthian rulers of Gandhara. But the destruction of Hermaios' kingdom by the Parthians probably supplied him with a cause. He made war on the latter and eventually destroyed their power in the north-west borderland of India.

The coins of Abdagases, the son of Gondophares' brother, are found in the Punjab only, while those of Orthagnes occur in Kandahar, Sistan, and Sindh. It would seem that the Indo-Parthian princes were gradually driven southward by the advancing Yueh-chi, who had expelled the last of them from the Punjab by the end of the first century A. D.

#### **1.1.4. The Scythians or Shaka**

Indo-Scythians is a term used to refer to Scythians (Sakas), who migrated into parts of Central Asia and north-western South Asia (Sogdiana, Bactria, Arachosia, Gandhara, Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Rajasthan), from the middle of the 2nd century BCE to the 4th century CE. The first Saka king in India was Maues (Moga) (1st century BCE) who established Saka power in Gandhara and gradually extended supremacy over north-western India. Indo-Scythian rule in India ended with the last Western Satrap Rudrasimha III in 395 CE. The invasion of India by Scythian tribes from Central Asia, often referred to as the Indo-Scythian invasion, played a significant part in the history of South Asia as well as nearby countries. In fact, the Indo-Scythian war is just one chapter in the events triggered by the nomadic flight of Central Asians from conflict with tribes such as the Xiongnu in the 2nd century CE, which had lasting effects on Bactria, Kabul, Parthia and India as well as far-off Rome in the west.

##### **1.1.4.1.Origins of the Scythians**

The ancestors of the Indo-Scythians are thought to be Sakas (Scythian) tribes. Saka tribes were part of a cultural continuum of early nomads across Siberia and the Central Eurasian steppe lands from Xinjiang to the Black Sea. Like the Scythians whom Herodotus describes in book four of his History, Sakas were Iranian-speaking horse nomads who deployed chariots in battle, sacrificed horses, and buried their dead in barrows or mound tombs called kurgans." In the 2nd century BCE, a fresh nomadic movement started among the Central Asian tribes, producing lasting effects on the history of Rome in Europe and Bactria, Kabul, Parthia and India in the east. Recorded in the annals of the Han dynasty and other Chinese records, this great tribal movement began after the Yuezhi tribe was defeated by the Xiongnu, fleeing westwards after their defeat and creating a domino effect as they displaced other central Asian tribes in their path.

Around 175 BCE, the Yuezhi tribes, were defeated by the Xiongnu tribes, and fled west into the Ili river area. There, they displaced the Sakas, who migrated south into Ferghana and Sogdiana. According to the Chinese historical chronicles (who call the Sakas, "Sai"): "The Yuezhi attacked the king of the Sai who moved a considerable distance to the south and the Yuezhi then occupied his

lands". Sometime after 155 BCE, the Yuezhi were again defeated by an alliance of the Wusun and the Xiongnu, and were forced to move south, again displacing the Scythians, who migrated south towards Bactria, and south-west towards Parthia and Afghanistan. The Sakas seem to have entered the territory of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom around 145 BCE, where they burnt to the ground the Greek city of Alexandria on the Oxus. The Yuezhi remained in Sogdiana on the northern bank of the Oxus, but they became suzerains of the Sakas in Bactrian territory, as described by the Chinese ambassador Zhang Qian who visited the region around 126 BCE. In Parthia, between 138-124 BCE, the Sakas tribes of the Massagetae and Sacaraucae came into conflict with the Parthian Empire, winning several battles, and killing successively King Phraates II and King Artabanus I. Finally, the Scythians were defeated by the Parthian, and drove out from central Asia.

#### **1.1.4.2.Settlement in Sakastan**

The Sakas settled in areas of eastern Iran, still called after them Sistan. From there, they progressively expanded into the Indian subcontinent, where they established various kingdoms, and where they are known as "Indo-Scythians". The Arsacid emperor Mithridates II had scored many successes against the Scythians including the Scythian hordes that came from Bactria and added many provinces to the Parthian empire. Thus, a section of these people moved from Bactria to Lake Helmond in the wake of Yue-chi pressure and settled about Drangiana (Sigal), a region which later came to be called "Sakistana of the Skythian (Scythian) Sakai", towards the end of 1st century BCE. The region is still known as Seistan. The presence of the Sakas in Sakastan in the 1st century BCE is mentioned by Isidore of Charax in his "Parthian stations".

#### **1.1.4.3.Indo-Scythian kingdoms**

*Abhira to Surastrene:* The first Indo-Scythian kingdom in the Indian subcontinent occupied the southern part of what is now modern day Pakistan, in the areas from Abiria (Sindh) to Surastrene (Gujarat), from around 110 to 80 BCE. They progressively further moved north into Indo-Greek territory until the conquests of Maues, c 80 BCE. The 1st century CE Periplus of the Erythraean Sea describes the Scythian territories there: "Beyond this region (Gedrosia), the continent making a wide curve from the east across the depths of the bays, there follows the coast district of Scythia, which lies above toward the north; the whole marshy; from which flows down the river Sinthus, the greatest of all the rivers that flow into the Erythraean Sea, bringing down an enormous volume of water (...) This river has seven mouths, very shallow and marshy, so that they are not navigable, except the one in the middle; at which by the shore, is the market-town, Barbaricum. Before it there lies a small island, and inland behind it is the metropolis of Scythia, Minnagara."

The Indo-Scythians ultimately established a kingdom in the northwest, based in Taxila, with two Great Satraps, one in Mathura in the east, and one in Surastrene (Gujarat) in the southwest. In the southeast, the Indo-Scythians invaded the area of Ujjain, but were subsequently repelled in 57 BCE by the Malwa king Vikramaditya. To commemorate the event Vikramaditya established the Vikrama era, a specific Indian calendar starting in 57 BCE. More than a century later, in 78 CE the Sakas would again invade Ujjain and establish the Saka era, marking the beginning of the long-lived Saka Western Satraps kingdom.

*Gandhara and Punjab:* The presence of the Scythians in north-western India during the 1st century BCE was contemporary with that of the Indo-Greek Kingdoms there, and it seems they initially recognized the power of the local Greek rulers. Maues first conquered Gandhara and Taxila around 80 BCE, but his kingdom disintegrated after his death. In the east, the Indian king Vikrama retook Ujjain from the Indo-Scythians, celebrating his victory by the creation of the Vikrama Era (starting 58 BCE). Indo-Greek kings again ruled after Maues, and prospered, as indicated by the profusion of coins from Kings Apollodotus II and Hippostratos. Not until Azes I, in

55 BCE, did the Indo-Scythians take final control of northwestern India, with his victory over Hippostratos.

Several stone sculptures have been found in the Early Saka layer in the ruins of Sirkap, during the excavations organized by John Marshall. Several of them are toilet trays roughly imitative of earlier, and finer, Hellenistic ones found in the earlier layers. Marshall comments that "we have a praiseworthy effort to copy a Hellenistic original but obviously without the appreciation of form and skill which were necessary for the task". From the same layer, several statuettes in the round are also known, in very rigid and frontal style.

Azes is connected to the Bimaran casket, one of the earliest representations of the Buddha. The casket was used for the dedication of a stupa in Bamiran, near Jalalabad in Afghanistan, and placed inside the stupa with several coins of Azes. This event may have happened during the reign of Azes (60-20 BCE), or slightly later. The Indo-Scythians are otherwise connected with Buddhism (see Mathura lion capital), and it is indeed possible they would have commended the work.

**Mathura area ("Northern Satraps"):** In central India, the Indo-Scythians conquered the area of Mathura over Indian kings around 60 BCE. Some of their satraps were Hagamasha and Hagana, who were in turn followed by the Saka Great Satrap Rajuvula. The Mathura lion capital, an Indo-Scythian sandstone capital in crude style, from Mathura in Central India, and dated to the 1st century CE, describes in kharoshthi the gift of a stupa with a relic of the Buddha, by Queen Nadasi Kasa, the wife of the Indo-Scythian ruler of Mathura, Rajuvula. The capital also mentions the genealogy of several Indo-Scythian satraps of Mathura.

Rajuvula apparently eliminated the last of the Indo-Greek kings Strato II around 10 CE, and took his capital city, Sagala. The coinage of the period, such as that of Rajuvula, tends to become very crude and barbarized in style. It is also very much debased, the silver content becoming lower and lower, in exchange for a higher proportion of bronze, an alloying technique (billon) suggesting less than wealthy finances. The Mathura Lion Capital inscriptions attest that Mathura fell under the control of the Sakas. The inscriptions contain references to Kharaosta Kamuio and Aiyasi Kamuia. Yuvaraja Kharostes (Kshatrapa) was the son of Arta as is attested by his own coins. Arta is stated to be brother of King Moga or Maues. Princess Aiyasi Kambojaka, also called Kambojika, was the chief queen of Shaka Mahakshatrapa Rajuvula. Kamboja presence in Mathura is also verified from some verses of epic Mahabharata which are believed to have been composed around this period. This may suggest that Sakas and Kambojas may have jointly ruled over Mathura/Uttara Pradesh. It is revealing that Mahabharata verses only attest the Kambojas and Yavanas as the inhabitants of Mathura, but do not make any reference to the Sakas. Probably, the epic has reckoned the Sakas of Mathura among the Kambojas or else have addressed them as Yavanas, unless the Mahabharata verses refer to the previous period of invasion occupation by the Yavanas around 150 BCE.

The Indo-Scythian satraps of Mathura are sometimes called the "Northern Satraps", in opposition to the "Western Satraps" ruling in Gujarat and Malwa. After Rajuvula, several successors are known to have ruled as vassals to the Kushans, such as the "Great Satrap" Kharapallana and the "Satrap" Vanaspara, who are known from an inscription discovered in Sarnath, and dated to the 3rd year of Kanishka (c 130 CE), in which they were paying allegiance to the Kushans.

**Pataliputra:** The text of the Yuga Purana describes an invasion of Pataliputra by the Scythians sometimes during the 1st century BCE, after seven great kings had ruled in succession in Saketa following the retreat of the Yavanas. The Yuga Purana explains that the king of the Sakas killed one fourth of the population, before he was himself slain by the Kalinga king Shata and a group of Sabalas (Sabaras or Bhillas).

#### 1.1.4.4. Western Kshatrapas legacy

Indo-Scythians continued to hold the area of Seistan until the reign of Bahram II (276-293 CE), and held several areas of India well into the 1st millennium: Kathiawar and Gujarat were under their rule until the 5th century under the designation of Western Kshatrapas, until they were eventually conquered by the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II (also called Vikramaditya).

The Brihat-Katha-Manjari of the Kshmendra informs us that around 400 CE the Gupta king Vikramaditya (Chandragupta II) had unburdened the sacred earth of the Barbarians like the Shakas, Mlecchas, Kambojas, Yavanas, Tusharas, Parasikas, Hunas, etc. by annihilating these sinners completely. The 10th century CE Kavyamimamsa of Raj Shekhar still lists the Shakas, Tusharas, Vokanas, Hunas, Kambojas, Bahlikas, Pahlavas, Tangana, Turukshas, etc. together and states them as the tribes located in the Uttarapatha division.

**Indo-Scythian coinage:** Indo-Scythian coinage is generally of a high artistic quality, although it clearly deteriorates towards the disintegration of Indo-Scythian rule around 20 CE (coins of Rajuvula). A fairly high-quality but rather stereotypical coinage would continue in the Western Satraps until the 4th century CE. Indo-Scythian coinage is generally quite realistic, artistically somewhere between Indo-Greek and Kushan coinage. It is often suggested Indo-Scythian coinage benefited from the help of Greek celators (Boppearachchi). Indo-Scythian coins essentially continue the Indo-Greek tradition, by using the Greek language on the obverse and the Kharoshthi language on the reverse. The portrait of the king is never shown however, and is replaced by depictions of the king on horse (and sometimes on camel), or sometimes sitting cross-legged on a cushion. The reverse of their coins typically show Greek divinities.

Buddhist symbolism is present throughout Indo-Scythian coinage. In particular, they adopted the Indo-Greek practice since Menander I of showing divinities forming the vitarka mudra with their right hand (as for the mudra-forming Zeus on the coins of Maues or Azes II), or the presence of the Buddhist lion on the coins of the same two kings, or the triratana symbol on the coins of Zeionises.

**Depiction of Indo-Scythians:** Besides coinage, few works of art are known to indisputably represent Indo-Scythians. Indo-Scythians rulers are usually depicted on horseback in armour, but the coins of Azilises show the king in a simple, undecorated, tunic. Several Gandharan sculptures also show foreigner in soft tunics, sometimes wearing the typical Scythian cap. They stand in contrast to representations of Kushan men, who seem to wear thick, rigid, tunics, and who are generally represented in a much more simplistic manner.

**Buner reliefs:** Indo-Scythian soldiers in military attire are sometimes represented in Buddhist friezes in the art of Gandhara (particularly in Buner reliefs). They are depicted in ample tunics with trousers, and have heavy straight sword as a weapon. They wear a pointed hood (the Scythian cap or bashlyk), which distinguishes them from the Indo-Parthians who only wore a simple fillet over their bushy hair,[20] and which is also systematically worn by Indo-Scythian rulers on their coins. With the right hand, some of them are forming the Karana mudra against evil spirits. In Gandhara, such friezes were used as decorations on the pedestals of Buddhist stupas. They are contemporary with other friezes representing people in purely Greek attire, hinting at an intermixing of Indo-Scythians (holding military power) and Indo-Greeks (confined, under Indo-Scythian rule, to civilian life).

Another relief is known where the same type of soldiers are playing musical instruments and dancing, activities which are widely represented elsewhere in Gandharan art: Indo-Scythians are typically shown as reveling devotees.

**Stone palettes:** Numerous stone palettes found in Gandhara are considered as good representatives of Indo-Scythian art. These palettes combine Greek and Iranian influences, and are often realized in a simple, archaic style. Stone palettes have only been found in archaeological



layers corresponding to Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian rule, and are essentially unknown the preceding Mauryan layers or the succeeding Kushan layers.

Very often these palettes represent people in Greek dress in mythological scenes, a few in Parthian dress (head-bands over bushy hair, crossed-over jacket on a bare chest, jewelry, belt, baggy trousers), and even fewer in Indo-Scythian dress (Phrygian hat, tunic and comparatively straight trousers). A palette found in Sirkap and now in the New Delhi Museum shows a winged Indo-Scythian horseman riding winged deer, and being attacked by a lion.

#### **1.1.4.5. The Indo-Scythians and Buddhism**

The Indo-Scythians seem to have been followers of Buddhism, and many of their practices apparently continued those of the Indo-Greeks. They are known for their numerous Buddhist dedications, recorded through such epigraphic material as the Taxila copper plate inscription or the Mathura lion capital inscription.

**Butkara Stupa:** Excavation at the Butkara Stupa in Swat by an Italian archaeological team have yielded various Buddhist sculptures thought to belong to the Indo-Scythian period. In particular, an Indo-Corinthian capital representing a Buddhist devotee within foliage has been found which had a reliquary and coins of Azes buried at its base, securely dating the sculpture to around 20 BCE. A contemporary pilaster with the image of a Buddhist devotee in Greek dress has also been found at the same spot, again suggesting a mingling of the two populations. Various reliefs at the same location show Indo-Scythians with their characteristic tunics and pointed hoods within a Buddhist context, and side-by-side with reliefs of standing Buddhas.

**Gandharan sculptures:** Other reliefs have been found, which show Indo-Scythian men with their characteristic pointed cap pushing a cart on which is reclining the Greek god Dionysos with his consort Ariadne.

**Mathura lion capital:** The Mathura lion capital, which associates many of the Indo-Scythian rulers from Maues to Rajuvula, mentions a dedication of a relic of the Buddha in a stupa. It also bears centrally the Buddhist symbol of the triratana, and is also filled with mentions of the bhagavat Buddha Sakyamuni, and characteristically Buddhist phrases such as: "sarvabudhana puya dhamasa puya saghasa puya" "Revere all the Buddhas, revere the dharma, revere the sangha"

#### **1.1.4.6. Indo-Scythians in Literature**

The presence of Scythian territory in the area of Pakistan, and especially around the mouth of the Indus near modern day Karachi is mentioned extensively in Western maps and travel descriptions of the period. The Ptolemy world map, as well as the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mention prominently Scythia in the Indus area, as well as Roman Tabula Peutingeriana. The Periplus states that Minnagara was the capital of Scythia, and that Parthian king were fighting for it during the 1st century CE. It also distinguishes Scythia with Ariaca further east (centered in Gujarat and Malwa), over which ruled the Western Satrap king Nahapana.

The Indo-Scythians were named "Shaka" in India, an extension on the name Saka used by the Persians to designate Scythians. From the time of the Mahabharata wars (400–150 BCE roughly[citation needed]) Shakas receive numerous mentions in texts like the Puranas, the Manusmriti, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Mahabhasiya of Patanjali, the Brhat Samhita of Vraha Mihira, the Kavyamimamsa, the Brihat-Katha-Manjari, the Katha-Saritsagara and several other old texts. They are described as part of an amalgam of other war-like tribes from the northwest.

#### **1.1.5. Condition of North-West India under the Foreign Rule**

From the above discussion we come to know that during the last two centuries before Christ much of the northwest was attacked and occupied by forces from across the border in Bactria, the part of Afghanistan that lies between the River Oxus and the Hindu Kush. Initially the Graeco-Bactrian invaded India and established their tiny kingdoms in parts of its northwest, particularly in

Gandhara and Punjab, are specifically known as Indo-Greek rulers known in ancient Indian literature as Yavanas. The Indo-Greeks were followed during the first century B.C by the Parthians or Pahlavs and the Scythians or Shakas. In Indian history, the Shaka rulers are known as Shaka-Pahlava, meaning a mixed group of tribal Shakas and the Parthians. Effective Shaka suzerainty in India came to be exercised eventually by two authorities, respectively known as the Northern Shakas of Taxila and Mathura and the Western Shakas of Malwa and Kathiawar. The period of these foreign rule in India witnessed large scale changes in Indian economy, society, culture and religion. The following paragraphs will discuss in brief about the significance of the foreign rule in post-Mauryan India.

#### **1.1.5.1.Changing Economic Scenario**

The post-Mauryan era is particularly well known for the range and volume of international trade that was generated; and this trade, by both land and sea, added enormously to both urban and rural prosperity. Practically no part of India was left untouched by developments resulting from increased foreign trade. Whether one examines the contents of *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, an ancient guidebook for mariners, or the works of Roman historians or the Sangam literature of south India, or studies the ground with archaeological skills, the subject of the international trading connections of India assumes utmost importance for our understanding of the period under review here.

**The Guild System:** During the post-Mauryan centuries the guilds came to play a crucial role in the success of both domestic and international trade. Known in India as shreni, the guilds can be described as associations of professional people, merchants or artisans. They acted variously as trade unions, cooperative organisations, regulatory bodies or even banks. They existed in various crafts and trades; there were, for example, guilds of potters, goldsmiths, bead and glass makers, ivory carvers, musicians and carpenters. The rules of work, the quality control over finished goods, the fixing of prices, the recruitment of labour from a specific occupational caste for a particular trade -these were all overseen by each craft guild. Rich merchants and many ruling dynasties invested in the guilds, making them viable and flourishing. The guilds, in turn, provided large donations to religious foundations and monasteries. The guilds of merchants, who were known as shreshthins, acted also as bankers, financiers and trustees.

**Introduction of Money Economy:** Another aspect of the commercial infrastructure was the great increase in the minting of coins during the post-Mauryan centuries. For the numismatist, the best of the early coins of India were those struck by the Indo-Greek kings and the Kushan monarchy. Through the foreign influence of the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans, the quality of Indian coins greatly improved over the older punch-marked coins. Made from gold, silver, copper or tin, the variety of coins proved especially useful for variant trading economies in different regions; and the huge quantity of local and foreign coins also made it easier for merchants to engage in forward speculation in goods and capital.

**Emergence New Trade routes:** The links by road and river between the various main cities and trading towns were an essential element in the general infrastructure facilitating the volume of trade as a whole. Starting with the northwest, in the centre of the Kushan territories, was Taxila, a city where the merchants of Central and South Asia exchanged their goods and the intellectuals their ideas. Taxila was joined to Pataliputra by a major highway; en route was Mathura, which in turn was linked to Ujjain in the Malwa region, controlled by the Western Shakas. Mathura and Ujjain linked the western Ganga valley and the lands of central India. A number of market towns were also developed in the Satavahana kingdom of the Deccan. Centres such as Nasik and Karad in Maharashtra and Nagarjunakonda in the Andhra region were all important trading centres where the farmers, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers from the hinterland congregated to sell their commodities and wares. The routes linking these places sometimes had to follow the gaps and breaks in

mountains or the river valleys. All the major routes led to the five main international ports of that period, namely Barbaricum in the Indus delta, Barygaza on the Gujarat coast, Muziris on the Kerala coast, Arikamedu on the Coromandel coast and Tamralipti in the Ganges delta. These ports handled the bulk of the sea trade of India with Arabia, the Levant, the Roman Empire and Southeast Asia.

The overland trade route through the Kushan territories Since at least 600 B.C the main overland trade route had run from Taxila towards West Asia and the Hellenistic world. Caravans from India carried ivory, elephants, spices, cloths, salt, musk, saffron and indigo; the returning caravans brought lapis lazuli, turquoise, fine quality ceramics, wines, and gold and silver coins. The first part of the overland route was from Taxila to Begram, from where two main routes branched out: the northern route via Bactria, the Oxus, the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus to the Black sea, and the southern route via Kandahar, Herat and Ecbatana to the ports of the eastern Mediterranean. Once the Kushans came to establish their trans-Oxus empire and controlled all territory between the Aral Sea and the middle Ganga valley, a new dimension was added to the overland trade route. This came to be in the form of a link to the famous Silk Road that connected China with Europe by land through Constantinople. Indian merchants now begin to share in the handling of the products that travelled along the Silk Road, particularly the silk from China. At various junctions on both the northern and southern routes of the Silk Road Indian merchants set up their colonies, while the missionaries established monasteries. As Buddhism spread into China, the demand for Buddhist artefacts from India underwent a manifold increase.

***Brisk Indo-Roman Trade:*** With the founding of the Roman Empire in 31 B.C, India and Rome began a highly successful trading relationship that lasted for more than two centuries. The main reason was the increasing prosperity of the Roman populace and their insatiable demand for certain Indian products and those of China and Southeast Asia, which could be easily procured for them by Indian merchants. The annexation of Egypt by Rome in 31 B.C was also a factor of great logistical importance, because Rome became the mistress of both the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.

A large Roman ship, carrying from India compact and costly merchandise of silks, fine cottons, pepper, costus, nard and spikenard, and bringing to India products such as two-handled amphorae, fine ceramics, bronze vases and delicate glassware, represented a 'monumental investment' by many traders. As the captains of such ships did not normally sail to the east coast ports of India, both import and export goods were loaded on to much smaller Indian ships that continually plied between the two coasts. Generally speaking, the overall balance of trade between India and Rome was in the favour of India, and the Romans had to pay for the deficits in the form of bullion. A large hoard of Roman coins found at Arikamedu and other places in South India, along with the archaeological remains of a Roman colony, testify to the vigour of the Indo-Roman trade.

#### **1.1.5.2.New trends in Indian religions & literature**

A series of remarkable developments in the religious thinking of India took place during the post-Mauryan era. They affected both Buddhism and Vedic Brahmanism. Within both systems particular strands of theism-belief in the existence of God with or without a belief in a special revelation-began to develop, with profound consequences for many millions of people in the subcontinent and beyond.

***Origin and Growth of Mahayana Buddhism:*** Buddhism by now assumed the status of a major world religion. The monarchs of Central Asian origin were particularly attracted by its 'catholicity'. Central Asian influence and the changing socio-economic scenario changed the outlook of Buddhism. A new form of sect within Buddhism arose during this time which is known as Mahayana Buddhism, or the Great Vehicle against the Hinayana, or the Lesser Vehicle. Some of the key Mahayana texts were formulated during the post-Mauryan centuries. One particularly interesting text was the Milindapanha, the philosophical questions asked by the Indo-Greek king

Menander to the Buddhist philosopher Nagasena. In some of his answers Nagasena laid great stress on the divinisation of the Buddha and the importance of relic worship. Another text, the Buddhacharita, a biography of the Buddha, composed by the renowned polymath Asvaghosha, also confirms the Mahayanist image of a divine Buddha. From an older and more traditional treatise, known as the Mahavastu, the Mahayanists adopted the particular styles of Buddha-worship, with copious use being made of such precious materials as gold, lapis lazuli, pearls, silver, silk, etc., as gifts for gaining merits and rewards from the Buddha. This attitude embodied 'the great influence of commerce oriented lay worshippers on Buddhism' and again demonstrated the importance of the overland trade between India and China. The key works of the Mahayana canon, made up of many different books used by different sects, were written in Sanskrit; they are known collectively as the Vaipulyasutra. The most important Vaipulyasutra is the Saddharmapundarika, a Mahayana text greatly revered in China and Japan. This text formulated the concept of the Bodhisattvas and provides elaborate details of how stupas should be designed and how the rituals of Buddha worship were to be conducted. Finally, there is the Prajnaparamita, a Mahayana philosophical text, which lists the various virtues necessary to attain the Buddha state.

***Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions:*** The first manifestations of what we would now describe as popular Hinduism began to emerge during the post-Mauryan centuries. By now a modified form of Vedic Brahmanism emerged. Two very strongly theistic traditions blossomed at this time, which we call the Vaishnava and the Shaiva. They centred round three main concepts: that of a supreme deity in the form of Vishnu or Shiva; that of salvation being made possible through the supreme deity's grace; and that of attainment of that salvation by the means of intense love and devotion to the deity, the process known as bhakti. The two traditions did not break away from Vedic Brahmanism, but rejected some of the practices such as animal sacrifices. The Vaishnava form of worship at first focused on three older deities: Vasudeva, a tribal deity; Krishna, the deity of the Yadava clan; and Narayana, referred to as a deity in the Satapatha Brahmana. The Shaiva tradition rests upon the ancient deity of Shiva and upon the Mother Goddess Shakti, Shiva's consort. Shiva has an ancient pedigree in Brahmanic mythology. During this period a definite Shaiva tradition emerged through the activities of sects such as Lakulin, Pashupata or Maheshvara. Their intense devotion to Shiva was also emulated by great rulers such as Vima Kadphises of the Kushans, who ordered the depiction of the Shiva on his coins. The lingam that replaced the Shiva image in due course has been the core of intense devotion by the Shaivites throughout India.

***The Dharmashastra of Manu:*** While Vaishnavism and Shaivism may have helped to access the Vedic religion to greater numbers of people, the Brahmanic thinkers nevertheless continued to reaffirm the principles of Vedic orthodoxy in much of the commentatorial literature that developed during this period. This literature was part of the great Smriti corpus that began with the composition of Sutras in the late Vedic and post-Vedic periods. It deals with a host of issues in society and life generally, with lessons and implications drawn from the Sruti literature. The particular component that we call the Dharmashastras were essentially normative texts dealing with Dharma, 'the whole system of Law, moral and legal, that has its foundation in the transcendent order, and the specific systems of rules and regulations under which a given individual lives.' In all, nineteen Dharmashastras, attributed to ancient seers, have been identified, but just four of them form the essential core. They are Manavdharmashastra, or Manusmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Naradasmriti and Parasarasmriti, attributed to sages Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada and Parasara. The Manusmriti is the critical text for our period: it might have been composed any time between 200 B.C and A.D 200. The Manusmriti became the rule book for orthodox brahmins. Its contents, consisting of 2,684 verses divided into twelve chapters, among other things, affirm the divine right of kings; confirm and rationalise the theory of the caste system; elaborate upon and sing praises of

the so-called four stages of life for Vedic followers; and express grave reservations about the constancy and capabilities of women.

#### **1.1.5.3. Secular literature, sciences and the arts**

A florescence of cultural creativity is distinctly noticeable during this period. This creativity was partly an expression of the efforts and genius of the Indian people themselves, and partly the result of cross-fertilisation of ideas from different traditions and cultures. The fusion of native ideas and skills with those borrowed from Persian, Greek, Central Asian or Chinese sources gave a sharper impetus and edge to all cultural products created in India at that time. In due course, the outside world came to admire some of these products. The developments in literature, sciences and the arts will furnish us with appropriate examples of progressive creativity.

**Sanskrit literature:** Sanskrit was the hallowed language in which the most sacred of India's literature had been composed. Although during the age of the Buddha and under the Mauryan Empire various forms of Prakrit- the popular languages-came into prominence, Sanskrit always remained the language that wielded a pervasive influence. Far from being hostile to Sanskrit, the post-Mauryan monarchs, whether Indian or foreign, also provided valuable patronage; and even much of the literature of Mahayana Buddhism was written in Sanskrit. In fact, during the post-Mauryan period, Sanskrit came to be recognised as the language of the educated and cultured classes, irrespective of their religion. It was the quality of language and its subtle use that preoccupied such people. The Buddhacharita, along with another acclaimed work, the Mahabhashya, by Patanjali the grammarian,<sup>68</sup> was admired as a fine example of Sanskrit prose literature. However, the most significant of literary developments in Sanskrit came to be expressed through poetry and drama. Even, during this period monarch of foreign origin used Sanskrit as the lingua franca such as the famous prasasti of Rudradaman, inscribed on a rock in Junagadh, is the first chaste Sanskrit inscription of India.

**Tamil literature:** The Aryanisation of the Dravidian-speaking peoples during the first millennium B.C. had involved an increasing use of Sanskrit in the south. The Sanskritic influence is strongest in three of the southern languages: Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Tamil, the principal and the most ancient of the Dravidian literary languages, was also influenced by Sanskrit, but on a far smaller scale. It retained its independence and originality, particularly in its technical structure. A fuller appreciation of the political, social and cultural development of the far south can be gained only by studying the most ancient of the Tamil texts. Tamils dominated the early history of the region, and one of their major intellectual traditions was the regular gathering of a large number of poets in a sangam, or an academy, at which poems and stories were recited. The so-called Sangam Age lasted from approximately 200 B.C to A.D 200. Three sangams were held, but the works from the first two are difficult to trace. Three sangam produced vast amount of literary work which are highly informative for the history of extreme south of Indian peninsula.

**Advance in sciences:** Astronomy and medicine were two of the main sciences in which steady progress was made during our period. Indian interest in astronomy dated from the earliest of Vedic times, and much astronomical knowledge can be gathered from the Samhitas, the Brahmanas and Sutra literature. It was with the beginning of the Christian era that a new turning point was reached, with a greater emphasis on a rigorous scientific method of inquiry and interpretation. There also came into use a more sophisticated system of computation, with mathematical concepts such as the integral solutions of indeterminate equations and trigonometry. The positions of the various planets were charted with greater precision, and more accurate calculations of the length of the year or of the day were recorded. The relevant literature for this information consists of a set of siddhantas, or the so-called final solutions, each ascribed to a particular astronomer-sage. It is believed that there were originally eighteen such siddhantas, but only five of them, codified in the sixth century by the great astronomer Varahamihira, are now available to us. The names of two of

them, the Romaka Siddhanta and the Paulisa Siddhanta, give strong hints of the Greek and classical influences on Indian astronomy. This is a subject of intense debate, but common sense suggests that the strong commercial links of India must also have had their parallel in cultural links.

Ayur-Veda, the ancient medical system of India, is today considered as one of the important branches of complementary medicine. Its relative popularity throughout the world is because of its emphasis on a more holistic approach by the physician towards illness in general. The bulk of our knowledge of the system is drawn from the works of Charaka and Susruta, who belonged to this period. Their works constitute the standard material of Ayurveda, and have been handed down to us over the centuries in various revisions. They describe and explain fully eight branches of medical knowledge and practice: therapeutics, surgery, diseases of the sensory organs, mental illness, infant disorders, toxicology, tonics/drugs and sexual virility. As with astronomy, there is debate among historians whether India contributed at all to the Greek and Hellenistic medical systems, or whether these developed independently. On balance, there is a greater likelihood of fairly strong Indian influences, in the light of the testimony from Alexander the Great's contemporaries, the accounts of Megasthenes, the export of valuable medicinal plants from India to the Mediterranean lands, and the generally more articulate and clearer instructions in Indian medical texts compared with the Greek.

**Architecture and sculpture:** Despite the political confusion of the post-Mauryan era, the arts developed to a remarkable degree. The stupa became the symbol of post-Mauryan architectural progress. The archetype at Sanchi is the most famous of all these structures in India, and the entire range of developments in the evolution of the stupa can be found there. The art of the sculpture also took off during this confusing period. Three types of relief sculpture have been studied in great detail. Indian art flowered during this period, with sculpture leading all other arts. The sculptures of the Buddha were most common. The Gandhara and Mathura school of art flourished during this period. The sculptures of Gandhara school consist principally of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva figures that show strong Greek and Roman artistic influences on Indian themes. In contrast to the Gandhara school, a more authentically Indian artistic influence is stamped all over the art of Mathura.

#### **1.1.6. Conclusion**

The five centuries which passed between the decline of the first great Indian empire of the Mauryas and the emergence of the great empire of the Guptas has often been described as a dark period in Indian history when foreign dynasties fought each other for short-lived and ephemeral supremacy over northern India. This period witnessed the rule of the Indo-Greek, the Parthians and the Sakas Kshatrapa. But this period was a period of intensive economic and cultural contact among the various parts of the Eurasian continent. India played a very active role in stimulating these contacts. Buddhism, which had been fostered by Indian rulers since the days of Ashoka, was greatly aided by the international connections of the Indo-Greeks and the Kushanas and thus rose to prominence in Central Asia. South India was establishing its important links with the West and with Southeast Asia in this period.

In Brahminical religion new popular cults arose around gods like Shiva, Krishna and Vishnu-Vasudeva who had played only a marginal role in an earlier age. Religious legitimation was of greater importance to these foreign rulers than to other Indian kings. Menander's ashes had been distributed according to the Buddhist fashion. The best-known contribution of the this period was, of course, to Indian art in the form of Gandhara school of art, with its Graeco-Roman style, and the Mathura school of art which included 'archaic' Indian elements. During this period also literature witnessed overall growth compilation of the authoritative Hindu law was carried out during this period as well as Sanskrit language flourished. As a whole this period prepare the stage for the setting of the classical culture of the Gupta age.

### 1.1.7. Summary

- *The post-Mauryan India witnessed a important political development in the form of waves of movements from across the northwestern borders.*
- *At first, the successors of Greek kings of Bactria are known as Indo-Greeks who came to occupy large parts Exercise of northwestern India and Afghanistan. About three dozen such kings are known largely from their coins. Indian literary sources refer to them as Yavanas.*
- *Demetrius, son of Euthydemus, moved into the Indian plains and established Indo-Greek rule in India. He and his successor Menander led several successful campaigns annexing most of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and perhaps even reaching as far as Pataliputra.*
- *The conquest of large parts of northwestern India is attested by Strabo's Geography and Periplus of the Erythraean Sea.*
- *Menander is the best known Indo-Greek ruler and his reign is dated to 155-130 B.C. While his coins have been reported from Kabul and Mathura, the Milindapanho records discussions between him and the Buddhist philosopher Nagasena. With the death of Menander the political influence of the Indo-Greeks waned.*
- *Besides Gandhara art, which synthesised Greek, Roman and Indian elements, and the Heliodorus pillar, mentioned above, the Indo-Greek coins, which unlike the Indian punch-marked coins, can be identified with individual kings and have been dated are among their important legacy.*
- *The Indo-Greek were followed by the Sakas, as the new rulers of the region in the first century B.C.*
- *Political developments in Central Asia pushed them towards Bactria and Iran and from Bactria they moved into the northwest of India through southern Afghanistan.*
- *Maues or Moga was the first Saka king in India. He and his successor Azes I founded a large kingdom by displacing the Indo-Greeks. Their territories extended from the northwest to Mathura and included the whole tract from Ujjain to Saurashtra.*
- *Deriving from their familiarity with aspects of Indo-Greek and Iranian culture they issued coins in imitation of the Indo-Greek style and used the Iranian title kings of kings (shahanu shahi), which can be translated into Greek as basileus basileon.*
- *Azes II was the last importat Saka king in the northwest. In the early part of the first century A.D. they were replaced by the Indo-Parthians or Pahlavas, whose rule did not last long.*
- *Pahlavas originally came from the Iranian province of Parthia. In the 2nd century B.C. they occupied Bactria. Gondopharnes who ruled in the first half of the first century A.D. is the best known among them.*
- *The rise of the Kushanas to prominence in India coincided with the decline of the Pahlavas.*
- *India during this period was greatly influence by the influx of foreign power. The cross cultural fertilisation resulted in socio-religios and economic change.*
- *The prosperous silk route trade, indo-Roman trade and inland trade also influence the existing religious set and art activities of the sub-continent.*
- *New form of sciences, literature and architecture emerge during this period of Indian history.*

### 1.1.8. Exercise

- Write an essay on the Indo-Greek rule in post Mauryan India.
- Discuss the origin, political history and contribution of the Indo-Parthian rule in India.
- Describe the political history of the Saka kingdom in India.
- Examine the significance of foreign rule in India in the post Mauryan era.

- Discuss the changing economic scenario of India during foreign domination.

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**Unit-1**  
**Chapter-II**  
**SOCIAL CONDITION & RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS**  
**Rise of Mahayana Buddhism, Development of Art and Architecture**  
**( Gandhara, Mathura, Central India and Vengi School of Art).**

**Structure**

- 1.2.0. Objective**
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### 1.2.0. Objective

The chapter discuss the socio-cultural and religious condition of political India on the eve of post Mauryan age. After learning this lesson the students will be able to explain

- *the arrival of the Indo-Greeks in north-west India and their impact on Indian society and culture;*
- *the changing socio-economic pattern of India between B.C 200 to A.D 300;*
- *the new religious scenario in Buddhism, Brahminism and Jainism owing to contact with the foreigner; and .*
- *the development of Indian Art under this new socio-religious and political condition of India between B.C 200 to A.D 300.*

### 1.2.4. Introduction

‘Post-Mauryan’ is the name given to the period extending from approximately 200 BC to 300 AD, that is, from the fall of the Mauryan dynasty to the rise of Gupta power. Though several important new developments are seen in this phase, it is best viewed in terms of the continuity and intensification of political, economic and social processes that started in the post-Vedic and matured in the Mauryan, culminating in the post-Mauryan. In this lesson, we survey the chief features of this period. Our sources include literature including Brahmanical, Buddhist as well as foreign accounts, archaeological excavations, coins of a large variety and number, inscriptions in Prakrit and, for the first time, Sanskrit and architectural and art remains from these five hundred years. In the last chapter we noticed how the post Mauryan period marked arrival of foreigner in to India. We discussed the political history of the foreign ruling dynasty and the significance of their rule on Indian history. This lesson as mentioned above will in detail discuss the rise of Mahayana sect in Buddhism and its impact on art activities of the period besides the post Mauryan development of Indian art will be dealt here in this lesson. This lesson also discuss the changing social scenario of the period between B.C 200 to A.D 300.

### 1.2.5. Social Condition of India

Literature and archaeology amply indicate that the period between 200 BC and 300 AD was one of urban prosperity all over the subcontinent. Indeed it can be said to represent the apogee of early historic urbanism. Not only did cities that arose in the sixth century BC, primarily in the Gangetic valley and the Malwa region, flourish but new towns came into being and city life spread to new regions as well, such as Kashmir, Sindh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, Andhra, Karnataka and the deep south. This went hand in hand with the expansion of agriculture, crafts production and trade, on the one hand, and the establishment of new ruling dynasties and power centers, on the other. It will be obvious that the intensified political and economic developments discussed above had important social implications. This took the form chiefly of the widening and deepening of the stratification along caste, class and gender lines that had started in the sixth century BC.

#### 1.2.5.1. Increasing Social Stratification

The four *varnas* and the four ashramas (*chaturvarnashramadharm*) emerge as the pillars of brahmanical ideology in the Dharmashastra texts of this period. Important features of caste were the preference for endogamy and hereditary occupation. There are indications of localization of caste and occupation with people of the same profession living in their own separate settlements or in distinct parts within settlements. Principles of purity-pollution and hierarchy governed restrictions on the giving and receiving of food, particularly vis a vis brahmanas on the one hand and chandalas, the outcastes, on the other. The ‘untouchable’ (*asprishya*) occurs in the Vishnu Dharmasutra of this period. It signified complete segregation of the social group called chandalas, which include corpse removers, cremators, executioners, sweepers, hunters, etc. According to the Manu Smriti, they had to live outside the village or town and could not eat out of other people’s dishes. There were a

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

#### **1.2.5.2. Emergence of Patriarchal Society**

Linked to the need for the maintenance and perpetuation of the caste and class structure was the strengthening of patriarchy in this period. It took the form of subordinating women and controlling their reproductive potential. The preference for sons over daughters continued. Women's access to knowledge, secular and scriptural, was diminished. Women of affluent classes were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, making them economically dependent on their male kinsmen. Great emphasis was put on the chastity of women which was sought to be preserved by early (Pre-puberty) marriages, on the one hand, and severe strictures on widows, on the other.

#### **1.2.5.3. Status of Women**

The texts also suggest that women were treated as property and akin to *shudras*. At the same time they were denied rights to inherit property which was patrilinearly passed on (passed on from father to son). The lawgivers of this period, however, do allow a married woman some control over the gifts made to her as a bride which was known as *stridhana*. It should be noted that the occurrence of number of women as donors of Buddhist sites indicates that certain women had some degree of access to economic resources of their households. The post-Mauryan period also saw the growing role of rituals in the life of the individual and household, and society at large. Known as *sanskaras*, these were rites performed to mark various life stages such as pre-natal (*garbhadana*), initiation by sacred thread (*upanayana*), marriage (*vivaha*) and death (*antyesthi*). And then there were *panchamahayajnas* that were actually simple ceremonies obligatory for upper caste householders, including making offering to ancestors (*pitriyajna*), to the sacrificial fire (*daivayajna*) and to all being (*bhutayajna*). These can be understood as ways to regulate the individual's life as well as to string society together through common beliefs and practices.

#### **1.2.6. Religious Development**

A series of remarkable developments in the religious thinking of India took place during the post-Mauryan era. They affected both Buddhism and Vedic Brahmanism. Within both systems particular strands of theism- belief in the existence of God with or without a belief in a special revelation- began to develop, with profound consequences for many millions of people in the subcontinent and beyond.

##### **1.2.6.1. Mahayana Buddhism:**

Buddhism was not just the 'central public religion' of India; during this period it was also assuming the status of a major world religion. A number of royal dynasties became the patrons and guardians of the religion, as can be witnessed from impressive monuments and inscriptions left behind. The monarchs of Central Asian origin were particularly attracted by its 'catholicity'; and the Kushan king Kanishka remains for the Buddhists even today the most cherished of monarchs, second only to Ashoka. It was the agency of the Kushan Empire that made possible the triangular commercial and cultural contacts between India, China and Central Asia and facilitated the movement of Buddhist ideas beyond the Pamirs and the Himalayas. Within India itself the religion was becoming attractive to different cults and sects. As a result of both domestic and foreign expansion and interactive encounters with beliefs inside and outside India new ideas were bound to emerge.

**Origin of Mahayana:** Over many centuries the traditional Buddhist ideology had come to be crystallised into what was called the 'Three Jewels': the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, the *sangha*. Now, in a period of new social and historical realities, many Buddhist thinkers argued that the 'Three

Jewels' approach was much too intellectual and restrictive for the masses to grasp. It was really a type of 'icy idealism', quite unsuited to the needs of newer devotees subscribing to the Buddhist faith. While not repudiating the core values of the Three Jewels, they argued that the Buddha could come to life for the masses only when he was elevated to the status of a god. This deification of the Buddha and the doctrine of salvation by faith were at variance with the traditional teaching, because the Buddha had never claimed divine status. The dissenters, argued that an individual needed the intercession of divine beings, the Bodhisattvas, who were born again and again on this earth because they were prepared to forego their own nirvana in order to help ordinary mortals help achieve theirs. The Bodhisattvas came to be arranged within the Buddhist pantheon of semi-divinities, which suggests that this new variant of Buddhism was attempting to become more attractive to local sects and cults by incorporating their gods and goddesses within the pantheon. It is also likely that another new idea, that of a saviour to come-the Buddha Maitreya- might have had its origins in the contacts between Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

The cluster of such new ideas provoked a split between the dissenters, who wanted a more inclusive and more faith based Buddhism, to be known as Mahayana Buddhism, or the Great Vehicle, and the traditional elders, the Theravadins, who clung on to the pristine purity of ideas represented by the principle of the Three Jewels. A pejorative term, Hinayana, or the Lesser Vehicle, came in due course to be applied to the Theravadin school of thought. The final victory, ultimately, was that of the Mahayanists; their brand of Buddhism remained dominant in India until the twelfth century and, apart from Sri Lanka and Thailand, the vast majority of the Buddhist world today is Mahayana-oriented.

***Philosophy of Mahayana:*** Historians of religion have argued that much of the new thinking, particularly in the Mahayana tradition, was really like 'old wine in new bottles', simply a reinterpretation of the traditional Buddhist viewpoints; but we still need to recognise that there is a considerable literature in this period which points to dynamic and radical departures in Buddhist thinking. Some of the key Mahayana texts were formulated during the post-Mauryan centuries, although we are uncertain about their exact dates. One particularly interesting text was the *Milindapanha*, the philosophical questions asked by the Indo-Greek king Menander to the Buddhist philosopher Nagasena. In some of his answers Nagasena laid great stress on the divinisation of the Buddha and the importance of relic worship. Another text, the *Buddhacharita*, a biography of the Buddha, composed by the renowned polymath Asvaghosha, also confirms the Mahayanist image of a divine Buddha. From an older and more traditional treatise, known as the *Mahavastu*, the Mahayanists adopted the particular styles of Buddha-worship, with copious use being made of such precious materials as gold, lapis lazuli, pearls, silver, silk, etc., as gifts for gaining merits and rewards from the Buddha. This attitude embodied 'the great influence of commerce oriented lay worshippers on Buddhism' and again demonstrated the importance of the overland trade between India and China. While the bulk of the Theravadin texts are in the Pali language, the key works of the Mahayana canon, made up of many different books used by different sects, were written in Sanskrit; they are known collectively as the *Vaipulyasutra*. The most important *Vaipulyasutra* is the *Saddharmapundarika* (The Lotus Sutra), a Mahayana text greatly revered in China and Japan. This text formulated the concept of the Bodhisattvas and provides elaborate details of how stupas should be designed and how the rituals of Buddha worship were to be conducted. Finally, there is the *Prajnaparamita*, a Mahayana philosophical text, which lists the various virtues necessary to attain the Buddha state.

Its followers believed in the heavenliness of Buddha and sought the salvation of all through the grace and help of Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Believes in idol worship, Believes that Nirvana is not a negative cessation of misery but a positive state of bliss, Mahayana had two chief philosophical schools: the *Madhyamika* and the *Yogachara*. The former took a line midway

between the uncompromising realism of Hinayanism and the idealism of Yogachara. The Yogachara school founded by Maitreyanatha completely rejected the realism of Hinayana and maintained absolute idealism.

#### **1.2.6.2.Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions**

The first manifestations of what we would now describe as popular Hinduism began to emerge during the post-Mauryan centuries. For more than a thousand years, until the sixth century bc, Vedic Brahmanism had been the principal Diffusion and dynamism after the Mauryas religion of India. The main elements of this religion, as we have noted earlier, were the supremacy of the Vedas, the caste system, the sacrificial rituals for propitiating the powerful Vedic elemental gods such as Indra, Surya, Rudra, Varuna, Vayu, etc., and the monopolistic role of the brahman priests in the performance of all ceremonies. From the sixth century bc onwards Buddhism, Jainism and various heterodox forms of Shramanism launched a challenge to Vedic Brahmanism and gained a relatively large number of adherents. Buddhism particularly secured a powerful ascendancy during both the Mauryan and the post-Mauryan periods. However, during the post-Mauryan age, there came a certain backlash in favour of Vedic Brahmanism at some of the royal courts.

What also took place was the beginning of a modified form of Vedic Brahmanism. Two very strongly theistic traditions blossomed at this time, which we call the Vaishnava and the Shaiva. They centred round three main concepts: that of a supreme deity in the form of Vishnu or Shiva; that of salvation being made possible through the supreme deity's grace; and that of attainment of that salvation by the means of intense love and devotion to the deity, the process known as bhakti. The two traditions did not break away from Vedic Brahmanism, but rejected some of the practices such as animal sacrifices. The Vaishnava form of worship at first focused on three older deities: Vasudeva, a tribal deity; Krishna, the deity of the Yadava clan; and Narayana, referred to as a deity in the Satapatha Brahmana. 56 All three deities eventually became identified with Vishnu, originally a Vedic god of lesser importance but now assuming a much greater status in the eyes of its followers. 57 The major strand in Vaishnavism came through those with the Vasudeva–Krishna connections, known as the bhagvatas. 58 Their intensely concentrated devotion to a personal lord, Bhagavana, attracted even some non-Indians. Their greatest spiritual and intellectual legacy to us is the world famous short dialogue between Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, and Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers, in the Mahabharata. Refuting such practices as withdrawal, renunciation and idle sentimentalism, Krishna enjoins Arjuna to focus his devotion upon him and fulfil his duty according to his place in society, however hard that struggle may be.

The Saiva tradition rests upon the ancient deity of Shiva and upon the Mother Goddess Shakti, Shiva's consort. Shiva has an ancient pedigree in Brahmanic mythology. Some scholars have also traced this deity to the Harappan culture 'Pashupati' seal that shows a seated horned proto-Shiva figure surrounded by animals, but this is now strongly challenged by others. More convincingly, Shiva was the original god Rudra in the Vedas, a god who represented destructive and malignant forces of nature. 59 Rudra was known as the 'Roarer', but, like Vishnu, he too had been a marginal god in the first instance. However, from the time when he was elevated to a supreme force in one of the Upanishads, Shiva has been venerated by millions in India. During the period under review a definite Shaiva tradition emerged through the activities of sects such as Lakulin, Pashupata or Maheshvara. 60 Their intense devotion to Shiva was also emulated by great rulers such as Vima Kadphises of the Kushans, who ordered the depiction of the Shiva on his coins. The lingam that replaced the Shiva image in due course has been the core of intense devotion by the Shaivites throughout India.

#### **1.2.6.3.Jainism**

Jainism also witnessed a schism or split in its ranks into the Digambara and the Shvetambara sects. The difference between the two related chiefly to rules of monastic discipline. Digambara

monks, believing in absolute renunciation, did not wear clothes and walked nude, while the *Shvetambaras* wore white garments. The former received alms in their cupped hands and did not carry alms bowls whereas the latter carried the vessel and ate out of it. They also accepted that women had the potential to attain salvation whereas the *Digambaras* denied this. Eventually the *Shvetambaras* came to predominate in western India and the *Digambaras* in the south. They received the patronage of wealthy political and social elites. At the level of Jaina lay practice, the post-Mauryan period saw the development of a temple cult and related rituals which, interestingly, did not involve any intermediary monastic or priestly class. A number of images of Jinas and tirthankaras have been found from sites like Kankali Tila (Mathura) from 200 BC onwards while Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves in Orissa were centres of Jaina monasticism.

### 1.2.1. Literature

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

The post-Mauryan period is significant for the composition of a number of philosophical treatises of the classical schools of early Indian orthodox philosophy. Jaimini's *Mimamsasutra* of the second century BC emphasized Vedic ritual as the embodiment of dharma and the means to salvation. Badarayana wrote the *Brahmasutra* at about the same time. It is a key text of the early school of Vedanta which aimed at enquiring into the nature of Brahman (the universal spirit) and atman (the individual soul). Kanada's *Vaisheshikasutra*, written between second century BC and first century AD, is an exposition on pluralistic realism which means that it aimed at classifying and explaining the special (*vishesh*) features of the multiple things that exist in the world. (They enunciated a theory of atoms.) Gotama's *Nyayasutra* of the first century AD laid down the parameters of formal, step-by-step method of logic and reasoning. The *Samkhyakarika* of Ishvarakrishna belongs to the fourth-fifth century AD: the philosophy is much older, though, and revolves around the concepts of *purusha* (soul) and *prakriti* (matter) out of the union of which the universe comes into being and through the rupture between which liberation of the soul can be attained. Finally, the *Yogasutras*, ascribed to Patanjali, are a manual of Yogic thought and practice. They prescribe a series of exercises, physical and mental, to achieve cessation of the activities of the mind (*cittavrittinirodha*) whereby tranquility and liberation can be achieved.

All the works discussed so far were in Sanskrit. Works in Pali and Prakrit espousing Buddhist thought or chronicling the life of the Buddha also date to our period. For example, the *Jatakas* (300 BC-100 BC), the *Nidanakatha* and *Milindapanho* (100 BC-100 AD). However, the *Mahavastu*, a Hinayana text, is in mixed Prakrit-Sanskrit as in the Mahayanist *Lalitavistara* (100-200 AD) while the *Avadanashataka* (200 AD) on the life of Ashoka, is in Sanskrit only.

An interesting aspect is represented by the technical treatises on a variety of 'secular' themes that are associated with our period. These include Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*, a commentary on Panini's grammar, and Pingala's *Chhandasutra*, a work on metrics. Parts of the Mauryan work on statecraft, the *Arthashastra*, were also composed in the post-Mauryan. Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*, an exposition on pleasure especially of the sexual kind, belongs to the end of our period. And so do the twin medical treatises, *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, though they were added to subsequently. They lay down with an astonishing degree of expertise and accuracy a comprehensive approach to human and even animal physiology, diagnosis of disease and treatment.

Finally, to the post-Mauryan period can also be traced our earliest surviving kavyas or highly aesthetic, creative literature which includes poetry, drama, novel and biography. Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharitam* and *Saundaranandam* in Sanskrit were composed in the first century AD (he was patronized by Kanishka) while Bhasa's 13 plays, such as *Avimaraka*, *Svapnavasavadatta* and *Karnabharam*, also belong to the first three centuries AD. An erotic poem, *Gathasattasai*, in Prakrit is attributed to a Satavahana king, Hala. The classical phase of *Kavya* writing followed in the Gupta period.

### **1.2.2. Art and Architecture**

The best-known contribution of the post Mauryan period was, of course, to Indian art. After the early sculptures of the Mauryas which were greatly influenced by the Iranian style, a new Indian style had first emerged under the Shungas and their successors in the Buddhist monuments of Bharhut and Sanchi which particularly showed a new style of relief sculpture. The merger of the Gandhara school of art, with its Graeco-Roman style, and the Mathura school of art which included 'archaic' Indian elements and became the centre of Indo-Kushana art, finally led to the rise of the Sarnath school of art. This school then set the pattern of the classical Gupta style.

Post-Mauryan art has the following broad characteristics: (1) It is structural art, meaning that it was originally part of architectural structures like the gateways, railings and facades of stupas, chaityas, viharas and temples. (2) It is by and large narrative, describing scenes from myths and legends to do with divine and semi-divine beings, and also depicting signs and symbols. (3) It is regarded as popular art, representing the folk spirit of commoners, unlike Mauryan art which was royal and stately. (4) It is overwhelmingly religious in nature and predominantly Buddhist. It should be noted, however, that the earliest brahmanical stone temples and sculpture are also from this period. A Vishnu temple stood at Vidisha (Besnagar) from the third century BC onwards in the vicinity of the famous Heliodorus pillar which was a Garuda column dedicated to Vishnu by a Greek ambassador called Heliodorus. Remains of a Vishnu shrine are also found at Nagari (third century BC), of a Lakshmi temple (200-50 BC) at Atranjikhhera, a Durga temple at Sonkh (100-200 AD) and one Vishnu and five shiva temples at Nagarajunakonda (400 AD).

The profuse inscriptions found at most Buddhist sites of the period show that they enjoyed the support of not only royalty but, more so, commoners like artisans, merchants, guilds, yavanas, monks and nuns who appear as donors. The post-Mauryan period was one of the culminating point in various spheres. In the sphere of Indian art it saw the inaugurating and founding of fundamental trends. Below we outline the various tradition of art flourished in the period of our discussion.

#### **1.2.2.1. Art of Bharhut & Sanchi**

Post Mauryan art that followed the Mauryan experiment was largely corporate and narrative in character. The period between 2nd century B.C and 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. is marked by the construction of structural stupas at Bharhut, Bodhgaya, Kausambi and Sanchi, alongwith rock cut chaityas and bodhi grihas and viharas at Karle, Kanheri, Bhaja, Bhedsa, Pitalkhora and Ghatokachha caves. Most of these early surviving examples of art are either Buddhist or Jaina. The structures were embellished with bas relief sculptures of sectarian emblems such as the *triratna* or *dharmachakra* along with lotuses and other auspicious (mangala) symbols such as couples or *mithunas*. Alongside narratives from the life of Buddha in previous lives such as the Jataka stories or avadana stories were also presented for the instruction of the pilgrim.

The earliest surviving example of narrative art comes from Bharhut, near Satna in Madhya Pradesh. Only the great railing or the *vedika* running around the stupa and the gateways or *toranas* constructed on all four cardinal points survive from this site now. Sanchi is a better preserved monument that showcases early narrative Buddhist art. Built over many centuries, the main structure of the stupa, the *vedika* and *torana* may be dated between 50 B.C. to A.D.150. Relief sculptures on the stone gateways not only illustrate episodes from the life and worship of the

Buddha along with the inscriptions about the donors, but also provide a glimpse onto the life, beliefs and structures of the period. These inscriptions inform us that traders, householders, craftsmen, guilds, queens, ministers, nuns and monks-ordinary and great men and women contributed to the construction of this monument to Buddhist piety.

The early stupas are first examples of sculpture in hard stone while the earlier tradition was to carve in softer surface of wood and ivory and this was the prototype for stone carving, thus the relief is shallow and rather flat with little three dimensionality. In the narratives the main character of the story is generally placed in the centre of the panel with subsidiary figures on either side. The human figures are placed in a frontal pose, and profile is very rare. In these early carvings, the Buddha is represented by his symbols be it a throne, a bodhi tree, a stupa or footprints but not in his human form as the art was made by monks and lay people who followed the earlier form of Buddhism or Theravada where Buddha is not worshipped in his human form. A large number of carvings at Sanchi depict episodes from the life Buddha particularly the Birth, the Great Renunciation, Enlightenment, the First Sermon at Sarnath and the Parinirvana or death. One also finds episodes from the Jatakas such the Vessanantara Jataka and Mahakapi Jataka. Other episodes include the miracles performed by the Buddha such as walking on the Nilanjana River and the conversion of the Kashiya Brahmins.

There are number of scenes of worship of Buddha and his symbols. The art of Sanchi is important for the study of narrative devices, one of the most important being the invention of continuous narrative. Here in a single panel, the same figure is shown three or four times, each showing a moment from the story such as the story of the Buddha leaving his palace on the east gateway. On the left is the gate of city and the palace (which gives us a fair idea of urban architecture) with the horse and umbrella indicating the presence of the divine being. This is repeated four times till we reach the extreme left where a set of footprints suggest that the Buddha has left the horse and the umbrella to proceed towards meditation under the Bodhi tree. Under this we see a horse without the umbrella being led back to the palace.

At Sanchi nature has been depicted not in a truly realistic manner but to suggest its recognizable aspects. Thus water, especially the river, is depicted through horizontal waves, with aquatic animals emphasizing the water environment. Trees are shown with large leaves and fruit and with short trunks, generally surrounding by a platform. The developments at Sanchi and elsewhere gave rise to three important schools of art in India that flourished in north and the Deccan from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourth century A.D.: in and around Mathura, north-western region of Gandhara and near the Krishna river at Amaravati. The developments in sculpture in these regions laid the foundation of classicism and iconographic canons in the India.

#### **1.2.2.2.Mathura School of Art**

Mathura art reflects the urban and sophisticated tastes of the inhabitants, patrons and sculptors of the region who adapted the older forms of Bharhut-Sanchi and foreign artistic influences of Bactro-Gandharan art to create a widely spread and influential art style. Mathura and the surrounding region have a long history though continuous political history can be traced from the 6th century B.C. onwards when this became the capital of the Surasena janapada. Later, it came under the control of the Magadhan kingdom under the Nandas and Mauryas from whom it passed on to the Sungas under whom it was a prosperous city as recorded by Patanjali in the 2nd century B.C. It continued to be under the suzerainty of local chiefdoms such as the Mitras and Dattas whose coins have been discovered from the region. It is in the middle of the 1st century B.C. that Mathura came under the rule of Saka-Kshatrapas whose rulers such as Rajula and his son Sodasa issued the inscriptions of importance. It is under the Kushanas, especially under Kanishka that Mathura became the eastern capital and emerged as a major centre of art activity. The Kushanas ruled this region till about A.D. 250 after which there is a hiatus or gap here till the rise of the Gupta in the 4th



century B.C. though art activity continued in the transitional period. This period saw an expanding urbanization and the rise of long- distance trade. This led to an increased contact within larger areas of the Kushana Empire.

The art of this period also has a pronounced urbanized sensibility as the tastes and desires of the lay city dwellers transform. By 2nd Century B.C. Mathura was both an important urban center as well as a center for various faiths such as Buddhism, Jainism, Shivaism, Vishnuism and Naga Cults. The Bhagvata cult of Vishnu spread here in 1st-2nd century A.D. (Kushana Period). Thus, during the period art derived from religion flourished here. In the early period large Yaksha and Yakshi images were carved. During the Shunga period worship of gods through symbols such as the Bodhi tree, chakra etc continued. Later Jaina and Buddhist stupas were built at Mathura along with the rest of central India.

The art of Mathura is characterized by the use of mottled red Sikri sandstone that is found in the area around it. Majority of sculptures have been recovered from sites in and around the city from various Buddhist, Jaina and other sectarian buildings. The important Buddhist sites include Katra Keshavadeva, Jamalpur, Chaubara, Bhutesvara, Palikhera, Maholi and Govindgarh, while the most famous Jaina site is at Kanakali Tila. Sonkh has revealed the existence of apsidal structural temples belonging to naga cult along with other antiquities.

However, the influence of Mathura art was spread over most of north India with specimens being discovered from Sarnath, Kausambi, Bodhgaya and Rajgir in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, along with Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh and Chandraketugarh in Bengal, Vadnagar in Gujarat and Taxila in Pakistan. From Ahicchatra and Sanghol in UP and Punjab respectively a considerable quantity and variety of sculptures in Mathura style have been discovered that provide proof of the export and popularity of the art beyond the city itself.

The sculptures from the Mathura School have remarkable stylistic unity. The figures have oval or round-ish faces with open eyes, thick lips and sharp nose with a fleshy full bodied figure are shown in a number of postures. Most of the female figures are delineated in a voluptuous manner with heavy round breasts, narrow waist and broad hips. The male figures are shown with slight V-shaped torsos. The figures are generally shown wearing a diaphanous (almost transparent), clinging dhoti, while a scarf like uttariya emerges from behind one shoulder over one forearm. The divine figures are shown with one hand upraised in abhaya mudra and the other is placed on the waist near the knot of waist band, with a canopy like halo atop and behind the head. Plants, leaves, birds and animals were rendered in a realistic manner and much care has been to create details of these on background as well as the reverse of many sculptures at Mathura. The figure of the Buddha wears a samghati that covers only one shoulder, the hair are arranged in small snail like curls or are gathered in a kapardin like top knot. A large halo with scalloped edges representing a flame or light can be seen behind the head. Often attendant deities such as bodhisattvas or Indra and Brahma are shown on both sides of the Buddha.

The discovery of a number of dated donative's inscriptions from the pedestals of the Buddha and bodhisattva images from Mathura and surrounding areas have contributed greatly to our understanding of the evolution of the Buddha image as well as the Buddhist principles and tenets popular during the time. One of the best preserved specimens is from Ahicchatra whose inscription reveals that it was a gift of the Bhikshu Virana for the 'benefit and happiness of all teachers, together with elderly shramanas and disciples.' The inscription is dated in the year thirty two, probably of the Kanishka era, i.e A.D. 152. In another example the sculpture of seated meditating Buddha founded from Katra informs us that it was dedicated by a Buddhist nun named Amoha-asi 'for the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings'. Such inclusive generosity is indicative of Mahayana Buddhism which emphasizes the belief that merit or punya can be transferred from one to another.

The large number of sculptures of bodhisattvas is another indication of the popularity of Mahayana Buddhism in the region. These were generally shown as standing royal personages, lavishly bejeweled with a dhyanī Buddha figure in their crown or diadem. The attributes in their hands such as a purse or a lotus identifies them as a particular bodhisattva such as Maitreya or Avalokiteshvara.

This early development of the identification of particular deities based on their posture, attributes, vehicle and form are termed iconographic traits. These iconographic traits are characteristic of the Mathura school of art and reflect the religious environment of the post Mauryan era based as it was on bhakti and sectarian principles. Shaiva figures were found from the region though their numbers are limited. Ekamukhalinga and Chaturmukhalinga, linga icons with one of four faces of Shiva carved on four sides began to be made during this period though the classic examples come from the subsequent Gupta period. Karttikeya- Skanda is one of the more prolific deities with independent as well as composite images being made of them. Or the latter, he is shown with Shashthi, as well as with Ekanamsa and with Vishakha. The pancharatra cult of Vishnu seems to have taken root here with a number of images being created such as Chaturvyuha Vishnu that shows Vasudeva as the central figure and Samkarsana, Samba and Aniruddha as emanations emerging from this main figure. Icons of Vishnu holding a mace and disc were also found from the region along with Krishna and Balarama-Haladhara both of whom evolved from independent pastoral and agricultural deities into becoming the incarnations or avataars of Vishnu.

Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth is associated with Kubera-Panchika, the lord of wealth and prosperity. They are seen not only in the Brahmanical context but also in the Buddhist and local cults because their association with material well being and growth was rooted in common cultural environment rather than in a particular sectarian creed. Kubera is also shown in conjunction with Hariti, a yakshi-goddess who is associated with children and their well being. In fact, small votive plaques of these two are found in plenty from Mathura. Other deities such as the Matrikas or the Mothers, Naigamesha and Skanda are associated with children and had protective-destructive functions were created and donated in large numbers during the postMauryan period at Mathura. The Jains of Mathura produced votive tablets called ayagapattas that contain auspicious marks of worship such as fish couple or matsya yugala, the swatika, shrivatsa, ratna-bhanda, bhadraoptha, purna kumbha, divyamana, indrayasti and matsya.

The most distinctive feature of Mathura art is the plethora or abundance of female figures in various poses carved on railing pillars and torana uprights engaged in activities such as bathing under a waterfall, playing with swords or a ball and with a child, carrying an offering basket, holding a lamp, tying a waist band, dinking from a cup, etc. they are often shown standing on a dwarf yaksha or on a lotus or an incline. These figures wear very transparent dhoti revealing the form beneath, a heavy waist band or mekhala and other jewelry such as bangles, anklets, bracelets and the like. They sport different coiffures and are generally voluptuous and sensuously delineated. These females derive from the shalabhanjika and yakshi figures found on the early stupas and probably conferred an element of fertility on the stupa and the devotee who visited these. Often scenes from Jataka stories or lotuses are carved on the other side of the pillars such as at Bhuteshvara.

Two sided panels with an offering bowl on top are another distinguishing specimen of sculptural art from Mathura, whose precise function and meaning are still to be ascertained. Perhaps alms and offering or water for ritual ablution were placed in these bowls. These may have a tree carved on one side and a figural panel on the other or a narrative passage on both sides such as the 'Vasantsena panel' from Maholi that depicts moments from the play Mrichchhakatika or Kubera and attendants drinking wine from Palikhera. Many scenes from royal life such as drinking and adorning the self seem to have taken the fancy of sculptors and patrons in the area. These include

the Sundari and Nanda episode and kamaloka scenes of mithunas or couples in amorous play that are depicted on the torana and railings of structures.

This is not to imply that narrative passages from Jataka katha and avadana katha relating to the life of Buddha did not adorn the railings and other architectural elements of stupa and vihara buildings, but only that they became less popular as newer subjects came to the fore that catered to the sensibility of an increasingly urban society. There was a strong royal cult also flourishing under the Kushanas where the royal family was worshipped in a devakula or shrine. One such shrine has been discovered at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan and the other at Mat just outside the town of Mathura. Here portrait sculptures of the first four kings have been discovered of whom Wima Kadphises seated on a lion throne is very majestic and impressive. There is also the standing headless figure of Kanishka wearing a stiff tunic and boots, holding a sword with a makara symbol on the scabbard. A head from the site wearing a conical helmet gives an idea of what a royal figure may have looked like at the time. The art of Mathura of the Kushana period had a lasting impact on the subsequent art of the Guptas. Many of the sectarian forms crystallized and got elaborated while others such as local deities lost popularity as we shall see below.

### **1.2.2.3. Gandhara School of Art**

Gandhara art represents the art that developed and spread in the north western part of India from the 1st Century B.C. to the 4th Century A.D. The major centers of art activity of this school were in the kingdoms in this region such as Bactria, Kapisha, Swat and Gandhara. The main material used in the Gandhara School is metal such as the gold used in the Kanishka reliquary from Shahji-ki-Dheri. Stone wherever used is usually blue or grey schist and slate. Style has naturalism in body form, drapery, and pictorial scale. The bodies are made in the classical tradition with its emphasis on perfection of the human form. Therefore they are usually shown as youthful and strong. The male figures are shown with musculature and with a squarish torso. The rendering of drapery with sharp flowing folds is similar to those seen on a Roman toga and is a distinctive feature of Gandharan art as are wavy curled hair and sharp features.

Gandharan style was an amalgam of Hellenistic- Roman, Iranian and indigenous art. A number of compositional traits were adapted from Roman mortuary art, while the divine attributes and decorative elements were taken from Hellenistic (Greek) and Iranian roots. This interaction of artistic components was largely due to the geographical position of the region which was at the cross roads of cultural exchange. The area saw the advent of number of foreign powers and political configurations ranging from the Greek, Bactrian to Kushana. It was also at the hub of economic activity based on trade with the west through the great Silk route. Sculptures of the school are usually found as part of architectural contexts with a deliberate iconographic scheme or pattern. There is a standardization of composition, pose of figures and other incidents from the life of Buddha which suggests that the sculptors are following an established iconographic mode.

Most of the sculptures from this period are Buddhist, though some Hellenistic sculptures also survive. Standing Buddha images are most characteristic feature of the style. These figures have a uniformity of pose, costume, lakshana and other characteristics. The Buddha is usually depicted standing frontally with one leg bent. He is shown wearing a heavy robe that covers both shoulders, his left hand hangs down but the right hand is raised in abhaya or varada mudra. There is an ushnisha or a top knot on the head. He is not adorned with any other jewelry, though his elongated ear lobes suggest that as a prince he did wear heavy ornaments. Behind the head a halo with lotus, etc can be seen. Seated Buddha figure is shown in dharmachakra mudra which is the gesture of teaching or in dhyana mudra which suggests meditation. Bodhisattva icons are another important category of sculpture found from Gandhara region. These represent mahasattva bodhisattvas who embody the fulfillment of bodhisattvahood that is that future Buddha hood and form one of the most important elements of Mahayana Buddhism prevalent in this area. These male

figures are shown standing or seated and wear a dhoti like lower garment, the torso is bare except for the a shawl-like length of cloth over the shoulder, the hairstyle is more elaborate with wavy hair falling over the shoulder. They, like the Buddha images of the region have an urna on the forehead and an ushnisha on the head with a halo behind. They are shown wearing sandals, and sometimes like the Buddha, may sport a mustache. Distinct bodhisattvas are recognized by their attributes, symbols and headdress, an example being Maiterya, the personification of love who is depicted holding a vase. The figures are usually depicted as royal figures with a profusion of ornaments and a crown. Influenced as they are by the Graeco Roman tradition they are also shown as muscular with perfect and realistic proportions.

Narrative panels relating to Jataka and Tushita phases of Sakyamuni's life are also found in Gandhara art. Of these the moment of Enlightenment and after are depicted in great profusion. These narratives are based on the canonical (orthodox) Buddhist literature and also on biographical texts such as the Buddhacarita of Asvagosha. The Birth of Buddha by Mayadevi (his mother) under a sala tree, the enlightenment of the Buddha, Mara Vijaya (victory over Mara) are some of the subjects that are popular in Gandharan art. Naturalistic proportions, scale and poses are sought to be depicted and composition is used to emphasize the central and key figure through a hierarchy of scaling; that is the more important figure may have a larger size. One of the distinguishing features of Gandharan art is the depiction of paradise such as Sukhavati which was part of the Paradise cult within Buddhism prevalent in North West India during the Kushana period. The cult centers on the belief that every devotee, through accumulation of merit, seeks to be reborn into paradise where he can reside without further rebirth and transmigration till he reaches nirvana.

Attendant deities other than Buddha and Bodhisattva were also created, such as KuberaPanchika and Hariti. The former is shown as a slightly corpulent royal personage while the latter is shown with children all around her. Bacchanalian scenes showing grape vine and wine drinking individuals are distinctly classical in their rendering. Besides stone, some sculptures in stucco, especially busts of Greek and Roman deities and princes, are an essential part of Gandharan art. Interestingly these were painted, with red colour being used for the lips and black for the eyes and hair. Ivory is another medium used to carve figures as is attested by large assemblage was found from Begram in Kapisa region. A number of furniture pieces found in a secular palace complex demonstrate that style was not limited to production of religious imagery but permeated the cultural matrix of the area. Begram ivories are also interesting for the amalgamation of classical and indigenous style. The preponderance of female figures in all kinds of voluptuous poses is very reminiscent of the yakshi-shalabhanjikas found on railing pillars at Mathura.

The interaction between the art styles prevailing in northwest Indian, north and central India was a dynamic process with many borrowings, assimilations and influences. Gandhara style continued to influence Indian art upto the early medieval period as is seen in Kashmir and parts of Himachal Pradesh.

#### **1.2.2.4.Amaravati School of Art**

Buddhist art was not confined to north India alone and a very large religious complex grew around Amaravati. It represents the evolution of uniquely beautiful regional art style based on a thriving commercial and imperial system. The rise and fall of the ruling dynasties of the region influenced the construction of the monument, as did the doctrinal changes in Buddhism itself. The Amaravati stupa is the largest and the grandest of all stupas found in the region though many other stupas have been found in Andhradesha region such as at Jagayyapeta, Goli, Ghantasala, Bhattiprolu and Nagarjunakonda. The stupa of Amaravati was product of a complex package made up of civilization, polity and economy of the area. An architectural site of this scale suggests that there was a large Buddhist population in the area who not only undertook the project of building this but whose spiritual needs were met through this stupa. It also presupposes that there was an

adequate supply of raw material as well as the presence of skilled artisans to work on these in the area. Thirdly and most importantly there existed adequate resources based on economic surplus that could patronize the building over the large period of its construction.

These resources must have been provided by the ancient city of Dharanikota which is about half a kilometer downstream on the mouth of river Krishna. This was a port on the river that allowed an enormous waterway, that could be easily navigated by large ships, into the hinterland of Andhradesha. The port and the hinterland had prosperous commercial relations with distant countries included the west from the beginning of the Christian era. Donative inscriptions found carved on the stupa refer to merchants as well as royal patrons who must have derived their riches from this trade. Buddhism was significant in the religious milieu of Andhradesha from the Mauryan period onwards, and the society was literate, complex and highly organized. At Amaravati one sees the transition from aniconic representations characteristic of Theravadin Buddhism to representing the Buddha in his anthropomorphic form.

The stupa consisted of a huge, solid dome mounted on a cylindrical, drum like platform and the whole was surrounded by a great railing. Like at Sanchi, this railing is made up of pillars, crossbars and a coping. There is a gateway or torana at each of the cardinal points that lets into the railing into the pradikshanapatha or the circumambulatory processional path that is paved with black flag stones. All these along with the drum and the dome are decorated with sculptures in high relief. There are early engravings dating from the third century to the first century BC and were influenced by the art of Bharhut and Sanchi. However the best known sculptures come from the second and third centuries AD that coincide with the rule of Satavahanas in Andhradesha, and the later the Ikshvakus continued to adorn the stupa here at Amaravati and also at Nagarjuanakonda.

The sculptures at Amaravati have a profound and quiet naturalism in human, animal and floral forms. There is a sense of movement and energy in the sculptures. The human figures are slender and slightly elongated. The faces are oval with sharp and well delineated and expressive features. The animals such as makaras have scaly naturalism and the vegetation environment is lush. There is emphasis on the narrative element with stories from the life of Buddha and bodhisattva dominating such episodes relating to the Birth, the miracles, Enlightenment and the victory over Mara, Sundari and Nanda, Tushita heaven, Angulimala. There are few Jataka scenes such as the Shibi, Nalagiri and Chhadanta Jatakas. The perfection of form and proportion seen in the middle phase of Amaravati as well as some of the themes continued to influence art at Nagarjuankonda and also later Vakataka and Gupta art styles.

### **1.2.3. Conclusion**

The political diffusion in the post-Mauryan period and the emergence of monarchies with foreign roots, described by historians as chaotic darkness, might be seen as signs of regression from the heyday of Mauryan imperialism; but, in reality, both the economy and the culture showed dynamism. The domestic literary evidence as well as foreign accounts give credence to the political and commercial setting of this period. The clear numismatic evidence available to historians also facilitates the construction of relative chronologies. With sufficient archaeological corroboration, we can be confident that, from about 200 B.C onwards, the study of Indian history takes on a definitiveness that for earlier periods often eludes us. The above discussion make us believe that the period from B.C 200 to A.D 300 was the stage preparing for the culmination of Indian culture, which was happened under the Imperial Gupta as India in all its sphere achieved classical tag.

### **1.2.4. Summary**

- *The five centuries which passed between the decline of the first great Indian empire of the Mauryas and the emergence of the great empire of the Guptas has often been ruled by the foreign dynasties. A*

- *But this period, particularly the first two centuries AD, was a period of intensive economic and cultural contact among the various parts of the Eurasian continent. India played a very active role in stimulating these contacts.*
- *In the social sphere the advent of foreign element further crystalised the social structure.*
- *Buddhism, which had been fostered by Indian rulers since the days of Ashoka, was greatly aided by the international connections of the Indo-Greeks and the Kushanas and thus rose to prominence in Central Asia.*
- *Buddhism also divided during this period as the new sect called Mahayana or great vehicle appeared in the scene with Buddha as a divine being.*
- *South India was establishing its important links with the West and with Southeast Asia in this period. These links, especially those with Southeast Asia, proved to be very important for the future course of Asian history.*
- *India itself also experienced important social and cultural changes in this period. For centuries Buddhism had enjoyed royal patronage. This was partly due to the fact that the foreign rulers of India found Buddhism more accessible than orthodox Hinduism with its caste barriers.*
- *The Vedic Brahmins had been pushed into the background by the course of historical development although Hinduism as such did not experience a decline. On the contrary, new popular cults arose around gods like Shiva, Krishna and Vishnu-Vasudeva who had played only a marginal role in an earlier age.*
- *The competition between Buddhism, which dominated the royal courts and cities, and orthodox Brahminism, which was still represented by numerous Brahmin families everywhere, left enough scope for these new cults to gain footholds of their own.*
- *The best-known contribution of the this period was, of course, to Indian art.*
- *After the early sculptures of the Mauryas which were greatly influenced by the Iranian style, a new Indian style had first emerged under the Shungas and their successors in the Buddhist monuments of Bharhut and Sanchi which particularly showed a new style of relief sculpture.*
- *The merger of the Gandhara school of art, with its Graeco-Roman style, and the Mathura school of art which included 'archaic' Indian elements and became the centre of Indo-Kushana art, finally led to the rise of the Sarnath school of art. This school then set the pattern of the classical Gupta style.*
- *Less well-known, but much more important for the future development of Hindu society, was the compilation of the authoritative Hindu law books (dharmashastra), the foremost of them being the Code of Manu which probably originated in the second or third century AD. After the breakdown of the Maurya and Shunga empires, there must have been a period of uncertainty which led to a renewed interest in traditional social norms.*
- *This period also witnessed the resurgence of Sanskrit, as testified by Rudradaman's famous rock inscription of the second century AD.*
- *This period contained all the elements of the classical culture of the Gupta age, which was in reality the harbinger of the classical age.*

#### **1.2.5. Exercise**

- Discuss the salient features of Vengi school of Art flourished in the Krishna-Godavari valley.
- What was the political and economic backdrop of the Mathura school of art? Discuss the characteristic features of Mathura style.
- Examine the salient features of the Gandharan school of art.

- Discuss the main features of Art of Bharhut and Sanchi flourished under the Sunga dynasty.
- Write an essay on the origin, development and philosophy of Mahayana sect of Buddhism.

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**Unit-1**  
**Chapter-III**  
**ECONOMIC CONDITION**  
**Contact with Other World, Monetization of Economy.**

**Structure**

- 1.3.0. Objective**
- 1.3.1. Introduction**
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- 1.3.6. Conclusion**
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- 1.3.9. Suggested Readings**



### 1.3.0. Objective

*The chapter discuss the changing economic condition of India on the eve of post Mauryan age. After learning this lesson the students will be able to.*

- *Assess the arrival of the Indo-Greeks in north-west India and their impact on Indian economy;*
- *identify the trade routes through which traders went and did business and became the first cultural ambassadors to spread Indian culture;*
- *give an account of trading communities, trade centres and trade route flourished during ancient India between B.C 200 to A.D 300;and*
- *analyse the importance of silk road and Indo-roman trade in Indian economy in ancient India.*

### 1.3.1. Introduction

In the first chapter we come to know that during the last two centuries before Christ much of the northwest was attacked and occupied by forces from across the border in Bactria, the part of Afghanistan that lies between the River Oxus and the Hindu Kush. Initially the Graeco-Bactrian invaded India and established their tiny kingdoms in parts of its northwest, particularly in Gandhara and Punjab, are specifically known as Indo-Greek rulers known in ancient Indian literature as Yavanas. The Indo-Greeks were followed during the first century B.C by the Parthians or Pahalavs and the Scythians or Shakas. In Indian history, the Shaka rulers are known as Shaka-Pahlava, meaning a mixed group of tribal Shakas and the Parthians. Effective Shaka suzerainty in India came to be exercised eventually by two authorities, respectively known as the Northern Shakas of Taxila and Mathura and the Western Shakas of Malwa and Kathiawar. The period of these foreign rule in India witnessed large scale changes in Indian economy, society, culture and religion. In the peninsular India, during this time the Satavahana were in power and in the extreme south the Pandya, Chola and Chera ruling smoothly their kingdom and are prosper owing to vigorous maritime trade with the Roman world. On this political setting this chapter in the following paragraphs will discuss in brief about the new economic setting India witnessed during the period of our discussion.

### 1.3.2. Sources of Study

Archaeology of excavated and explored sites together with literature, epigraphy and numismatics form the main source for the study of the economy of the this period. The period has yielded numerous inscriptions, most of which are donative in nature, as also a huge number of coins issued by the monarchs ruling during this period. The important literary sources are the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (c. late 1st century AD), Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (about AD 79), Strabo's *Geographikon* and *Geographike. Huphegesis* by Claudius Ptolemy (c. AD150). Chinese historical works like Hou Han-shu (the official history of the Later or Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), compiled in the fifth century by Fan Ye) and Chi'en Han-shu (the official history of the Later or Eastern Han Dynasty, generally attributed to Pan Ku, was begun by his father, Pan Piao, and completed by his sister, Pan Chao) also throw ample light on the economy of the period Though Indian literature does not directly enrich us with information about the economy of the period concerned, some of them like the Jatakas, the *Angavijja*, the *Lalitavistara*, etc. enlighten us with some reflections of the economic condition of this period. The period is noted for the availability of many inscriptions, mostly composed in Prakrit language. A bulk of the inscriptions are donative records, informing the donations to Buddhist and Jaina religious establishments by people from different walks of life including merchants. Some evidence of commerce is furnished by seals and sealings. A major source of our knowledge of trade are coins, struck by both indigenous and foreign ruling houses in gold, silver, copper and billon. One of the surest proofs of the spurt of urban

centres in north India is available from field archaeological materials. The period is famous for its sculptural art which offer many visual representations of commercial contacts and urban centres.

### **1.3.3. Trade and Urban Development c. 200 BC- AD 300**

The post-Mauryan era is particularly well known for the range and volume of international trade that was generated; and this trade, by both land and sea, added enormously to both urban and rural prosperity. Practically no part of India was left untouched by developments resulting from increased foreign trade. Whether one examines the contents of The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, an ancient guide book for mariners, or the works of Roman historians or the Sangam literature of south India, or studies the ground with archaeological skills, the subject of the international trading connections of India assumes utmost importance for our understanding of the period under review here.

#### **1.3.3.1.Trading Communities**

Buddhist Jatakas not only speak eloquently of merchants but indicate their diverse categories. The term *vanik* stands for a merchant in general. The *sarthavaha* was the same as the leader of caravan merchants. The *apanika* means the shop keeper who must have been engaged in retail trading. However, the most important type of merchant was the *setthi* or *sresthi* whom we have already encountered in section 9.4. Numerous references to the *setthi* in the Buddhist Jatakas cannot but suggest that the *setthi* was prominent in economic life than in the previous ages. The Jatakas invariably describe the *setthi* as a fabulously rich merchant whose wealth amounted to eighty crore (*asitikotivibhava*, obviously a standardized figure). The immense wealth of the *setthi* is clearly hinted in a Jataka story which tells us that the king took possession of the vast estate of the *setthi* when he died without an heir. His sons usually followed their father's profession, implying thereby that the occupation of the *setthi* assumed a hereditary character. The term *setthiputta*, literally meaning a son of a *setthi*, actually denotes a *setthi*. The office of the *setthi* was known as *setthithana* (*sresthisthana*). The *setthi* was certainly a merchant of great prominence and prestige; one of the avenues of his prosperity was his role as an investor of money in other people's business. Some Jataka stories bear impressions of the *setthi* investing money in the trade of smaller merchants and craftsmen. He thus played the vital role of a financier and probably became richer by charging interest on loans to other merchants. Interestingly enough the *setthi* regularly figures in the Buddhist texts as having visited the royal court thrice a day; some Jataka stories also suggest friendly relation between the ruler and the *setthi*. Though the *setthi* goes to the royal court daily he does not belong to the list of salaried officers (*rajabhogga*) of the realm. The *setthi* paid regular visits to the king not merely as a rich merchant prince, but probably in the more significant capacity as a representative of the mercantile community. This suggests that the *setthi* probably had an official role to play, in addition to his function as an individual merchant of great prosperity. The official status of the *setthi* as the representative of merchants to the ruler undoubtedly enhanced his prominence. This is indicated by the formation of an exclusive group of *setthis* (*setthikula*) who in the Jataka texts often claimed an exalted position.

Along with *vanik*, *vaidehaka*, *sarthavaha* and *setthi* were present *naigama* type of merchants. They are particularly seen in several donative records from Bandhogarh (in eastern Madhya Pradesh), datable to the early centuries of the Christian era. The term *nigama* stands for a market town and also for a professional group. The *naigama* type of merchants therefore could have denoted a trader belonging to a guild-like professional group. The itinerant nature of a large number of merchants can be easily guessed from regular references to their presence at cultural and trade centres which they reached from diverse places. A close perusal of donative records at Sanchi (nearly 625 small inscriptions), Bharhut, Mathura and Bandhogarh shows that these were convenient points of convergence of merchants and travellers.

### 1.3.3.2. Urban Centres

Literary and archaeological sources are replete with information on cities which proliferated to a great extent. The five centuries from 200 BC to AD 300 saw the peak of urbanism in north India, a process which had begun since the sixth century BC. While earlier cities continued to flourish, new cities also appeared; this is known particularly from archaeological evidence. The frequent portrayal of urban life in the sculptures of Gandhara and Mathura schools and Sanchi, and Bharhut also speak of the spread of urban experience over the whole of north India. Urban development is also noticeable in the Deccan and the far south, which will be dealt with in the next Unit.

The most important city in the northwest was Taxila, closely linked with the contiguous city of Pushkalavati (identified with the site of Charsadda). Excavations at Sirkap mound at Taxila highlight the most prosperous phase in the history of the city. It was extended and fortified by masonry wall by Indo-Parthian rulers. It was a planned city with main highways running north-south and smaller lanes going east-west; this provided a grid pattern layout of the city. In contrast to the haphazard construction of dwelling houses of Bhir mound, residential structures were laid out in a well-defined manner. In the planning of this city, the influence of Hellenistic model is evident. A. Ghosh, the noted archaeologist, remarked, 'foreign in origin and conception, Sirkap was not a representative Indian city'. Excavations at Ahichhatra yielded remains of a concrete road in a layer assignable to c. 200 AD. Literary and archaeological evidences point to the continuous prosperity of already established cities like Sravasti, Kausambi, Varanasi and Pataliputra. Remains of a large urban centre have been found out at Khairadih in Uttar Pradesh though its exact identification with an ancient city is yet to be made. A remarkable growth can be marked in the case of Mathura and its nearby site at Sonkh. The area around Mathura enjoyed considerable prominence under the Scytho-Parthian and Kushana rule, especially in the rule of the latter when it served as one of the major centres of the vast Kushana realm. Archaeological materials from layers 23 and 24 at Sonkh (assignable to the Kshtrapa age (1st to 4th century AD) reveal that houses were irregularly placed and streets looked crooked in comparison to earlier periods. Pieces of stones were projected from buildings at street corners probably as a protection from damages by moving vehicle. This may be reasonably interpreted as a sign of greater movements of vehicular traffic. Under the Kushan occupation, regular use of burnt bricks for construction cannot be missed. New fortifications were also raised in Mathura. In sharp contrast to the derogatory remarks about Mathura in the *Anguttaranikaya*, the *Lalitavistara* lauds Mathura as prosperous, extensive, beneficial, for easy availability of alms and teeming population. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata graphically describe the cities of Ayodhya in Kosala and Indraprastha, the newly founded capital of the Pandavas by burning the Khandava forest tract. In North Bihar, Vaisali (Muzaffarpur) witnessed three successive fortifications between second century BC and second century AD. Urban development can also be noted in Bengal. While the two earlier urban centres at Mahasthan and Bangarh continued to flourish, new urban centres sprang up in the early centuries of the Christian era. The most prominent of these were Mangalkot, Chandraketurgh and Tamluk. Of these Tamluk was the same as the ancient port of Tamralipta, while Chandraketurgh, a huge archaeological site, is often identified with the port of Gange in the Periplus and Ptolemy's Geography. Orissa also experienced the growth of a major urban centre in the form of Sisupalgarh, located close to Bhuvaneswar. A massive mud rampart was raised around 200-100 BC and this was further reinforced by brick rivetments. The most important feature of Sisupalgarh was its magnificent gateway complex.

Urban settlements of north India generally share certain common features, as revealed by archaeology. These are usually fortified, occasionally with a rampart or a moat. Several streets are noticeable in urban areas which also bear increasing use of burnt bricks. Seal cutting and bead

making industries are abundant in urban areas. The urban centres of north India generally had characteristics which were typical of 'primary' urban centres of the sixth-fifth century BC during the age of mahajanapadas. Seen from this angle, the spread of urban centres was modelled more or less on the urban experience in the middle Ganga valley. Hence these had their epicentre in the middle Ganga plains; the later urban centers, therefore, are sometimes regarded as 'secondary' ones, influenced by the formation of 'primary' cities. Most of the urban centres commanded a rich and strong agricultural hinterland from where came the major food supply to the city. Most of the products manufactured and transacted in the city were rooted to agriculture and animal rearing (e.g. textile production, and sugar making craft). H. Sarkar in a masterly study of contemporary cities in Andhra considered urban centres as 'agro cities'. Long distance trade, including trade with the eastern Mediterranean region, was an additional factor to urban growth. But it was not the prime factor for urban proliferation in north India. The city of Mathura was possibly an exception to that. Mathura was not situated in a very flourishing and fertile part. It did not grow profuse paddy. Mathura had actually one outstanding product of its own, i.e. *satika* (a garment, from which the term sari is derived). Mathura's prominence as an urban centre cannot be explained in terms of its agrarian hinterland or its diverse crafts. But its location at the convergence of several important overland routes enormously increased its importance. Its role as a nodal point in long-distance trade paved the way for its prosperity as an urban centre. The *Avasyakacurnni* and the *Brihatkalpabhashya* clearly recognize that Mathura's prosperity was rooted not to agriculture but to trade. Many of the urban centres also functioned as major political centres. A recent survey of urban centres of ancient India suggests that several urban areas derived their prominence from being major religious centres. Those urban centres where converged many functions, i.e. political, economic, cultural, were more prominent than the centres which were known for a single function, for example long-distance trade or their administrative importance. The relatively less orthodox social and cultural life in urban centres cannot be missed. In the sculptures of the Gandhara and Mathura school a rich assemblage of diverse dress, decoration, ornaments, hairstyles can be seen. Bacchanalian scenes and depictions of drinking bouts were also not uncommon. Donors at the time of recording their gifts to Buddhist and Jaina monasteries rarely referred to their *varna* status, though *varna* assumes enormous importance in the *Dharmasastras* of Manu and Yajnavalkya. The donors usually recorded their respective occupations. The urban culture, thus, considered occupation as a more important determinant of social status than the orthodox criterion of birth. A marriage between the families of a jeweller and an ironmonger was hardly frowned upon in the urban context of Mathura. In the same city a courtesan could record her lavish donations to the Jaina establishment and also inform that her mother too was a courtesan. In this atmosphere of burgeoning cities it was possible for Caraka, the master physician, to declare that the physician's wealth did not consist merely of the goodwill generated by the relief to his patients, but also by the material wealth and patronage secured by him from kings (*isvara*) and wealthy persons (*vasumantah*).

### **1.3.3.3. Growth of Money Economy**

Another aspect of the commercial infrastructure of this period was the great increase in the minting of coins during the post-Mauryan centuries. For the numismatist, the best of the early coins of India were those struck by the Indo-Greek kings and the Kushan monarchy. Through the foreign influence of the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans, the quality of Indian coins greatly improved over the older punch-marked coins. Made from gold, silver, copper or tin, the variety of coins proved especially useful for variant trading economies in different regions; and the huge quantity of local and foreign coins also made it easier for merchants to engage in forward speculation in goods and capital. North India had already been well accustomed to the *karshapana* type of silver coinage (of 32 rati or 57.6 grains weight standard) during the second half of the first millennium BC. The

numismatic tradition was indeed enriched with the silver coins of the Bactrian Greeks and Indo-Greeks. While these coins were initially engraved only with Greek legend, they were subsequently inscribed with both Greek and Prakrit legends, clearly showing that they were meant for circulation among Indians. To the Kushana ruler Vima Kadphises (first half of the first century AD) goes the credit of issuing the first gold coins in India. The Kushana gold coinage was based on the gold species of the Imperial Parthian ruler Gotarzes I (c. BC 95-90). The immense variety of devices in gold coinage of Kanishka (generally but not unanimously assigned from AD 78-101) and Huvishka (c. AD 105-145) suggests their wide circulation. The importance of the Kushana coins in international transactions is borne out by the discovery of Kushana coins in Ethiopia. The Kshatrapa rulers of Ujjayini who had probably served the Kushanas before 150 AD also struck high quality silver coins. The find of Roman coins in north India (though these are more numerous in the peninsular part) illustrates its commercial linkages with the eastern Mediterranean region. It is, however, not certain whether the Roman pieces were used as regular coins or bullion in India. Less spectacular than coins of precious metals, but no less significant is the presence of copper coins in profuse numbers in greater parts of north India. Copper coins and coin moulds are found in large numbers in areas associated with several non-monarchical clans in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan (Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas etc.). Punch marked and cast copper coins along with copper coins struck as imitation of Kushana coinage are available from Bengal and Orissa. These coins were minted on the *karshapana* 57.6 standard and not on the Attic tetradrachm standard. The regular striking of copper coins cannot but point to the use of metallic currency for local level transactions.

#### **1.3.3.4. Trade Route: Internal**

The links by road and river between the various main cities and trading towns were an essential element in the general infrastructure facilitating the volume of trade as a whole. Starting with the northwest, in the centre of the Kushan territories, was Taxila, a city where the merchants of Central and South Asia exchanged their goods and the intellectuals their ideas. Taxila was joined to Pataliputra by a major highway; en route was Mathura, which in turn was linked to Ujjain in the Malwa region, controlled by the Western Shakas. Mathura and Ujjain linked the western Ganga valley and the lands of central India. A number of market towns were also developed in the Satavahana kingdom of the Deccan. Centres such as Nasik and Karad in Maharashtra and Nagarjunakonda in the Andhra region were all important trading centres where the farmers, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers from the hinterland congregated to sell their commodities and wares. The routes linking these places sometimes had to follow the gaps and breaks in mountains or the river valleys. All the major routes led to the five main international ports of that period, namely Barbaricum in the Indus delta, Barygaza on the Gujarat coast, Muziris on the Kerala coast, Arikamedu on the Coromandel coast and Tamralipti in the Ganges delta. These ports handled the bulk of the sea trade of India with Arabia, the Levant, the Roman Empire and Southeast Asia.

#### **1.3.10. International Trade Route: Silk Road Trade**

The overland trade route through the Kushan territories Since at least 600 B.C the main overland trade route had run from Taxila towards West Asia and the Hellenistic world. Caravans from India carried ivory, elephants, spices, cloths, salt, musk, saffron and indigo; the returning caravans brought lapis lazuli, turquoise, fine quality ceramics, wines, and gold and silver coins. The first part of the overland route was from Taxila to Begram, from where two main routes branched out: the northern route via Bactria, the Oxus, the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus to the Black sea, and the southern route via Kandahar, Herat and Ecbatana to the ports of the eastern Mediterranean. Once the Kushans came to establish their trans-Oxus empire and controlled all territory between the Aral Sea and the middle Ganga valley, a new dimension was added to the overland trade route. This came to be in the form of a link to the famous Silk Road that connected China with Europe by

land. The Silk Road began at Lo-yang in China, progressed through Chang'an and reached Dunhuang on the eastern edge of the Taklamakan desert. From there two routes branched, one north of the desert and the other south of it, both reaching Kashgar on the western edge of the Taklamakan. From Kashgar the Silk Road entered the Central Asian and Bactrian territories of the Kushans before proceeding through the Parthian Empire towards Syria, the Levant and eventually Constantinople. Through their Kushan connections, the merchants of India could now begin to share in the handling of the products that travelled along the Silk Road, particularly the silk from China.

They first did this by taking expensive gifts to the Chinese emperors. At the same time, during the first and second centuries ad, Buddhist missionaries were making progress in spreading the message of the Buddha among both the Central Asians and the Chinese; and, during the period when the Kushans were dominant, Indian merchants and the Buddhist missionaries forged a powerful alliance of interests.

At various junctions on both the northern and southern routes of the Silk Road, skirting the Taklamakan desert, at places such as Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Miran, Kuchi, Qurashahr and Turfan, Indian merchants set up their colonies, while the missionaries established monasteries. As Buddhism spread into China, the demand for Buddhist artefacts from India underwent a manifold increase. During this time the Chinese emperors were becoming concerned by the growing tensions between the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire, resulting in Parthian impediments to the movement of goods through their territory. They were therefore more than content to entrust Indian merchants with handling the silk destined for the Roman market, taking it via Taxila whence it would be dispatched southwards to the ports of Barbaricum and Barygaza, bypassing Parthian lands. Roman ships would then carry away the silk and leave behind their products such as coral, glass, silver and topaz. These, in turn, would also be handled by Indian merchants on their overland route to China. The strategic location of the Kushan state between India and China meant that the ruling nobility and the subsidiary elites were heavily involved in this trade; they too wished to partake of the share of luxury goods. However, they were not particularly interested in the handling of the trade itself; they left that to individual merchants and, probably, to the specific merchant guilds. Their benefits came in the form of imposts and levies that they charged on all movement of goods through their territory.

#### **1.3.11. Contact with South East Asia**

The subcontinent also had commercial links with south-east Asia that expanded perceptibly in the post-Mauryan period. The Jatakas and the *Milindapanho* refer to traders undertaking difficult sea voyages to *Survarnadvipa* (Malaysia and Indonesia) and *Survarnabhumi* (Myanmar). Archaeological discoveries in this region corroborate interaction. Imports from south-east Asia to India included gold, tin, spices like cinnamon and cloves, sandalwood and camphor. Exports from India were cotton textiles, sugar, valuable beads and pottery. It is important and interesting to note that social and cultural exchange went hand in hand with India's commercial contracts with the world. As we have seen, the north-west of the subcontinent was a cultural cross roads that witnessed the commingling of Greek, Persian and Mongol populations and traditions with the India. In the case of China, interaction took the form mainly of the spread of Buddhism-doctrines, scriptures, relics, and monks and pilgrims traveled over many centuries between the two regions; it is from China that the religion went further east to Japan and Korea and underwent significant transformations. And early south-east Asia was long believed to have been actually 'colonized' by people from India since the names, practices, religious affiliations and rituals of the earliest kingdoms that arose there (seen in their inscriptions) are Sanskritic and brahmanical while both Hindu and Buddhist sculpture and architecture prevail. However, it is now clear that all this may be evidence only of cultural borrowing rather than of a direct Indian presence and role.

### 1.3.12. India and Rome

With the founding of the Roman Empire in 31 B.C, India and Rome began a highly successful trading relationship that lasted for more than two centuries. The main reason was the increasing prosperity of the Roman populace and their insatiable demand for certain Indian products and those of China and Southeast Asia, which could be easily procured for them by Indian merchants. The annexation of Egypt by Rome in 31 B.C was also a factor of great logistical importance, because Rome became the mistress of both the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The ports of the Red Sea, both on the Arabian and the Egyptian–Ethiopian shores, had had trading relations with India for many centuries, during the post-Alexandrine Hellenistic period and even earlier. Relatively small Egyptian, Arab, Greek and Indian ships used to ply between those ports and the western Indian ones of Barbaricum, Barygaza and Muziris. Until the first century ad foreign mariners, with perhaps the exception of the Arabs of Yemen and Hadhramaut, did not fully understand the behaviour of the Indian Ocean winds, which meant that destinations were reached after prolonged detours by ships closely hugging the Arabian and Indian coastlines. This changed after ad 45, when Hippalus, an Alexandrian, worked out the pattern of seasonal winds (the monsoon), thereby helping his fellow seamen to sail through the Arabian Sea during the right season and shortening their journey time. The trade links with south India were to be particularly strengthened by this development.

After 31 B.C, the type of large vessels that used to carry Egyptian grain from Alexandria to Rome began to be built along the Red Sea ports, in order to be fitted out for trade voyages to India. They could be 180 feet in length and weigh 1,000 tons. A large Roman ship, carrying from India compact and costly merchandise of silks, fine cottons, pepper, costus, nard and spikenard, and bringing to India products such as two-handled amphorae, fine ceramics, bronze vases and delicate glassware, represented a ‘monumental investment’ by many traders. As the captains of such ships did not normally sail to the east coast ports of India, both import and export goods were loaded on to much smaller Indian ships that continually plied between the two coasts. At Arikamedu, for example, the foreign goods brought by these ships would be unloaded, and valuable spice cargoes from both India and the Indonesian spice islands, along with other Indian goods, would be loaded on to the same ships bound for Muziris. This was the legendary trade of south India. Generally speaking, the overall balance of trade between India and Rome was in the favour of India, and the Romans had to pay for the deficits in the form of bullion. A large hoard of Roman coins found at Arikamedu and other places in South India, along with the archaeological remains of a Roman colony, testify to the vigour of the Indo-Roman trade. Owing to the absence of local gold coins in south India, the Roman gold and silver coins were also used as high-value currency, which would have encouraged hoarding. Only a quarter of the amount of good quality Roman coin hoards discovered in south India have been found in north India: the Kushan state issued its own gold coins, as valuable in metal terms as the Roman ones, and simply melted down the Roman coins for their metal. Apart from coins, small hoards of other Roman goods, such as amphorae, bronze vessels and finer quality ceramics and potsherds, have been recovered from a variety of sites in western India, the Andhra region and the south. Much research is also directed at studying whether the excellent Red Polished Ware (RPW) pottery of western India or the rouletted ware of southeastern India were imitations of Roman or Hellenistic potteries. Another interesting piece of recent research concerns the role of the Indian venture capitalist in the financing of Indo-Roman trade. Until recently, it was widely assumed that the ‘initiative of this long-distance sea-borne trade with west was taken by western traders, while the role of India, steeped in agriculture, was only that of the grower of some luxury and prestige commodities.’ This view needs to be revised in the light, firstly, of a recently discovered papyrus document detailing a loan contract between an Indian and a

Roman and, secondly, of the excavations in Egypt pointing to the presence there of Indian settlers and traders.

#### **1.3.12.1. The Nature of Indo-Roman Trade**

Although Roman trade intervened in many circuits and networks of exchange and dominated some, it did not disrupt these or replace them. The pattern was one of using and intensifying the existing networks. There was no change from private entrepreneurs to state-supported trading companies or for that matter the acquisition of territory, the imposition of political authority and the re-ordering of Indian economies, as happened in the colonies of our times.

The more spectacular maritime trade was occasional, but in its interstices there was a steady small-scale contact, often coastal, which involved transporting essential supplies quite apart from luxury items. Fernand Braudel, the great French historian, talks of ships which tramped from port to port and were travelling bazaars, largely covering the more confined circuits. Links between Red Sea and India existed from early times as mentioned in Greek and Latin texts, which also attest to a spurt from the 1st cent BC to the mid-first century AD. Tamil literature (the Sangam anthologies) and Prakrit inscriptions, and increasingly numismatics and archaeology provide evidence of this trade. Excavations are important also for examining the ecological locations and the gathering and distribution of goods. For example, domesticated pepper, the mining of chalcedonies and beryls and their manufacture into items, and the varieties of textiles can be located with the contextualization of archaeological data.

In the context of Indian the history the Indo-Roman maritime trade has a specific meaning. It refers to the Roman demand, in particular, for pepper, pearls, semi-precious stones and textiles, all imported from South Asia and most of which were exchanged for high value coins. The term “Roman” refers to the eventual destination of the items as well as broadly to the Mediterranean participation in the trade part of the activities within the Roman empire. The Roman state does not appear to have participated in this trade, but it did exercise control by collecting substantial taxes on the cargo and protecting the routes from the Red Sea ports to Alexandria, with forts, garrisons and military camps and to establish watering places along the routes. The varied Indian systems exploited the Roman trade to their own advantage.

It has been argued that by speaking of it as Roman trade, the Indian component in this trade is under emphasised. On the contrary, we are told, the Roman and eastern Mediterranean component of this trade did not play a dominant role in the south Asian trade, for it was only a more visible pattern among the many. It has, however, gained validity due to extensive mention in the Greek and Latin texts. In Indian sources the term Yavanas refers not only to those coming from the Red sea but others from the north west and from the Gulf. Though the importance of the Roman trade cannot be minimised, it should be treated as one among the many trading patterns. Hence, it is argued that to link a general decline in urbanism in India, which is in any case controversial, to a decline in Indo-Roman trade, can hardly be taken as a causal factor, in either urban growth or decline on a generalised scale for the subcontinent. However, since the pattern varied from region to region, the impetus that the Roman trade and its intrusion into the local circuits were of varying degrees and it is precisely for this reason that its decline affected the regions of Deccan and Tamilakam in different ways, Tamilakam showing a more direct impact of the decline in this trade than any other region.

The trade was conducted largely by the merchants of Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean, but this did not preclude merchants from other parts of the Mediterranean. That the south Indian traders participated in this trade on an equal footing is clearly established by the recent discovery of a papyrus document in Vienna, recording an agreement between an Alexandrian Greek and a Tamil merchant for a large cargo of Indian goods to be shipped from Muziris and the terms of exchange. The ultimate destination was Rome. Roman trade in the Indian context was for limited periods, with



the Indian circuits affected by the trade shifting over time. When substantial, it was a long distance maritime trade, including more than one local circuit in the network of its activities and touched on others.

Not all changes in the patterns of trade were concerned solely with navigational and technical matters. Shifts and new circuits were occasioned by the availability of and demand for particular items. On the Roman side this trade was in the hands of Greek and Jewish merchants of Egypt and of the Palmyrene (modern Syria) and Levantine merchants from the Hellenistic world. Large fleets of ships plied each year according to Pliny. The ships were armed with archers as a protection against piracy (attested by Tamil sources) with mercenaries employed by the merchants or ship captains. Detailed discussion on trade are available in Strabo's Geography, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, a manual for traders containing information on itineraries, harbours, navigation and cargoes, all relating to the ports of the Arabian Sea and their hinterlands, Pliny's Natural History, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, 1 st cent BC-1 st Century AD, and Ptolemy's Geography (2nd centuries AD). Pliny's comments on this trade give a different perspective. He condemns it as an agency of financial drain which he perceives offering the Roman economy, i.e., Roman empire's gold resources which threw the Roman monetary system into a crisis. Roman concern with the problem dates from the pre-*Periplus* period. Ptolemy's Geography is of a later date and is a compendium of existing information in the tradition of Greek Geographies, with fuller descriptions of the eastern coast of India and the Ganges Delta than the *Periplus*. Greek and Latin texts are more detailed than the Prakrit inscriptions and Tamil sources. In western Deccan, votive inscriptions recording donations by Yavanas mark the presence of eastern Mediterranean traders, while such inscriptions are not known from the Tamil region.

A re-ordering of the historiography of this trade and a re-consideration of its varied patterns in relation to other categories of trade and exchange is required, as there has been large inputs from a variety of new sources as well as our improved understanding of trade and exchange generally in South Asia. It would be unrealistic to treat this trade (due to its geographical reach), as a uniformly active trade for all places in the Indian subcontinent and over the early centuries AD. There were smaller localised circuits with a relatively more evenly balanced continuity. There the Roman trade entered when it could use a particular circuit to advantage. Initially it was from the Red Sea to the west coast i.e., Malabar and its hinterland, in swift movements, entering the local circuits on the west coast where the availability of resources was well known. The Romans were already familiar with aromatics and spices, perhaps brought by Indian and Arab traders in smaller quantities to the south Arabian ports and trans-shipped to the Red Sea. The distribution of items does not support a uniformity of trading patterns. Barygaza was special in that. It combined both categories (local and distant products), whereas the ports of south India were, in the main, exporting items derived from local resources. The Roman demand increased the volume of productive and other activities but did not require a major re-orientation of the local economies. The discovery of the monsoon (Hippalus—the name of a wind and not the navigator) and references to navigation indicate additional facilities to this trade.

It is not easy to answer the question why the Roman input into this trade declined after the 2nd cent AD? Was it due to a greater participation of Indian traders who may have gradually edged out the earlier traders in supplying pepper and textiles to Alexandria? Or the Indian involvement in the trade with central Asia and south east Asia may have led to the tapping of new resources and products different from the earlier ones and the supply of these to Central Asia and south east Asia would have diverted attention from the Roman trade. Or did Roman objects in India become a passing fancy?

### 1.3.13. Conclusion

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

### 1.3.14. Summary

- *The period spanning from c. 200 BC to AD 300, covering nearly five centuries, appears to have witnessed considerable commercial activities which often occurred at major urban centres.*
- *As towns and cities generally figure as centres of commerce, the study of early trade is connected with that of urban centres.*
- *These five centuries certainly marked brisk trade both within the subcontinent and also beyond.*
- *Commercial ventures of merchants are known not only in north India, but also between north India and southern part of India.*
- *To this must be added the evidence of external contacts of north India from c. third century BC onwards and especially during the first three centuries of the Christian era.*
- *The external contacts of north India usually took place through the northwestern frontier areas, which was well connected by overland routes with Central and West Asia.*
- *During the first three centuries of the Christian era there was brisk trade between India and the Roman Empire; north India seems to have derived considerable advantage out of this trade.*
- *The deltas of the rivers Indus and the Ganga, respectively on western and eastern flanks of north India, provided important outlets to the sea.*
- *The flat plain of north India and the extensive Ganga valley, virtually without any natural barriers, were conducive to movement and communication both by overland and riverine routes. During the first three centuries AD one can observe unmistakable growth both in commercial activities and spurt of urban centres.*
- *Urbanisation, as the term suggests, is not merely listing or identifying cities and towns; but it looks into the process of how and why cities grew or declined.*
- *In our survey of urban centres from c. 200 BC to AD 300 we have taken into account the growing number of cities in north India and also offered explanations of the reason of the increase of urban centres, especially during the period from 200 BC to AD 300.*
- *From c. 200 BC onwards, north India and then gradually the greater parts of India experienced widespread sedentary settlements, which signalled a new kind of society and culture which is termed as early historical.*

### 1.3.15. Exercises

- In what respect was urbanization linked to trading activities? Discuss the issue in the context of the rise and growth of towns during BC 200-300 AD.
- Examine the economy of India between B.C 200 to A.D 300 on the basis of the study of coins.
- Enumerate the importance of the silk route during c. BC 200 to AD 300.

- Discuss the nature of Roman trade in India. What was its long term impact?
- Write an essay on the trading communities, trade centers and trade route of ancient India between B.C 200 to A.D 300.

#### **1.3.16. Suggested Readings**

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**Unit-2**  
**Chapter-I**  
**THE GUPTA EMPIRE**  
**Sources of Gupta History; Origin of the Gupta, Foundation and Consolidation of the Gupta**  
**Empire: Chandragupta-I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta-II.**

**Structure**

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  - 2.1.6.8. Performance of Asvamedha**
  - 2.1.6.9. The Emperor**
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  - 2.1.6.11. Family of Samudra Gupta**
- 2.1.7. Chandra Gupta-II Vikramaditya**
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  - 2.1.7.3. War Against the Saka Ksatrapa**
  - 2.1.7.4. Gupta Empire under Chandragupta II**
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- 2.1.11. Exercise**
- 2.1.12. Further Readings**

### 2.1.0. Objectives

The chapter discuss the political history of the Imperial Gupta from Chandragupta I to the decline of the dynasty. After learning this lesson the students will be able to explain

- *the sources for the history of Guptas like the Allahabad Pillar inscription and their importance.*
- *the origin and original home land of the Gupta dynasty.*
- *foundation of Gupta dynasty by Chandragupta I*
- *Samudragupta's military achievements as well as his personal accomplishments.*
- *the conquests of Chandragupta II and his other qualities including patron of art and literature.*
- *the fate of Gupta Empire after reign of Chandragupta II.*

### 2.1.1. Introduction

History, does not normally repeat itself. This adage is emphatically proven with the story two of the greatest dynasties of Indian history: The Mauryas and the Guptas. A Chandragupta founded the Maurya dynasty in 320 B.C.; exactly six hundred years later another Chandra Gupta founded the Gupta dynasty, in 320 A.D. A coincidence that cannot be ignored. The Gupta dynasty rule over India for about two hundred years. "The Gupta period", writes Dr. Barnett, "is in the annals of classical India almost what the Periclean age is in the history of Greece". This dynasty freed India from foreign shackles of Kushana-Sassanian and broke the Huns who were invincible throughout Asia and Europe. This is probably the dynasty which gave Vikramaditya, an immortal legendary ruler of India. Like any other dynasties of India, the history of the Imperial Gupta dynasty is a dark cloud. Though we might know the first ruler of this dynasty however their origin and rise to king-hood is obscured in mystery. However study of the Guptas has held a very prime position in Indian history and correctly pointed out by V A Smith, who states, "With the accession of the Guptas, light again dawns, the veil of oblivion is lifted and the history of India regains unity and interest". This chapter will look at the political history of the imperial Guptas from the days of Chandragupt I to that of Skanda Gupta.

### 2.1.2. Sources of Information

Although the timeline of dynastic succession is at times ill-defined, the Gupta rule is an important epoch in Indian history. Several sources have been made available to us, through the scholarly labours of Indologists, both of the East and of the West, for the reconstruction of an almost correctly datable history of the times of the Gupta dynasty- "the dynasty which had liberated Indians from the Kushan-Sassanian shadow, the dynasty which broke the Hun, unbreakable throughout Asia and Europe, the dynasty which made the name Vikramaditya, a tradition immortal in their country". Literature-both religious and secular, writings of foreign travelers, inscriptions, coins and monuments etc., constitute various sources of the history of the Guptas.

#### 2.1.2.1.Literary Sources

Written history in the established proper sense of the term was not an art that was well-practised in ancient India. Literary sources of the Gupta include both religious and secular as well as writings of foreign travelers. The available written material of the Gupta period are mostly from the Puranas, which are more prophetic in nature than a factual record of the unfolding of actual events. They occasionally mention some event, normally culled from local stories and lore, passed on orally and committed to writing only at a much later stage. Their veracity therefore becomes questionable. The Vishnu-Purana clearly mentions the rule of the Gupta kings. One statement in it can be translated as, 'The nine Nagas will reign in Padmavati, Kantipuri and Mathura; and the Guptas of Magadha along the Ganges to Prayaga.' Here the nine Nagas (or Nakas as they are called in some translations) were an obscure tribe and for that reason called 'gupta-vansas', literally meaning

‘secret races’ (the word *gupta* in Sanskrit means secret, and is not to be confused with the title ‘Gupta’ of the dynasty being examined). They were supposed to be nine families who ruled various districts, independent of each other. The *Vayu-Purana* elaborates further on the statement in the *Vishnu-Purana* and states, ‘Princes of the Gupta race will possess all these countries [the holding of the Nagas], the banks of the Ganges to Prayaga, and Saketa, and Magadha (the Magadhas).’ Thus, Puranas, such as "*Vayu-Purana*", "*Matsya Purana*", "*Vishnu Purana*", "*Brahmanda Purana*" and "*Bhagvat Purana*" are the most important. They throw light on the dynastic list, the area of science, polity and system of government etc. the empire and names of the provinces.

Other, literary sources are the "*Dharmasastras*" such as "*Narada Smriti*", and "*Brihaspati Smriti*" was probably written during the Gupta period and give us a lot of useful information. "*Kamadaka Nitisara*" was probably written during the Chandra Gupta-II reign by Sikhara, Prime Minister of Chandragupta-II. The object of the book was to give instructions to the king. The author defends the murder of Saka king by his sovereign.

The 'Kavya-Nataka' literature is also useful as a source of information. The "*Kaumudi Mahotsava*" is a drama in five Acts, which lays down the political condition of Magadha on the eve of ascendancy of the Guptas. The other drama "*Devichandraguptam*" narrates the contest for the throne between Ramagupta and Chandragupta-II.

The records of the Buddhist Kingdom handed down by Fa-hien, the Chinese traveler who visited India during the reign of Chandra Gupta-II tells us the social, religious and economic condition of India at that time. He noted the wealth and prosperity of the towns and their citizens. He also refers to the free hospitals maintained by the state and other charitable institutions.

Another Chinese traveler I-tsing, who travelled in India after the Gupta age. He refers to Maharaja Srigupta. Who created a shrine for the use of Chinese pilgrims near Mrigasikhava known as the Temple of China.

He saw the ruins of that temple. He states that, a temple was built about 500 years before his time. This Srigupta was probably the founder of the Gupta dynasty and reigned about 500 years before the visit of the I-tsing.

#### **2.1.2.2.Epigraphic Sources**

Inscriptions are another indispensable source for the Gupta history. Dr. Fleet brought together not only the inscriptions of the early Guptas but also of the later Guptas. The first 16 inscriptions in the "*Corpus Inscription Indecorum or Inscriptions*" refer to the early Guptas. The direct line of the early Gupta dynasty is taken to aid with Skandagupta. Buddhagupta and Bhanu Gupta with their respective dates 484 A.D. and 510 A.D are mentioned in Nos. 19 and 20 the '*Corpus*'.

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta gives us a detailed account of the conquests of Indian Napoleon. The "Eran stone No.2 Inscription" of Samudragupta's period contains a record of the power and achievements of Samudragupta. The Udaygiri Cave Inscription', "The Mathura Stone Inscription", "the Sanchi Stone Inscription" and "the Gadhwa Stone Inscription " of the time of Chandragupta-II gives us a lot of information regarding the religious condition.

The "Godhwa Stone Inscription", the "Bilsad stone Pillar Inscription and the "Man-Kuwar stone Image Inscription" indicates to Kumaragupta-I. The 'Bihar Stone Pillar Inscription' in two parts the "Bhiari Stone Pillar Inscription", the "Junagadh Rock Inscription", and the "Kahaun Stone Pillar Inscription and the "Indore copper plate Inscription" refer to Skandagupta.

The "Mahrauli Iron Pillar Inscription" indicates that King Chandra conquered the Vanga countries after fighting against a confederacy of enemies united against him. He also conquered the Vahlikas in a running fight across the seven mouths of the river Sindu. The "Bhitari Pillar Inscription" of Skandagupta tells us about the fight with the Pushyamitras and probably also with the Hunas during the reign of his father Kumaragupta-I.

Besides these inscriptions there are a number of copperplates also called "Tamrapatra". These Copper Plates are mostly of donative nature. They refer about the donor, donees and donation. Most of these are in fact the religious grants made by history making the Gupta rulers to these temples. The copper plates or "Tamrapatras" usually provide us information on the genealogy of the kings mentioned in them. However, scholars tend to consider these type of plates as having lesser authenticity and even term them 'quasi-monumental documents'. The fundamental reason for this relative insignificance of land grant plates is the fact that in a number of cases it has been found that the date of the document and that of the signature of the granting authority have centuries in variance. This dichotomy could be attributed to the tendency in the beneficiary families to ante-date the grant to reinforce their claim to the land in question. From a historian's perspective this trend diminishes the value of such evidence, making it necessary to corroborate information from these plates with other sources. In terms of inscriptions, the most trusted data are the ones that are gathered from writings on stone, which need not be only on specially erected pillars, but also to be found on the walls of buildings, as well as within temples or caves, made to commemorate an event of even purely local significance.

#### **2.1.2.3. Seals**

A large number of seals have been found from Vaisali in the Muzaffarpur District. Among these seals, we have the seal of "Mahadevi Dhruvaswamini", queen of Chandragupta-H. She was the mother of Maharaj Govind Gupta. Probably, he was the younger brother of Kumaragupta-I who was the Governor of Vaisali in the reign of his father Chandragupta-II. The variety and character of the seals give us an insight into the provincial and local administration. These seals were related to the high and low officials, by which we can draw a long list of civil and military administration officers.

#### **2.1.2.4. Monuments**

The Monuments of the Gupta period are also a reliable source of artistic and religious history of that period. They not only depict different aspects of life but also illustrate different schools of art and architecture viz. Mathura centre, Banaras School and Nalanda School. The Gupta art was free from foreign influence.

The image of seated Buddha in the Sarnath museum belongs to the Banaras school of Art, is a master-piece of Indian art. Illustrations of the Nalanda School are to be found at Nalanda and Kurkihar. The temples of the Gupta period give us an idea of the religious beliefs of the people. They represent the religions and the deities of the period viz. Vishnu, Shiv, Durga, Jain Thirthankaras, Buddha or Bodhisattvas. The temples at Udaygiri Pathari illustrate the worship of Vishnu. A temple at Deogarh is dedicated to the worship of Shiv and Vishnu. A temple at Aioli is dedicated to the worship of Durga.

The paintings of Ajanta and Ellora caves pointed the artistic tastes of the people. These paintings throw a flood of light on Indian culture. Thus these paintings and monuments help us a lot for the reconstruction of the social and religious history of the Guptas.

#### **2.1.2.5. Numismatic**

A lot of useful and authentic information for the history of the Guptas is to be found in the coins of the Gupta emperors. Allan published in 1914, "Catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties". We have the various varieties of coins of Chandragupta-I, Samudragupta, Chandragupta-II, Kumaragupta-I and Skandagupta viz tiger type, lyrist type, asvamedha type, standard type, archer type, couch type, chhatra type, lion slayer type, horsemen type, tiger slayer type, elephant-rider type etc. The archer type coins of Skandagupta are mainly of GOLD. The legends on the coins possess great poetic merit. Samudragupta and Chandragupta issued as many as six types of gold coins.

### 2.1.3. Origin and Original Homeland of the Gupta

The Gupta dynasty ascended the throne around 320 A.D. and continued upto 550 A.D., with magnificence and splendour. They consolidated the entire Northern India by subjugating the local and provincial powers that became independent after the downfall of the Kushanas. The period during the Gupta Empire is referred as the Golden Age in all fields, embracing art, architecture, literature, sculpture and education. However the origin of the Guptas is still shrouded in obscurity. This is so because the sources of Gupta History, which have been unearthed till date, do not throw enough light on the ancestry of the Guptas and also their original homeland.

The Shunga and the Sattavahana referred to many officials bearing the surname Gupta. But their relationship with the Imperial Guptas is not yet determined. Furthermore it is not yet discovered whether the term Gupta indicated any surname of a family or referred to any clan. However the Gupta records itself and the Chinese records provided by I-Tsing, furnished the names of the first three rulers of the Gupta Dynasty, viz. Maharaja Sri Gupta, Maharaja Sri Ghatotkacha and Maharajadhiraja Sri Chandragupta. K.P. Jaiswal has suggested that the Guptas belonged to the Jat tribe of Punjab. But since the theory of Jaiswal lacked conclusive proofs, it was discarded. Dr. H.C. Roychowdhury, however holds that the majestic Guptas belonged to the Dharana Gotra. According to Roychowdhury, the Guptas were related to queen Dharini of Agnimitra, son of famous king Pushyamitra Shunga. Roychowdhury drew his theory about the pedigree of the Guptas based on the records of Prabhavati Gupta, daughter of Chandragupta II. In her records she claimed herself to be a descendant of the Dharana Gotra. Again Dr. S. Chattopadhyaya has put forth a different theory about the ancestry of the Guptas. According to him, in the Panchobh Copper Plate, some kings bearing the title Guptas and related to the imperial Gupta Dynasty, claimed themselves as Kshatriyas. The theory of S.Chattopadhyaya has been widely accepted, after a prolonged research by scholars.

Vishnu Purana suggests that names ending with Gupta are characteristics of Vaishya and Sudra castes however there are instances when many Brahmana people also have suffix gupta. K.P. Jayaswal points to Kaumudi Mahotasava which mentions that Chandasena was a karaskara, a lower order of the Hindu society, and was adopted by the king of Magadha. Jayaswal identifies Chandasena with Chandragupta I of the Gupta dynasty. But many scholars like O.P. Singh, D.K. Ganguly, R.K. Mookerji, D.R. Bhandarkar, A.N. Dandekar do not agree with Jayaswal. D.K. Ganguly rejects the historicity of Kaumudi Mahotsava as the story narrated there does not match correctly with the Gupta history. Singh says if the strict *varna* rules were followed in the society, would it be possible for a Brahmana king to adopt a child of some low caste? It seems to be a very improbable act. Hence it can be ruled out that the Guptas were from low order society.

The identification of the Guptas as Kshatriyas though has been supported by facts, the controversy whether the term "Gupta" was a family surname or a full name is still unresolved. This is so because the name of the first king was Sri Gupta, where the term "Gupta" seemed to be a title, but the second Gupta did not use the title like that. Hence, here lies enough dubiousness about the term "Gupta". However the expression "Gupta" had been systematically used by all the Gupta rulers from Chandragupta I onwards, which had led to the acceptance of the term 'Imperial Gupta dynasty'.

There is a keen controversy among the scholars about the original homeland of the Guptas. K.P Jaiswal has pointed out that the Guptas were originally inhabitants of Prayag (Allahabad), as the feudatories of the Nagas or Bharsivas. Thereafter they rose in prominence. Dr. Gayal also supported the theory of Jaiswal, suggesting that the original home of the Guptas was Antardvedi in eastern U.P, embracing the regions of Oudh and Prayag. These historians have derived their theory based on the fact that several coins belonging to the Gupta Dynasty have been found in those regions and the study of those numismatics evidences lead to the conclusion that the Guptas were



the original inhabitants of that region. However Dr. D.C Ganguli has provided a different view about the original homeland of the Guptas. According to him the Guptas were inhabitants of the Murshidabad region of Bengal and not of Magadha in Bihar. He based his theory on the statement of I -Tsing, who had visited India during 675 and 695 A.D. Fleet and other historians however criticise the above theory because of the fact that Sri Gupta ruled during the end of the third century, but I-Tsing placed him at the end of the second century. Hence the theory of historians, who have provided their views based on the accounts of I-Tsing, can be refuted without much difficulty.

S R Goyal associates Allahabad as the homeland of the Guptas as most of their coins and inscriptions have been discovered in this part of Uttar Pradesh. He is right about the inscriptions as many of these are found in this region however their coins have been discovered in bulk at Bengal and Bihar also. B P Sinha puts them to Mathura-Ayodhya region as he mentions that the Guptas were Jats from Mathura based upon a reference from Arya-Manjushri-Mulakalpa. However D K Ganguly states that this Jat association is due to a misinterpreted phrase from Arya-Manjushri-Mulakalpa hence not tenable.

Not only the ancestry and homeland of the Guptas, the extent of the Gupta Empire, when they ascended the throne after the lapse of the prolonged Dark Age, is also subject of intense controversy among the scholars. Dr. R.C. Majumdar has pointed out that the picture of a stupa has been found in Nepal with the label "Mrigasthapana" Stupa of Varendri. This "Mrigasthapana" is the same as "Mrigashivana" of I-Tsing. As Sri Gupta built a temple in Mrigashivana and as the place was in Varendri, so historians have pointed out that Varendri might have been under the sway of the Guptas, when they ascended the throne. According to Dr.Ganguli, Bengal and parts of Bihar was also included in the Gupta Empire, when they were ruling from the seat of power.

From these theories, several conflicting opinions about the original homeland and the Empire of the Guptas are available. According to Allan and some other scholars, the Guptas were originally concentrated in the region of Magadha and from there they extended their sway upto Bengal. According to other groups, the original homeland of the Guptas was Varendri or the Varendra Bhumi in Bengal, wherefrom they extended their Empire upto Magadha. Whatever the theory is, the Imperial fabric of the Guptas initiated the Golden Age in history of ancient India and with passage of time they became the sole authority of entire Northern India.

#### **2.1.4. The Foundation of the Gupta Empire**

It is well and wisely said that Magadha has a history extending far into the early centuries before the Christian era, "a history, which is undoubtedly unique, at any rate, unrivalled, not only in India, but perhaps, in the whole world". The province of Magadha had undergone several political and cultural vicissitudes particularly under the illustrious dynasties of the Mauryas, the Sungas and the Kanvas. The Kanvas were overthrown by a Satavahana king, who subsequently became ruler of Magadha. The Satavahanas could not have been at Pataliputra and in Magadha for more than fifty years after the fall of the Kanvas. During the period when the early Kusana princes, Kadphises and Wema, were advancing against the Satavahana prince in Northern India, a local Lichchhavis ruler established himself at Pataliputra. The Lichchhavis, however, in their turn, had also to quit Pataliputra ultimately when a minister of Kaniska advanced against the Magadha capital.

The Kusanas were thus virtual masters of the whole of Northern India for some time after the beginning of the decadence of the Andhra power. During this period the erstwhile feudatories of the Andhras were trying to shake themselves politically independent. The downfall of the Kusanas, as has already been pointed out, was accompanied by the rise of the Bharasivas. The Puranas mention Vindhyasakti and Pravira-Vindhyasakti and Pravarasena of the Vakataka dynasty - a century after the Bharasivas rose to power, that is, in circa 260 AD. There were thus two great dynasties, in Northern India, that of the Bharasivas, and the Vakatakas, who seem to have attained predominance about a century later. These two dynasties were responsible for the foundation of new

tradition or rather the revival of old tradition-the tradition of Hindu freedom and sovereignty. This tradition was characterized by three ideals- all-India Imperialism, Revival of Sanskrit, and Social Revival.

When the Bharasivas liberated the Gangetic valley and reorganized the political scheme over there in about 250 AD, we find Magadha in possession of an orthodox Ksatriya family. Itsing, who travelled in India between 670 and 700 AD, states "that a great king, Sri Gupta built a temple near Mrgasikhavana for some Chinese pilgrims, about 500 years ago". This would give Sri Gupta a date somewhere about 175 to 200 AD. If we depend upon the Puranic tradition in this connection, it may further be assumed that, at the commencement of the 4th century, the early Guptas were associated with the banks of the Ganges, dominated by the cities of Prayaga and Saketa. The vicissitudes of the Magadha kingdom during this period, cannot, however, be reconstructed in a connected form from epigraphical sources.

If we grant the validity of Itsing's statement we have also to accept the late inferred there from. The immediate successors of Sri Gupta are not known. They seem, however, to be gradually growing in power, Gupta, perhaps a grandson of Sri Gupta, seems to have risen to the position of a feudatory prince. This is suggested by the fact that Gupta is styled in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta as Maharaja and is appropriately called so in the Poona plates of Prabhavati Gupta Vakataka. Vincent Smith rightly places him between 275-300 AD.

Next to Gupta, Allahabad pillar inscription mentions Maharaja Ghatotkaca as the son of Maharaja Gupta. Bloch suggested that this Ghatotkaca may be identical with Ghatotkaca Gupta, whose name appeared on a seal at Vaisali. This, however, does not seem to be possible since the name of the son of Maharaja Gupta and the father of Chandra Gupta I has, in no inscription, been given as Ghatotkaca Gupta, but has been given merely as Ghatotkaca. It was also suggested by some scholars that some gold coins, hitherto invariably classed in the Early Gupta series, which have on the obverse the name of Kaca should be attributed to Ghatotkaca, the father of Chandra Gupta I. But the epithet occurring on the reverse of the same coins, and the fact that Ghatotkaca, being merely a feudatory Maharaja, was not entitled to issue coinage in his own name, finally and convincingly disprove this theory. Ghatotkaca must have been ruling, according to Allan, between 300 and 320 AD.

#### **2.1.5. Chandra Gupta I**

The first independent sovereign (*Maharajadhiraja*) of the line was Chandra Gupta I, son of Ghatotkacha, who *may have* ascended the throne in 320 A.D., the initial date of the Gupta Era. Like his great fore-runner Bimbisara he strengthened his position at some stage of his career, by a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis of Vaisali or of Nepal, and laid the foundations of the Second Magadhan Empire.

The union of Chandra Gupta I with the Lichchhavi family is commemorated by a series of coins having on the obverse standing figures of Chandra Gupta and his queen, the Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi, and on the reverse a figure of Lakshmi, the goddess of luck with the legend "*Lichchhavayah*" probably signifying that the prosperity of Chandra Gupta was due to his Lichchhavi alliance. Smith suggests that the Lichchhavis were ruling in Pataliputra as tributaries or feudatories of the Kushans and that through his marriage Chandra Gupta succeeded to the power of his wife's relatives. But Allan suggests that Pataliputra was in the possession of the Guptas even in Sri Gupta's time.

From the record of Samudra Gupta's conquests it has been deduced that his father's rule was confined to Magadha and the adjoining territories. In the opinion of Allan the Puranic verses defining the Gupta dominions refer to his reign ; *Anu-Ganga-Prayagamcha Saketam Magadhashstatha Etan janapadan sarvsn bhokshyante Gupta vamsajah*. "Kings born of the Gupta

family will enjoy all these territories viz., Prayaga ( Allahabad ) on the Ganges, Saketa (Oudh), and Magadha (South Bihar)."

It will be seen that Vaisali (North Bihar) is not included in this list of Gupta possessions. Therefore, it is difficult to concur in Allan's view that Vaisali was one of Chandra Gupta's earliest conquests. Nor does Vaisali occur in the list of Samudra Gupta's acquisitions, though the reference to Nepal as a border state in the famous Allahabad inscription may suggest that North Bihar was included within his dominions. It first appears definitely as a Gupta possession in the time of Chandra Gupta II, and constituted a viceroyalty under an imperial Prince. Prayaga (Allahabad) may have been conquered from a line of kings whose existence is disclosed in certain inscriptions discovered at Bhita. Two of these kings, Maharaja Gautamiputra Sri Sivamagha and Rajan Vasishthiputra Bhimasena are assigned by Marshall to the second or third century A.D. The name Sivamegha (or Sivamagha ) reminds us of the 'Meghas' (Maghas) who ruled in Kosala in the third century A.D. Another king, Maharaja Gautamiputra Vrishadvaja, is assigned to a third or fourth century A.D. One of the most memorable acts of Chandra Gupta I was the selection, before the assembled councilors (*Sabhyas*) and princes of the blood, of Samudra Gupta as his successor.

#### 2.1.6. **Samudra Gupta Parakramattka.**

Samudra Gupta, was the fourth king of the Gupta dynasty, considered as the greatest amongst the Gupta emperors. He was anointed the heir apparent by Chandra Gupta I because of his demonstrated leadership qualities and other kingly virtues. The exact date when Chandra Gupta I was succeeded by his son, Samudra Gupta, is not known. If the evidence of the spurious Nalanda plate has any value the event may have happened before the year 5 of the Gupta Era, i.e., A.D. 325. But this is doubtful. It is clear not only from the Allahabad *Prasasti* but from the epithet '*Hatpadaparigrihita*,' applied to Samudra Gupta in the Riddhapur inscription, that the prince was selected from among his sons by Chandra Gupta I as best fitted to succeed him.

From the date of his accession Samudra Gupta assumed the role of an aggressively ambitious monarch and immediately plunged into war with his neighbours. The resounding success that he achieved in his endeavours to expand his inheritance through conquest and annexation makes him one of the greatest military geniuses in Indian history.

When he had almost completed his campaigns, he caused a panegyric of his military achievements to be engraved on an already existing Asoka pillar that had already been in existence for six centuries. The pillar is currently situated in Allahabad. This lengthy eulogy by his court poet, Harishena, provides detailed information of the military campaigns of Samudra Gupta. The inscription is written in a script called Gupta Brahmi and is composed in a combination of classical Sanskrit poetry and prose.

##### 2.1.6.1. **The Allahabad Prasasti**

The Pillar containing the Prasasti, currently kept in Allahabad was originally an Asokan pillar. The Asokan edict on the pillar proclaims as yet under developed Buddhist tendencies of the emperor, although it advocates simpler doctrines towards living one's life. This pillar had initially been erected in Kaushambi and had been shifted downstream at a later date. The Allahabad pillar had been shifted by the great Mughal Akbar in the 16th century to the Allahabad fort and his son Jahangir had added his own inscription along with those of Samudra Gupta. This pillar was again uprooted sometime in the 18th century and Prinsep and his colleagues discovered it half buried in the ground. It was re-erected at Allahabad with a new, 'supposedly' lion capital, on the top of the pillar. The inscription is dated around 365-370 A.D. towards the later part of Samudra Gupta's reign and it was obviously done after all major military campaigns had been successfully completed. The inscription divides the campaigns into four distinct groups, listed below in the probable order in which they were conducted. First, against nine named and some unnamed kings in the Gangetic plain to the west of the original Gupta holdings; second, against 12 kings of South India; third,

against the chiefs of the forest tribes ; and fourth, against the rulers of the frontier kingdoms and the gana-sanghs, or republics. The eulogy also provides details of the diplomatic overtures made by the Gupta emperor to kings of countries that were geographically too far away to initiate or effect military conquest.

#### **2.1.6.2. Conquests of Aryabarta**

Almost immediately on assuming the throne, Samudra Gupta embarked on a campaign against the lesser kingdoms to the west of Magadha. The names of the nine kings who were defeated and their kingdoms annexed to the Gupta empire have been given as Achyuta, Balvarman, Chandravarman, Ganapati Naga, Matila, Nandin, Nagadatta, Nagasena, and Rudradeva. Nagasena of Mathura, Achyuta of Ahichchhata, modern day Ramnagar and Bareilly districts of Uttar Pradesh, and an unnamed prince of the Kota family were all killed during the battles to annex their kingdoms. The defeated kings were treated very harshly-the term used in the inscription to describe the actions taken being ‘forcibly rooted up’-and all the territories attached directly to the Gupta kingdom. Although the exact locations of all the nine kings have not been provided, Ganapati Naga is confirmed as having ruled from his capital at Padmavati, or Narawar, that still exists in Madhya Pradesh. On the completion of these victories and with a greatly enlarged kingdom, Samudra Gupta turned his attention to the south and Peninsular India.

#### **2.1.6.3. The Southern Campaign**

The task of conquering South India demanded boldness in the design of the enterprise, complete mastery of organisation, and the ability to devise and execute military plans in a sure-footed and confident manner. Samudra Gupta was not only up to the task, but excelled in all three aspects. Throughout the Southern Campaign Samudra Gupta followed the three-fold principle of conquest-*grahana*, the capture of the enemy king; *moksha*, liberation; and *anugraha*, the reinstatement of the deposed king. Adoption of this principle had a salutary effect and directly impacted the success of his southern conquests.

The Kings of Dakshinapatha who came into conflict with the great Gupta were Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghra-rajah of Mahakantara, Mantaraja of Kaurala, Svamidatta of Kottura, a chieftain of Pishtapura whose precise name is uncertain, Damana of Erandapalla, Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Nilaraja of Avamukta, Hastivarman of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palakka, Kubera of Devarashtra, Dhananjaya of Kusthalapura and others.

He commenced his southward journey by marching through the Chota Nagpur plateau towards the east coast and attacking South Kosala in the Mahanadi valley. The core of the Kosala kingdom was based around the districts of Bilaspur, Raipur, and Sambalpur. The Guptas deposed King Mahendra of Kosala and subsequently went on to subdue a number of chiefs ruling the inhospitable and backward areas of Orissa. The principle chief of the region was one Vyaghra Raja, or ‘Tiger Chief’, of Mahakantara, the forest region of Jeypore in Orissa, who was defeated. This chief is never mentioned in any of the annals before or after this brief interaction with Samudra Gupta and vanishes into the mist of ambiguity that so often surrounds Indian historical narrative.

Samudra Gupta continued his march southwards through the east coast, conquering all kings and kingdoms on his way. The details of this triumphant march is listed in the Allahabad pillar: he vanquished the chieftain, Mahendragiri, ruling from Pishtapura (now Pithapuram in the Godavari district) the capital of Kalinga; conquered the hill forts of Svamidatta of Kotturam (Kothoor) in Ganjam; defeated king Mantaraja who ruled the territory on the banks of the Kolleru (Colair) lake; subjugated the neighbouring king Hastivarman of Vengi, who was probably a Pallava prince ruling the region between Krishna and Godavari rivers; and overwhelmed the Pallava rulers Nilaraja of Avamukta and Vishnugopa ruling around Kanchipuram to the south-west of Madras (Chennai). At this stage Samudra Gupta turned west and defeated Ugrasena, the king of Palakka in Nellore district; Kuvera, ruler of Devarashtra in Vizhagapatam district; and Dhananjaya of Kusthalapura in

North Arcot. He then returned home to his capital through western Deccan, and crossing Khandesh. This campaign that included marching nearly 3000 miles through inhospitable terrain and hostile countryside lasted over two years and was concluded in 350 A.D.

The most notable aspect of this campaign is that Samudra Gupta made no attempt to permanently annex the defeated kingdoms to the Gupta Empire, but only sought temporary submission of the rulers in keeping with the three-fold principle that he adopted. The rulers were almost always reinstated to their thrones. This is in sharp contrast to his earlier westward march in which he had uprooted the established kings and chieftains, demolishing their dynasties and bringing their holdings into direct Gupta control. It is certain that the great king realised the logistical difficulties in imposing direct rule of these far-flung southern territories from his capital in the north-east of the country and therefore opted to leave them as tributary kingdoms. He however, exacted a great deal of tribute in gold and other treasure from each conquest to enhance Gupta wealth. This could be considered a master stroke by a military genius and statesman.

#### **2.1.6.4.Campaign against the Forest Kingdoms**

These kingdoms were also called Atavika kingdoms and Samudra Gupta is reported to have reduced 'all' forest-states to complete subjugation. A copper plate inscription of Parvrajaka, the king of Basti, names 18 forest kingdoms/states that were defeated by the Gupta king.

#### **2.1.6.5.Relationship with the Frontier Kingdoms & Tribal States**

The victorious career of Samudra Gupta must have produced a deep impression on the *Pratyanta nrupatis* or frontier kings of North-East India and the Himalayan region, and the tribal states of the Panjab, Western India, Malwa and the Central Provinces, who are said to have gratified his imperious command "by giving all kinds of taxes, obeying his orders and coming to perform obeisance." The most important among the eastern -kingdoms which submitted to the mighty Gupta Emperor were Samatata (part of Eastern Bengal bordering on the sea, having its capital probably at Karmmanta), Davaka and Kamarupa (roughly in Assam). We learn from the Damodarpur plates that the major portion of Northern Bengal, then known as Pundravardhana-bhukti, formed an integral part of the Gupta Empire from A.D. 443 to A.D 543, and was governed by a line of *Uparikas* as vassals of the Gupta Emperor.

The Northern *Pratyantas* were Nepal and Kartripura. The latter principality comprised probably Katarpur in the Jalandhar district, and the territory of the Katuria of Kumaun, Garhwal and Rohilkhand.

The tribal states which paid homage were situated on the western and south-western fringe of Aryavarta proper. Among these the most important were the Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas.

The Malavas occupied part of the Panjab in the time of Alexander. They were probably in Eastern Rajaputana when they came into conflict with Ushavadata. Their exact location in the time of Samudra Gupta cannot be determined. In the time of Samudra Gupta's successors they were probably connected with the Mandasor region. We find princes of Mandasor using the reckoning, commencing B.C. 58, handed down traditionally by the Malava-rajya.

The Arjunayanas may have been connected with the Pandoonoi or Pandava tribe mentioned by Ptolemy as settled in the Panjab. The connection of the Arjunayanas with the Pandava Arjuna is apparent. Yaudheya appears as the name of a son of Yudhishtira in the *Mahabharata*. The *Harivamsa*, a later authority, connects the Yaudheyas with Usinara. But the Yaudheya territory must have extended beyond the limits of this area and embraced the tract still known as Johiyabar along both banks of the Sutlej on the border of the Bahawalpur state.

The Madrakas had their capital at Sakala or Sialkot in the Punjab. The Abhiras occupied the tract in the lower Indus valley and western Rajaputana, near Vinasanain the district called Abiria by the *Periplus* and the geography of Ptolemy. We have already seen that an Abhira possibly became

*Mahakshatraps* of Western India and probably supplanted the Satavahanas in a part of Maharashtra before the middle of the third century A.D. A section of the tribe apparently settled in Central India and gave its name to the Ahirwar country between Jhansi and Bhilsa. The territories of the Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas lay probably in Malwa and the Central Provinces. The Prarjunakas are mentioned in the *Arthashastra* attributed to Kautilya and are located by Smith in the Narsinliapur District of the Central Provinces.

The rise of a new indigenous imperial power could not be a matter of indifference to the foreign potentates of the North-West Frontier, Malwa and Surasjitra (Kathiawar) who hastened to buy peace "by the acts of homage, such as offer of personal service, the bringing of gifts of maidens, begging for seals marked with the Garuda sign to allow them to rule over their respective districts and provinces. The foreign powers that thus established diplomatic relations with Samudra Gupta were the Daivapidra-Shahi-Shahaniishahi and the Saka Mimindas as well as the people of Simhala and all other dwellers in islands. The Daivaputra-Shahi-Shahanushahi belonged apparently to the Kushan dynasty of the north-west, which derived its origin from the Devaputra Kanishka. The Saka Murundas must have included the northern chiefs of Scythian nationality who issued the Ardochsho coins as well as the Saka chieftains of Surashtra and Central India, the representatives of a power which once dominated even the Ganges valley. The existence of a Murunda power in the Ganges valley a couple of centuries before Samudra Gupta is vouched for by Ptolemy. The Jaina Prabhavaka-charita testifies to the control that a Murunda family once exercised over the imperial city of Pataliputra.

#### **2.1.6.6. The Empire**

By the end of his conquests, Samudra Gupta had unquestioned control over the region that in ancient times was called Aryavarta, the Aryan homeland, which became his core territorial holding. The area included the modern states of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Eastern Rajasthan. These states account for the most fertile and populous areas of North India. Essentially Samudra Gupta's direct rule covered an area that ran from the Hooghly in the east to the Chambal in the west, and from the foothills of the Himalayas in the north to the River Narmada in the south—a vast empire by any reckoning.

While this area was under direct Gupta rule, Samudra Gupta's sovereignty and irresistible might was also acknowledged by the Kushans ruling in Gandhara and Kabul; the descendants of the great Satrap Rudradaman ruling in Gujarat and parts of Malwa; the chiefs and princes of the frontier kingdoms of Assam and the Gangetic delta; the king of Nepal in the southern slopes of the Himalayas; and by the king of Ceylon and 'other islands'. It is possible that these other islands that are mentioned could be references to the Indianised kingdoms of South-East Asia.

#### **2.1.6.7. The Interaction with Ceylon (Sri Lanka)**

Around the year 360 A.D. the king of Ceylon Siri Meghavarna (A.D.352-379) send two Buddhist monks, one of whom was his brother, to pay homage to the Buddha by visiting a monastery built by Asoka Maurya to the east of the sacred tree in Bodhi Gaya. In what can only be terms as a strange development, the monks apparently found Indian hospitality lacking and insufficient and found it difficult to find a place to stay in comfort during their sojourn in India. On their return to Sri Lanka they complained to the king. The king decided to resolve the issue by founding a monastery near the holy place in India for his subjects to stay in comfort during their pilgrimages. Towards this end, he send a mission to Samudra Gupta's court laden with gems and other valuables seeking permission to found a monastery in what effectively was Gupta territory.

Samudra Gupta was flattered by this attention from a distant kingdom and in his heightened state of power could well have imagined that the gifts were tributes. In any case permission was granted to construct a monastery. Meghavarna decided to build near the sacred tree and erected a splendid convent to the north of it, the completion of which has been recorded in a copper plate.

The building has been described as being three stories high, with six halls, adorned by three towers with subsidiary stupas, and protected by a strong wall 30 to 40 feet high all around. It was very artistically decorated and contained a statue of the Buddha made in gold and silver and studded with gems. Hiuen Tsang the Chinese traveller-pilgrim visited the monastery in the 7th century and reported that there were about 1000 monks of the Sthavira school of Mahayana Buddhism in residence at that time. Today, the site where the monastery existed is an extensive mound.

#### **2.1.6.8. Performance of Asvamedha**

After six centuries of Mauryan rule, Samudra Gupta stood on the threshold of a pan-Indian Empire. He proclaimed the universality of his empire by reviving and performing the ancient rite of Asvamedha (the horse sacrifice), perhaps for the first time after the one conducted by Pushyamitra Shunga centuries back. The ceremony was conducted with appropriate splendour with reports that 100,000 cows were gifted, presumably to Brahmans as was the custom of the period, and that millions of gold and silver coins were distributed. A small number of coins minted for the occasion has been found and reveal the Vaishnavite leanings of the Emperor. However, the term conqueror as appropriate to a devotee-king of Vishnu is not seen in the coins leading to the belief that Samudra Gupta had grown sufficiently vain to consider himself the incarnation of the deity itself. The coins also depict the Garuda of Vishnu, the on-umbrella insignia of the Samrat, and the wheel turning pose of the *Chakravartin*. Another memorial to the event is a carved stone figure of a horse that was discovered in northern Oudh and is currently on display at the Lucknow Museum. Traces of the brief inscription on the horse carving refers to Samudra Gupta and the *Asvamedha*. After that he proclaimed himself a *chkravartin* (universal ruler), and a new tone appears in Indian kingship: he was a mortal only in celebrating the rites of the observances of mankind, but otherwise a god dwelling on Earth.

In his acclaimed book on the history of Medieval India, Vincent Smith an acknowledged historian of great merit, calls Samudra Gupta the 'Napoleon of Ancient India'. This is also echoed in some other publications. There is complete injustice in this comparison for a number of reasons. First, is that a comparison of this sort lessens the greatness of the person being compared to the original. Since Samudra Gupta lived centuries before Napoleon burst onto the European theatre, he should have been considered the original. Therefore, the comparison smacks of the arrogance of Euro-centric scholars in considering the oriental king a lesser person and a copy of someone who lived at a later date. Samudra Gupta was in fact a far greater conqueror and an even more astute statesman than Napoleon could ever imagine to have been. Second, the Gupta Emperor's greatness lies in the fact that he never met his Waterloo, because he refused to overextend himself in any of his campaigns or annexations. Third, Samudra Gupta was a strategic genius who could be considered better than any other conqueror the world has seen because of the manner in which he consolidated his conquests and administered his greatly expanded kingdom.

#### **2.1.6.9. The Emperor**

Samudra Gupta remained unknown till the early 1900s, although there was no confusion regarding his name or antecedents, once he was 'discovered'. His fame was uncovered through extremely diligent archaeological research and the detailed study of obscure inscriptions that were then corroborated through aligning them with the available narrative of events. Court eulogies that celebrate the rule of a king are prone to exaggerations and at times display almost total bias in their praise for the benevolence of the ruler. This is a universal truth in the study of history. Therefore, the writings regarding Samudra Gupta, especially the ones by his court poet, must also be assessed accordingly.

There is however no doubt that Samudra Gupta was a greatly gifted and exceptionally capable ruler. He was a great patron of the arts and the renowned Buddhist author Vasubandhu is considered to be one of the beneficiaries of Samudra Gupta's largess. He cultivated learned people

and regularly interacted with them, displaying an acute and extremely polished intellect. He is reported to have been proficient in song and music and devoted to their practice as an individual. This devotion of the Emperor to the pursuit of music is confirmed by some rare coins that have been unearthed which show Samudra Gupta seated on a high-backed couch playing the Indian lute, the veena. He is also reported to have been a poet of note. While there are no surviving examples of the King's poetry, the testimony to his highly developed aesthetic sense leads one to believe that he would have indulged in poetry and that he would have been at least a passably good poet. On the whole, the picture that emerges is of a man of genius, well-versed in the art of war, at home with the arts, with a keen understanding of the more esoteric and creative aspects of human pursuits.

The titles used by this monarch were *Apratiratha*, 'unrivalled car-warrior' *Aprativaryavirya*, 'o f irresistible valour' *Kritanta-parasu*, 'axe of death,' *sarvarajochchhetta*, 'uprooter of all kings,' *Vyaghra-parahrama*, 'possessed of the strength of a tiger,' *Asva-medhaparakrama*, 'whose might was demonstrated by the horse sacrifice,' and *Parakramanka*, 'marked with prowess,' but not *Dharmaditya*. Most of these epithets are connected with particular types of coins issued by the emperor. Thus *Parakrama* is found on the reverse of coins of the standard type, *Apratiratya* on coins of the archer type, *Kirtanta-parasu* on coins of the battle-axe type, *sarvarajochchhetta* on coins of the Kacha type, *Vyaghraparakrama* (Raja) on the tiger type of coins, and *Asvamedha-parakrama* on the *Asvamedha* type.

#### **2.1.6.10. Governance**

His governance style has been recorded in rich but allusive phrasing, written more in rhetoric than with a direct connection to reality. Although he defeated most of his contemporary kings in battle and could have annexed their territories, he chose not to do so. Samudra Gupta made no attempt at annexing the conquered territories beyond the immediate region of Arya-Varta, instead imposing one-time tributes, reinstating the defeated kings, and withdrawing the Gupta forces. After exacting tributes from the defeated rulers, he left them to continue their rule with almost no bureaucratic intervention or continued intrusion into the domestic affairs of the vassal state. This process essentially created a web of feudatory states around the core Gupta Empire. This is in sharp contrast to the Mauryan administration which was minutely intrusive and micro-managing at the height of its power. But unlike the directly administered empire of the Mauryas, this was at best a web of feudatory arrangements and one which, lacking an obvious bureaucratic structure, left the sovereignty of the feudatories intact.

Samudra Gupta was proclaimed a '*chakravartin*', or world ruler, on completion of the *Asvamedha* sacrifice. To be a *chakravartin* it was not necessary to have sustained direct governance over vast and far flung areas—the concept only needed nominal submission to the sovereignty of the *chakravartin* by vassal kings. Such submission normally was in the form of representative attendance in the *chakravartin*'s court on ceremonial occasions. The requirement was for sufficient number of kingdoms to accept the sovereignty without it having to be enforced as such and the status of the *chakravartin* depended as much on the status and number of the *rajas* surviving as independent rulers while also willing to pay tribute and accept his suzerainty. This situation validated and magnified the threefold principle of conquest. There was a vested interest for the conquering Emperor to reinstate the defeated kings to their throne.

The exact year of Samudra Gupta's death is not known, although it is certain that he lived a long life and that his reign was one of uninterrupted prosperity and peace for nearly half a century. In keeping with his sagacious nature, he attempted to make the transition of the crown to the next generation as smooth as possible by nominating his son through Queen Datta Devi, already the crown prince, as his successor. The short struggle he faced when coming to power could also have influenced the ageing monarch's decision to lay the foundations for a smooth succession. There is a story of his immediate successor, Rama Gupta, being weak and being forced into a dishonourable



treaty by the Saka Satraps. This could only mean either that Samudra Gupta did not fully subjugate the Sakas, contrary to what has been mentioned in the inscriptions, or that the Sakas, occupying an area far away from the centre of power were quick to revolt at the demise of the old king. The final subjugation of the Sakas and the conquest of Malwa and Gujarat was left to his successor. Samudra Gupta's beautifully minted gold coins provide the initial impetus to name the Gupta dynasty 'Golden'.

#### **2.1.6.11. Family of Samudra Gupta**

Samudra Gupta's 'virtuous and faithful wife possibly Datta Devi, appears to be mentioned in an Eran inscription referable to the period of his rule. We possess no genuine dated documents for the reign of the great emperor. The Nalanda and Gaya grants profess to be dated in the years 5 and 9 respectively, but no reliance can be placed on them and the reading of the numeral in the Gaya record is uncertain. Smith's date (A.D. 330-375) for Samudra Gupta is conjectural. As the earliest date of the next sovereign is. A.D. 380-381 it is not improbable that his father and predecessor died some time after A.D. 375. One of the last acts of Samudra Gupta was apparently the selection of his successor. The choice fell on Chandra Gupta, his son by Datta Devi.

#### **2.1.7. Chandra Gupta-II Vikramaditya**

Accepted history states that Emperor Samudra Gupta, the *Chakravartin* of Arya-Varta, was succeeded to the throne by his son by Queen Datta Devi, the anointed heir apparent Chandra Gupta II, who later claimed the title 'Vikramaditya', or 'the sun of valour'. However, there is a mystery that surrounds this sanitized version of events.

##### **2.1.7.1. The Story of *Devichandragupta***

The scope of literature as a source of history is usually regarded as restricted, in the sense that literary works are often drawn upon only in order to supplement and confirm the historical material already provided by the more reliable epigraphic records. But sometimes it happens that an important historical detail, not already known from inscriptions, is first brought to light through a literary source and is thereafter sought to be corroborated by means of some inscriptional evidence. A typical case in point is that of Samudra Gupta's successor on the Gupta imperial throne.

The Gupta inscriptions invariably mention Chandra Gupta II as the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta. But new light has been thrown on the question of the genealogy and the succession of the Early Imperial Guptas through the discovery of a Sanskrit play, *Devichandragupta*, by Visakhadatta. The extracts of this newly discovered drama, *Devichandragupta*, begin with the second act, where it is stated that Rama Gupta agreed to give away his queen, Dhruvadevi, to the Sakas, in order to remove the apprehension of his subjects. It appears that the Saka king had demanded Rama Gupta's legally married wife, Dhruvadevi, and that Rama Gupta, being a coward, had actually consented to send her over to the Sakadhipati. Dhruvadevi then complains of her husband's heartlessness. Later on, Prince Chandra Gupta determines to go to the Saka king in the disguise of Dhruvadevi. Chandra Gupta ultimately kills the Saka king through this stratagem. It is indicated by the extract from the concluding portion of the play that after the destruction of the Sakas, Chandra Gupta murdered his brother, Rama Gupta, and married his widow, Dhruvadevi. The author of this play, Visakhadatta, is very likely the same as the author of *Mudraraksasa*. It may be possible that he was actually a contemporary of Chandra Gupta II, and was thus an eyewitness of the events represented in *Devichandragupta*.

That the Chandra Gupta of this play is Chandra Gupta II, is proved by the fact that the name of Chandra Gupta II's queen given in the Gupta records and the name of Rama Gupta's widow, whom Chandra Gupta is represented, in the drama, to have married after murdering his brother, are one and the same. The same story has been referred to this story in their works by many poets of ancient India. Banabhatta in his *Harsacharita* and Sankararya (1713 AD), in his commentary on the *Harsacharita* referred this story in their respective work. Even in the *Majmal-ut-tawarikh*, its author

Abul Hasan Ali (1026 AD), made merely a literal translation of an Arabic work, which, in its turn, was a translation of a Hindu work.

The Gupta inscriptions make it clear that Chandra Gupta II married his brother's widow, and the son born to them Kumara Gupta, succeeded him on the Gupta throne. That Chandra Gupta II had married his brother's widow was a well-known fact even in the 9th. century AD. In the Sanjan plates of Amoghavarsha I, dated 871 AD, it is stated: "That donor, in the Kaliyuga, who was of the Gupta lineage, having killed (his) brother, we are told, seized (his) kingdom and wife". Hiuen Tsang refers to a great Gupta sovereign, Vikramaditya, who was widely known for his charities. Dhruvadevi's seals at Vaisali describe her as the crowned queen of Chandra Gupta II. Even, a critical examination of several works on Hindu Law makes it clear that such a marriage was held to be quite desirable, at least in the age of Chandra Gupta II. The conclusion already arrived at by the study of *Devichandragupta*, Majmal-ut-tawarikh and the Sanjan copperplates get further epigraphic corroboration from the Sangali and Cambay plates of Govinda IV Rastrakuta.

After the short reign of this ignominious Gupta king, Rama Gupta, Chandra Gupta II, with whom, presumably the glorious Indian tradition of Vikramaditya started, became, in circa 378 AD, the overlord of the Gupta Empire. We are fortunate in that we possess several sources, literary and epigraphic, providing ample information with regard to the career of this worthy son of a worthy father. By the nobility of his character evinced by his gallant rescue of Dhruvadevi and by the remarkable diplomacy and valor, which he exhibited in the successful attack against the Sakapati, Chandra Gupta II must have already endeared himself considerably to the people of Magadha. His marriage to Dhruvadevi seems to have been the auspicious beginning of a very glorious career.

In the Gupta inscriptions, Chandra Gupta II has been described as the son of Samudra Gupta and Dattadevi. He seems to have been one among many sons. In spite of the intervening short reign of Rama Gupta, it is stated in the inscriptions that he ascended the throne 'by the choice of the father'. It appears as if Samudra Gupta, who desired Chandra Gupta II to succeed him, and who must have made his desire known to his courtiers privately, died before the formal nomination of Chandra Gupta to be his successor. So after Samudra Gupta's death, in the absence of any formal ceremony for Chandra Gupta's Yauvarajya, the Gupta throne passed on, as a matter of course, to the eldest son of the deceased emperor. When, however, Chandra Gupta II came to the Gupta throne after Rama Gupta, he thought it necessary to make his father's choice known to the people through his records. He seems to have looked upon the empire as a sacred and glorious heritage confidently handed down to him by his respected father. Chandra Gupta II, it must be said, amply justified his father's choice. He started by consolidating his empire on firmer basis.

#### **2.1.7.2. Early difficulties**

Samudra Gupta had left behind him an empire, which, though considerably extensive, was not necessarily a unified empire under a single ruler. It was something like a federation of autonomous states grouped together in subordinate alliance to the Gupta suzerain, not certainly without the realization of the common interests that such a unity subserved. States of nearer Hind formed the integral part of the empire; the frontier states in the east and the north were practically independent, but at the same time on terms of active diplomatic relationship amounting to subordinate alliance. The same seems to have been the case also in respect of northwest frontiers.

After the death of Samudra Gupta, who was certainly the unifying factor of all these different political units, there naturally followed some sort of disintegration of the empire. One such attempt, during the reign of Rama Gupta, on the part of the Kusana king, was successfully flouted by Chandra Gupta II. The reference in the Meharauli iron pillar inscription of Chandra Gupta II to a successful war against the Bhalikas by getting across the seven mouths of the Sindhu' can be easily explained by such a supposition. Chandra Gupta II, thereafter, made his position on the north-west

frontiers and in the Punjab stronger than ever, which fact has been definitely pointed out by his inscription at Mathura.

He is the first sovereign of the Gupta dynasty, whose record has been discovered in that city. It is a greatly damaged and undated inscription, but the fragment of it, which is available, refers to the glories of his father, Samudra Gupta, and to his own devotion to the Bhagavata religion. Chandra Gupta II's coins, particularly his silver coins, are plentiful all over the eastern Punjab as far as the banks of the Chenab.

Another inscription at Mathura, was discovered in a garden of Mathura city. This record is inscribed on a stone pillar, consists of seventeen lines. It is damaged in different parts, the most regrettable damage however being to the part, which mentioned the date in regnal year, since this is the only inscription of the early Gupta emperors, which was dated both in Gupta era and regnal year. The inscription is Saiva and on one side of the pillar is to be found a naked figure of a Sivagana. The inscription opens with the name of Maharajadhiraja Bhataraka Chandra Gupta, the worthy son of Samudra Gupta. The object of this inscription is to record the building of a temple of Siva, named Kapilesvara. The great importance of the record lies in the fact that it supplies us with a very early date in the reign of Chandra Gupta II, that is, 380 AD.

#### **2.1.7.3. War Against the Saka Ksatrapa**

The consolidation of the northwestern dominions of his empire was completed by Chandra Gupta II within two years immediately after his accession to the Gupta throne. All this evidence, epigraphic and numismatic, indicates that Chandra Gupta II first strengthened his north-western dominions from the Jallundhar Doab to Mathura. He thereafter turned his attention to the southern end of the north-western frontier, where the Ksatrapa revival had become sufficiently aggressive. According to Rapson's investigations based on the study of the Ksatrapa coins, the period extending from 305 AD to 348 AD is marked by great changes in the political history of the Ksatrapas, the one clear indication of which was that the office of Mahaksatrapa fell in abeyance during that period. In the first part of that period, there were two Ksatrapas, and in the latter part, Ksatrapa coinage ceases to be issued altogether. All this suggests that their territory was subject to foreign invasion, firstly under Pravarasena I Vakataka, during the first half of that period, and later, during the second half, under Samudra Gupta, whose victorious advance must have, greatly, reduced its extent. It seems that the constant wars between the Ksatrapas and the Vakstakas were partly responsible for the decadence of Ksatrapa power.

The expansion of Vakataka authority under Prthvisena I, whose reign was a long one, according to Ajanta inscription, brought about another period of break in Ksatrapa rule, between the years, 351 to 364 AD. After the death of the great Vakataka king, Prthviena I, circa 375 AD. the Ksatrapas seem to have recovered some parts of their lost territory and a considerable amount of their political influence, so much so that Rudrasena III restored the original family title, Mahaksatrapa, assumed the offensive, and made a bold bid for regaining that region round about Ujjain, which had constituted the core of their territory, in the best days of Ksatrapa domination. The successor of Rudrasena III was his sister's son Mahaksatrapa Svami Simhasena. The only date known of this monarch is 382 or 384 AD. The martial activities on the part of Mahaksatrapas Rudrasena III and Simhasena attracted the attention of Chandra Gupta II, who had just then completed his consolidatory operations on the northwestern frontiers and in the Punjab. The earliest known date of the silver coinage of the Guptas, in the region which had formerly been in exclusive possession of the Ksatrapas, comes almost about twenty years after 388 AD, and on this numismatic evidence it is generally assumed that the Gupta conquest of the west must have been effected sometime about 409 AD. But there is an inscription of Chandra Gupta II at the Udayagiri cave, which is dated in 401 AD.

An inscription in the Chandra Gupta cave on Udayagiri hill near Bhilsa dated 401-402 AD record the gift, by a Maharaja of the Sanakanika tribe, who seems to have been a feudatory of Chandra Gupta II. The Udayagiri cave inscription brings the date of Chandra Gupta II's conquest and occupation of Malwa much earlier than that given by numismatic evidence. There is another undated inscription at Udayagiri cave, which is a record of the excavation of the cave, as a temple of Siva, by order of a certain Virasena, also called Saba, a king's minister of peace and war, having got the position by hereditary rights. The minister is described as Sandhivigrahika, a man of learning, and a native of Pataliputra. The inscriptions at Udayagiri indicate the extent of Chandra Gupta II's authority, bringing it quite close to Ujjain, the capital of Malwa and the headquarters of the Ksatrapas. The last line of the second inscription of Udayagiri indicates clearly that the king in person and the minister were both, at that place, on an expedition of the 'conquest of the world'. In the times of Samudra Gupta, a large portion of Malwa was included in the Gupta empire and a number of tribes in that region were made to submit to the Gupta sovereign. Mahakatrapas Rudrasena III and Simhasena, however, represent the temporary revival of the Sakas in that territory. The process of the conquest of this region must have been gradual. Chandra Gupta II seems to have started operations for rounding off his empire in that particular corner. His expedition involved more than one campaign and a gradual reduction of territory for final incorporation in the empire.

The stone inscription of Chandra Gupta II at Sanchi in the north-eastern Malwa, dated 412-13 AD, confirms his established domination in that part of the country. The year 93 of the Sanchi inscription is the last known date of Chandra Gupta II. The inscriptions show that Chandra Gupta II conquered the whole of Malwa and his silver coins indicate that he put an end to the domination of the later western Ksatrapas of Kathiawar. These wars on the south-west frontiers seem to form the only major military enterprise undertaken by Chandra Gupta II after his accession. All other frontiers were presumably free from any political disturbances.

#### **2.1.7.4. Gupta Empire under Chandragupta II**

***Extension of Empire:*** According to Fa Hien, Pataliputra was the original capital of the Guptas, but it appears that later Chandra Gupta II made Ujjain his second capital, probably in view of the special exigencies of administration that arose particularly on account of the wars against the Sakas and the consequent reorganization of the newly acquired territory in that region. This fact explains the genesis of the glorious Indian tradition of Vikramaditya of Ujjain. The conquest of Western Malwa and Kathiawar made the Gupta empire, under Chandra Gupta II very vast, extending from Kathiawar peninsula to the confines of Eastern Bengal, and from the Himalayas to Narmada. It is known to have included Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Eastern Punjab, and practically the whole of Central India including the famous and fertile province of Malwa, North Gujarat and Kathiawar. All this wide extent of his dominions justifies' Chandra Gupta II's boast of sole sovereignty of the earth, made in the Meharauli iron pillar inscription.

This extension of the western frontiers of Chandra Gupta's empire had considerably influenced trade and commerce as well as culture of Northern India. European and African trade with India received great impetus as a result of the Gupta conquest of Kathiawar ports. The western traders poured Roman gold into the country in return for Indian products and the effect of this great wealth on the country is still noticeable in the great variety and number of coins issued by Chandra Gupta II.

***Matrimonial Alliance with the Vakatakas:*** Chandra Gupta II's western conquests must have been facilitated by the subordinate alliance of the Vakatakas with him. It was then feared that the Vakatakas would be a rival power against the Guptas. Chandra Gupta II, who was perhaps a peaceful statesman rather than a warlike monarch adhered, in this case, to a policy of peaceful diplomatic relations with the Vakatakas. Rudrasena II, the son successor of Prthvisena I, is

described in the Vakataka records, to have married Prabhavatigupta, daughter of Deva Gupta and Kuberanaga. Whatever may have been the diplomatic relations between Chandra Gupta II, and Prthvisena I, there can be no doubt that Chandra Gupta II's influence was predominant during the reign of Rudrasena II, the regency of Prabhavatigupta for her son, and a considerable part of the reign of Pravarasena II..

**Administration under Chandra Gupta II:** Chandra Gupta II was the first Gupta sovereign to assume the title of Vikramaditya. He is also styled Simhavikrama, Simhacandra, Sahasanka, and Vikramanka. His empire, vast as it was, must have been administered efficiently, so that even the most remote provinces could substantially feel the influence of the imperial head quarters. We get an insight in Chandra Gupta II's provincial administration from the Basarh excavations and the Damodarpur copperplates. At the former place a number of clay seals were unearthed. From one of these it appears that Dhruvadevi held charge of the administration of a province even under the emperor. Among the clay seals which were discovered by Fleet in the excavations at Basarh there is to be found one bearing the following inscription: Mahadevi Sri Dhruvasvamini, wife of Maharajadhiraja Sri Chandra Gupta, and mother of Maharaja Sri Govinda Gupta. There were a number of other seals belonging to officers of various denominations as also to private individuals. Among them, again, is one of Sri Ghatotkaca Gupta. The variety and character of the seals in this find seem to justify Bhandarkar's suggestion that they were the casts preserved in the workshop of the potter, who was the general manufacturer of seals for that locality. There were several administrative divisions and subdivisions of the empire and these were under the command and control of a regular hierarchy of officials. References are also made to the staff and the subordinate officers. The reference to the Parisad of Udanakupa indicates that Parisad still formed an important element of the Hindu government machinery.

**Growth of Guild:** There were, besides these, several guilds and commercial corporations. The benevolent efficiency of Chandra Gupta II's administrative organization finds support in the fact recorded in the Mandasor inscription of 437 and 473 AD, that a guild of silk weavers belonging originally to a particular province found it necessary to migrate, owing to disorder prevailing in their native land, and settled down within the Gupta empire, with a view to ply their trade of silk-weaving over there and attain prosperity thereby. That a guild of weavers should, in the course of a generation prosper so well that a considerable section of them could devote themselves to the leisurely pursuit of the study of astronomy, testifies to the fact that the imperial administration offered advantages necessary for the prosperity of the trade, internally and perhaps even overseas, in such article of luxury as silk-fabrics. The great literary works of Kalidasa and Visakhadatta, produced under the regime, of Chandra Gupta II, are an imperishable evidence of the Gupta sovereign's patronage of learning and cultural sciences.

**Vikramaditya-The Person:** Like his father before him, Chandra Gupta II was a great swordsman and personally extremely courageous. He was a strong and vigorous ruler who also possessed the virtues of a just monarch. He was a warrior, diplomat, and statesman, creating alliances when required to further the prosperity of the kingdom. After the conquest of Western India he established diplomatic relations with Ardashir, King of Persia, furthering trade and exchange of ideas. He was also a renowned patron of the arts and culture and the famous Navaratnas, or Nine Jewels, lived in his court. It is possible that Chandra Gupta II was perhaps vainglorious: he loved exalted titles, assuming the title of Vikramaditya, Maharajadhiraja, and Paramabhogavata. But then he had the right to be proud! The unparalleled strength and prosperity of the Gupta kingdom during Vikramaditya's reign is attested by the fine gold and silver coins that were minted during the period.

**The Navaratnas (Nine Gems) of Vikramaditya's Court:** As a patron of art and learning, Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya attracted the best and the brightest from across his vast empire to

reside and work in his court. Nine very renowned scholars have been reported as having lived in the Gupta court and are known even today as the Navaratnas or Nine Gems. They are, (in no specific order): Dhanvantari, an early medical practitioner and perhaps the first surgeon in the world, regarded as the founder of the Ayurvedic system of medicine; Kshapanaka, who could also have been a Jain monk called Siddhasena the author of *Dvathrishatikas* and a prominent astrologer; Amarasimha, a Sanskrit grammarian and poet who wrote the *Amarakosha*, a thesaurus of Sanskrit, (the book contains 10,000 words and is arranged, like other contemporary works of its class, in metre to aid memory and comprises three books, therefore at times called *Trikhanda*, or the *Tripartite*); Shanku, an expert in geography and the least known of the nine; Vetalabhatta, a Maga Brahmin and the author of a sixteen stanza tribute to Vikramaditya, *Niti-pradeepa*, or the *Lamp of Conduct*, also renowned for his expertise in black magic and the tantric sciences; Ghatakarpara, a great sculptor and architect as well as a poet of renown; Kalidasa, perhaps the most famous of the nine, regarded as the greatest Sanskrit poet and dramatist who wrote three famous plays, two epic poems, and two lyrical poems, (plays—*Malavikaagnimitram* (*Malavika and Agnimitra*), *Abhijanashakuntalam* (*Shakuntala*), and *Vikramorvasiyam* (*The Story of Urvashi and Pururavas*); epic poems—*Raghuvamsa* (*The Dynasty of Raghu*), and *Kumarasamdhava* (*The Birth of Kumara*); lyrical poems—*Meghaduta* (*The Cloud Messenger*), and *Rtusamhara* (*The Exposition of the Seasons*)); Varahamihira, a great astronomer and mathematician who compiled the astrological compendium *Pancha Siddhantika* that contains the knowledge of Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Indian astronomical calculations, and also the *Brihat-Samhita*; and Vararuchi, a poet and grammarian of repute who is also considered the founder of the Vikrama Era in starting from 57 B.C.

***Fa-Hein's Visit:*** Fa-Hein (also known as Fa-Hsien, Faxian, etc.)—the first of the three renowned Chinese pilgrim travellers to visit India between the 5th and 7th centuries in search of knowledge, manuscripts and relics—travelled around the sub-continent during the reign of Chandra Gupta II. He lived in the kingdom for around 10 years, probably 400-410 A.D., and his writings provide a contemporary account of the state of the nation from the perspective of an intelligent and articulate foreigner. Although his records are fully focused on Buddhist religious work, he also noted some everyday facts and happenings, which provide a vivid picture of the life and times of Vikramaditya, both from the viewpoint of the ruling class as well as from that of the normal populace. The basic picture that emerges from Fa-Hein's writings is that of a happy country-rich, peaceful, and prosperous.

***General Condition of Gupta Empire under Chandragupta-II:*** We can get sufficiently reliable information about the conditions prevailing in North India at the beginning of the 5th century AD from the accounts of Fa Hien's travels. He speaks of the people, who were numerous and quite happy. There was no register of households and no necessity, was felt of magistrates and regulations. Capital punishment was abolished by Chandra Gupta II. He is also said to have installed a series of hospitals. His officers were obviously well paid and were consequently very efficient. To the common people, Chandra Gupta II is said to have often given away donations of dinaras and *suvarnas*. His munificence, as observed elsewhere was of world-wide fame.

***Religion of Chandra Gupta II:*** The catholic spirit of Chandra Gupta II, in religious matters is evidenced by the fact that the Udayagiri cave inscription and Mathura stone inscription are Saiva, the Sanchi inscription is Buddhist, and the other Udayagiri cave inscription is Vaisnava. So, too, among his ministers were persons belonging to different religious sects; Amrakaradeva was a Bauddha, while Virasena Saba and Sikharasvamin were Saivas. It has been suggested that Chandra Gupta II too, like his father, Samudra Gupta, performed a horse-sacrifice, and that a stone horse lying in a village, named Nagawa near Benares, which bears an inscription containing the letters *candragu*.....commemorates that event. Fa Hien who visited India between 405 and 411 AD, while

telling us that the empire was prosperous and well-governed, would lead us to think that Buddhism held a predominant position.

***Coins of Chandra Gupta II:*** The evidence of the coins indicates, on the other hand, that the rulers were Hindus and that Buddhism must have, by this period, long passed its zenith. More gold and silver coins of Chandra Gupta II have been discovered than those of his father, Samudra Gupta, or of his son, Kumara Gupta I. The most important innovations introduced by Chandra Gupta II were in the coinage of the country. His coins are characterized by considerable originality. The throned goddess is now replaced by purely Indian type of goddess seated on a lotus. His other types are the couch type, the umbrella type, the simha-parakrama type and original horseman type. Chandra Gupta II is also responsible for the introduction of a currency of silver and copper coins, the former being considerably extended by Kumara Gupta I and Skanda Gupta. Fa Hien's statement that cowries were the only articles used in buying and selling, though of great numismatic interest, has to be taken to be referring to petty transactions. The inscriptions mention the *suvarnas* and *dinaras* which were generously distributed by the Gupta sovereign among his people.

***Family of Chandra Gupta II:*** Chandra Gupta II had, besides Prabhavatigupta, two or three children from his chief Queen, Dhruvadevi. Kumara Gupta, his eldest son, succeeded him on the throne, while Govinda Gupta, and perhaps also Ghatotkaca Gupta were appointed viceroys to rule over certain provinces in his vast empire. Certain mediaeval chieftains of Kanarese districts claimed descent from Chandra Gupta II. The origin of this tradition is to be traced back to some unrecorded adventures of Vikramaditya in the Deccan.

Chandra Gupta II had become the master practically of the whole of Northern India, after having exterminated the Scythians of the Punjab, the north-west frontiers and Western India. Through the matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas, he had neutralized the only rival power in India. He wielded, in fact, complete domination even over the Vakataka territory, as shown above. He was unquestionably the paramount sovereign of India in his times. The latest date of Chandra Gupta II, which is given in the Sanchi pillar inscription, viz, 412- 13 AD, and the earliest date of his successor, Kumara Gupta I, mentioned in the Bilsad stone pillar inscription, viz., 415-16 AD, would indicate that Chandra Gupta II died and was succeeded by his eldest son, Kumara Gupta I sometime between 413 and 415 AD.

#### **2.1.8. Gupta Empire after Chandragupta II**

Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya left the Empire in an exalted state in terms of its national power, prosperity of both the kingdom and the people as well as the stability of governance. The borders were secure, trade both internal and external was thriving, and there were no internal revolts or insurgencies of any note. This period is also considered the Golden Age in the history of India.

Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya was succeeded on the throne by Kumara Gupta I who ruled from A.D. 415-455. It is a measure of the tranquillity and stability of the State that in this instance there is no mention of a succession struggle, actual or contrived. Kumara Gupta I ruled for 40 years and it can be presumed that the empire did not face any challenges for the greater part of his reign. This is corroborated by the coins of the period that have been discovered and inscriptions left behind. He is also reported to have carried out the Aswamedha, or 'horse sacrifice', to assert his paramount sovereignty over the Empire and outlying provinces, most probably not directly ruled, but paying tribute to the Gupta Empire. Surprisingly for an emperor who ruled for nearly half a century, there is an extraordinary dearth of records of events that mark the reign of Kumara Gupta.

There is a report that in A.D. 450 the Guptas were invaded by the Pushyamitra, probably from the Narmada region. The shock of the invasion brought about considerable instability to the Empire and could also have hastened the demise of Kumara Gupta, whose death has been fixed at having occurred in 455. The defeat was avenged by the crown prince Skanda Gupta, who succeeded to the throne. Towards the end of Kumara Gupta I's rule, in the middle of the 5th century, the Hun

hordes also erupted through the North West passes into mainland India. It can be said with certainty that the date of Kumara Gupta's death also marks the beginning of the decline of this illustrious dynasty.

The Huns who came to India were a branch of the White Huns-the Hepthalites from Central Asia. They were at times referred to as Hunas in Indian sources. The Guptas succeeded in keeping the Huns at bay for some time. As king, Skanda Gupta(A.D.455 to 467) effectively contained the Pushyamitra challenge and then turned his attention to the Hun invasion. Skanda Gupta was an experienced and mature individual with a touch of brilliance in military matters. He conclusively defeated the barbarians and India was saved, for the time being at least. This victory was celebrated by erecting a pillar in Bhattari in Ghazipur, which contains a detailed inscription of the defeat of the Huns.

Skanda Gupta's inscriptions provide a chronology of the repeated Hun invasions and his efforts to safeguard the kingdom. An inscription in Saurashtra dated 458. once again details the defeat of the barbarians and provides information that the viceroy of the West, Parnadatta, rebuilt the embankment of the lake in Girnar Hills and constructed a temple to Vishnu. The location of another column in a village east of Gorakhpur, in combination with the geographical site of inscriptions further in the west testifies to Skanda Gupta's rule across the entire extended Gupta Empire. A temple to the Sun God built in 465 in Bulundshahr is the last testament of the tranquillity that prevailed during most of Skanda Gupta's reign.

The Huns were back again few years later and in a ferocious attack occupied Gandhara and North West Punjab, ousting the diminished Kushans from their traditional seat of power. The White Huns appointed a Toramana, or viceroy, to rule Gandhara. By 470 they had started making further inroads into the interior of Gupta India. Toramana, who was a vassal of the White Hun king and responsible for carrying the war into the Gupta Empire. By this time Skanda Gupta was hard put to contain the Hun attacks.

Although the Huns were defeated in most of the conflicts, they were still able to carry out certain amount of plunder and the Gupta Empire was bleeding, both in terms of treasure and lives. The financial hardship that the Gupta Empire was facing is clearly demonstrated by the lessening of the gold content, from 108 to 73 grains each, in the coins minted during this period. Subsequently the coinage suffered further and extreme debasement. Skanda Gupta died around A.D. 467 and the Empire perished, but the dynasty remained. The Guptas continued to rule mainly the eastern provinces of the Empire as independent rulers with Magadha at the core for several more generations. There was a brief period of hiatus after the death of Skanda Gupta, who left no male heir capable of shouldering the burden brought about by the Hun incursions and rising to the challenge of protecting the Empire. This was a time of extreme existential crisis and the dynasty failed to produce a capable ruler to hold the Empire together. Pura Gupta a brother of Skanda Gupta, and the son of Kumara Gupta I and Queen Ananda, ascended the throne and ruled for a brief period. The only noteworthy deed of his reign was his attempt to restore the purity of Gupta coinage to its original glory, an attempt that was only partially successful.

After Skandagupta's death, the Guptas were unable to resist the repeated waves of Huna invasions and central authority declined rapidly. The succession of the kings that followed is uncertain. A number of administrative seals have been discovered with the names of the same kings, but in a varied order of succession, which points to a confused close of the dynasty. A major blow came at the end of the fifth century, when the Hunas successfully broke through into northern India. The Hunas who attacked northern India, and eventually ruled parts of it, were not entirely independent but functioned under a Huna overlord whose dominions extended from Persia to Khotan. The Huna king Toramana consolidated Huna power in Panjab, from where he invaded the Gupta kingdom. Toramana was succeeded by Mihirakula, who ruled at the same time as the Gupta



king, Narasimhagupta II, c. 495. In his struggle against Mihirakula, Narasimhagupta II received support from some powerful feudatories, particularly the Maukhari chief Ishvaravarman and Yashodharman of Malwa, whose Mandasor inscription states that Mihirakula paid tribute to him. The political impact of the Hunas in India subsequently subsided. Acting as a catalyst in the political process of northern India, however, the Hunas saw the slow erosion and final dissolution of the Gupta kingdom by the middle of the sixth century.

#### **2.1.9. Conclusion**

The Gupta rule is otherwise called as the 'Golden Age'. This period is also considered the Golden Age in the history of India for a number of reasons-in the Gupta Age for the first time in centuries the entire sub-continent was free of foreign rule; the Guptas had subdued petty kingdoms and unified the North India as no other dynasty had managed to do until then; their efficient system of administration brought about peace and stability; and the conquest of Saurashtra provided an added impetus to foreign trade and commerce leading to increased wealth and domestic prosperity. Perhaps the most important factor for this period to be considered of a 'Golden Age' was the distinctly secular nature of the government. While Vedic Hinduism was revived as the primary religion of the land, the rulers continued to be benevolent to other religions, a policy that became a hallmark of all great Indian monarchs who followed. Along with the revival of religion, Hindu culture also blossomed during this period, and notable intellectual progress was made-works on polity, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, philosophy and other subjects are unrivalled. Sanskrit literary achievements of the period have not been surpassed. By any measure, it was indeed the Golden Age. The Guptas, deservedly became the benchmark for all succeeding dynasties to rate their own performance. The title, 'Golden Guptas' is not out of place.

With the disintegration of the Gupta kingdom, the notion of a pan-Indian Empire came to an end until the advent of the Turks, although it was briefly revived during the reign of Harshavardhana in the seventh century. The post- Gupta period in northern India saw the emergence of regional kingdoms, mostly derived from the feudatories of the Guptas. The more important among them were the Later Guptas, the Maukharis, the Pushyabhutis and the Maitrakas. The Later Guptas had no connection with the Gupta main line. The Apsad inscription gives a detailed history of the dynasty which shows that the Later Guptas were rulers of Magadha with suzerainty over Malwa. They were eventually ousted from Magadha by the Maukharis of Kanauj, who originally held the region of western Uttar Pradesh.

#### **2.1.10. Summary**

- *The Gupta Empire, which ruled the Indian subcontinent from 320 to 550 AD, ushered in a golden age of Indian civilization. It will forever be remembered as the period during which literature, science, and the arts flourished in India as never before.*
- *During the late third century, the powerful Gupta family gained control of the local kingship of Magadha (modern-day eastern India and Bengal).*
- *The Gupta Empire is generally held to have begun in 320 AD, when Chandragupta I (not to be confused with Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Mauryan Empire), the third king of the dynasty, ascended the throne. He soon began conquering neighboring regions.*
- *Samudragupta, son and successor of Chandragupta I, began a conquest of the entire subcontinent. He conquered most of India, though in the more distant regions he reinstalled local kings in exchange for their loyalty.*
- *Samudragupta was also a great patron of the arts. He was a poet and a musician, and he brought great writers, philosophers, and artists to his court.*

- *Samudragupta was a devoted worshipper of the Hindu gods. Nonetheless, he did not reject Buddhism, but invited Buddhists to be part of his court and allowed the religion to spread in his realm.*
- *Samudragupta was briefly succeeded by his eldest son Ramagupta, whose reign was short.*
- *In 380 AD, a younger son of Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, came to the throne. Like his father, Chandragupta is often called “the Great.” Under his rule, the Gupta Empire reached its zenith, and this is considered the golden age of India.*
- *Reign of Chandragupta II, like his father’s, was marked by religious tolerance and great cultural achievements. Poetry and drama flourished at the court of Chandragupta II, at his new capital of Ujjain. Hindu legend tells of a great king of Ujjain called Vikramaditya, who kept a group of unrivaled poets, known as the Nine Gems, at his court.*
- *The Vikramaditya of legend is almost certainly Chandragupta II. The poets at his court included Kalidasa, one of the greatest authors of Sanskrit poetry and drama. His plays are some of the most famous works of Indian literature, and continue to have an influence on playwrights to this day.*
- *Visual art also flourished in the reign of Chandragupta II. Hindu art reached new heights, as exemplified in the carved reliefs of the Dashavata Temple.*
- *Chandragupta II also patronized Buddhist art. The Ajanta Caves, decorated with images of the life of Buddha, provide a vivid example of Gupta-era Indian painting. Chandragupta II also sponsored work on medicine, mathematics, and science.*
- *Besides presiding over a cultural golden age, Chandragupta II expanded the empire through military feats. He conquered many new lands for his empire, and even expanded the empire outside the Indian subcontinent. When he died in 415 AD, the Gupta Empire was at its height.*
- *Kumaragupta ruled after his father Chandragupta II. Later Kumaragupta was succeeded by Skandagupta, the last powerful ruler of the imperial Gupta line.*
- *The Gupta Empire declined precipitously under Chandragupta II’s successors. During this time the Huna or Huns by the Indians, and today are commonly called Hephthalites or White Huns invaded India. By the year 500 AD, the Huns had overrun the Gupta Empire.*
- *After the Gupta, the subcontinent once again became a patchwork of independent states. However, the legacy of the Gupta Empire, and the cultural renaissance it presided over, has continued to be a source of inspiration for India up to the present day.*

#### **2.1.11. Exercise**

- Discuss the various types of sources employed by historians to reconstruct history of the Gupta Empire.
- Give an account on the career and achievements of Chandragupta-I.
- Write an essay on the origin and original home land of the Gupta dynasty.
- Describe the achievements of Samudragupta parakramaka on the light of Allahabad prasasti.
- Assess Chandragupta II as one of the greatest Gupta monarchs.

#### **2.1.12. Further Readings**

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**Unit-2**  
**Chapter-II**  
**GUPTA EMPIRE**  
**Administration and Decline of the Gupta Dynasty**

**Structure**

- 2.2.0. Objective**
- 2.2.1. Introduction**
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  - 2.2.2.1. The Central Administration**
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- 2.2.3. Decline Of The Gupta Empire**
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  - 2.2.3.7. Policy of Religious Antagonism**
  - 2.2.3.8. Nature of the Gupta Empire**
- 2.2.4. Conclusion**
- 2.2.5. Summary**
- 2.2.6. Exercise.**
- 2.2.7. Further Readings**

### **2.2.0. Objective**

*In this lesson, students explore the history of India under the imperial Maurya. After completing this chapter, you will be able to:*

- *assess the significance of administration under the Gupta*
- *discuss the role of king in Gupta administration;*
- *know the provincial administration introduced by the imperial Guptas during their rule; and ;*
- *examine the factors responsible for the decline and disintegration of Gupta Empire after Skanda Gupta rule.*

### **2.2.1. Introduction**

The age of the Guptas has been regarded as the age of progress in India by all historians. Of course, Dr. Romila Thapar seems to be near the mark when she contends that when we accept the Gupta period as the classical age of ancient India we have accepted its limitations also. That the living standard which reach their peak were limited to upper classes alone and, further the classicism of the Gupta period was restricted to Northern India alone. With these limitation she agrees with others regarding the progress achieved during this period. Majority of scholars agree with the view that it was die "Golden Age" of Ancient India. Dr. V.A. Smith writes, "The age of great Gupta Kings presented a more agreeable and satisfactory picture than any other period in the history of Hindu India. Literature, Art and Science flourished in a degree beyond ordinary and gradual changes in the religion were effected without persecution." The empire of the Guptas was certainly less extensive than the empire of the Mauryas prior to them. The great Gupta ruler provided political unity to a large part of North India for nearly two centuries. The political institutions of the Gupta Age were not original but were rather "founded the historical traditions of the past and improved and adapted to suit contemporary conditions." They were both imposing and benevolent. The imperial perfection was achieved in the hands of the Guptas and their administrations was better than that of the Mauryas. This chapter discuss the administration of the Gupta Empire and also the causes for the decline of Gupta dynasty.

### **2.2.2. Gupta Administration**

In many respects, the Gupta administration constitutes the watershed between India's past and future traditions of polity and government. The most noticeable feature of the post-Mauryan administrative development was the gradual erosion of the government's centralized power. First, the Satavahanas and the Kushans entered into feudatory relations with the smaller kingdoms. Second, land-grants, which began from this time, created administrative pockets in the countryside managed by the religious beneficiaries. A third factor which contributed to the process of decentralization was the existence of autonomous governments in several cities of northern India. Guilds of traders from these cities even issued coins, which was normally the prerogative of the sovereign power. At several points, however, the old centralized system of administration was continued and even strengthened by the accession of new elements.

Fa-hien's account and lot of inscriptions issued by the Gupta monarchs provides useful information on the Gupta administration. Fa-hien characterises the Gupta administration as mild and benevolent. There were no restrictions on people's movements and they enjoyed a large degree of personal freedom. There was no state interference in the individual's life. Punishments were not severe. Imposing a fine was a common punishment. There was no spy system. The administration was so efficient that the roads were kept safe for travelers, and there was no fear of thieves. He mentioned that people were generally prosperous and the crimes were negligible. Fahien had also appreciated the efficiency of the Gupta administration as he was able to travel without any fear throughout the Gangetic valley. On the whole the administration was more liberal than that of the Mauryas.

### 2.2.2.1. The Central Administration

**King:** Monarchy was the form of government which was in vogue during the Gupta Age. But it was the benevolent monarchy. The king was the head of the state as well as that of administration. The theory of the divinity of kings was popular during the Gupta period by which the royal power and prestige had increased. The Guptas discarded the modest title of raja and adopted the high-sounding ones brought into vogue by the Kushans. The most typical example is maharajadhiraja which, along with its several variants, appears in Gupta inscriptions. The Guptas were fond of sounding titles and the whole administrative structure was saturated with designations and titles. The Gupta rulers assumed a number of titles such as '*Raja-dhiraja*', '*Maharaja-dhiraja*', '*Paramaraja-dhiraja*', '*Raja-dhirajashi*', '*Eka-dhiraja*', '*Pramdevata*', '*Parambhattarka*', '*Prithipala*', '*Paramesvara*', '*Samrat*', and '*Chakravartin*'. Samudragupta is described as equal to the gods "Dhanda" or "Kubera", "Varuna", "Indra" and "Antaka" or "Yama". Thus Gupta kings also claimed superhuman qualities for themselves. Certainly, the establishment of a vast empire had helped in increasing the powers of the rulers and divinity assigned to the kings.

The Gupta Kings enjoyed a large number of powers. Those powers covered the political, administrative, military and judicial fields. Samudragupta, Chandragupta-II and Skandagupta personally led their armies. The Gupta Kings appointed all the governors and important military and civil officers. They were also responsible to the king. The governors and their officers had to work under the control and guidance of the King. The King was the source of all honours and titles. All land in the empire was the property of the King who could give away the same to anybody he pleased. He could construct dams, give shelter to any one, impose, recover and remit taxes and impart the justice. Yet the Kings could not afford to be selfish despots. They had to rule according to "Rajya Dharma" and with the help of their ministers. In other words it is wrong to say that the Gupta Kings were autocrats. They shared their powers with ministers and other high officers. A large number of powers were delegated to the local bodies such as village Panchayats and town councils.

The king was required to adopt all means to win popularity among the people by respecting their wishes and promoting their welfare. The King toured the country with a view to keep himself in touch with the people. The important matters were decided in the joint meeting. The king respected the advice given by his ministers.

The secret of the success of the Gupta rulers lies in the principle of succession to kingship which was based on sound principles. The old law of the primogeniture was not in vogue then. The usual practice was selection by the dying King of the best fitted prince from amongst his sons. Samudragupta represents this kind of selection. The use of words "selected by the father in the Mathura inscriptions points to this in the case of Chandragupta-II as well. The personal life of the King was very simple. He took great interest in redeeming the poor from misery in protecting religion and in dispensing justice.

**Council Of Ministers:** It appears that the Gupta rulers had their councils. Perhaps, it consisted of princes, high officials and feudatories. Kalidas refers to the "*Mantri-Parishad*" or council of ministers. Some officers the designation of "Kanchuki" or "Chamberlain" acted as an agent between the King and the council. Whatever decisions were taken by the council of Ministers were conveyed to the King through an "*Amatya*".

It means that the matter was placed before the "Council of Ministers" and efforts were made to arrive at some conclusion then the decisions were conveyed to the King who was left to arrive at any conclusion he pleased. It was the duty of the "Council of Ministers" to advise the king but ultimately it had to obey the verdict of the King.

The emperor was assisted by a council of ministers of "*Mantri-Parishad*". The prominent "*Mantris*" among whom was the "Prime Minister" of the state known as "*Mantri Mukhya*". The

portfolios of war and peace, the chief Councillorship, military forces and law and order were held by different persons respectively known as, '*Mahasandhi Vigrahaka*', '*Amatya*', '*Mahabaladhikrita*' and '*Mahadandanayaka*'. The provinces were called Desas or Bhuktis and were governed by *Uparikas*. The *Uparika* may represent the *pradesikas* of the Ashokan epigraphs and in the same as the *Amatyas* of the Satavahana provinces. The provinces were divided into districts, called *Vishyas*. Each *vishaya* was administered by a royal official, known as the *Adhisthana Adhikarna*. *Ranabhandahi-Karana* was the military exchequer. *Dandaparsadhikarna*, office of the chief of police.

*Vinayasthiti-Sthapaka*, office of minister in charge of law and order. *Bhatasvapati*, head of the infantry and cavalry. *Mahapratikara* chief chamberlain. *Vinayasur*, chief censor. According to Kalidas, there were three ministers foreign-minister, finance minister and the law-minister. The ministers were expected to be experts in their spheres of works. In many cases their office was hereditary. The great secrecy was maintained with regard to the deliberations in the meetings of the ministers. Further, it appears that the Question of the succession to the throne was a function of the 'Council of Ministers'.

**Civil Officers:** They continued the traditional machinery of bureaucratic administration with nomenclature that was mostly borrowed or adopted from earlier times. The Guptas entire central government was under the direct control of the King. The most important officers of the royal court were known as "*Mahapratihara*" or "Receptionist", "*Rajamatya*" or "Adviser to the king" and "*Ajnasamchrikas*" or courtiers. The Gupta civil administration was a "bureaucracy of high-sounding officials like "*Rajapurusha*", "*Rajanayaka*", "*Rajaputra*", "*Rajamatya*", "*Mahasamanta*", "*Mahapratihara*" and "*Mahakumaramatya*" etc.

**Revenue And Police Officers:** The duties of revenue and police administration were not separate and were run by officials like '*Uparika*', '*Dashparadhika*', '*Chauroddharanika*', '*Dandika*', '*Dandapashika*', '*Gaulmika*', '*Kottapala*' or '*Kottupala*' '*Angarakshika*' and '*Ayuktaka-Viniyuktaka*', '*Rajuka*' etc.

**Military Officers:** The military officers referred to in the inscriptions are the '*Senapati*', '*Mahasenapati*', '*Baladhikrita*' '*Mahabaladhikrita*', '*Dandanayaka*', '*Sandhivigrahika*', '*Mahasandhivigrahika*', *Gopta* etc. They were the key functionary in the Gupta army. The Gupta army had four wings such as- informatory, cavalry, elephant and the navy. The main weapons of war were bows and arrows, swords, axes and spears.

**Judicial Officers:** Inscriptions of Gupta's refer to such judicial officers as '*Mahadanda nayaka*', '*Mahakshapatalika*' etc. Probably, '*Mahadandanayaka*' combined the duties of a judge and a general. The "*Mahadandanayaka*" was probably the "Great keeper of Records". It appears that the "*Kumaramatya*" a "*Bhondapashika*" and the "*Uparika*" had each his separate "*Adhikarna*" or "court or office" where the transactions pertaining to land were decided. It is possible that judicial matters were also decided there. According to Fa-Hien, punishments were very lenient and capital punishment was very rare. However, the testimony of Fa-Hien is not accepted and it is pointed out by the Kalidas, Visakhadatta that punishments were pretty harsh in the Gupta period-such as death, death by elephant etc. Four kinds of ordeals seemed to have been employed to ascertain the guilt or innocence of a person. These are by water, by fire, by weighing and by poison.

#### 2.2.2.2. Administrative Divisions

A study of the Gupta inscriptions shows that there was an hierarchy of administrative divisions from top to bottom. The empire was called by various names such as "*Rajya*", "*Rashtra*", "*Desha*", "*Mandala*", "*Prithvi*" and "*Avani*". It was divided into provinces which were called as, "*Bhukti*", "*Pradesha*" and "*Bhoga*". Provinces were divided into "*Vishayas*" and put under the control of "*Vishaya Patis*". "*Vishaya*" were divided in "*Nagaras*" and "*Nagares*" were divided into villages.

A part of a "Vishaya" was called "Vithi ." A union of villages was called "Pethaka" and "Santaka". Smaller units or divisions of a village were "Agrahara" and "Patta".

For the first time, the inscriptions give us an idea of systematic local administration in the Gupta period, which assumed many new dimensions. The series of northern Bengal epigraphs mentions the *adhishthanadhipakarana* (municipal board), vis. *ayadhipakarana* (district office) and *astakuladhipakarana* (possibly, rural board). The full *adhishthanadhipakarana* is said to consist of four members, the *nagarasresthi* (guild president), the *sarthavaha* (chief merchant), the *prathamakulika* (chief artisan) and the *prathamakayastha* (chief scribe). The precise significance of the *astakuladhipakarana* is unknown, but in one example it is said to be headed by the mahattaras (village elders) and also includes the *gramika* (village headman) and the *kutumbins* (householders).

#### **2.2.2.3.Provincial Administration**

The head of the provincial administration was known by various names and some of them were- "Uparika", "Gupta", Bhogika", "Bhogapati" and "Rajasthaniya". In certain cases, the son of the King or "Rajaputra" was appointed the Governor. The minister in attendance on the royal Governor was called "Kumaramatyā". There are the references to various provincial officials such as- "Baladhipakaranika" or "Head of the army or military"; "Dandapasadhipakaranika" or 'Chief of the Police'; 'Ranabhandarika' or 'Chief Justice'; 'Vinayasthiti Sthapaka' or 'Minister of Law and order'; 'Sadhanika' or 'Officer to deal with debts and fines'; 'Hiranya-Samudyika' or 'Currency Officer'; 'Tadayuktaka' or 'Treasury Officers'; 'Audrangika' or 'Collector of the Udranga tax'; 'Aurna-Sthanika' or 'Superintendent of silk factories'; etc.

#### **2.2.2.4.District Or "Vishaya" Administration**

The head of the "Vishaya" administration was the "Vishayapati" or District Magistrate'. The District Magistrate or "Vishayapati" was assisted in his work by the "Mahattaras" or "Village elders". "Gramikas" or "Village Headmen", "Saulkikas" or Collectors of Customs and tolls, "Gaulmika" or "officers in charge of forests and forts", "Agarharikas", "Dhruvadhipakaranikas" or "Treasurers" etc. There were many clerks in the department whose duty was to write and copy out the records and documents. The writers were called "Lekhakas" and "Diviras". The officer-in-charge of the documents was known as the "Karanika".

#### **2.2.2.5.City Administration**

The head of the city administration was known as the "Nagara-Rakshaka" or "Purapala". "Purapala Uparika" was another officer who controlled the heads of the various cities. A city was governed by a "Parishad". In the city, there was a reference of "Avasthika", who was a special officer who acted as the "Superintendent of Dharamsalas."

#### **2.2.2.6.Village Administration**

The village was the smallest unit of the administration. "Gramika" was the head of the village but there were other officials known as "Dutas" or "Messengers", heads men, Kartri, etc. He was assisted by a village assembly but due to the lack of references, it is not possible to describe the exact duties and functions of the assembly. The administrative and judicial business of villages were carried on by the Gramikas. He was assisted by a group of village elders, such as Kutumbikas, Mahamataras etc. The royal servant in the village was the Gram-Vridha.

#### **2.2.2.7.Source Of Revenue**

In order to meet the vast expenditure incurred on the maintenance of such a vast administration of the empire, the king levied different types of tax. Land revenue has always been an important source of income in an agricultural country. Land revenue was one of the primary sources of the income of the Guptas and they helped in increasing agricultural production and provided security to the cultivators. Waste lands were brought under cultivation and pasture land was also protected and increased. The government increased the man-made means of irrigation at both capital and provincial levels. All this helped in the growth of agricultural and animal husbandry.



During the Gupta days "*Uparika*" or "land- tax", which was levied on cultivators who had no property rights on soil, "*Vata*", "*Bhuta*", "*Dhanya*", "*Hiranya*" or gold, "*Adeya*" etc. Perhaps, it was one sixth of the total produce. Though there were other means of source of income like surplus or income tax known as "*Bhaga*", customs, mint, inheritance and presents etc. In addition to these taxes, fines known as "*Dasa-Paradha*" from offenders and free labour due to the king known as "*Vaishtika*" formed the source of income. On the whole, the Gupta administration was well organised. Peace and prosperity of the subjects and the progress achieved by them in practically all walks of their life was its proof. It is to be observed that the designation of Gupta officials continued even after the passing away of the Gupta empire. The early Kalacuriyas were the first to be influenced by the Gupta administrative system. Likewise the Chalukyas of Badami, the Rashtrakutas of Malkhed and the Western Chalukyas of Kalyani were also accepted the Gupta administrative system.

#### **2.2.2.8. Gupta Emperor and the Feudal Lord**

Under the Guptas, the scope and functions of royal authority underwent a significant change. The Guptas left a number of conquered states in a position of subordinate independence. With the exception of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and parts of Bengal, the kingdom was held by feudatories such as the Parivrajaka princes, who issued their own land-grants. The presence of these feudatories must have severely restricted the Guptas' royal authority. We do not have much information about military affairs, but can reasonably surmise that the troops supplied by the feudatories must have accounted for a good proportion of the Gupta army. The state no longer enjoyed a monopoly over the possession of horses and elephants. The significant aspect of Gupta bureaucracy was that, since it was less organized and elaborate than the Mauryan administration of the third century B.C. (seen in Kautilya's Arthashastra), it allowed several offices to be combined in the hands of the same person and posts tended to become hereditary. In the absence of close supervision by the state, village affairs were now managed by leading local elements who conducted land transactions without consulting the government.

Similarly in urban administration, organized professional bodies enjoyed considerable autonomy. The law-codes of the Gupta period, which provide detailed information about the functioning of the guilds, even entrusted these corporate bodies with an important share in the administration of justice. With the innumerable jatis (which were systematized and legalized during this period) governing a large part of the activities of their members, very little was left for central government. Finally, the Gupta kings had to take account of the brahman donees, who enjoyed absolute administrative privileges over the inhabitants of the donated villages. Thus in spite of the strength of the Gupta kings, institutional factors working for decentralization were far stronger during this period. This Gupta administration provided the model for the basic administrative structure, both in theory and in practice, throughout the early medieval period.

#### **2.2.3. Decline Of The Gupta Empire**

After the downfall of the Kushanas in north and Satavahanas in south, no great power had arisen in India. For more than a hundred years, India was divided into many independent states that continuously struggled for power. It was the Guptas who established a strong foundation of their Empire by coalescing the disintegrated republics. The Gupta period constituted the "Golden era" in history of ancient India. However, such a vast and strong Gupta Empire which was built by the bravery of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II, began to decline and ultimately collapsed towards the end of 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The decline and fall of the Gupta Empire can be attributed to many causes.

##### **2.2.3.1. Discord in the Imperial Family**

The discord within the imperial family was supposed to be the primary cause for the decline of the Gupta Empire. After the death of Kumaragupta I there was probably a struggle for succession

among the successors. However Skandagupta did ascend the throne. But the family feud initiated by the successors of Kumaragupta continued even in the following generations, which weakened the family integrity of the Gupta Dynasty. Skanda Gupta had to exert himself strenuously to maintain the integrity of the empire against the attack of the Pusyamitras and Hunas. There was a lot of confusion in the country after his death. The result is that it is practically impossible to give a definite account of the history of the imperial Guptas after his death. We have the names of many kings but it is difficult to ascertain their dates and their relation with one another. There was no law of primogeniture for succession to the throne and it is possible that there may have been struggle for the throne. It is suggested that there were rival Gupta monarch ruling the country at the same time from their respective capitals. The only rulers of any importance after Skanda Gupta were Puru Gupta, Kumara Gupta II and Budha Gupta and the others did not exercise much influence. The result was that they were not able to check the decay that had set in and no wonder the Gupta empire fell. Since the latter Guptas were busy in civil war over the accession to the throne, they could not pay attention towards the administrative maintenance of the vast Empire. Thus the struggle for throne inside the family substantially weakened the central authority in the provinces and feudatories. Thus family grudges continued to be the primary reason for the downfall of the Guptas.

#### **2.2.3.2.Absence of strong centralized administration.**

Since the later Guptas could not check the forces of disintegration, hence, there absence of strong centralised administration. Thus, lack of a centralised management contributed to a steady downfall of the Guptas. Provincial administration was extremely weak and consequently the regional governors enjoyed a great deal of authority and freedom. Again due to exhaustion of the royal exchequer, the Guptas were suffering from shortage of money and accordingly could not spend enough money for provincial administration. Finally the local chiefs or the governors, who were working under the supremacy of the central authority, unfurled the flag of independence. Thus the vast Gupta Empire was disintegrated into provinces and was ruled by local governors, who were originally feudatories of the Gupta suzerain.

#### **2.2.3.3.Economic Bankruptcy of the Empire**

The reign of Skandagupta marked the beginning of the decline of the Gupta Empire. In spite of the sweeping military success against the Pushyamitras and the Huns, the strain of constant war depleted the resources of the realm. The debased coinage and the lack of variety of coins during Skandagupta testified the financial drain of the royal exchequer of the Guptas. The death of Skandagupta and the short reign of Puru Gupta hastened the pace of decline. The latter rulers could not hold back the administration of the vast Gupta Empire. Buddha Gupta was the last great ruler who tried to halt the process of decline for sometime, but his hold over the western part of the Gupta Empire was very weak. After the reign of Skanda Gupta (467 AD) any Gupta coin or inscription has been found in western Malwa and Saurashtra. The migration of guild of Silk weavers from Gujarat to Malwa in AD 473 and their adoption of non-productive professions show that there was not much demand for cloth produced by them. The advantages from Gujarat trade gradually disappeared. After the middle of the fifth century the Gupta kings made desperate attempts to maintain their gold currency by reducing the content of pure gold in it. The loss of western India complete by the end of the fifth century, must have deprived the Guptas of the rich revenues from trade and commerce and crippled them economically, and the princes of Thaneswar established their power in Haryana and then gradually moved on to Kanauj.

#### **2.2.3.4.Foreign invasions:**

Foreign invasions was the second major factor in the decline and disappearance of the Guptas. The invasion of barbaric tribe Pushyamitra was not the decisive. A far more important invasion was that of the White Huns, who, after settling in the Oxus vally, invaded India. Though

Dr. R.C. Majumdar is of the opinion that Skandagupta successfully had delayed the violent Hun invasion by Toraman and Narasimha Gupta had suppressed the forthcoming invasions, yet most of the historians are inclined to suggest that the Hun incursion had brought about the immediate downfall of the Guptas. Internal dissension already had decomposed the base of the Gupta family and the Hun invasion was just adding of fuel to fire. The Hun plundering not only exhausted the royal exchequer but also weakened the military organisation of the Guptas. The Hun inroads in western India completely had destroyed the lucrative trade of the Guptas with Rome. The ports and markets of western India were completely devastated due to the invasion of the Huns and their associates. Toramana who annexed a large portion of the north-western region including parts of Modern U.P. was followed by his son, Mihirakula, who became the overlord of north India. Indeed he was defeated by Yashodharman of Malwa but the repercussions of these invasions were disastrous for the Gupta Empire.

#### **2.2.3.5. Rise of Yashodharman**

According to Dr. R.C. Majumdar, the death blow of the Gupta Empire was dealt not by the Huns but by the ambitious chiefs like Yashodharman. It is true that the Huns caused destruction on a large scale but the force of their success was spent up very soon. However, the rift caused by Yashodharman widened gradually and ultimately the Gupta empire was completely smashed. To begin with Yashodharman was merely a local chief. He took advantage of the troubled situation in Malwa and established his independent authority. He became so strong that he not only defeated Mihirakula but was also able to defy the Gupta Emperor. He might have made many conquests at the cost of the Gupta Empire although their exact nature and extent is not known. It is stated in the Mandasore inscription that his suzerainty was acknowledged over the area bounded by the Himalaya in the north, the ocean in the West, the Brahmaputra in the east and Ganjam district in the South. It appears that Yashodharman could not maintain his position for a long time. He rose and fell like a meteor. However, his dazzling military success led others to follow his example. If Yashodharman could defy success led others to follow his example. If Yashodharman could defy the Gupta empire, there was no reason why others could not do likewise. In such an atmosphere, the future of the Gupta Empire was doomed.

#### **2.2.3.6. Revolt of the Feudatories:**

As a result of the weakening of Central Authority a number of feudal chieftains, principally those of the north-western region, assumed the status of independent rulers might more some names in this regard such as Maitrakas (of Kathiawar), Panivarajaks (of Budndhelkhand), Unchkalpas, Laxman in Allahabad, Maukharis in Thneswar Etc. After the reign of Buddhagupta, the status of certain, governors of North Bengal and Yamuna - Narmada area around Magadh too assumed independence and became to be known as the later Guptas. By far one of the most important rebellions was that of Yashodharman of western Malwa who became independent and established his kingdom. Nevertheless, it set a pattern for other feudal chieftans, who in due course, broke away from Central authority..

#### **2.2.3.7. Policy of Religious Antagonism**

Last but not the least, we might note that the change in the Gupta polity from one of militancy to that of pacifism greatly affected the composition of the empire. We do have instance some of the later Gupta kings who changed from Hinduism to Buddhism and this was reflected in the total military inefficiency of the later Guptas. It is well known fact that the earlier Gupta kings were the patrons of Hinduism in a militant form. However, some of the later Gupta kings such as Buddha Gupta, Thathagata Gupta and Baladitya came to have Buddhist leanings. This new development was bound to effect adversely the fortunes of the Gupta Empire. Like the Mauryas after Asoka, 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, it would have been impossible

to maintain the integrity of the empire. Hiuen Tsang tells us that when Mihirakula was ruling at Sakala or Sialkot, he proceeded to invade the territory of Baladitya, the Gupta king. When the latter heard of this, he addressed his ministers in these words, “ I hear that these thieves are coming and I cannot fight with them; by the permission of my ministers I will conceal my poor person among the bushes of the morass”. Not only he said so, he actually withdrew to an island with many of his subjects. It is stated by Hiuen Tsang that Mihirakula was made a prisoner but was allowed to go on the request of the mother of Baladitya. It is not possible to say how far the story of Baladitya as stated by Hiuen Tsang is true but it is clear that these Gupta kings did not possess much courage or military strength. Their kindness and piety was bound to affect adversely the fortunes of the Gupta empire. Such rulers could not maintain their supremacy in the country and were bound to be thrown into the background.

#### **2.2.3.8. Nature of the Gupta Empire**

Apart from these three major groups of causes, that led to the final disappearance of the Gupta empire, it is to be borne in mind that no empire after the Mauryas was a reality. Very often they were total fictions. With the disappearance of the Mauryan empire no empire in its full connotation came into existence in India since we had no tradition like that of the Greeks where it is held that the State comes into existence for the necessities of life but continues to exist for the good of life, and man, by nature, is a political animal. Somehow, after the Mauryan era the thinking of India became apolitical. The first factor that contributed for this outlook of Indians was the emergence of feudalism about which evidence is there from the days of the Satavahanas. This tendency grew in the Christian era and was firmly established by the seventh century AD.

Along with this development one more saboteur of political consciousness was the religious perception of ancient Indians. Beginning before the Christian era it came to be gradually established that the kingship has its own dharma known as *rajya-dharma* while the people had a handful of dharmas like *varnashrama dharma* and the *grihadharma*. All these dharmas led the individual loyalty or perception towards a non-political entity. This thinking is given religious sanction by the priestly order. This thinking is given religious sanction by the priestly order of the day. Thus the State never was the architectonic factor in the life of ancient India except during the Mauryan era. It is this perception of ancient India that made the emergence and disappearance of hundreds of States mere non-events.

#### **2.2.4. Conclusion**

The last great king of the Gupta was Skanda Gupta who ascended the throne about 455 A.D. Even during the later years of Kumar Gupta's reign, the empire was attacked by a tribe called Pushyamitra but it was repulsed. And immediately after the accession of Skanda Gupta, Hunas made inroads, but they too were repelled. However, fresh waves of invaders arrived and shattered the fabric of the Gupta Empire. Although in the beginning the Gupta king Skanda Gupta tried effectively to stem the march of the Hunas into India, his successors proved to be weak and could not cope with the Hunan invaders, who excelled in horsemanship and who possibly used stirrups made of metal. Although the Hunan power was soon overthrown by Yasodharman of Malwa, the Malwa prince successfully challenged the authority of the Guptas and set up Pillars of victory commemorating his conquest (AD 532) of almost the whole of northern India. Indeed Yasodharman's rule was short lived, but he dealt a severe blow to the Gupta empire. The Gupta empire was further undermined by the rise of the feudatories. The governors appointed by the Gupta kings in north Bengal and their feudatories in Samatata or south-east Bengal broke away from the Gupta control. The later Guptas of Magadha established their power in Bihar. Besides, the Maukharis rose to power in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and had their capital at Kanauj. Probably by AD 550 Bihar and Uttar Pradesh passed out of Gupta hands. And the rulers of Valabhi established their authority in Gujarat and Western Malwa. Thus, the causes of the downfall and disappearance of the Guptas were

basically not different from those that brought the end many ancient and medieval dynasties. Over and above the usual causes of administrative inefficiency, weak successors and stagnant the fall of the Guptas: dynastic dissensions, foreign invasions and some internal rebellions.

#### **2.2.5. Summary**

- *According inscriptions, the Gupta kings assumed titles like Paramabhattaraka, Maharajadhiraja, Parameswara, Samrat and Chakravartin.*
- *The king was assisted in his administration by a council consisting of a chief minister, a Senapati or commander-in-chief of the army and other important officials.*
- *The king maintained a close contact with the provincial administration through a class of officials called Kumaramatyas and Ayuktas.*
- *Provinces in the Gupta Empire were known as Bhuktis and provincial governors as Uparikas. They were mostly chosen from among the princes. Bhuktis were subdivided into Vishyas or districts. They were governed by Vishyapatis.*
- *Nagara Sresthis were the officers looking after the city administration. The villages in the district were under the control of Gramikas.*
- *Fahien's account on the Gupta administration provides useful information. He characterises the Gupta administration as mild and benevolent. The administration was so efficient that the roads were kept safe for travelers, and there was no fear of thieves. He mentioned that people were generally prosperous and the crimes were negligible.*
- *Fahien had also appreciated the efficiency of the Gupta administration as he was able to travel without any fear throughout the Gangetic valley. On the whole the administration was more liberal than that of the Mauryas.*
- *After Skandagupta's death, the Guptas were unable to resist the repeated waves of Huna invasions and central authority declined rapidly.*
- *The succession of the kings that followed is uncertain, which points to a confused close of the dynasty.*
- *A major blow came at the end of the fifth century, when the Hunas successfully broke through into northern India. The Huna king Toramana consolidated Huna power in Panjab, from where he invaded the Gupta kingdom.*
- *The political impact of the Hunas in India subsequently subsided. Acting as a catalyst in the political process of northern India, however, the Hunas saw the slow erosion and final dissolution of the Gupta kingdom by the middle of the sixth century.*
- *With the disintegration of the Gupta kingdom, the notion of a pan-Indian Empire came to an end until the advent of the Turks, although it was briefly revived during the reign of Harshavardhana in the seventh century.*

#### **2.2.6. Exercise**

- Examine the salient features of the Gupta administration.
- Discuss the power and role of Kings in Gupta Administrative set up.
- Examine the causes for the decline of Gupta Empire.
- Discuss the economic and foreign invasion theory responsible for disintegration of Gupta empire.
- Describe the provincial and local administration of the Gupta Empire.

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**Unit-2**  
**Chapter-III**  
**SOCIETY AND ECONOMY UNDER THE GUPTA**  
**Development of literature, Science and Technology, Art and Architecture, Religion and Economic conditions.**

**Structure**

**2.3.0. Objectives**

**2.3.1. Introduction**

**2.3.2. Social Conditions**

**2.3.2.1. *Varna*/Jati System**

**2.3.2.2. Position of Women's.**

**2.3.2.3. Dress and Ornaments under Gupta Empire .**

**2.3.2.4. Amusements under Gupta Empire**

**2.3.3. Religious Life**

**2.3.4. Art and Patronage**

**2.3.4.1. Buddhist Architecture of Gupta Period:**

**2.3.4.2. Hindu Temple Architecture of Gupta Period**

**2.3.4.3. Sculpture of Gupta Period**

**2.3.4.4. Paintings of Gupta Period**

**2.3.5. Literature**

**2.3.6. Education**

**2.3.6.1. System of Education during Gupta Age**

**2.3.6.2. Noted Centre of Education**

**2.3.7. Science and Technology**

**2.3.7.1. Mathematics under Gupta Empire**

**2.3.7.2. Astronomy under Gupta Empire**

**2.3.7.3. Medicine under Gupta Empire**

**2.3.7.4. Astrology under Gupta Empire**

**2.3.7.5. Chemistry and Metallurgy under Gupta Empire**

**2.3.8. Economic Condition during Gupta Rule**

**2.3.8.1. Agriculture**

**2.3.8.2. Industrial production**

**2.3.8.3. Guild System**

**2.3.8.4. Trade & Commerce**

**2.3.8.5. Roads & Trade Routes**

**2.3.8.6. Land Grant and feudalism**

**2.3.9. The Debate on Golden Age**

**2.3.10. Conclusion**

**2.3.11. Summary**

**2.3.12. Exercise**

**2.3.13. Further Readings**

### 2.3.0. Objectives

*This chapter give a brief outline of the society and economy of India under the Gupta rule. After learning this lesson the students will be able to explain*

- *the condition of Indian society and religion under the Gupta rule.*
- *the growth of literature, language and the contribution of scholars like Kalidasa and Visakadatta under the patronization of Gupta Emperor.*
- *the art and architecture of the Gupta period as well as the progress in sciences n India; and*
- *the economic condition of India under the Gupta rule.*

### 2.3.1. Introduction

The period from the fourth to the seventh centuries is important in ancient India history, as it was a transitional period in terms of political, social, economic, religious and cultural historians. The period has been debated and a rich historiography is available for the study of this period. Nationalist historians like R.C. Mazumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri etc exaggerated the achievements of ancient India and coined the term 'golden age' for the Gupta period. To the nationalists, the Gupta period surpassed all other periods in ancient Indian history in its achievements in political unity, economic prosperity, art, architecture and literature. In the post-independence era, the Marxist historians in a critique of the nationalist historiography postulated the theory of 'Indian Feudalism' from the Gupta period onwards. As a critique of 'Indian Feudalism', B.D. Chattopadhyaya and Hermann Kulke forwarded the processualist model/integrative model of state formation for the study of the post-Gupta India or early medieval India. Chattopadyaya and Kulke argued that landgrants to brahmanas and temples, instead of decentralization of the political authority of bigger and smaller states, legitimized the exercise of royal authority in the countryside and hence, integrated the territorial units and chiefs into the emerging local, sub-regional and regional states.

### 2.3.2. Social Conditions

For reconstruction of social conditions under the Guptas, we depend heavily on the contemporary legal texts, or smrtis. A number of such texts, most of which took the Dharmasastra of Manu as their basis, were written during this period, the best-known being the Yajnavalkya, the Narada, the Brhaspati and the Katyayana. These smrtis provide an ideal representation of society from the brahmanical point of view. Contemporary Sanskrit plays and prose literature, however, do not always corroborate this ideal and it may be safely assumed that the injunctions of the smrtis were not necessarily strictly enforced. This conclusion is supported by the inscriptions of the period and by the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang.

#### 2.3.2.1.Varna/Jati System

In the Gupta period, brahmanical reaction against Buddhism and Jainism became stronger. As a result, *varna* (i.e. caste-) based social stratification and the supremacy of the brahmans (the highest caste) received much greater emphasis. It is difficult to ascertain the caste of the Guptas, but they were, in all probability, brahmans themselves and strongly supported the brahmanical social order. The brahmans were given land on a large scale and they claimed many privileges which are listed in the Narada. For example, under no circumstances was capital punishment to be inflicted on them or their property confiscated.

The ksatriyas (the second, or warrior, caste) continued to enjoy great prestige due to their political influence, and there was a tacit understanding between these two upper castes in sharing social and political power. The degeneration of the vaisyas (the third, or trader, caste), which had begun earlier, intensified during this period. Because of advanced agricultural techniques and developments in handicrafts, the condition of the sudras (the fourth, or menial, caste) improved and there was no great difference between a poor vaisya and a prosperous sudra .



The vaisyas, however, retained their supremacy in industry and commerce and held important positions on the municipal boards. There are repeated references to the sudra peasantry in the contemporary sources as opposed to their status as agricultural labourers in earlier times. The smrtis of the Gupta period make a clear distinction between the sudras and the slaves. This period saw the emergence of the untouchables, who were beyond the pale of the caste structure and lived outside the city boundaries. From this cumulative evidence it appears that the significance of the traditional *varna* structure, based on colour and race, was being seriously undermined and the jati structure, based on occupational status, was becoming increasingly important.

Like the *varnas*, the jati system was hereditary and the number of jatis gradually proliferated. As a social institution the jatis were independent of the *varnas*, although Hsuan-tsang describes occupations demarcated for each of the four *varnas*. In this period the jati system was not particularly strict and it was still possible for a person to move from one occupational status to another. That social mobility was not altogether restricted is demonstrated by examples of brahmins taking up the professions of merchant, architect or government official. Hsuan-tsang gives a comparative account of the political rights of the four *varnas*. He had seen five brahmin, five ksatriya, two vaisya and two sudra kings. However, people increasingly came to be identified with the small occupational groups and the wider *varna* consciousness was replaced by a commitment to the jatis.

The brahmins had tried to explain the creation of the jatis in terms of the mixed castes, born out of intermarriage between the *varnas*, which was prohibited but practised. The father of Bana married a sudra woman. The Yajnavalkya prescribed that the son of a sudra mother and a brahmin father should inherit his father's property, although this right was not recognized in the Brhaspati, a text composed towards the end of the Gupta period. The contemporary smrtis mention a number of mixed castes.

#### **2.3.2.2.Position of Women's**

Although women were idealized in literature and art, in practice they had a distinctly subordinate social position. Education of a limited kind was permitted to upper-class women but they were not allowed to participate in public life. Early marriage was advocated and strict celibacy was recommended for widows. The attitude of the contemporary smrtis towards women was one of contempt. Women were described as almost a consumer commodity, exclusively owned by their husbands. But there were exceptions to this norm in real life. For example, as mentioned earlier, Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II, managed the affairs of state for some 20 years. On the whole, however, the only women to enjoy a measure of freedom were those who deliberately chose to opt out of the prevailing system of regulations by becoming a Buddhist nun or a courtesan.

#### **2.3.2.3.Dress and Ornaments under Gupta Empire**

The male wore an upper garment and a lower dhoti though the Scythians introduced coats, overcoats and trousers, often worn by the Indian kings. Head dress was worn on special occasions. Women either wore a petticoat and a sari. A long sari had served both the purposes. To cover the bust a bodice was used below the sari. On ceremonial occasions silk garments were worn. Ornaments were used over the forehead. Various designs were found in the earrings and necklaces. A gauzy pearl ornament was used over the breasts as well as the thighs. There were armlets, bangles, rings and anklets. Men also were fond of wearing ornaments. False hair was used to give different artistic shapes. The use of paints, pastes, powders and lipsticks was known.

#### **2.3.2.4.Amusements under Gupta Empire**

Amusements consisted of theatrical entertainments, dances, performances and musical concerts. Though gambling was a popular pastime, animal fighting, wrestling and athletics was no less popular in the Gupta society and was in vogue both in towns and villages.

### 2.3.3. Religious Life

The Gupta period has been traditionally known as a period of brahmanical renaissance. The Gupta Period was marked by great transformation in Hinduism and Buddhism. Gupta rulers themselves were very sophisticated and benevolent. Though they were patrons of Brahmanism, yet the Guptas were highly tolerant towards the other creeds.

The Gupta period had witnessed the synthesis of Brahmanical Hinduism with heterodox creeds. The integration of various heterodox creeds like Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shakti cult with Brahmanical Hinduism, had marked the culmination of the Gupta period. The synthesis of heterodox creeds gave rise to neo-Hinduism or Puranic Hinduism, the flavour of which is still found in contemporary Hinduism. The ideal of Neo-Hinduism had almost changed the concept of Vedic Brahmanism, but the form however remained unchanged. Neo-Hinduism had shed its concept of multi-cult creators. The concept of three gods connected with life, death and destruction united together as "Trinity" or "Trayi" had first materialised during the Gupta Period. According to neo-Hinduism, the three gods Brahma-Vishnu-Maheswar were united in the trinity concept or Trayi. According to scholars, due to religious admixture of heterodox creeds, the concept of "monism" or the doctrine of different schools of thought had evolved during the Gupta period. Gradually Brahma, considered the God of creation, passed into oblivion. Only Siva and Vishnu dominated the neo-Hindu doctrine of the Gupta period. The Puranas were rewritten in order to accommodate Siva and Vishnu as the chief Gods. Not only they were considered the chief Gods, but were also attributed with extraordinary powers. Most of the Vedic Gods passed into oblivion and were replaced by new Gods according to the concept of neo-Hinduism. Gods like Siva, Vishnu, Kartikeya, and Ganesha who belonged to the heterodox creeds formerly replaced all the Vedic Gods. Thus due to religious movements during the Gupta Period, Hinduism became the vast mosaic of various religious patterns, combining religious ideas of both the old and the new.

One of the interesting features of religious development during the Gupta Period was the wide prevalence of worship of 'Shakti' or mother goddess. 'Tantricism', or the cult of Tantra that preached the worship of female deities, had initiated the fertility cult. Hinduism, prevalent in the contemporary Gupta Period could not escape the influence of the Shakti cult. Henceforth it gave rise to worship of several female gods, who themselves were considered the wives of the chief gods. The cult of mother Goddess became very popular. Originally "Shakti" was worshipped as the goddess of force in the form of Kali, Chamunda and Bhima. In the "Markandeya Purana" Chandi is described as a destroyer of Mahishasura, the symbol of evil. Gradually the character and concept mellowed down into goddess Shakti, who was considered the wife of Siva and mother of Kartikeya, Ganesha etc. The concept of Siva and Durga was very popular. Durga was the new form of Shakti. Two opposite cults were ascribed to the concept of Shiva-Shakti. Their violent aspect came to be known as Rudra or Ghora or Chamunda respectively. In their graceful manifestation they came to be known as Aghora Mahadeva and Uma. Uma, Haimavati, Durga, Kali were worshipped as the various manifestations of the wife of Shiva. Lakshmi was worshipped as the wife of Vishnu. Puranas were re-written to accommodate the new Gods and Goddesses in Hindu temples. The Puranas described the cult of neo-Hinduism and narrated the mutual relationship of various gods and goddesses, worshipped according to the concept of neo-Hinduism.

Prevalence of idol worship was another feature of Puranic Hinduism of the Gupta period. Specification of images of different gods and goddesses were incorporated from Puranas. The cult of Kartikeya and Ganesha was also very prominent during that period. The Kartikeya cult was popular among the Kushanas is evident from the figure of Kartikeya on the coins of Hushikha, a Kushana chief. Kartikeya was originally considered the war God. Later he was included in the family of Shiva-Parvati. Ganesha was also unknown before the 300 A.D. In the Gupta period he became a popular God. Many images of Ganesha made of stone and terracotta, belonging to the

Gupta period has been found. The concept of Goddess Lakshmi underwent an evolutionary change during the Gupta Period. Lakshmi was originally Gaja-Lakshmi and a solitary goddess. Later, according to the concept of neo-Hinduism, goddess Lakshmi was considered the wife of Lord Vishnu and the Puranas delineated the story of her birth from the ocean. Various virtues were added to her character and she was popularised as the goddess of wealth.

In the Gupta era, the Vedic form of worship by performance of yajna did not survive much. In order to make a synthesis with Vedic Hinduism, 'yajna' or sacrifice was retained along with idol worship. Yajna lost its prominence in the form of image worship. Bhakti or the devotion of the worshipper became more important. Still priests were needed to perform the worship, but the concept of priesthood lost its dominance due to the emergence of Bhakti cult. Worship of god henceforth became personal matter of the worshipper. Priests became irrelevant due to the decline of yajna or sacrifice. Therefore Almighty became a much more concern for the individual. Men started believing that he had four fold objects in life- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

Apart from Hinduism, Buddhism also underwent transformation during the Gupta Period. Since Gupta rulers were tolerant towards other religious creeds, all religions flourished during that period. Nalanda received patronage from the Guptas. However the typical change that entered the folds of Buddhism, was the rise of Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism. Buddhism adopted worship of mother goddesses like Tara. Buddhism also accepted the theory of incarnation of Buddha and thus prepared the way for assimilation by Hinduism. Jainism however remained much original in its creed. It received the patronage of the merchant community of western India. Jainism continued to flourish in south and western India, while neo-Hinduism became a dominating creed of north India.

The religious movement in India during the Guptas therefore is a synthesis and integration of different heterodox creeds with Brahmanical Hinduism, which ultimately led to a complete transformation of Brahmanical Hinduism prevalent in ancient India.

#### **2.3.4. Art and Patronage**

The Gupta period had witnessed a brilliant development in the fields of art, architecture, sculpture and literature. The enormous wealth of the country during the imperial Guptas had led to a cultural resurgence in India. According to historians, in architecture, sculpture, and painting and in other branches of art, the Gupta rulers excelled more than most of the dynasties that ruled India. The period witnessed a culmination of earlier tendencies and style and the beginning of new style and technique in the field of architecture.

##### **2.3.4.1. Buddhist Architecture of Gupta Period:**

Architecture of the Gupta Period Buddhist art had flourished during the Gupta period. A famous rock-cut monastery in Ajanta caves consists of several Chaitya halls and numerous residential Viharas. The interiors are covered with painted murals that feature superb figures drawn with a gracefully winding line. Large stone figures, stone and terra-cotta relief and large and small bronze statuettes are made in the refined Gupta style; the level of production is uniformly high. Several significant Buddhist pieces of art were created after 7th century, during the reign of the Pala Dynasty and Sena dynasty (730-1197). Images in bronze and hard black stone from Nalanda and elsewhere reveal a development of the Gupta style, with extensive attention towards ornamentation and fabrication.

The Gupta architecture is revealed through the cave and temple architecture of those times, which also include two Buddhist stupas. The "Mirpur Khas stupa" was built in 4th century A.D., which contains a number of arches. The curve of this respective Stupa denotes that arch-making was known to the Indians before the advent of Muslims to India. The relics of the "Dhameka Stupa" built of bricks represent the idiom of the Gupta architecture. The caves of the Buddhist and Hindus sects denote the architectural pattern of the Guptas. Ajanta, Ellora caves and the Bagh cave paintings denote the Buddhist outline, which was very popular during the Gupta period. Hindu

caves are found in Udayagiri, Bhopal. The cave paintings of Gupta period conspicuously differ from the others due to their artistic elegance and design.

#### **2.3.4.2.Hindu Temple Architecture of Gupta Period**

The Gupta Age indicated a new era in the history of temple architecture. Free standing sculptural temple were the chief features of temple architecture during the Gupta period. For the first time they initiated permanent materials like brick and stone, instead of perishable materials like bamboo, wood etc. Structural temples, instead of cave temples were erected during this period for the convenience of idol worship. The Gupta architects had invented an artistic standard, which became the general rule of temple construction in the successive ages. The stone temple in Deogarh of Dasavatara with its excellent carvings and panels on the walls is extant remains of Gupta architecture. The 'shikara' or top of the temple are the chief attractions about these constructions. The talent of Gupta architect found expression in the sculpture of the 'dome'. The Shiva temple at Nachana, the Parvati Temple at Ajaya Garh in Uttar Pradesh, the Vishnu Temple in Central Province, the Ekkalinga Shiva Temple at Satana, are some of the extant remains of Gupta architectural pieces.

The main temple or the 'Garvagriha' housed the image of God and the original temple was connected to the hall by a vestibule. The whole temple complex is surrounded by a spacious courtyard. One of the chief features of temple architecture was to write down texts around temple buildings, which were faithfully followed in the later years.

#### **2.3.4.3.Sculpture of Gupta Period**

The style of Gandhara School of art and sculpture had attained an unprecedented excellence during the Gupta period. The style had originally developed in Mathura, which was carried to perfection in Sarnath and where Buddha had turned the wheel of law. Gupta sculpture outgrew the sculptural phrase of Bharhut and Sanchi, where the subject matter was animal figures and trees. During the Gupta period, spiritual and religious themes dominated the field of sculptures. Most of the sculptures focused of gods like Shiva, Vishnu and Buddha. The sculptures were rather exquisite and the figures were proportionate and balanced. The sculptors implemented exotic gestures and postures and the figures appeared to have fitted attire.

The flavour of Gupta architecture is found in the Shiva-Parvati relics in Kosam, in the Ramayana panel in Deogarh and also in Sarnath. The Bodhisattva images were representative of the Mathura school of art, which had attained an unprecedented excellence during the Gupta architecture. The sculptural tradition in the Gupta Age speaks of the artistic finesse and brilliance of the Gupta sculptors.

#### **2.3.4.4.Paintings of Gupta Period**

Art of the Gupta Period Apart from architecture and sculpture, paintings had constituted a significant position in the Gupta period. During the Gupta period, painting had assumed a secular character. The cave paintings of Ajanta, Badami and Bagh were the representations of Gupta paintings. The cave paintings mainly depicted the Jataka stories and the life of Lord Buddha. The Bodhisattva-Padmapani painting of Ajanta represents Bodhisattva standing in a 'trivanga' style. His face depicts a youth with jewelled crown atop his head, holding a white lotus in his right hand. His face glows with pathos and sympathy for the fellow beings while looking below from heaven.

Art, architecture and sculpture of the Gupta period had scaled peak heights, for which the Gupta phase has been given the epithet "the Golden age of India". Very few examples of temple architecture have survived from the Gupta period. Architecture of the Gupta period temples was still in its formative period. Rock-cut Buddhist caves at Ajanta and Ellora are the best examples of architecture. Classical sculpture reflecting a high aesthetic sensibility is visible, particularly in the Buddha images from Sarnath, Mathura, Kushinagara and Bodh Gaya. These sculptures inspired the portrayal of the more important Vaishnava and Shaiva deities as impressive coins. Vaishnava

representations were either of the deity or of an incarnation, which allowed a wider range of images. Shiva was most often represented as a lingam. Terracotta images continued to be popular and more accessible to masses. Stone sculptures were patronized by the rich only.

### **2.3.5. Literature**

During Gupta period puranas had their final form. Puranas such as Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana, Bhagvata Purana, Brahmanda Purana and Harivamsha Purana were completed in this period. Puranas are important sources not only for the study of brahmanical religious but also for royal genealogy and historical traditions. During this period bhakti hymns composed by the Vaishnava Alvar and Shaiva Nyamar Saints of south India. It is also important to note that the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata were codified first epics are important sources for socio-religious-political history. In this section, we shall highlight creative literature which became the source of studies of dramaturgy, poetry and literary theory the subsequent period. The famous Natya-Shastra of Bharata-a foundational treatise on dance, drama and poetry can be possibly be dated to these times. Literary, criticism and theory of Rasa emerged an important feature of creative literature. The ruling elite, the court and the aristocracy, the urban rich patronized poetry and prose in Sanskrit. Kalidasa, the poet in the court of Gupta emperor, Chandragupta II, was an extraordinary poet and dramatist whose work enhanced the prestige of the language and inspired later poetic forms. His play Abhijnana-Shakuntala and his long lyrical poem Meghaduta (cloud messenger) are considered examples in Sanskrit drama and poetics respectively. Following Kalidasa's works, Bharavi's Kiratarjuniya, Magha's Shishupalakadha and the Bhatti-Kavya, and somewhat later Bhavabhuti's Malati-Madhava are important examples of classical work in Sanskrit. The Mrichchha-Katika (the little day cast) by Shudraka provides glimpses of urban life. Vishakhadatta chose to dramatize past political events in his Mudrarakshasha, a play on the overthrow of the Nanda king, and in Devi-Chandra-Gupta, on the bid for power by Chandra Gupta II.

The fables of the Panchatantra and Subandhu's Vasavadatta are acclaimed for social message and literary quality respectively. Band's Harshacharita is an excellent example of both biography and Sanskrit phrase and so his narrative Kadambari. Classical was the language of the court and its pronouncements through inscriptions. The dominance of Sanskrit dates to the Gupta period and continued until about the early second millennium AD, after which the regional languages were widely used. In the times of Delhi Sultanate and Mughals, court language was Persian. But the local language and cultures were not abandoned. They can be glimpsed in the use of Prakrit in various contexts such as in some inscription and in the languages of religious sects. The Natya-shastra lists a number of languages and dialects, including those spoken by the lower castes and Chandalas. In addition to Sanskrit, literature in Prakrit also had its patronage among the Jaina merchants. The Paumacariyam of Vimalasuri, a Jain version of the Rama story is a good example of Prakrit and popular literature. We must note that high-status characters spoke Sanskrit whereas those of low social status and all the women spoke Prakrit in Sanskrit dramas.

During this period, besides Sanskrit and the Prakrit, vernacular language also developed. For example Sanskrit 'sutra' and 'Dharma,' appear in 'Prakrit,' as 'Sutta' and 'Dharma.' Of other 'Prakrit' the important types were Sauraseni, spoken round Mathura, Ardha- Magadhi, spoken in Oudh and Bundelkhand, Magadhi language, spoken in modern Bihar and Maharashtra. The last stage of the 'Prakrit' was known as 'literary Apabhramsh.' When the Prakrit language came to be used as literary language, the Indian grammarians began to apply the term 'Apabhramsh'. It was used for literary purposes, and the modern vernaculars are the direct descendants of these 'Apabhramsh.' From the Apabhramsh of Sauraseni languages like Punjabi, Western Hindi, Rajasthani and Gujarati were derived. From the 'Apabhramsh' of Ardha Magadhi descended Eastern Hindi. Kashmiri and Lahada has also been derived from Apabhramsh and from Vrachada was derived the language of Sindhi.

Maharashtri gave Marathi language and Magadhi blossomed into Bihari, Oriya and Bengali. These were the main developments in the linguistic history of India.

It is true that Sanskrit became dominant during the Gupta period but it was a language of the elite. As a result other languages like Prakrit gained superiority during the Gupta era. However gradually it was believed that Prakrit is the language of the lower strata of the society and Sanskrit should be used by those who were set in the powerful positions of the society. Another important feature of the Gupta period with regard to language was that it was closely linked with status and gender.

#### **2.3.6. Education**

Education during Gupta age was given utmost importance. Holy places and capitals of kingdoms were the common centers of learning. Among the capitals, Pataliputra, Valabhi, Ujjain and Padmavati were famous centers of learning while Ayodhya, Mathura, Nasik and Kanchi were famous centers of education. There were the Agrahara villages which had learned Brahmans who were supported by the revenues of these villages assigned to them for maintenance by the state. The teachers were often attracted students from far and wide. In South India centers of learning were known as Ghatikas.

##### **2.3.6.1. System of Education during Gupta Age**

According to Manu there were two types of teachers- 'acharya' and 'upadhyas'. The acharyas were entrusted with fundamental teachings of Vedas, Upanishads and Kalpasutra. The acharyas took their work as 'work of charity' and refrained from taking fees from pupils. The Upadhyas took teaching as a profession and charged the pupils. For scholarly education, study of Dharmashastras, Smriti, itihasa-puranas and heterodox scriptures were included in the syllabus. For non-scholarly education, mathematics, science of warfare, astronomy, astrology and medicine were included. Education was generally permitted to the people belonging to the upper stratum of society. Brahmins were eligible for all types of education, while the Kshatriyas and Sudras were eligible only for some items of learning. But the Sudras were deprived completely from any light of education.

##### **2.3.6.2. Noted Centre of Education**

The most famous centers of learning were the monastic collage founded mostly by the Buddhists. These centers contributed to the building of a harmonious cultural life of the people. Taxila, Varanasi, Ujjain and Amravati were other famous centres of learning before the Gupta Age. University of Taxila, though had lost its former glory due to Hun invasion, yet had maintained its standard. Valabhi in Gujarat and Vikramasila in Bihar were other famous centers of learning.

Technical education was also imparted by the guilds. Technical training included metallurgy, ivory and diamond cutting, woodwork. This was usually done in the family itself as professions had become hereditary. Sometimes artisans took outside students as trainees. Elementary education probably commenced at the age of five and was imparted by teachers who were called Daraka-charyas. Lipisalas or primary schools did exist in many villages. Children used to write either on wooden boards in colour or by the finger on the ground covered with sand. Excellence in metallurgy is proved by the Iron Pillar, Delhi of King Chandra.

Nalanda University can be considered as an epitome of education in the Gupta age. Nalanda in Magadha was the international university and students from Asia had come there to pursue their higher education. It was the largest of its kind in the contemporary world to which scholars of different castes, creeds and races hailing from India and from countries like China, Japan, Korea, Java, Sumatra, Tibet, Mongolia flocked for advanced studies. There was catholicity of method in education and curriculum was liberal. Wide varieties of subjects were taught. The curriculum included systems of philosophies of different religions in India as well as arts and sciences. The state provided revenues of more than hundred villages for the upkeep of the university. There were

a hundred lecture halls where classes were held daily. Scholarship was measured by the number of Sutra collections a student was able to master. Time was regulated over a wide area of Northern India by the Nalanda water clock.

### **2.3.7. Science and Technology**

Development of Science under Gupta Empire Changes came in the over all social life in the Gupta period with the tremendous development of science during this period. With the growth and intensification in the arena of mathematics, astrology, astronomy, medicine, Chemistry, Metallurgy, Botany, Zoology and Engineering Gupta period gained a striking facet.

#### **2.3.7.1. Mathematics under Gupta Empire**

In the realm of arithmetic the most important achievement was the discovery of the decimal system of notation. It was based upon the principle of the place value of the first nine numbers and the use of the zero. Geometry attained great heights and many theorems relating to circles and triangles are mentioned. The most famous work in mathematics was that of Aryabhata, the Aryabhattyam which was written in 499 A.D. the work deals with arithmetic, geometry and algebra. Trigonometry was also being cultivated during this time. Indians took the lead over the Greeks as far as mathematics is considered.

#### **2.3.7.2. Astronomy under Gupta Empire**

Astronomy made great progress during the age. Varahamihira and Aryabhata were the major astronomers. Aryabhata pointed out that eclipses were caused by the moon coming within the earth's shadow or between the earth. He utilized trigonometry in astronomy. He worked out accurate formulas to measure two consecutive days. He had also obtained correct equation for the planet's orbit. Aryabhata was much more advanced than the European astronomers. Most probably he began composing his work Panchasiddhantika in 505 A.D. He discusses in this work the principles of the five astronomical schools, which were considered as the most authoritative one in his time. Of these five schools the Romaka Siddhanta clearly betrays Western influence. This is expected to happen as a result of active trade contacts between the Roman Empire and the Gupta Empire. The Surya Siddhanta is the most important and complete astronomical work of the period. It seems that Greek astronomy served as the basis of the Surya-Siddhanta. The other three schools of astronomy discussed by Varahamihira are the Paitamaha Siddhanta, the Vasistha Siddhanta, and the Paulish Siddhanta. In his work Varahamihira has preserved the essential teachings of these five schools of astronomy.

#### **2.3.7.3. Medicine under Gupta Empire**

Development of Science under Gupta Empire The Charaka samhita and the Sushruta samhita by Charaka and Susruta were the most important works of medicine. Their conclusions are presented in the Ashtanga Sangraha by Vagbhata I. Charaka and Susruta placed very high ideals for a physician. A physician is supposed to be a yogi, noble in character and supporter of mankind. He was not to charge high for the medicines he prescribes. He should not distinguish between the rich and the poor. The government and the public provided for the establishment and maintenance of hospitals where men and animals both were looked after. Nagarjuna had discovered the process of distillation and use of disinfectants. Vaccination for small pox was also known to the Indians. Indian medicine dealt with the whole area of the science. The structure of the body, its organs, ligaments, muscles, vessels and tissues were described in detail. Vast collections of drugs belonging to the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms are mentioned in the Hindu books of medicine. Hygiene, regimen of the body and diet was paid more attention. Doctors had conducted amputations and operations as well as improved deformed ears and noses. Surgical instruments were also carefully made. Susruta describes around 120 surgical instruments. The Bower manuscript was discovered by Lt. H. Bower in a Buddhist stupa in Kashgar in 1890. Out of the seven works discovered by Bower three deal with medicine. The manuscript on the basis of palaeographical

grounds has been dated to the second half of the fourth century A.D. The manuscript deals with such subjects as the use of garlic in curing diseases, digestion, and eye diseases. A book named Navanitaka deals with different kinds of powders, decoctions, oils, elixirs and children's diseases. The only familiar name of a medical authority referred to in the Bower manuscript is that of Susruta.

#### **2.3.7.4.Astrology under Gupta Empire**

The Vriddha Garga Samhita is the only work on astrology prior to Varahamihira's Brihat samhita, which is a collection of ancient Indian learning and sciences. Besides the sections on astrology in the Brihat samhita, Varahamihira also composed four other works on astrology, which deal with auspicious muhurtas for marriage, auspicious portents for the expeditions of kings and the time of man's birth, and its influence on his future.

#### **2.3.7.5.Chemistry and Metallurgy under Gupta Empire**

In the Gupta age no books dealing with Chemistry and metallurgy are found. Nagarjuna is mentioned as a great chemist. The famous Iron Pillar near the Qutub-Minar stands as a silent witness to assert the striking metallurgical skill of the Hindus. This pillar has not yet been rusted or corroded despite it being exposed to rain and sun for the last 1500 years. The use of mercury and iron in medicine shows that chemistry must have been practiced. Varahamihira was a scientist who was comfortable in dealing with astronomy, mathematics, astrology, metallurgy, chemistry, jewellery, botany, zoology, civil engineering, water-divining and meteorology.

Science was cultivated with enthusiasm in ancient India and many important discoveries were made which were passed on to Europe by the Greeks and the Arabs.

#### **2.3.8. Economic Condition during Gupta Rule**

The Guptas had ruled north India for about 200 years. Political unity, economic prosperity and extraordinary progress in every aspect of life under the Guptas were prevalent. The Gupta period had witnessed great prosperity, owing to the flourishing trade, agriculture and industry. Prosperity due to Roman trade, which began in the Kushana period, continued till the early reign of the Guptas. The Saka Satraps of western India continued trade with the west after the fall of the Kushans. Chandragupta II had conquered Malwa and Saurashtra, by overthrowing the Saka rulers had established direct link of the Guptas in India with Roman trade. In the subsequent paragraphs a brief discussion on economic condition of India under the Gupta is attempted.

##### **2.3.8.1.Agriculture**

The social supremacy of the brahmins is also reflected in the economy of the period, as attested by the frequency of tax-free land-grants made to them. This was a period of partial decline in trade and consequently a greater concentration on land. There were four categories of land-fallow and waste land, state-owned land and privately owned land. Agriculture expanded with the reclamation of new land for cultivation. Contemporary texts reveal a more liberal and practical attitude towards waste land, with the state encouraging the peasantry to bring uncultivated and forest land under the plough. Those who reclaimed land on their own initiative and made arrangements for its irrigation were exempted from paying taxes until they started earning an income of twice their original investment. Inscriptions of the Gupta period repeatedly mention the sale and purchase of waste land, which indicates that such transactions were financially profitable. The state actively patronized agricultural activity. This is suggested by the Junagadh inscription of Skandagupta, which records work on Lake Sudarsana at Girnar under state supervision, presumably for irrigational purposes. Kalidasa describes agriculture and animal husbandry as the mainstay of the royal exchequer, since the major portion of revenue came from the land, at one-sixth of the net produce.

Agricultural implements remained much the same, although iron was more widely used for their manufacture. Varhamihira, in his astrological work, the Brhatsamhita, refers to an instrument



for measuring rainfall. Crops were grown twice a year. According to Hsuantsang, sugar cane and wheat were grown in the north-west and rice in Magadha and further east. Southern India was known for black pepper and spices. The Amarakosa, the Sanskrit lexicon belonging to this period, also refers to a large variety of fruit and vegetables. Despite overall growth, however, brahmanical and Buddhist religious injunctions were not conducive to the expansion of agriculture.

#### **2.3.8.2.Industrial production**

The Brhaspati was unwilling to respect the income derived from agriculture and cultivation was prohibited for the Buddhist monks. The manufacture of textiles of various kinds was one of the more important industries at this time. There was a vast domestic market, since textiles were a prime item of trade between northern and southern India. There was also a considerable demand in foreign markets. Silk, muslin, calico, linen, wool and cotton were produced in great quantity. The production of silk decreased towards the end of the Gupta period since many members of an important guild of silver-weavers in western India abandoned their traditional occupation and took to other professions. This might have been due to the increasing use of the Silk Route and the Sea Route to China, which brought a large amount of Chinese silk to India or, more generally, to the decline in trade with the West. Metalwork, particularly in copper, iron and lead, continued as one of the essential industries. The use of bronze increased and gold and silver ornaments were in constant demand. We have little clue as to the sources of the abundant supply of metals in the Gupta period and it seems that copper, lead and tin had to be imported from abroad. Gold may have been obtained from the Byzantine Empire in exchange for Indian products, although Hsuan-tsang mentions that it was also produced indigenously in huge quantities. The working of precious stones continued to maintain its high standard. Pottery remained a basic part of industrial production, although the elegant black polished ware of earlier times was now replaced by an ordinary red ware with a brownish slip.

#### **2.3.8.3.Guild System**

The guild was the major institution in the manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise. Some historians believe that the importance of the guilds declined in the Gupta period. India no longer participated in the long-distance trade in luxury goods. Instead a new kind of commercial network emerged on regional lines, based on the exchange of articles in daily use. In these changed circumstances, the powerful guilds of the earlier times disintegrated. Contemporary sources, particularly the seals found at Vaisali and Bhita, suggest nevertheless that both the activities and the significance of the guild remained during this period. Guilds sometimes acted as bankers and loaned money on interest, as did some of the Buddhist sanghas (communities). The rate of interest varied according to the purpose for which money was required. The lowering of the interest rate implies an increased confidence in overseas trade as well as a greater availability of goods and the consequent decrease in profit margins. Hence, guilds continued to be vital in manufacture of goods and in commercial enterprise and had their own laws regarding their internal organization. The guilds provided socio-economic support in some ways parallel to that of jati. The excessively high rates demanded in earlier times on loans for overseas trade were reduced to a reasonable twenty percent, indicating a confidence in overseas trade.

#### **2.3.8.4.Trade & Commerce**

Trade between northern India and South-East Asia was conducted through the ports of the east coast. The west coast ports served as the link in India's trade contacts with the Mediterranean region and Western Asia. Several inland routes connected India with China through Central Asia and Tokharistan and across the Karakorum range and Kashmir. The most important event in the economic history of East and South-East Asia during this period was the development of an inter-oceanic trade, reaching from China through Indonesia and the east coast of India up to Simhala and extending from there along the west Indian coast to Persia, Arabia and Ethiopia. Despite

commercial competition between China and India, the two countries maintained close links. Coins of the T'ang emperors of China have been discovered in southern India and Indian merchants resided in Canton. Still more far-reaching in their consequences were India's trade contacts with South-East Asia, leading to Indian settlements there and an Indian influence that permeated the local pattern of life, particularly in Thailand, Cambodia and Java. The export of spices, pepper, sandalwood, pearls, precious stones, perfumes, indigo and herbs continued as before. Pepper was exported from the ports of the Malabar coast and sesame, copper and cotton garments from Kalyana. The Pandya area had an important role to play in the pearl trade. The commodities that were now being imported to India, however, differed from those in earlier times. Chinese silk came in greater quantity, as did ivory from Ethiopia. Imports of horses from Arabia, Iran and Tokharistan also increased. Copper came from the western Mediterranean region and sapphire from Simhala. The Gupta king issued special charters to merchants' organizations which relieved them of government interference. Since this was the time when the law-makers declared it a great sin for a brahman to travel by sea, this may have resulted in reduced Indian participation in maritime trade.

#### **2.3.8.5.Roads & Trade Routes**

The campaigns of Samudra Gupta to the east and the south, and the repeated tours of Harsha, would have required efficient communication and movement of goods. Ox-drawn carts were common on the roads and pack animals were used on rough terrain and elephants in heavily forested areas. The lower reaches of large rivers such, as Ganges, Narmada, Godawari, Krishna and Kaveri were the main waterways. The ports of the eastern coast, such as Tamralipti and Ghanta Shala, handled the northern Indian trade, with the eastern coast and south-east Asia and those of the west coast traded with the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. The ports and production centres of peninsular India that were involved at this maritime trade appear not to have declined at this time, but these were outside Gupta control. Neither the overland trade with central and west Asia had declined between the fourth and the seventh centuries. There appears to have been appreciable rise in the import of horses, coming from Iran and Bactria centres in north-west India, or from Arabia by sea to the western coast.

#### **2.3.8.6.Land Grant and feudalism**

The most important innovation in the agricultural sector was the introduction of land grant economy. Initially, religious denees were exempted from payment of revenue (land-tax) and later received administrative judiciary rights over the villages. However, economic advantages of land-grant donated to religious specialists like Brahmanas were more important than the royal act of giving away since land to brahmanas and later officials. The astronomical knowledge of brahmanas in agricultural seasons, calendar, agricultural manners brought considerable amount of land under cultivation. Thus, historians like R.S. Sharma have accepted the phenomenon of agrarian expansion for early medieval India. Important like Krishiparaghara (agricultural manual) mentions vivid descriptions of fields, and agricultural operations of this period.

Although revenue-free land grants to religious and secular denees did not bring immediate revenue to state these grants initiated rural prosperity and bound villages in a wider economic network. If the land donated to brahmanas was wasteland or forest, the grantee took the initiatives of introducing agriculture. This was especially true of forest and tribal areas. Brahmanas possessed technical and astronomical knowledge of agricultural operations. Brahmanas became proficient in supervising agrarian activities assisted manual on agriculture, such as the Krishiparashara, which may be dated in the Gupta period or the subsequent period. One of the most important socio-economic changes was 'peasantization' of tribes in central Indian belt Orissa, Assam, part of western and southern India. As the brahmanas denees arrived in the forests and hills of tribal India, they began to initiate a section of the tribal society into agricultural activities. The process brought two economic advantages to state and society. More cultivable land was brought under agriculture

generating more revenues for the expanding rural society and meeting increasing revenue demands. The part of the tribal society offered its labour for agriculture, forest and rural law and order, mining operations of public work in villages etc.

Some historians have characterized the socio-economic developments of the Gupta period in terms of feudalism. They argue that although there had been a long tradition of donating land to the brahmins, the number of such donations greatly increased in the Gupta period. Villages along with their inhabitants, revenue due to the king, administrative and judicial rights, exemption from the interference of government officials, and even the right to enjoy fines levied on cultivators, were all transferred to the religious beneficiaries. What began as grants to the priestly class were later extended to administrative officials. With the emergence of a local, self-sufficient economy, religious donations as well as land-grants to secular officials (either in lieu of salary or as a reward for services) became popular. The principal characteristics of this self-sufficient economy were the decline of trade and urban centres and a scarcity of coinage. Thus from the economic point of view, the central feature of Indian feudalism was the emergence of landed intermediaries. As a result, the freedom of the peasantry was curtailed, their mobility was restricted and they were forced to serve as unpaid labour.

Those historians who do not subscribe to this view have challenged the premises of Indian feudalism. They argue that during the Gupta period, trade did not decline and the scarcity of coins was at best marginal. Quantitative analyses of the coinage of this period have still to be made and the relative scarcity of coins is still merely an assumption. Some of the old-established towns did lose their importance, but new urban centres emerged to replace them. Finally, the two indispensable institutions of European feudalism, namely manor and serfdom, never developed in India. Historians who subscribe to this second view are therefore inclined to describe the practice of land-grants as nothing but India's traditional landlordism. The debate is still to be settled.

The literary records of this period suggest an overall economic prosperity at least among the upper classes. Fa-hsien describes the people of Madhyadesha (the 'middle country') as prosperous and happy towards the beginning of the fifth century. Evidence of material conditions obtained from excavations also points to a high standard of living. The prosperous urban dwellers lived in luxury; and comfort, in the urban centres at least, was not confined to the upper classes. Yet it was a culture with wide variations. The untouchables lived on the outskirts of the opulent cities and the peasantry were being gradually impoverished. The maintenance of an imperial façade was a purposeless expense which must have been a drain on the economy. Indeed, the debased Later Gupta coinage indicates an economic crisis. In some parts of the sub continent the Gupta age was the concluding phase of the economic momentum that began in the preceding period.

### **2.3.9. The Debate on Golden Age**

In the days when historians of 'Golden Ages', the Gupta period was described as such, civilizations were said to have a Golden Age when virtually every manifestation of life reached a peak of excellence. The Gupta period was selected largely because of impressive literary works in Sanskrit and the high quality of art, which coincided with what was viewed as a brahmanical 'renaissance'. Since India civilization had early been characterized as Hindu and Sanskritic, the initial spread of brahmanical culture as 'high' culture on an unprecedented scale was described as golden period. The distant past had an advantage, for it allowed greater recourse to imagination in recreating that past. Now that historians are commenting on all aspects of society, the notion of a uniformly Golden Age that encompasses an entire society has been questioned. The description of a Golden Age reflected the life of the wealthy and their activities along characterized such an age. There are at least three epochs when artistic and literary expression achieved impressive standards—the post-Mauryan and Gupta period; the Cholas; and the Mughals. The precursor to the culture of the Gupta period was not restricted to northern India, since the Deccan shows a striking evolution of

cultures. The classicism of the Gupta period is not an innovation emanating from Gupta rule but the culmination of a process that began earlier. New artistic forms were initiated during the pre-Gupta in north India, such as those associated with Buddhism and which also found parallels in other religious sects, with the writing of texts on technical subjects and creative literature of various kinds. Much of the articulation is in Sanskrit, but it is of Sanskritic culture assumes certain kinds of social and cultural exclusivity and demarcates social groups it attempts a transition towards a uniform, elite culture, but in the process becomes a catalyst for many others. The description of the Gupta period as one of classicism is relatively correct regarding the upper classes, who lived well according to descriptions in their literature and representations in their art. The more accurate, literal evidence that comes from archaeology suggests a less glowing life-style for the majority. Materially, excavated sites suggest that the average standard of living may have been higher in the preceding period.

#### **2.3.10. Conclusion**

The literary as well as archaeological records of this period suggest an overall socio-economic prosperity at least among the upper classes of Gupta Empire. Fa-hsien describes the people of Madhyadesha (the 'middle country') as prosperous and happy towards the beginning of the fifth century. Evidence of material conditions obtained from excavations also points to a high standard of living. The prosperous urban-dwellers lived in luxury; and comfort, in the urban centres at least, was not confined to the upper classes. Yet it was a culture with wide variations. The untouchables lived on the outskirts of the opulent cities and the peasantry were being gradually impoverished. In the sphere of agriculture large scale land grants created a situation of sub-infudation which in subsequent period leads to emergence of feudal setup in India. In the sphere of trade and commerce India witnessed prosperity. This period also witnessed origin of Hindu temple architecture and culmination of Buddhist rock cut architecture. In painting and sculpture Gupta period was an important epoch in the history of art in Indian subcontinent.

#### **2.3.11. Summary**

- *The Gupta period, the caste system became rigid. The Brahmins occupied the top ladder of the society. The practice of untouchability had slowly begun during this period.*
- *Fahien mentions that Chandalas were segregated from the society. Their miserable condition was elaborated by the Chinese traveler.*
- *The position of women had also become miserable during the Gupta period. The subjection of women to men was thoroughly regularized. But it was insisted that they should be protected and generously treated by men.*
- *In the sphere of religion, Brahmanism reigned supreme during the Gupta period. It had two branches - Vaishnavism and Saivism. Most of the Gupta kings were Vaishnavaites.*
- *The worship of images and celebration of religious festivals with elaborate rituals made these two religions popular.*
- *Religious literature like the Puranas was composed during this period. The progress of Brahmanism led to the neglect of Buddhism and Jainism.*
- *Fahien refers to the decline of Buddhism in the Gangetic valley. But a few Buddhist scholars like Vasubandhu were patronized by Gupta kings.*
- *In western and southern India Jainism flourished. The great Jain Council was held at Valabhi during this period and the Jain Canon of the Svetambras was written.*
- *The Gupta period witnessed a tremendous progress in the field of art, science and literature and on account of this it has been called "a golden age".*

- *The Sanskrit language became prominent during the Gupta period. Nagari script had evolved from the Brahmi script. The best of the Sanskrit literature belonged to the Gupta age.*
- *The Gupta period witnessed a brilliant activity in the sphere of mathematics, astronomy, astrology and medicine.*
- *In the sphere of economy Gupta period witnessed system of land grants. The condition of trade and commerce was prosperous but there was regional imbalance. Agriculture was also prosperous gradually moving towards feudal setup.*
- *Scholars even call this period a period of renaissance. There was no dark period before the Gupta rule. Therefore the cultural progress witnessed during the Gupta period may be called the culmination of Indian intellectual activities.*

#### **2.3.12. Exercise**

- Describe the socio-economic life under the rule of Guptas.
- Examine the cultural contributions of the Guptas.
- Write an essay on the debate of golden age on Gupta period in Indian history.
- Discuss the system and consequences of land grant prevailed during the Gupta rule.
- Examine the art, architecture & painting flourished under the patronization of Imperial Gupta.

#### **2.3.13. Further Readings**

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**Unit-3**  
**Chapter-I**  
**POST-GUPTA PERIOD OF INDIAN HISTORY**  
**Harshavardhana: Sources and Achievements.**

**Structure**

- 3.1.0. Objectives.**
- 3.1.1. Introduction.**
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  - 3.1.2.3. Hiuen Tsang account –*Si-Yu-Ki*.**
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- 3.1.3. *The ancestry & early life of Harsha.***
- 3.1.4. *Accession of Harsha to the throne.***
- 3.1.5. *The military activities of Harsha.***
  - 3.1.5.1. *Campaign against Sasanka.***
  - 3.1.5.2. War with Pulakesin II.**
- 3.1.6. *Administration of Harsha.***
- 3.1.7. *Religious policy of Harsha.***
  - 3.1.7.1. Kanauj Assembly.**
  - 3.1.7.2. Prayag Assembly.**
- 3.1.8. Society and Economy under Harsha**
- 3.1.9. Cultural Progress under Harsha.**
- 3.1.10. Nalanda University**
- 3.1.11. Conclusion.**
- 3.1.12. *Summary***
- 3.1.13. Exercise**
- 3.1.14. Further Readings**

### **3.1.0. Objectives.**

The unit deals with Harshavardhana, an important ruler of 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. in the Post Gupta period of Ancient Indian History. The objectives of this unit are to.

- *make you aware about Sources for the study of Harsha.*
- *provide a brief sketch on the early life and ancestry of Harsha.*
- *describe the military activities of Harsha.*
- *assess Harsha's Administration and Harsha's religious activities*

### **3.1.1. Introduction.**

In the sixth century A.D. the disintegration of the Gupta Empire gradually paved way for the growth of many smaller kingdoms. In certain regions new kingdoms emerged and in other areas the dynasties which had earlier accepted Gupta suzerainty now declared their independence. For example, kings like Yasodharma and political powers like the Maukharis, the Hunas and the later Magadhan Guptas were the new powers. Besides these the Maitrakas of Kanauj, the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar, the Gaudas under Sasanka, the Varmans in Kamarupa grew in importance. There was political turmoil and several dynasties were emerging the Pushyabhuti of Thaneswar was the most important ruling family which emerged. Thaneswar was situated in the Srikantha Janapada, which is now identified with modern Haryana. This dynasty made very significant contribution to the history of India in Seventh Century A.D. Harsha Vardhana, was the most famous descendant and ruler in the Pushybhuti family, he succeeded to his brother king Rajya Vardhan in or about A.D 606.

### **3.1.2. Sources for the study of Harsha.**

#### **3.1.2.1.Literary Sources**

We are fortunate to get plenty of information about Harsha. In fact we do not have abundant information about all the past ruler of India. The travelogue of Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India during Harsha's reign and Banabhatta, Harsha's court poet, have left behind rich literary source about Harsha and his time. The information collected from Bana and Hiuen Tsang is further corroborated by epigraphic, numismatic and other archaeological sources. For proper understanding of the subject we have given herein the details of those sources.

#### **3.1.2.2.Harsha Charita of Banabhatta.**

Among the literary sources the most important one is the Harsha Charita of Banabhatta, the, court poet of Harsha. Harsha Charita, is the biography of Harsha, which gave us a exaggerated account of Harsha's life in an ornate style. It was not a complete biography. It covers only a part of Harsha's life and his achievements. This is particularly helpful for its content regarding the family, Harsha's accession to the throne and his campaign against Sasanka, where the works stop abruptly.

#### **3.1.2.3.Hiuen Tsang account –Si-Yu-Ki.**

Hiuen Tsang was a Chinese pilgrim travelled into India to visits places associated with Lord Buddha. He also wanted to study Buddhist literature. He has given an account of his experience in India. His account throws light on the economic and social life as well as religious condition of India. Hiuen Tsang was royal guest of Harsha for a long time. He witnessed the court affairs of Harsha his account throws ample light on the history of Harsha's reign. Even historian view that Hiuen Tsang account was like a gazette.

#### **3.1.2.4.Epigraphical Sources.**

Apart from the literary sources as mentioned above we have the following epigraphic records for the reign of Harsha.1. Banskhera Copper Plate, 2. Nalanda Seals, 3. Sonapat Seals, 4. Madhuvana Copper Plate and 5. Aihole inscription. The above epigraphic records show the land grant pattern, their use and the society during Harsha' rule.

### **3.1.2.5. Numismatic Sources.**

Besides the epigraphic sources few coins were also discovered by archaeologist. Those provide us information regarding the Harsha's empire and its extensions and economic condition apart from the personal information on the emperor Harsha.

### **3.1.2.6. Archaeological Sources.**

The most important archaeological sources are the monuments and material ruins of the period unearthed from the archaeological mounds. Hence, the ruins of Nalanda University and the material unearthed therein were also reveal us about the conditions of India during Harsha's rule.

Besides the above sources it is believed that three dramas entitled Ratnavali, Nagananda and Priyadarshika were written by King Harsha himself. The Ratnavali and Priyadarshika deals with love and court intrigues, whereas Nagananda refers to the charity and magnanimity of Harsha. The above sources were utilized by historian to reconstruct the history of Harsha Vardhana.

### **3.1.3. *The ancestry & early life of Harsha.***

According to Banabhatta, the family of Harsha Vardhana was founded by one Pushyabhuti. His family was known as Pushyabhuti family. Inscriptions like 'Madhuban' copper plate does not mention about the name of any Pushyabhuti. It record the name of one Naravardhana, as the founder.

Banabhatta says that Pushyabhuti was a Saivite and great disciple of one 'Vairabhacharya' from south. He also devoted to goddess Lakshmi. Bana record that once Lakshmi, the goddesses of wealth and fortune being pleased with Pushyabhuti, granted a boon. Pushyabhuti instead seeking the boon for himself, requested her to grant boon for his teachers' Vairabhachraya. Bana further noted that Laxmi pleased with Pushyabhuti devotion to his teacher blessed Pushyabhuti. Laxmi granted a boon that he would become the founder of a great dynasty and kings of his family would become a *Chakravartin*. Bana holds that Harsha was that ruler.

The Madhuvan copper plate gives us a clear picture of the genealogy of the Vardhana dynasty, where Naravardhana was the mentioned as founder of the family. The copper plate reveals the following list of kings. Naravardhana → Adityavardhana → Prabhakaravardhana → Rajyavardhana, Harshvardhana and Rajyashree.

Among all the kings of the dynasty prior to Harshavardhana, Bana praised highly Prabhakaravardhana in his work, which suggested that the kingdom of Thaneswar was extended from Himalaya in North to Rajasthan in South and upto River Beas in the west. In this famous royal dynasty Harsha was born on the date "*Jaistha Mase Prurtika Nakshyetre Krushna Paksheye Dwadasi Thithi Sayan Kale*" the exact date on the above account fall on June 4<sup>th</sup> of 590 A.D. Bana, writes that when Harsha was born astrologer forecasted that the new born baby would be a great king on earth.

### **3.1.4. *Accession of Harsha to the throne.***

Rajya Vardhan's and Harsha's sister Rajyashree had been married to the Maukhari king, Grahavarman. This king, some years later, had been defeated and killed by King Deva Gupta of Malwa and after his death Rajyasri had been cast into prison by the victor. Harsha's brother, Rajya Vardhan, then the king at Thanesar, could not stand this affront on his family and marched against Deva Gupta and defeated him. But it happened when Sasanka, king of Gauda in Eastern Bengal, entered Magadha as a friend of Rajya Vardhana, but in secret alliance with the Malwa king. Sasanka treacherously murdered Rajya Vardhan. On hearing about the murder of his brother, Harsha resolved at once to march against the treacherous king of Gauda and killed Deva Gupta in a battle. Harsha Vardhan ascended the throne of his ancestral kingdom of Thanesvar in 606 A.D at the age of 16. He probably started Harsha Era from the same year.

The immediate task which confronted Harsha was to recover Rajyashree, his widow sister. Harsha got the information that Rajyashree had escaped from the prison and entered the Vindhya



forests. With the help of forest chiefs like Vyaghra-ketu, Bhukampa and Nirghata and the ascetic teachers Divakamitra and his disciple, Harsha was able to rescue Rajyashree who was just going to burn herself by throwing herself into the fire.

Soon his arrival in his capital, a problem arose before him, that the King of Kanauj, Grahavarman, who was killed by Deva Gupta left no heir and the widow queen Rajyashree refused to accept the responsibilities of Kanauj. The statesmen of Kanauj led by Bhandi, requested Harsha to ascend the throne of Kanauj. As Harsha was not sure of the feeling of the people, he consulted the circle of Bodhisattva, ultimately he decided to act as the regent and he did not assume the title of the king of Kanauj at that time. But, when his position became secure afterward he transferred his capital from Thaneshvara to Kanauj and made Kanauj, the imperial capital. The same incident was also mentioned by Hiuen Tsang in his travelogue.

### **3.1.5. The military activities of Harsha.**

#### **3.1.5.1. Campaign against Sasanka.**

Harsha ascended the throne at Thaneshvara, when a political disaster had fallen upon his house due to the death of his elder brother Rajyavardhana in the hand of Sasanka and the murder of his brother in law, Grahavarman and imprisonment of his sister by the enemy. The immediate task before Harsha was to take revenge by crushing the enemy. He had to rescue his sister from enemy camp. During that time, Sasanka was the ruler of Gauda (North Bengal). His rule extended over a large tract known as Sasanka mandala. This included Bengal, Orissa and Magadha (part of Bihar).

Banabhatta mentioned Harsha's military preparation against Sasanka, his army consisted of 50,000 soldiers, 5000 elephants and 20,000 cavalry. Corroborated by Hsuen Tsang he waged continuously 6 year wars and besieged and brought five Indian rulers or Pancha Varata namely Kunjala, Pundravardhana, Karnasuvarna, Samatoka, Tamralipti under his allegiance. When Harsha marched against Sasanka, he received a proposal from King Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa for forming an alliance against Sasanka perhaps the former had hostility with Sasanka. Harsha readily courted the alliance.

**Course of Campaign:** Being fortified with the new alliance Harsha hurried to meet Sasanka's army then occupying Kanauj but the outcome of this campaign against Sasanka is not clear to us. Banabhatta's narrative abruptly ends here. Leaving us in doubt it is assumed that on the arrival of Harsha's army near Kanauj, Sasanka thought discretion was the best part of valour and he made a masterly retreat. The hostility between Harsha and Sasanka did not end with the latter's withdrawal from Kanauj or its vicinity. According to '*Arya Manjushree Mulakalpa*' Harsha marched against the capital of Sasanka, defeated him and forbade him to move out of the country but this theory was not free from criticism.

Many other sources said that Sasanka ruled peacefully with sovereignty till his death like the Madhavaraja grant of Sailodbhavas mentioned in *Guptabada* 300 Sasanka, was his overlord. (619 A.D), even Hiuen Tsang mentioned that when he visited Magadha in 637 A.D. he heard from the people that Sasanka cut down the Bodhi tree recently at Bodhi Gaya (637 A.D)

It was only after the death of Sasanka that Harsha conquered the Kingdom of his adversary consisting of Magadha, Bengal, Orissa and Kangoda. Ma-Twan-Lin has stated that Harsha established his authority in Magadha in 641 A.D. Harsha conquered Orissa and Kangoda, the remaining part of Sasanka's dominion in 643 A.D.

#### **3.1.5.2. War with Pulakesin II.**

After his campaign against Sasanka and finally conquest of Gauda, the lord of Uttarapatha Raja Siladitya (Harsha) put an envious eye on the Dakshinapatha, where Pulakesin II of the Chalukyan family ruled over. Harsha started a campaign against Pulakesin II in the year 642 A.D but the date was in obscurity. There are many causes for the conflict between two great rulers, the causes are like clash for supremacy, old enmity with Vallabhi and Harsha's enduring ambition.

In the opinion of noted British historian Vincent Smith, the Harsha-Pulakesin war took place near the river Reva i.e Narmada. On the assumption that Pulakesin guarded the passes of the Narmada so effectively that Harsha was forced to retire after facing discomfiture. He was forced to accept river Narmada as dividing line. The result of the war was that, Harsha was defeated by the Chalukyan prince and retired to his capital Kanauj. This fact was corroborated by the Aihole Inscription and the account of Hieun Tsang. Ravikirti says that “ Harsha, whose lotus feet were arrayed with the rays of jewel of the diadems of the hosts of feudatories, prosperous with unmeasured might, throw him and his mirth melted away by fear, having become loathsome with the rows of lordly elephants fallen in battle” Hiuen Tsang tells that “the celebrated great king Siladitya at the time of invading east and west and countries far and near giving allegiance to him, but Ma-ha-la-cha refused him” The Rirpana, Kurnool and Tograsedu plates testify to the Chalukyan monarch Pulakesin II adoption to the title Paramesvara after defeating the war like lord of all region of the north ‘ *Sakalttarapathanatha* ’

### **3.1.6. Administration of Harsha.**

Harshvardhana, as an able ruler maintain a profound and systematic administration during his reign. The success of Harsha’s administration is testified by Hiuen Tsang. He was highly impressed by the character of Harsha’s civil administration, which he considered to be founded on benevolent principles. Instead of relying on the services of trained bureaucracy, the king personally supervised the administration, constantly toured the provinces and extended justice to all.

From various accounts it is evident that the kingdom of Harsha was mostly extended towards the east, and it was probably natural too that he should aspire to control the territories lying on this side, since the southern routes were blocked to the mighty arm of Pulakesin II. Harsha succeeded in bringing nearly the whole of the Gangetic plain under his yoke. According to some scholar his empire was extended from Kamarupa to Kashmir and from Himalaya to the Vindhyas. He was referred as the lord of North India or *Sakalottarapathanath* by Hiuen Tsang.

In an oriental disposition the sovereign being the centre of the state much of the success in administration necessarily depend on his benevolent examples. He must need to pay laborious attentions to details in order to infuse life into the government apparatus and to check the corruption and laxity of officer placed in authority over distance areas. With this ends in view Harsha appears to have handled the difficult task of supervising personally the affair of his dominion.

Hiuen Tsang notes ‘ the kings day was divided into three periods of which one was given up to affairs of government, and two more devoted to religious works. He was indefatigable and the day was too short for him. But in spite of this overwork Harsha was not content to rule from the luxurious surroundings of the palace only. He constantly toured the province and extended justice to all. The royal tours were not merely confined to urban areas, but rural areas also received equal attentions. The tour were conducted in the manner of state procession accompanied by music and pace drum. During the tours he punished the evil doers and established contact with the peoples. The tours were only suspended during the rainy seasons. He took himself the duties of royal inspector and listened to complaint, inspected general working of the administration and also made donations. Thus denying himself the comforts of the palace, Harsha toured round his far flung empire to promote the well being of his subjects. In order to rule his empire properly, Harsha divided his empire into many administrative units and appointed officials for smooth running of the administrations. For the safety and security of his empire Harsha maintained a large army. Hiuen Tsang notes that Harsha's army consisted of 6,000 elephants and 1, 00,000 cavalry. The police department of Harsha was very efficient and the judicial administration was very harsh.

### **3.1.7. Religious policy of Harsha.**

The sources like Sonepat (Haryana), Madhuban(Uttar Praesh) and Banskhera(Uttar Pradesh) inscription reveals that Harsha’s ancestors were ardent devotees of lord Surya and Shiva, which was

further attested by their title like '*Paramaditya bhakta*' and '*Paramesvara*'. Harshacharita also testifies that Harsha's great grandfather or ancestor 'Pushyabhuti' was an ardent Saivite. Harsha's forefathers were not Buddhist.

Harsha, himself was in his earlier days a devotee of the god Siva attested by the title '*Paramamahesvara*' or devout worshipper of the god *Mahesvara* or Siva (Bankshera & Madhuvar Plates). In his later years, Harsha was inclined towards Buddhism. Most Indian rulers were tolerant to various sects and patronized more than one sect also. After accepting the Mahayana, sect of Buddhism he stood as its redoubtable champion and also patronized his earlier religion side by side with Buddhism.

#### **3.1.7.1.Kanauj Assembly.**

Soon after adopting Buddhism (without being converted), Harsha convened special assembly at Kanyakubja for the avowed purpose of exhibiting the refinement of the great vehicle and of making manifest the exceeding merit of the master. On this occasion Harsha showed some amount of open partiality and narrow sectarian spirit for Mahayana. To this occasion Harsha invited princes and disciples of various sects to assemble in the town of Kanyakubja to investigate the treatise of the master of law, of China Hiuen Tsang. It was attended by 20 kings, 1000 scholars from the Nalanda University, 3000 Hinayanists and Mahayanists, 3000 Brahmins and Jains. The Assembly went on continuously for 23 days. Hiuen Tsang explained the values of Mahayana doctrine and established its superiority over others. However, violence broke out and there were acts of arson. There was also an attempt on the life of Harsha. It was brought under control and the guilty were punished. On the final day of the Assembly, Hiuen Tsang was honoured with costly presents.

#### **3.1.7.2.Prayag Assembly.**

After the assembly of Kanauj, Harsha invited Hiuen Tsang to attend another imposing ceremony which the sovereign held every year at Prayaga at the confluence of the river Ganga and the Yamuna. Harsha celebrated sixth quinquennial distribution of the alms called the *Maha Mokshya Parisad* during this time. At this ceremony 5, 00,000 *sramanas*, heretics, *narganthas*, the poor, orphans and the solitary of the five Indies were present. Hiuen Tsang mentions in his account about the conference held at Allahabad, known as Prayag. Harsha gave away his enormous wealth as gifts to the members of all religious sects. According to Hiuen Tsang, Harsha was so lavish that he emptied the treasury and even gave away the clothes and jewels he was wearing. His statement might be one of admiring exaggeration.

#### **3.1.8. Society and Economy under Harsha**

Both Bana and Hiuen Tsang portray the social life in the times of Harsha. The fourfold division of the society – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya and Sudra-was prevalent. The Brahmins were the privileged section of the society and they were given land grants by the kings. The Kshatriyas were the ruling class. The Vysyas were mainly traders. Hiuen Tsang mentions that the Sudras practiced agriculture. There existed many sub castes. The position of women was not satisfactory. The institution of Swyamvara (the choice of choosing her husband) had declined. Remarriage of widows was not permitted, particularly among the higher castes. The system of dowry had also become common. The practice of sati was also prevalent. Hiuen Tsang mentions three ways of disposal of the dead-cremation, water burial and exposure in the woods.

The trade and commerce had declined during Harsha's period. This is evident from the decline of trade centres, less number of coins, and slow activities of merchant guilds. The decline of trade in turn affected the handicrafts industry and agriculture. Since there was no large scale demand for goods, the farmers began to produce only in a limited way. This led to the rise of self-sufficient village economy. In short, there was a sharp economic decline as compared to the economy of the Gupta period.

### **3.1.9. Cultural Progress under Harsha**

The art and architecture of Harsha's period are very few and mostly followed the Gupta style. Hiuen Tsang describes the glory of the monastery with many storeys built by Harsha at Nalanda. He also speaks of a copper statue of Buddha with eight feet in height. The brick temple of Lakshmana at Sirpur with its rich architecture is assigned to the period of Harsha. Harsha was a great patron of learning. His biographer Banabhatta adorned his royal court. Besides Harshacharita, he wrote Kadambari. Other literary figures in Harsha's court were Matanga Divakara and the famous Bartrihari, who was the poet, philosopher and grammarian. Harsha himself authored three plays Ratnavali, Priyadarsika and Nagananda. Harsha patronised the Nalanda University by his liberal endowments. It attained international reputation as a centre of learning during his reign. Hiuen Tsang visited the Nalanda University and remained as a student for some time.

### **3.1.10. Nalanda University**

The Chinese travelers of ancient India mentioned a number of educational institutions. The most famous among them were the Hinayana University of Valabhi and the Mahayana University of Nalanda. Hiuen Tsang gives a very valuable account of the Nalanda University. The term Nalanda means "giver of knowledge". It was founded by Kumaragupta I during the Gupta period. It was patronised by his successors and later by Harsha. The professors of the University were called panditas. Some of its renowned professors were Dingnaga, Dharmapala, Sthiramati and Silabadhra. Dharmapala was a native of Kanchipuram and he became the head of the Nalanda University.

Nalanda University was a residential university and education was free including the boarding and lodging. It was maintained with the revenue derived from 100 to 200 villages endowed by different rulers. Though it was a Mahayana University, different religious subjects like the Vedas, Hinayana doctrine, Sankhya and Yoga philosophies were also taught. In addition to that, general subjects like logic, grammar, astronomy, medicine and art were in the syllabus. It attracted students not only from different parts of India but from different countries of the east. Admission was made by means of an entrance examination. The entrance test was so difficult that not more than thirty percent of the candidates were successful. Discipline was very strict. More than lectures, discussion played an important part and the medium of instruction was Sanskrit. Recent archeological excavations have brought to light the ruins of the Nalanda University. It shows the grandeur of this centre of learning and confirms the account given by the Chinese pilgrims. It had numerous classrooms and a hostel attached to it. According to Itsing, the Chinese pilgrim, there were 3000 students on its rolls. It had an observatory and a great library housed in three buildings. Its fame rests on the fact that it attracted scholars from various parts of the world. It was an institution of advanced learning and research.

### **3.1.11. Conclusion.**

In the post-Gupta period many kingdoms came into existence. These kingdoms were not as large as the Gupta kingdom. The political fortunes of the dynasties which ruled these kingdoms fluctuated with time. During this political juncture the Pushybhutis under Harsha managed to bring almost the whole of northern India under their control. Harsha initially defeated some of the powerful king of his period like Sasanka of Gauda and Deva Gupta of Malwa. After consolidation of his empire Harsha Siladitya looks forward the wellbeing of his subject by introducing smooth and effective administrative apparatus with parental care of the King himself. It is also noticed that Harsha, in the latter year of his reign he accepted Mahayana form of Buddhism and patronize this sect vehemently under his supervision Buddhism witnessed her last glorious time in the history of India. Harsha also proved himself as a man of learning by patronizing Nalanda University and favouring learned personalities like Banabhatta and Hiuen Tsang in his court. Harsha died in the

year 647 AD. He ruled over north India for 41 years. After Harsha's death, apparently without any heirs, his empire died with him. The kingdom disintegrated rapidly into small states.

### **3.1.12. Summary**

- Harsha Vardhana was one of the most important rulers of North India in the Seventh Century A.D, Post Gupta period and before the advent of the Turko-Afghan Rule.
- Sources for reconstructing the history of Harsha's political career and socio-economic condition of this period include:-
  - Banabhatta's Harsha Cahrita and Si-Yu-Ki of Hiuen Tsang's Travel Account as literary sources.
  - Copper plate grants and seals like Madhuban, Sonepat and Bankshera Plate and Nalanda seal and Aihole Inscription constitute epigraphic sources.
  - The ruins and materials remains and coins discovered from the excavation of various sites in north India constitute numismatic and archaeological sources.
  - Besides the Nagananda, Priyadashika and Ratnabali written by Harsha also throw light on the history of Harsha's reign.
- Harsha's ancestors ruled from Thaneswar situated in modern Haryana. Banabhatta notes that his dynasty was known as Pushyabhuti.
- Harsha's born in the year 590 A.D as the second son of Pravakaravardhana, the first son was Rajyavardhana. Only daughter Rajyashree, was given in marriage to Grahavarman of Maukhari dynasty of Kanauj.
- Rajyavardhana succeeded Paravakaravardhana as the king of Thaneswar. During his war against Deva Gupta of Malwa, his brother-in-law Grahavarman was killed by Deva Gupta. Rajya Vardhan was also treacherously killed by Sasnaka, the King of Gauda.
- After death of his brother, Harsha Vardhana ascended the throne of Thaneswara in 606 A.D. Soon after his coronation he started his military campaign against Sasanka and Deva Gupta. He also rescued his sister Rajyashree, from the Vindhyan forest by the help of forest chief. Rajyashree was made captive and subsequently released from prison by Deva Gupta of Malwa.
- Harsha in course of time led a campaign against Sasanka and occupied Eastern India. He also had to fight with Pulakesin II of Chalukyan family ruling in South India.
- Harsha consolidated his empire and his empire at its height extended from Himalaya in the North to River Narmada in South and Kamarupa(modern Assam) in the East to Kashmir in the west. Harsha introduced a smooth administrative apparatus and took care of his subject. A detailed account of his administration was noted by Hiuen Tsang.
- In the early year of his reign Harsha was devoted to Lord Surya and Shiva but in his later year he adopted Mahayan sect of Buddhism and patronized it. He also worshipped lord Surya and Shiva. He convened two great religious assemblies one at Kanauj, and the other one at Prayag. Hiuen Tsang tried to establish supremacy of Mahayana Buddhism.
- He authored three dramas namely Nagananda, Priyadarshika and Ratnavali. He also patronizes learned man like Banabhatta and Hiuen Tsang in his court. Harsha donated number of villages to Nalanda University for its maintenance.
- Harsha's reign was one of the important phases of Indian History. During his rule India witnessed all round peaceful development.
- Harsha died in the year 647 AD. He ruled over North India for 41 years. After Harsha's death, apparently without any heirs, his empire died with him. The kingdom disintegrated rapidly into small states.

### **3.1.13. Exercise**

- Bring out the cultural progress under the rule of Harsha.
- Write a brief account of the Nalanda University.
- Give an account of the life and achievements of Harshavardhana.
- Estimate the contributions of Harsha to Buddhism.
- Describe the administration and society under Harsha as explained by Hiuen Tsang.

### **3.1.14. Further Readings**

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**Unit-3**  
**Chapter-II**  
**CHALUKYA OF BADAMI**  
**Pulakesin-II- Achievements, Chalukyan Art and Architecture**

**Structure**

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### 3.2.0. Objective

*This chapter deals with the history of the early Chalukya dynasty of south India. After learning this lesson the students will know*

- *the sources and early political history of the Chalukyas of Badami.*
- *achievements of prominent rulers of the Chalukya of Badami*
- *achievements of pulakesin II*
- *art, architecture and culture flourished under the patronization of the Early western Chalukyas.*

### 3.2.1. Introduction

Peninsular India went into almost three centuries of ambivalence and uncertainty when the Andhra power diminished and dissipated around 225. Detailed and definitive political history of the Deccan can be considered as starting with the rise to power of the Chalukyas in mid-6th century. The Chalukyas ruled a very large part of South and Central India from the 6th century-their power waxing and waning, but never being completely extinguished until the dynasty went into terminal decline and final obscurity in the 12th century. Three distinct, but related branches of the Chalukya family ruled the Deccan and region around it for a combined duration of nearly six centuries, a feat achieved by very few preceding or succeeding dynasties. The earliest of the three is the dynasty of the Chalukyas of Vatapi (modern Badami) who came to power in early 6th century. They ruled uninterrupted till 757 when they were conclusively defeated by the Rashtrakutas who were rising to power in the Western Deccan. The next is the Eastern Chalukya dynasty who broke away from the primary branch around 625, becoming independent rulers of the region around Vengi. They continued to rule from Vengi till 1020 at which time they seem to have gradually succumbed to external aggression and ceased to exist as autonomous kings. They have also been referred to as Chalukyas of Vengi. The third branch is the Western Chalukyas who revived the lost glory of the Badami Chalukyas late in the 10th century and ruled from Kalyani between 973 and 1200. They are also referred to as the Later Chalukyas. This chapter will deal only on the early Chalukya or the Chalukya of Badami.

### 3.2.2. Sources of Information

The primary source of information regarding the Chalukyas is archaeological, both inscriptions and monuments, which is corroborated by coins, records left behind by travellers and the chronicles of other kingdoms that interacted with the Chalukya kingdoms.

#### 3.2.2.1. Inscriptions.

The inscriptions left behind by the Chalukyas are in Sanskrit and Kannada, with most of them being considered authentic. So far about 150 have been discovered in caves, temples, cliffs and pillars, the majority of which are in Mangalesa, the Kanchi Kailasanatha temple, and the Pattadakal Virupaksha temple. A large number of them are Sanskrit inscriptions written in the Kannada script, indicating the increasing use of Kannada and its gradual acceptance as a royal language of the courts. It is apparent that during the reign of the Chalukyas Kannada had become the predominant language, at least as important as Sanskrit, in areas outside the Tamilaham territory. One of the prominent inscriptions is found in the Meguti temple at Aihole, called the Aihole Prasasti, written in 630. This is written in Kannada by the court poet Ravikirti and provides the history of the Badami Chalukya dynasty up to the reign of Pulakesin II, the most famous king of the dynasty.

#### 3.2.2.2. Monuments.

The monuments left behind by a dynasty provide interesting insights into the cultural, philosophical, artistic and religious development of their times while also providing a broad-brush historical perspective of their rule. This is also the case with the Chalukyas. The Chalukya



monuments are concentrated in three centres-Aihole, Vatapai, and Pattadakal, the last in Bijapur district. The temples are mainly Vaishnavite, although a few Shaivite ones have been discovered along with some dedicated to other gods. There are also few Jain temples of the period that have been unearthed, a sure sign of a benign and tolerant society from a religious perspective. Further, the beauty of the temple architecture definitely indicate royal patronage, since only the king could have afforded the resources necessary to create these magnificent edifices to religion.

#### **3.2.2.3.Coins.**

Coins assist in determining the chronology of a dynasty as well as providing corroborative indicators of the political relationship that existed with the adjoining kingdoms and of trade relations with far-flung states. They also provide information regarding dress and ornaments of the time. Although they ruled for a long period of time by any standards, surprisingly few coins of the Chalukya dynasty have so far been uncovered. From the available coins it becomes clear that the Chalukyas were the first rulers to adopt the Varaha (wild boar) crest. In turn this validates the theory that the Chalukyas were devotees of Vishnu, especially in the Varaha incarnation. Among the few coins that have been discovered is the Rupaka-a silver coin-that commemorates the Chalukya conquest of the Kalachuris. The Kannada writing on the coins further emphasise the increasing importance that was being given to the local script.

#### **3.2.2.4.Written Records.**

So far hardly any compositions by Chalukya court poets have come to light. This is surprising considering the longevity of the dynasty and the proven prosperity of its rule. This becomes even more intriguing when it has been ascertained that the Chalukyas were dedicated patrons of such talented poets as Ravikirti who has been favourably compared to the great Kalidasa. However, the Chalukya epigraphs as well as written records of their feudatories and adversaries provide a credible narrative of the dynasty. The Pampa Bharata, written in Kannada provides the genealogy of the complete dynasty and also gives an insight into the cultural and social conditions of the region under the Chalukyas. This also corroborates the information derived from various other inscriptions. There are also the 'Prasastis', which are smaller pieces of writings in both prose and poetry, which glorifies the achievements of a king and that of his chief/senior queen and at times even of the dynasty in a generic manner. These are descriptions not only of the military and administrative achievements of a king but also provide personal details and personality traits of the king while also commenting on his moral attributes.

#### **3.2.2.5.Records of Hiuen-Tsang.**

The intrepid Chinese religious traveler visited the Chalukya kingdom during the reign of Pulakesin II when it was at its zenith of power and glory. His penchant for leaving accurate and authentic records of his observations provides great insights into the Chalukyan rule and nation at large. His writings confirm that the land was fertile and well cultivated and that the people were uniformly learned yet simple and benevolent in their behaviour pattern. His chronicles go on to extol the gallant qualities and traditions of the Chalukyan army. Although he was an ardent admirer of Emperor Harsha Vardhana of Kanauj, having made the Vardhana court the primary base for his travels and spent most of his time in India there, he confirms clearly that Harsha was the aggressor in the war with the Chalukyas in which he was conclusively defeated.

#### **3.2.2.6.Tabari**

Tabari the Persian historian mentions that Pulakesin II had established diplomatic relations with Khusru Perviz II, who was his contemporary ruling Iran. However, unlike the annals of the Chalukya feudatories, the Persian court records do not provide any detailed information regarding the relationship between the two nations and nor do they record any event of significance that took place while the relationship was on-going.

### 3.2.3. The Early Rulers of the Dynasty

As in the case of almost all dynasties of ancient and medieval India, there are differences of opinions even amongst the most learned of historians regarding the origins of the Chalukyas as well. The more probable explanation of their origins start with the likelihood of their having been a minor feudatory of the early Rashtrakutas. This is confirmed by the Undikavatika Grant dated to the 6th century that clearly states that the Rashtrakuta King Abhimanyu granted a village to the Shaiva ascetic Jatabhara in the presence of Jayasimha, the commander of the Harirasta Fort. Most historians accept this Grant as authentic, which in turn confirms the fact that Jayasimha started his career as a senior military commander of the Rashtrakutas. Subsequently sufficient evidence has emerged from the records of the early Rashtrakutas to prove the veracity of this Rashtrakuta-Chalukya relationship.

The sequence of events that led to the establishment of the Chalukya kingdom therefore can be surmised to have taken place in the fashion as described now. Jayasimha was a powerful commander of one of the more important forts of the early Rashtrakutas at the time that the Rashtrakutas were in the midst of a bitter war against the combined forces of the Nalas and the Mauryas. It is highly probable that Jayasimha appreciated that Rashtrakuta sovereign was embroiled in a serious life and death struggle for survival and seized the opportunity to strike out on his own. He declared independence as the ruler of the parts of the Rashtrakuta kingdom that he controlled around modern-day Bijapur. This theory is supported by the fact that there is absolutely no evidence of a direct conflict between the Rashtrakutas and Jayasimha when he came to power. He followed the declaration of independence by gradually wresting power over larger tracts of land during the preoccupation of the Rashtrakutas with their war with the Nalas and Mauryas.

The declaration of independence by Jayasimha denied the support of an important military vassal like the Chalukyas to the Rashtrakutas and could have further weakened them. They succumbed to the combined assault of the Nala-Maurya armies and were vanquished. At this stage in the sequence of events information that conclusively refute the hypothesis of the Chalukyas having been Kadamba feudatories also becomes available. This is further reinforced in the Daulatabad Grant of Jagadekamalla, which describes Jayasimha as the 'destroyer of the pomp of the Kadambas'. There could be two explanations to this statement, both of which discount the concept of the Chalukyas having been vassals of the Kadambas.

First, it could be that the Kadambas attacked the Rashtrakutas while the latter was in the middle of the war with the Nala-Maurya combine and Jayasimha, faithful to his Rashtrakuta overlord at that time, warded off the attack. He thereafter claimed or was given the credit for the defence of his king's domain. The second explanation, the more believable of the two, is that after the defeat of the Rashtrakutas and the near-simultaneous declaration of independence by the Chalukyas, the Kadambas attacked the broken kingdom in an opportunistic manner. This attack was thwarted by Jayasimha who withstood the Kadamba attack and defeated them. The Chalukyas then went on to overthrow the Nalas and the Mauryas.

Ranaraga, the second established king of the Chalukya dynasty is also referred in some texts as Ranaragasimha, in keeping with the title of his father. According to a later cliff inscription in Badami, he ruled between 520 and 540, which also corresponds approximately to the dates attributed to his father's reign. Although he has been described as a valorous prince of 'stately and gigantic personality' in the Yevur inscriptions, no conquest has been attributed to him in any of the family records. It can therefore be surmised that he devoted his energies to stabilising the fledgling kingdom, holding only a small bit of territory around Bijapur and striving to lay the foundation for a lasting dynasty.

### 3.2.4. The Harbingers of Chalukya Power

**Pulakesin I:** Pulakesin was the eldest son of Ranaraga. His name, if taken purely in its Sanskrit sense, would mean ‘the Great Lion’ and if considered to be a hybrid of Sanskrit and Kannada would convey a more prosaic meaning of ‘tiger-haired’. Either way, it is certain that he lived up to the expectations placed on him by becoming an aggressive ruler. During his 27-year reign he assumed various exalted titles such as Sriprithvivallabha meaning the lord or husband of Sri Lakshmi and also of the Earth, thereby equating himself to Lord Vishnu, by then one of triumvirate of primary gods in the Hindu pantheon. This was a title that subsequent Chalukya rulers adopted for themselves, rather than the more common title of Vallabha. He also gave himself the regal title of Maharaja.

Pulakesin’s rule, which started in 540 is also the beginning of clear records regarding the dynasty, which provide a believable chronology of important events that happened in the Chalukya domains. There are three epigraphs that provide details of Pulakesin’s rule. The first is the rock inscriptions in Badami, which is also the first to be dated in the Saka Era by the Chalukyas. From this inscription it is clear that Pulakesin ruled at least till 567. The second and third epigraphs enumerate Pulakesin’s achievements, even though there is some debate regarding the chronology, especially the sequence of events leading to his conquest of the Kadambas. The most important achievement is perhaps the shifting of the capital to the citadel that he built in Vatapi situated on a defensible eminence near the Malaprabha River. In any case, the Chalukyan military victories during Pulakesin’s reign were of sufficient significance for him to perform the aswamedha sacrifice in celebration. This established the preeminent position of the Chalukya dynasty in the Deccan. Pulakesin left behind a stable and considerably enlarged kingdom to his two sons-Kirtivarman and Mangalesa.

**Kirtivarman I:** The elder son and commander-in-chief of the Chalukyan army, Kirtivarman, came to the throne on the death of his father around 566-567. He is referred to also as Kirtiraja in some inscriptions, which has also been rendered in Kannada as Katti-arasa. There are some unclarified mention regarding a fratricidal war on his ascension connected to the tales of an elder brother who was killed, which obviously questions regarding the legitimacy of Kirtivarman’s claim to the throne. However, this suspicion regarding the legitimacy of his kingship is considered to be purely imaginary and not substantiated.

The Badami inscriptions give the starting date of Kirtivarman’s 12th regnal year as 31 October 578 that in turn confirms the year 566 as his coronation year. Even so the paucity of information continues to an extent that even the length of Kirtivarman’s reign is uncertain. Although most of the inscriptions of his time are silent regarding the political developments that took place during what could be termed the years of consolidation for the Chalukya Empire, it is certain that Kirtivarman spend almost his entire reign in strengthening the foundations of the newly established kingdom. It is certain that Kirtivarman was an impressive and capable ruler who adopted an aggressive stance in the dealings with his neighbours. The Mahakuta Pillar inscriptions credit him with a large number of military victories in far-flung areas of the Peninsula including the defeat of the Cheras ruling in Malabar. However, these claims are almost certainly overstated and exaggerated claims and have to be discounted from any cohesive and factual historical narrative.

The Aihole Prasasti is more factual and can also be corroborated with other sources. In terms of military victories it credits Kirtivarman with those against the Nala, Maurya and Kadamba rulers. Having neutralised the primary threat, Kirtivarman turned his attention towards the southward expansion and further consolidation of Chalukya power. Kirtivarman defeated the Nalas then ruling the areas around Bellary and Karnool districts, and expanded the territorial holdings of the Chalukyas. The Chalukya king then went on to expand the kingdom towards the north-west where the Mauryas ruled the Konkan region of present day Maharashtra. Kirtivarman annexed the

Maurya territories and appointed a governor-possibly a maternal uncle-to rule the province. At the culmination of Kirtivarman's conquests, the Chalukya kingdom was built around Badami stretching to the Konkan in the north-west; Shimoga, including Dharwar and Belgaum, in the south; and up to the Guntur district which also included Bellary and Karnool to the north-east in Andhra country. In a span of merely six centuries, the Chalukyas has managed to carve out a sizeable kingdom that could be considered an empire, controlling the Deccan from sea to sea, becoming the most important dynasty in the region.

Kirtivarman can be considered the first paramount sovereign of the Chalukya dynasty, achieving the status purely by virtue of his own capabilities and prowess. His reign also marked the beginning of an era of Chalukya supremacy and their sweeping and confident conquest of the Deccan and South India. Family records clearly show that Kirtivarman had three sons-Pulakesin II, Vishnuvradhana, and Budhavarasa-who were all minors at the time of his death. Therefore, his younger brother Mangalesa assumed the role of regent in 591.

**Mangalesa:** At that time that Mangalesa assumed the regency, it can be presumed that he had honourable intentions of handing over to the rightful heir, Pulakesin II, when the latter came of age. However, Mangalesa's some years before Pulakesin came of age, declared himself king with his own son as the heir apparent. It is reliably reported that Pulakesin had to fight to get his kingdom back. The doubt is not about how Mangalesa handed over power, but regarding the reason for his succeeding Kirtivarman to the throne, the minority of the princes at the death of their father not being fully confirmed.

There is absolutely no doubt that Mangalesa followed his elder brother to the throne. Almost immediately on assuming power, he embarked on an ambitious and extensive scheme of conquest. In the chronicles of the Chalukyas he is not given sufficient prominence and almost no credit for his achievements. This could be attributed to his usurping the throne later in his regency and attempting to establish a different line of succession that supported his own son, an attempt that failed.

The rule of Mangalesa is a notable period in Chalukya military history, even though the family records do not acknowledge it. The king was an accomplished military commander and it is also certain that he actively participated in the wars won by both his father and elder brother, gaining valuable experience as a wartime commander of forces. His ambition, if stray stories are to be believed, was to conquer North India and construct a victory pillar on the banks of the River Ganga. However, this far-fetched dream was never realised, although that does not distract from his other great military victories.

Early in his reign he invaded the Kalachuri kingdom, at that time ruled by King Buddharaja and consisting of Gujarat, Kathiawad and Nasik districts, and defeated their forces. The Chalukya domain extended to the River Mahi and it is highly probable that Mangalesa attacked or raided the Kalachuri territories multiple times. He then conquered Revatidvipa (present day Goa) south of Ratnagiri district on the Konkan coast. The available description of this attack provides information that Mangalesa deployed naval forces who attacked from the sea in conjunction with the land forces. In this expedition, Mangalesa killed Svamiraja, the regent appointed by Kirtivarman I his predecessor and brother, since the regent was loyal to Pulakesin II and supported his claim to the throne. This conquest affirmed his control over the Konkan. At the end of his reign the Chalukya Empire stretched from the lower part of Gujarat and Kathiawad to the northern regions of Karnataka and encompassed the Bellary and Karnool regions of Andhra. Mangalesa was a great conqueror and truly entitled to the title of Ranavikranta that he adopted towards the end of his reign. He has to be credited with the single-handed expansion of the territorial holdings to the northern regions, which was instrumental in gradually establishing the Chalukyas as a pan-Deccan dynasty, rather than a purely South Indian one.

Mangalesa's reign culminated in a fratricidal war with his nephew Pulakesin II. The consequence of Mangalesa ignoring Pulakesin's claim to the throne was that he lost the three things that was dearest to his heart-he lost his throne, his life, and failed in his attempt to perpetuate his own line of descent. There is no information available regarding his sons, even their names having been obliterated in the endless march of history.

By the time Pulakesin II successfully claimed his patrimony, the Chalukyas were undisputedly the most prominent dynasty ruling an empire that straddled the waistline of the sub-continent from coast to coast. They were Brahminical Hindus, although tolerant of other sects and religions, like most of the medieval Indian rulers. However, their attitude to other religions was one of indifference and not support. This resulted in a lack of concerted patronage to other religions that subsequently led to their decline. Buddhism was particularly affected during this period and declined rapidly to oblivion in the Deccan. This period of the Chalukya ascent also saw the creation of a number of religious treatise that made the sacrificial form of Hinduism become predominant. Pulakesin I, Kirtivarman I and Mangalesa laid down a solid foundation for the coming generations to build on and create a magnificent edifice-the Chalukya Empire. The process of further construction was initiated by Pulakesin II, who proclaimed the greatness of his dynasty in an indisputable fashion and also captivated later-day historians as the epitome of Indian princely qualities.

### **3.2.5. Pulakesin II- The Greatest of Early Chalukya**

Mangalesa, the regent turned king, refused to hand over power to Pulakesin II on his reaching the age to be crowned king. Therefore it was inevitable that he would leave the court of Badami. With the help of loyal friends he gathered power and an army outside the capital and then at an opportune moment revolted against his uncle. In the Civil War that ensued, Mangalesa was defeated and killed. It is certain that Pulakesin was formally crowned as the king almost immediately, although there is some debate regarding the date of Mangalesa's defeat and Pulakesin's ascension to the throne. Later evidence permits fixing the actual date of the coronation as having taken place between January and July in 610.

The Civil War shook the foundations of the young kingdom and brought out the disgruntled elements and Mangalesa's supporters within the kingdom against the young king. Further, the kingdom was surrounded by hostile adversaries, which was a normal state of diplomatic relations in medieval times when ambitious and opportunistic rulers abounded. Pulakesin devoted the next 20 years of his reign to a career of aggressive military annexation, initially to save his fledgling kingdom and later to enhance its stature. [There is no better proof that an aggressive policy is the best form of defence than the demonstrated rise of Pulakesin II and the consolidation and subsequent growth of his once fractured kingdom.]

#### **3.2.5.1.Sources of Information**

Pulakesin's rule has been chronicled in a large number of sources. There are the charters that mark an eventful career; the undated records and temple inscriptions; and the information that can be gleaned from the records of both allies and adversaries.

**List of Charters:** For ease of understanding, the Charters can be listed chronologically in order of the regnal year of Pulakesin in which they were issued.

1st Year-Yekkeri Rock Inscription, where the language is similar to earlier Gupta inscriptions. 3rd Year-Hyderabad Copper Plates dated to 612 that fixes Pulakesin's coronation date as 610. 5th Year-Kandalgoan Copper Plate that celebrates the grant of Pirigipa Village in Revatidvipa (Goa) by the king. 8th Year-The Maruthuru Grant which records the occupation of Pishtapura. 8th Year-The Satara Grant of Vishnuvardhana (Pulakesin's brother) who had earlier been declared the Yuvaraja, or Crown Prince, and appointed Governor. There is a gap of 12 years from the Satara Grant to the next charter/inscription. Since Pulakesin had so far been prolific in

recording the significant events of his rule till then, this is a surprising development. 20th Year-Inscription in Lohner (Nasik district) that has been reliably dated to 630. This inscription takes the form of an order to the 'Rajyasamata(s)' or administrative officers of the realm to register the king's gift of Goviyanaka Village to the Brahman Dama Dikshita. 21st Year-The Koppam Plates record the gift of another village to a Brahman belonging to Karmarashtra. 24th Year-The Aihole Prasasti (referred earlier). This record written in praise of the king is reliably dated to 634 and as having been written by Ravikirti the court poet. 634 was the year in which the newly built temple to Jinendra was consecrated. It provides a believable chronological order and also details of the military exploits of Pulakesin and his ancestors.

**Undated Records:** The Tummayanuru Grant, as yet undated correctly, it provides one of the earliest references to Pulakesin as 'Parameswara'. There are also a number of Plates discovered at Chiplun and Nerur, some of which may be spurious, that mostly refer to the grant of lands to individual citizens. There are undated stone inscriptions at Badami and Hirebidri in Dharwar that according to the content belong to the time of Pulakesin's reign. The temple inscription at Peddvadaguru Isvara Temple mentions Pulakesin's subjugation of Ranvikrama, most probably a Bana king, although there is no date mentioned in the text.

**Other Records:** Pulakesin's military exploits are also mentioned in the records of the Chalukyas of Kalyani, written at a later date. However, since they were a sub-branch of the Badami Chalukyas, it can be presumed that some of the claims were embellished and therefore some amount of doubt regarding the authenticity of all the claims exists. However, the Pallavas of Kanchi, traditional adversaries of the Chalukyas also mention details of Pulakesin's rule and military victories. These clearly corroborate the details provided in the Chalukya chronicles, thereby increasing their veracity and by extrapolation making it possible to consider even non-corroborated information as correct. The third source is the chronicles of the Chinese pilgrim-traveller Hieun Tsang who provides graphic descriptions of the famous Pulakesin-Harshvardhana battle as well as detailed information regarding the general state of affairs in the Chalukya kingdom during the time of his visit.

### **3.2.5.2. Military Achievements of Pulakesin II**

The first rulers who rebelled at the discomfiture of the Chalukyas brought about by the Civil War were Appayika and Govinda, rulers of the country north of the River Bhima. At this early stage of his reign, the young Pulakesin displayed admirable statesmanship and adopted a combination of diplomacy and military skill to defeat the imminent threat. He created dissension between the two, who were presumably allies, and alienated them from each other by winning over Govinda by bestowing favours on him. Appayika was defeated in battle and subsequently Govinda was overthrown. Other than for the fact that they came from across River Bhima, the Aihole Prasasti neither provides any information regarding the identity of these rulers nor are there any details of their territories. However, their names indicate Rashtrakuta lineage. Considering the hereditary animosity and regular clashes between the two dynasties, it can be presumed that these two minor kings decided to take advantage of the chaos of the aftermath of the Civil War in order to reclaim lost territory and declare independence. This situation can be considered the most probable since the Aihole Prasasti provides proof that the Rashtrakutas were indeed in control of the area before the Chalukyas rose to power in the south and subsequently overcame them.

**The Defeat of the Kadambas of Banavasi:** The Kadambas had been defeated and made into a feudatory by Pulakesin's father but they seem to have rebelled and declared independence in the wake of the Civil War. In the event, they refused to accept Chalukya overlordship after Mangalesa's death in the Civil War. The Kadambas were a group of families, interlinked and related, with the primarily family based around Banavasi. None of them were independently strong enough or capable of opposing even the diminished Chalukya power. However, it is likely that they felt that

their combined strength would be sufficient to withstand the Chalukya onslaught, when Pulakesin besieged Banavasi to enforce his will.

The Kadambas put up a very strong resistance for they knew that this was the fight for the very survival of the family. However, Pulakesin was more than a match for them as a military commander and comprehensively defeated them, leaving the Kadambas no option but to surrender. Pulakesin now displayed the strategic side of his character. He deposed the Kadamba ruler, probably Bhojivarman, and annexed the kingdom. He further divided their territorial holdings and parcelled them out to his faithful allies thereby conclusively exterminating Kadamba power for ever. By doing so he ensured that there would not be any chance of a future rebellion by the families once again coming together, eliminating opposition permanently. The Aihole Prasasti describes the devastated Banavasi as having been a prosperous city with strong defensive fortifications.

***The Alupas:*** The exact identity of the Alupas and their status as rulers is still debated. It is likely that they were at some time in the past allies of the Kadambas, especially during the latter's more powerful days. There is also uncertainty regarding the borders of their kingdom with one opinion stating that they were the same as the Alukas who ruled Guntur in Andhra. This is not a correct assumption since the geographical factors in terms of their conquest and those of the Alukas do not align. It is more probable that they were ruling the South Kanara district of Karnataka with their capital at Humcha in Shimoga. The Alupas had already been defeated by Kirtivarman I, although it is highly probable that they were not fully subdued. This is evidenced by the fact that Mangalesa also had to subdue them militarily during his rule. Therefore, when the Civil War broke out and the Kadambas openly rebelled, the Alupas decided to hedge their bet and they stayed neutral in order to see which way the wind would blow when Pulakesin laid siege to Banavasi.

On the Kadambas being defeated they decided not to confront the victorious Chalukya king and reverted to acknowledging his overlordship, thereby avoiding conflict and almost certain defeat. Pulakesin was happy with the reassertion of Chalukya control over the Alupas and their acceptance of his sovereignty. He showed his appreciation by granting the Alupas control of the major portion of the divided Kadamba territory, thereby making them trusted feudatories.

***The Gangas of Talakkad:*** Some sources state that the Gangas were defeated by Kirtivarman I, which should be considered a bit of an exaggeration and hyperbole. That the Gangas were not completely defeated is established by the fact that King Durvinita of the Gangas had a particularly long rule and he was the contemporary of Kirtivarman I, Mangalesa and also Pulakesin II. It is possible that Kirtivarman did indeed invade the Ganga kingdom at some stage during his military conquests, but was content to let the king continue on his throne—a situation that indicates a less than optimum outcome for the Chalukyas in this contest. The Gangas were supporters of the Kadambas, being matrimonially allied to them over generations. During the Civil War in Badami it is certain that the Gangas also entertained visions of gaining independence, but the definitive defeat and destruction of the Kadambas put paid to that ambition. The Gangas were quick to acknowledge Chalukya supremacy and in order to cement the relations, King Durvinita gave his daughter in marriage to Pulakesin.

The matrimonial alliance was done with political considerations and was an astute strategic move on the part of the Ganga king. The Gangas were age-old adversaries of the Pallavas and were in a perpetual state of conflict with them. The Pallavas had conquered part of Ganga territory, annexing the district of Kongunadu to their kingdom. Obviously the Gangas wanted to retrieve the area and found the alliance with Pulakesin advantageous in their constant squabbles with the stronger Pallavas. From the Chalukyan viewpoint, the acceptance of their sovereignty by the Gangas assured their supremacy of western Deccan.

***The Mauryas of Konkana:*** The Mauryas had also been defeated by Kirtivarman I and were vassal kings during both his and Mangalesa's reign. Like a number of other smaller entities, they also decided to rebel against the young Chalukya king immediately after, or more probably during, the Civil War. The Mauryas could also have been ruling Goa and the major portion of the Konkana coast at some time since a number of Mauryan records have been recovered from Goa in the recent past.

Pulakesin took the fight to the enemy as was his wont and besieged the Maurya capital of Puri situated on the West Coast. The Chalukyan navy stormed Puri and overran it with relative ease and the kingdom was annexed to the expanding Chalukyan Empire. The Mauryas disappear from the political scene of the Deccan and South India after this defeat and it can be reliably presumed that Pulakesin was not lenient with the defeated dynasty. During Pulakesin's military march he repeatedly demonstrates the ability to forgive and embrace lesser kings who accepted his overlordship without resistance even if they had attempted rebellion and chased the shadow of independence. On the other hand he shows an absolute ruthless streak against the dynasties that took up arms to fight the Chalukyan army. The shadow of a matured understanding of diplomacy and the understanding of the need to cultivate allies and vassals can be seen in every decision that he made in the aftermath of a victory.

***The Latas, Malavas and the Gurjaras:*** The Latas ruled the territory situated south of the River Kim with Navasari, modern day Navasari in Gujarat, as their capital. They were part of the Kalachuri domain of Buddhiraja before he was defeated by Mangalesa. Pulakesin recaptured the territory by force and installed a Chalukya scion, Vijayavarmaraja, as the viceroy. Evidence from the Kaira plates confirm this viceroy as continuing to rule the area even in 643.

The situation in Malava was more complex than the straightforward conquest of the Lata territory. Hieun Tsang refers to the Malava territory as Mo-la-po and states that they were an independent dynasty, dominated by the Maitraka king Siladitya I. The conjecture is that although Siladitya was an independent king in his own right, he accepted the suzerainty of the ruler on Vallabhi because of the threat posed to his kingdom by the expansionist policies of Harshavardhana of Kanauj. It is even possible that the Vardhana kingdom had engaged in some raids into the Malava territory. In Harshacharita, Bana mentions the Malava king as one of the enemies of Prabhakaravardhana, along with the Latas and the Gurjaras. It is highly likely that the Malava king was also a co-conspirator in luring Rajyavardhana, the crown prince of Kanauj, to a trap that resulted in his assassination. Further, they were also definitely involved in killing the Maukhari king Grahavarman who was Harshavardhana's brother-in-law, an event that in the first place made the Vardhana dynasty attack Malava. The Kanauj-Malava enmity was of long standing and irrevocable.

There is a view that is expressed that the Malava kings were earlier feudatories of the Chalukyas who also rebelled at an opportune moment and operated independently for some years. However, this is not corroborated and is highly unlikely to have been the situation. It is certain that their territory was in close proximity to the Chalukya borders and fear of the Vardhana strength and their obvious animosity drove the Malava kings to the Chalukya camp.

The Gurjara kingdom was situated between the Rivers Kim and Mahi with the Latas to the south and Malavas to the east. The Gurjara king Dadda II assisted the Maitraka king in his fight against Harshavardhana and submitted to Chalukya overlordship along with the Malavas, although he did not share a geographical border with the Chalukya kingdom. Although there was some confusion in determining whether the Gurjara ruler who submitted to Pulakesin was of the Broach or Mandor branch of the family, combining information from different sources confirm that he was of the Broach branch of the Gurjara clan. The Latas, Malavas and Gurjaras accepted Chalukya overlordship of their own accord and there are no indications of any major military action in this region in the Chalukya chronicles or the local history.



***Subjugation of Kosala, Kalinga and the Vishnukundins:*** Dakshina Kosala (South Kosala) was traditionally ruled by the Panduvanshi kings and consisted of the districts of Raipur and Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh and Sambalpur in Orissa. King Mahasivagupta protected his kingdom and his rule by submitting to Pulakesin without putting up a fight and accepting the overlordship of the 'Supreme Lord'. Kalinga, ruled by the Eastern Gangas also followed suit and accepted Chalukya overlordship. There is scant information regarding the details of how this was achieved, but it is certain that no military manoeuvre was involved in making these two kingdoms Chalukya feudatories.

The situation was different with the Vishnukundins who were the rulers of Andhra and the overlords of Kalinga, wielding great power in the region. Nobody gives up an exalted status willingly and a clash was inevitable. The Vishnukundins ruled Vengi with Pishtapura, modern day Pithapuram, as their capital. Pulakesin stormed and captured Pishtapura in 617-618. The Vishnukundins put up a stiff resistance to the Chalukya invasion through a heroic defence of their kingdom while withdrawing from the capital. The next battle was fought near Lake Kunala (later Kolleru and even later anglicised to Colair) where the water is reported to have turned red with the blood of the slain soldiers. The Vishnukundins lost the battle and their independence with the ruling king Indravarman accepting Chalukya supremacy. This was obviously done to ensure that Pulakesin desisted from appointing a Chalukyan viceroy, as was his normal procedure, immediately at the culmination of the battle. The Chalukyan victory therefore was only conquest, not annexation of territory. However, the reduction of the Vishnukundins to feudatory status had far-reaching and unfortunate repercussions. By now the Chalukya Empire in the east spread from Vishakhapatnam to Southern Nellore.

### **3.2.5.3. Clash with Harshavardhana of Kanauj**

The most important event during the Pulakesin's command of the victorious Chalukya military forces was his defeat of the Kanauj king Harshavardhana. This was the clash of the titans of the era-Harshavardhana the undisputed ruler of the North and Pulakesin the acknowledged lord of the South. The reason for the conflict is unclear and still obscure and shrouded in conjecture. The two empires did not share a common border, therefore border dispute as a primary cause can be effectively ruled out. The Latas, Malavas and the Gurjaras ruled the buffer states and had accepted Chalukya overlordship. They displayed a shared animosity towards the Vardhana kingdom from the time of Prabhakaravardhana and this could also have been a reason for their acceptance of Chalukya 'protection'. Considering the long-standing enmity between the three buffer states and the Vardhana dynasty, the Chalukyas providing them with protection could have further irritated the imperial Harsha and added to his ire, making an expedition against the Southern 'upstart' a necessity.

By the time of the conflict both the kings were paramount rulers of in their respective areas and both could have nurtured the ambition to test the strength of the other. Essentially this was a test for ultimate supremacy that was waiting to happen. Therefore, the reason for the actual conflict has very little meaning in the larger scheme of things. It is certain that Harsha was resentful of the Southern king's power and sought to invade his feudatories. It is equally clear that Pulakesin viewed Harsha as the 'Northern' enemy, although this epithet is in all probabilities the addition of a later day historian, biased in favour of the Chalukya king.

Even the location where the historic battle took place is a debated issue. Vincent Smith, the renowned historian, states that since Harsha accepted the River Narmada as the dividing line between the two kingdoms at the end of the war, the battle must have been fought on its banks. This cannot be true since Harsha's empire did not reach the Narmada and he would have had to conquer the Malavas and Gurjaras before reaching its banks. It is certain that such a conquest did not take place. Hieun Tsang testifies to the fact that the three buffer states never submitted to Harsha and confirms their independent status at the time of the conflict. Therefore, the battle would have taken

place in some place far to the north of River Narmada and not on its banks. The acceptance of Narmada as the dividing line between the two empires itself is a wrong premise since the three buffer states continued their independent existence even after the battle.

***The Date of the Battle:*** There are opposing views regarding the date of the battle with one opinion that it took place before 615 and the other emphasising that it happened between 630 and 634. There are two arguments that support the theory of it having taken place before 615. One: the Hyderabad Plate dated to 612 clearly gives the title of 'Parameswara' meaning Supreme Lord to Pulakesin. Later Chalukyan records associate this assumption of the title with the defeat of a hostile ruler from the North who had himself won a hundred battles. Since the only great king from the North that Pulakesin fought and defeated was Harsha, it is presumed that the battle took place before the date of the Hyderabad Plate, which is 612. Two: Hieun Tsang reports that Harsha waged incessant war for the first six years after ascending the throne and thereafter ruled without ever having to wield a sword for the next 30 years. It is therefore presumed that Harsha's last battle was against Pulakesin in 612, since his coronation is confirmed as having been held in 606.

There are a number of arguments that support the 630-634 timeframe, although some of them are based on conjuncture alone. One: the battle is not mentioned in the Lohner Plate of Pulakesin dated to 630 and therefore, the battle could not have taken place before this date. This dating is dubious but some analysts corroborate this date with Hieun Tsang's '30 years of peace' statement. They point out that Harsha attacked the region of Kongda in late 643, which was exactly 31 years after 612 when the 30-year peace began. Therefore the battle could not have taken place before 642 and definitely not before 630. While the interpretation of the Chinese writing is correct, it is tenuous to base the dating of this important battle on these circumspect calculations. Two: it is mentioned that around 612, Pulakesin would have been busy consolidating his newly acquired kingdom and therefore would not have been able to withstand the might of the mature Vardhana army and their illustrious king. This is pure conjuncture and cannot be taken to be verified fact.

Three: it is claimed that the assumption of the title 'Parameswara' was associated with Pulakesin's defeat and conquest of other contemporary dynasties and kingdoms, which came to be linked to Harsha's defeat only in the later recounting of the dynastic history. Once again, this is sheer speculation without any evidence to prove its veracity. Four: The Gurjara ruler Dadda II had defended the Maitraka ruler Dhruvabhatta against the incursion of Harshavardhana and the earliest known date for Dadda II is 629. It is therefore surmised that the Pulakesin-Harsha conflict could not have taken place before this date. This too is a tenuous claim since the fact that no earlier date is available for Dadda II does not mean that he was not ruling before 629.

The defeat of Harshavardhana was the single most important achievement of Pulakesin. The records of Adityavarman, the successor to Pulakesin, reaffirms the victory while clearly mentioning Harsha as the defeated king in question. The victory is thereafter mentioned in detail in a large number of Chalukya records. The veracity of the battle and the defeat of Harsha is also attested in the dynastic records of the Rashtrakutas. Considering that the Rashtrakutas were traditional adversaries of the Chalukyas, their records have to be considered as being truthful in their reportage. Harsha's defeat has proverbial fame in the Chalukya dynastic history with the Kalyani-Lata and Vengi sub-branches also praising the achievement as the most significant event in their history. Therefore, the assumption of the title 'Parameswara', which is in itself uncommon, cannot be taken as the egoistic postulation of an inflated personality but the declaration of a victorious king celebrating a specific and important event not only for him but for the entire dynasty.

Considering all the arguments, and their pros and cons, it can be confirmed with assurance that the famous battle took place in the fifth year of Pulakesin's rule and definitely before 615. Firmly supporting this theory and making it believable is the fact that the Aihole Prasasti, which

adheres to a strict chronology in the recounting of events, also places the defeat of Harsha in this timeframe. Pulakesin's other conquests are recorded as having been achieved in later years.

***The Conclusion of the Epic Battle:*** As stated earlier, Pulakesin had sheltered the traditional enemies of the Vardhanas and Harshavardhana was intent on punishing what he considered an upstart Southern king and making him a vassal. He was unaware of the extremely gallant Chalukya army and its tactically brilliant commander and therefore did not cater for a powerful response. There is no debate or doubt regarding the fact that the conflict was initiated by Harsha. There are various suggestions regarding the manner in which actual battle played out that only contribute to muddying the understanding of this extremely important event and making it somewhat inconspicuous. By raising unanswerable questions and providing contestable information the significance of the event is reduced. This was one of the first battles between equally strong empires of the North and the South and its echo would be heard far into the future.

There is a stanza in a poem written in praise of Harshavardhana that alludes to his 'conquest' of the south. From this some historians have drawn stories which claim that Harsha concluded a treaty with Pulakesin to continue his military push further south. This hypothesis has to be discounted for what it is—a fanciful tale concocted on the basis of unverifiable information. It is possible that the name mentioned in this stanza of the poem is that of the Chalukya prince Siladitya of the Lata branch who may have come in contact with Harsha and stood aside instead of fighting. There is also a mention of this contact in the Navasari Plate of indeterminate date.

It is certain that the battle took place far to the north of River Narmada; that Harsha was conclusively defeated; that he concluded an honourable treaty with the Chalukya king and retreated back to his kingdom; and that he never again attempted a southern military foray. Harshavardhana, for all his military prowess never crossed the River Narmada, nor did he even come close to its banks. Further, he did not attempt to invade the buffer kingdoms and steered clear of all contact with the Chalukyas and their feudatories after this defeat. These are the categorical assertions in the Aihole Prasasti and can most certainly be believed.

By around 615, at the successful conclusion of the power struggle with Harsha, Pulakesin controlled the western and northern Deccan all the way to River Narmada and had sovereignty over the Maharashtra region consisting of around 99,000 villages. The region, 'three' Maharashtras as they have been named in older texts, are Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Konkan. The Chalukya Empire also encompassed the territory between the Rivers Narmada and Tapti, the modern day district of Betul in Madhya Pradesh. In a short span of time Pulakesin had carved out and consolidated a large empire.

#### **3.2.5.4. The Chalukya-Pallava Rivalry**

With the conquest of the Vishnukundin kingdom, the buffer between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas, the emerging power in the Peninsula, vanished. Further, until they were conquered by Pulakesin the Vishnukundins had been Pallava allies and therefore, the Pallavas considered this invasion an insult to their power. It was only natural that the powerful Pallavas opposed the assertion of Chalukya power in areas that had so far been considered their sphere of influence. The Aihole Prasasti unequivocally mentions the growing power of the Pallavas and alludes to the mounting rivalry between the two dynasties. This situation initially led to a number of minor clashes and skirmishes between the two kingdoms, although they were uniformly indecisive. However, with mounting tension, major clashes were not far away.

The reason for the Chalukya-Pallava rivalry is often mentioned as being obscure. In reality there is nothing obscure about it. Here was an established empire ruled by an ambitious dynasty, the Chalukyas, which had by now reached maturity and become entrenched over more than four generations aspiring to achieve political supremacy. It was but a natural progression that they would gradually encroach on the turf of an emerging power, the Pallavas. A clash to establish the political

hierarchy, a 'pecking order', therefore became a circumstantial necessity. This struggle for political supremacy that was initiated by Pulakesin II was not a passing phase since both the contestants were dynastically strong and secure. The conflict went on for generations.

Pulakesin took the initiative to settle the simmering issue and around 618-619 pushed the Pallavas into their capital Kanchipura, subsequently vanquishing the Pallava king Mahendravarman I. It is clear that the Chalukya intention was subjugation and not annexation or even conquest, since no action was initiated to deprive the adversary of political independence, after the military victory. After the Pallava king was defeated, Pulakesin pushed further south as far as the River Kavery. It is a testimony to the military genius of the Chalukya king that he appreciated the difficulties in securing the long line of communication and logistic supply and adopted a strategy of conciliation with the Southern kingdoms who were located south of the Pallava kingdom, rather than attempting subjugation. The fact that these kingdoms were very prosperous and well-administered may also have influenced this decision to befriend them. This is also a valid example of the Mandala Theory of envelopment being used in practical diplomacy. Pulakesin returned in triumph to his capital Badami and almost immediately the Pallavas regained their lost authority.

Pulakesin II was now the sovereign ruler of an empire that was bounded by three oceans and the Vindhya mountain ranges in the north. However, this did not dampen the rivalry and struggle for supremacy with the Pallavas that continued unabated.

Although the Pallava king was defeated, the campaign was inconclusive as demonstrated by the rapidity with which the Pallavas returned to dominate the scene on Pulakesin's return to his stronghold. A few years later, Narasimhavarman ascended the Pallava throne and was clearly ambitious to regain territory lost during his father's defeat at the hands of the Chalukya king. At this stage there may have been punitive Pallava raids into Chalukya controlled territories or their feudatories. The provocation was sufficient for Pulakesin to mount another military expedition against the Pallavas. It is definite that the Chalukyas initiated the attack and not the Pallavas since all the clashes took place in Pallava territory. However, this time around the end-results were somewhat different from the first expedition.

Pulakesin could not besiege the capital like the previous campaign and decided to push further south to extend the area of conquest while bypassing Kanchipura. The Pallavas gave battle at Pariyala, Suramara, and Manimangala-all in their own territory-and gradually started to repulse the invaders. This slow reversal of fortunes was the beginning of the final Chalukya defeat. At this stage the Pallavas had managed to create a sort of loose Confederacy with other Southern kingdoms. There came into being an uneasy truce between the two antagonists for a few years with only minimal sparring taking place. This was also the time of the visit of Hieun Tsang who does not report any details of the raging Chalukya-Pallava rivalry.

Once he was certain of the support of the Southern allies, Narasimhavarman initiated a campaign into Chalukya territory. For the first time during his reign Pulakesin was being attacked in his home turf. The Pallavas won a number of battles and advanced on the capital, Badami. The exact date of the final battle cannot be ascertained but it is clear that Pulakesin was killed in this battle and the Pallava general Siruthodara Paranjoti captured Badami. In this campaign the Pallavas were assisted by a prince of Ceylon called Manivarman, confirming the age old connection between the Peninsula and the island nation. This momentous victory is affirmed by the title of 'Vatapikonda', meaning the Victor of Vatapi, being bestowed on Narasimhavarman in all records following the battle. Further, there is an inscription on the back wall of the famous Mallikarjun Temple at Badami mentioning the Pallava victory and the capture and burning of the capital. This dates to the 13 year of Narasimhavarman's rule, corresponding to 642-43.

Perhaps because of his ignoble end-military defeat and death-there is no further mention of Pulakesin II in the Chalukyan records. This was a sad end to a brilliant military commander who had raised Chalukyan power to the acme of accomplishment. The kingdom went into the depths of strife and decline immediately after the sacking of its capital. Pulakesin, a king who had spent all his life commanding his army in military expeditions, one who had defeated the mighty Harshvardhana and forced him to return to his own kingdom, who had made the Chalukya Empire the greatest that Peninsular India had so far seen, was laid low and vanished from the chronicles of this illustrious dynasty. Failure is never lauded-a king and a beggar becomes equal in the face of death.

### **3.2.5.5.Pulakesin's Administration**

The size of the empire that he created made it difficult to rule it under a direct and centralised administration, a fact that the astute Pulakesin realised fairly early in his conquering, annexing march. He divided the kingdom into administrative zones that were ruled by either trusted family members or loyal feudatories. He even trusted the administration of some minor regions to the defeated ruler of the region, who was restored to power as a feudatory. This system had the advantage of freeing the Emperor to concentrate on the more important task of increasing and perpetuating the Chalukya influence in the Deccan and the Peninsula.

Pulakesin initially appointed his younger brother Vishnuvardhan as the Governor of Velvola, the southern Maratha country and around 631 moved him as the Governor of the newly captured Vengi region. This move was probably done to ensure that he had a trustworthy kinsman ruling the strategically vulnerable area around Vengi. Vishnuvardhan declared independence around 642 after 18 years of governorship in two different parts of the empire. Although there is opinion that he rebelled against his brother, this is patently an incorrect assessment. In all likelihood he declared independence only after his brother was killed in battle since it is reliably learned that Vishnuvardhan held his elder brother in great esteem. Around the same time Vijayavarman, son of Buddhavarman the Governor of Gujarat or Lata territories appointed by Pulakesin earlier, also rebelled and declared independence. This was the beginning of the two sub-branches of the Chalukyas who continued their rule for another four centuries in their respective areas. The Konkan continued to be ruled by the Chalukya's most loyal feudatory dynasty, the Sendrakas.

Hieun Tsang records that after visiting Kanchipura he reached Mo-ha-la-cha, Maharashtra, one of the earliest references to the region by that name. He writes of the powerful king Pu-la-ke-she who controlled a number of feudatories, was a Kshatriya by birth, and ruled a very prosperous kingdom. He praises the warrior-like qualities of the king and particularly mentions the gallant nature of the Chalukya army.

There is no doubt that Pulakesin was known far and wide and accepted as the Supreme ruler of the Deccan and the South. The Persian historian Tabari (838-923) records the presence of a Chalukyan ambassador in the Persian court, send sometime during the 26 years of Pulakesin's reign. In his account Pulakesin is referred variously as Pramesha and Pharmis, presumably a Persian variation of the title Parameswara. The return embassy send by King Khusru Perviz II and their reception at the Chalukya court is depicted in Cave No I in the Ajanta caves and could be dated between 600 and 625.

By all accounts Chalukya military power reached its acme during the reign of Pulakesin II, and also reached its first nadir at his death at the hands of the victorious Pallava king Narasimhavarman. Even a cursory analysis of the career of Pulakesin reveals that while he was a great military commander in the field, he did not cater for administrative overstretch in terms of his annexations and the fatigue that must have enveloped his army after decades of continuous campaigning. The indication of his dwindling power and hold on conquered areas should have been noted when the Pallavas almost immediately came back to power on Pulakesin's withdrawal after

the first Southern invasion. History is replete with examples of kings who succumbed to hubris and a belief in their own invincibility, only to find that there was always an adversary who would be better than them. The second attempted conquest of the Pallavas was one hill too many for the Chalukyan army and their illustrious commander to climb.

The most glorious military innings in the history of the Badami Chalukyas came to an equally vainglorious end-military defeat, the death of the king, and the pillage of his capital.

### **3.2.6. The Chalukya Empire-An appreciation**

The Chalukya dynasty ruled the Deccan Plateau and adjoining areas for more than six centuries and then faded from the historical narrative of the Indian sub-continent, as so many had done before and since. The central family was established in Badami in early 6th century. They were ambitious and capable, creating a vast Empire within the span of little over a century. Their self-confidence is demonstrated by the kings setting up their brothers as powerful viceroys in conquered areas and more importantly by later permitting these off-shoots to set up sibling dynasties independent of the principal group. The subsidiary dynasties were established in the periphery of the core Empire; in the east around Vengi, and in the west with Kalyani as capital. The Kalyani branch came to its own only towards the end of the dynastic rule in Badami and there was nearly a 200-year period when this branch was dormant.

The reign of the Chalukyas had its own cycle of ups and downs, victories and defeats, civil wars and other disturbances, but they were never completely defeated by any one king or dynasty, nor was their kingdom annexed. They were never vanquished and never vanished for six centuries; at the end being pushed aside into relative obscurity only because of the overwhelming fatigue that came with the constant wars and the heavy burden of holding a large empire together. It cannot be said that the Chalukyas suffered from Royal hubris or that they went into decline because of overstretch, like so many other empires.

#### **3.2.6.1. The Chalukyan Society**

Like most other kingdoms of the time, the Chalukya Empire was primarily agrarian in nature and a majority of the population was centred on villages, making a living off agricultural pursuits. The staple crops were rice and pulses with cotton in dry areas and sugar cane being cultivated in rain-deficient regions. [Since the pattern of monsoons have not changed significantly in the past 1500 years, it is not surprising that the region even today follows a similar pattern in agricultural activities.] It was common practice for labourers to migrate en mass to another ruler's jurisdiction if they were unhappy with the treatment meted out to them. This would have put the landlords in a quandary if such an exodus took place at some critical point in the cultivating cycle and therefore would have had a salutary effect on the treatment of the 'lowly' labourer. Since there is no record of any kind of labour rebellion during the Chalukya reign, it can be ascertained that the labourers were treated well.

Tax collectors who were called Praja Gavundas (today corrupted to Gaundas) were appointed by the State and these officials also doubled as the peoples' representatives in front of the ruler, especially in times of draught, flood etc. There were also the Prabhu Gavundas who were the lords of different groups of Gavundas, obviously a senior position. The peoples' representative also doubling as the collector of taxes is bound to have created conflicts of interest and encouraged the tendency of the junior officials towards corruption.

#### **3.2.6.2. The Importance of Trade**

The Chalukya Empire had a number of powerful merchant guilds that transcended political divisions. Accordingly, trade activities were not halted in times of wars and rebellions. The wealthiest and obviously the most powerful South Indian Merchant Guild of the time was called the 'Ainnuruvar', meaning 'the five hundred', a sort of 'chosen' and exclusive group. They were also called the Aihole Svamis and their successors are resident in Aihole even today.

The Ainnuruvar conducted extensive and extremely profitable trade both through maritime and land routes. Their significant power is demonstrated by the fact that they were permitted their own flag and assumed the bull as their emblem. [Was this the beginning of the adoption of the bull as a symbol of wealth like the 'Wall Street' bull?] Further, they also committed their achievements in writing in the form of inscriptions called 'Prasastis', a privilege normally reserved for the Royal family. According to their records, this group traded with Maleya (the Malaya Peninsula), Parasa (Persia), Kambhoja (Cambodia), Nepal and Magadha in precious stones, spices and perfumes.

The Western Chalukyas conducted extensive trade with the Chinese Tang Empire around 10th century and were also frequent traders with the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. Indian ships have been reported in Dhofar and Aden as well as in Siraf, an important port of the time in the Eastern coast of the Persian Gulf. The Indian merchants and their trade was considered important enough in Siraf for local eateries to maintain separate plates for their feasting because of the differences in dietary habits.

### **3.2.6.3. Religious Practices**

For a long period during Chalukya rule Jainism and Hinduism existed side-by-side on an equal basis with Jainism being more predominant in the Western parts of the Empire. The fall of the Rashtrakutas to the Western Chalukyas during the brief revival of the Chalukya glory combined with the almost simultaneous defeat of the Gangas by the expanding Chola dynasty was a setback for Jainism from which it never fully recovered. However, the conscious practice of religious tolerance by the kings and high officials kept Jainism alive in the Peninsula, albeit in a diminished form.

The revival of alternative Hindu philosophies like the Advaita philosophy propagated by Adi Shankara had already made Buddhism go into terminal decline by late 7th century. Although both Buddhism and Jainism were in decline, there are no reports of religious strife and therefore it can be taken for granted that the change in circumstances was gradual, smooth and evolutionary. This period also coincided with the growth of Vaishnavism in the form of the Lingayats in the Chalukya Empire and of a different version of Vaishnava Hinduism in the Hoysala controlled region. The ascendancy of the Lingayats was doctored by Basavanna, considered a saint in later days, who extolled the concept of direct worship of god through his Vachanas, sayings in a sort of poetry form written in simple Kannada and therefore appealing to the common people. For example he wrote 'Kayakave Kailasa', meaning 'Work is worship', a catch phrase that is still used in India.

Ramanuja, the head of the Vaishnava monastery in Srirangam was an influential teacher and preached the Bhakti Marga, a way of devotion and also wrote the much lauded Sribhasya, which is a commentary on a critique of the Advaita philosophy of Adi Shankara. Essentially, the Chalukya reign was one of constant activities in the religious sphere. These religious advances, all of them peaceful, impacted the development of culture, literature, and architecture in the whole of South India. Literature was particularly influenced with a number of people writing poems in praise of Shiva in the Vachana form and a large number of prolific Vaishnava scholars producing writings that survive to this day.

### **3.2.6.4. Literary Achievements**

There was substantial literary activity, both in Kannada and Sanskrit, during the entire Chalukya reign, spurred on by the extensive patronage that the kings extended to talented scholars. At one stage more than 200 Vachanakaras, or Vachana poets, were listed of whom 30 were women. These poets expressed their closeness to god through these poems. Ranna was the court poet of king Satyasraya and was honoured with the title 'Kavi Chakravarti', meaning the Emperor amongst Poets, and is credited with five major works. Ranna's most famous book is Saahasabhima Vijayam, which is also called Gada Yudham, written in 982 as a eulogy to his patron whose valour he compares to that of Bhima of the Mahabharata.

Nagavarma II who was the poet laureate of king Jagadhekamalla produced erudite books on Kannada grammar and vocabulary-Karnataka Bhashabhushana providing details of the grammar and Vastukosha, a lexicon that provided the Kannada equivalent for Sanskrit words. Around 1129, king Somesvara II wrote Manasalloa an encyclopaedia in Sanskrit that covered varied subjects such as medicine, magic, veterinary science, fortifications, evaluation of precious stones, music, painting, and provided information on a whole lot of other subjects. This tome is a landmark and provides detailed information and understanding of the level of knowledge prevalent at the time. From this book it is abundantly clear that the knowledge resident in the Chalukya Empire was certainly extensive. During Vikramaditya I's rule the Sanskrit scholar Vijnaneshwara wrote the legal treatise, Mitakshara, which formed the basis for Hindu Law at that time. This book was translated by the philologist Colebrook and formed the basis for the British law on Indian inheritance that was formulated in later years.

### **3.2.7. Successor of Pulakesin II**

Pulakesin's death in battle and the sacking of their capital Badami by the Pallavas were devastating blows to the Chalukya entity. After the defeat, the Chalukyas went into a self-imposed inward looking period and there is scant information of the events that transpired in the ensuing 13 years or so. The period between 643 and 655 is a dark period in the history of this illustrious dynasty, which went into temporary eclipse during this time.

After the death of Pulakesin-II, Badami and some of the southern districts remained in the hand of Pallavas. Though Chalukyas throne remained vacant from 642 AD - 655 AD, Vikramaditya-I managed to ascend the throne in 655 AD. He recovered Badami and brought the whole kingdom under his control. The next successor Vinayaditya ruled from 681 to 696 AD and carried on campaigns against Cholas, Pandyas, Pallavas, Aluvans ..... By defeating the Lord of the entire Uttarapatha, he acquired the banner Palidhvaja. His immediate successor Vijayaditya ruled for nearly forty years (696 AD - 733 AD). His reign was stated to have been peaceful throughout. Vikramaditya-II was son and successor of Vijayaditya. He ruled from 734 AD - 745 AD. He defeated the Pallava king thus putting off the continuing hostilities. With this conquest, he took possession of musical instruments, banner, elephants, rubies which belonged to the Pallavas. He destroyed the power of the Chola, Kerala, Pandya. The son of Vikramaditya-II, Kritivarman - II succeeded to reign for the next eleven years. He was the last and glorious ruler of Chalukyas. For the next fifty years, the Chalukya power was totally eclipsed by the Rashtrakutas. Dantidurga defeated Kritivarman-II to gain the control of Chalukyas once for all. The subsequent attempt by Kritivarman-II to regain the control was futile. The Rashtrakutas remained the supreme power for the next two centuries until the same was destroyed by the later Western Chalukyas of Kalyani.

### **3.2.8. Decline of the Dynasty**

It is a universal rule that all great dynasties rise to power through the perseverance of ambitious founders; are consolidated by extremely resilient successors; and stay in a state of splendour and magnificence for a reasonable period of time. This zenith of power is inevitably followed by the gradual onset of decline and decay through mismanagement by less capable kings who are either poor or indifferent administrators combined with dynastic hubris gradually built-up through arrogance, and then invariably falling on its own sword. The reasons are almost always flawed policy decisions that are taken based on overarching ambition of autocratic rulers who fail to match the actual capacity of their kingdoms to the task at hand and overextends the spread of their power-military, political and economic. The Chalukyas of Badami also followed the same path.

The reasons for the decline and eclipse of Chalukya power in the Deccan can be clubbed under few generic heads-extensive Empire, decline in the capability of successive rulers, unprofitable military expeditions and external invasions, dilution of strength through the expansion of collateral branches, and the gradual but unchecked rise of other regional powers.



### **3.2.8.1.Extensive Empire**

From the height of Pulakesin II's reign till the end of empire, the Chalukya kingdom encompassed a very large stretch of territory that encompassed the region from the Rivers Narmada and Mahi in the north to the lands bordering the Pallava kingdom in the south and stretching across the Peninsula touching oceans in both the west and the east. Such a vast empire is difficult to administer from one central point, in this case Badami, considering the difficulties in communications. In the earlier period of their rule the Chalukyas attempted to set up subordinate centres of administration but this initiative met with only very limited success and seems to have been discontinued. In the later years, the kings kept a tight control over the administration and did not permit any decentralisation. The result was that even at the height of their glory, the periphery of the Chalukya Empire was not well governed, which permitted certain amount of unrest to percolate.

The peripheral turmoil made it necessary result for the kings to be in a perpetual state of motion, doing the rounds of the borders of the Empire or engaged in conflict with the more powerful neighbours. The combination of a totally centralised administration, constant turbulence in the border regions, and the regular conflicts with powerful adversary dynasties made it necessary for the Chalukyas to create and cultivate loyal feudatories who could be relied to put down minor rebellions in the periphery of the Empire. However, such arrangements could never become long-term solutions to controlling a vast Empire, since feudatories would always be on the look-out for opportunities to improve their position vis-à-vis the central dynasty. In volatile times the loyalty of the feudatories could itself become contentious, although the Chalukyas were blessed with feudatory dynasties that remained loyal to them till the very end. On the other hand, their demise also came about at the hands of an ambitious feudatory, which sort of evens the score for the loyal ones.

### **3.2.8.2.D Decline in the Capability of Rulers**

Analysis of the rise and fall of any significant dynasty will show that the founder and his immediate successors were extremely capable, ambitious and often ruthless rulers full of energy, capable of facing even life-threatening hardships with equanimity. As the dynasty gets established, the succeeding generations tend to be brought up in ever greater luxury and tend to lose the cutting edge thinking that is so essential to keeping a large kingdom together and expanding it. Some even tend to become 'soft' and become completely engrossed in the pursuit of art, culture and other 'royal' pleasures to the detriment of the kingdom's administration and security. Invariably it is seen that in such circumstances a more capable and crafty subordinate usurps power with alacrity. In the governance of a kingdom, ruthlessness to ensure that national interests are always given the highest priority is a gift that the ultimate leader, the king, must possess. In traditional monarchies it can be noticed that with the passage of time and the establishment of the dynasty as a powerful entity, the ruthlessness required to deal with adverse situations declines, and strategic forethought, critical to the security and progress of the kingdom, diminishes with each succeeding generation. The result is the inevitable fall of the dynasty.

In the case of the Badami Chalukyas, Kirtivarman's discomfiture at the hands of the Pandyan king provided a window of opportunity for the ambitious Dantidurga to declare independence. Kirtivarman being far away in the South of his kingdom and already reeling under a defeat could not initiate any action promptly to put down the upstart who had overthrown the control of the Lata collateral branch of the dynasty. This inaction permitted Dantidurga to generate further power and was the death knell of the dynasty. It is also noticeable that towards the end of his reign Kirtivarman had become lethargic and indecisive, lacked initiative and was slow in formulating policies for keeping the kingdom together. There was no attempt at directly confronting the security challenges facing the kingdom. It is true that he tried to win back lost territories at the

death of Dantidurga, but the effort must have been uncoordinated for him to have been defeated and killed in the attempt.

### **3.2.8.3. Military Expeditions**

Military expeditions, then as now, are a drain on the treasure and lives of a kingdom. The olden tradition of the victor demanding and receiving tribute, one that has been sort of stopped in recent times, was a pragmatic attempt at dealing with the challenge of ensuring that the national exchequer was always replenished after the expenditures of a war. Similarly defeated armies used to be selectively incorporated into the victorious ones to make up for the depletion of numbers through casualties. However, there is a limit to the amount the tributes can top up the depletion of treasure, especially when military expeditions are regular and unproductive occurrences. Such expeditions are resource-intensive and constant wars are sources of drain on the exchequer of even the most powerful of nations.

The Southern campaigns of the Chalukyas, while initially considered necessary to contain the rise of the Pallavas, were all equally unproductive. It is true that the Pallava capital was captured a number of times, but the fact that the Chalukyas did not even attempt once to annex the kingdom is proof of their acceptance that such a move would have been unsustainable and counter-productive. Historically the territories of the Pallavas and the nations further south have always been difficult to dominate. No northern power was ever able to maintain a long-term hold on this region and have always contended with temporary control after victory in a battle or war and then the establishment of a tenuous overlordship of the region at best. Therefore, the expeditions against the Pallavas were inevitable loss-making initiatives, almost always draining the Chalukya Empire of resources.

Two factors, generated by the Chalukya obsession with the Pallavas and their Southern campaigns, impacted the long-term stability of the Chalukya Empire. First, the later kings were brash in invading territory further south beyond the Pallava kingdom, endangering their own lines of communications while attempting untenable conquests. This cost more in terms resources than the tributes or even the status that these transitory victories brought to the Empire in a holistic calculation. By the time of Kirtivarman's reign the cost of mounting the southern campaigns was unbearable, although he persisted with them. Second, the preoccupation with the Southern Peninsula and the smaller but fiercely independent dynasties that ruled the area created a situation wherein the tertiary branches were relied upon to maintain the peace in the greater Chalukya Empire. Unfortunately they were not as competent rulers as the core branch and the rebellion that finally finished the Badami Chalukyas originated in the area controlled by the Lata Chalukyas.

The other factor of note is the Arab invasion that has been brushed aside as an inconsequential raid of no import in the Chalukya chronicles. A strategically astute king would have immediately realised the vulnerability of the borders and outlying districts of his kingdom. Further, history would have indicated to him that the main threat to the integrity of the Empire would come from the north rather than from the Southern kingdoms. The Arabs invaded from the north-west while the king was preoccupied with the pet Chalukya antagonism with the Pallavas and was busy trying to control other troublesome feudatories. Although the Arabs were defeated in this instance, the raid weakened the core dynasty, mainly in terms of the political influence and military power that they were able to wield at will. In an indirect way, the Arab invasion paved the way for the Rashtrakuta rebellion-they had observed the difficulty the Badami Chalukyas had in facing the Arab invasion and understood that the Empire was weak at the core.

### **3.2.8.4. Expansion of the Collateral Branches**

In the latter half of the Badami Chalukya rule, two collateral branches of the dynasty emerged to rule independently from Vengi in the east and Kalyani in the west. The dynastic records mention the establishment of these semi-independent dynasties in passing, although in one instance

even mention the development as being done with the tacit approval of the then ruling king of Badami. However, when viewed within the convolutions of medieval Indian politics and the functioning of the greater dynasties, it is almost certain that these branches could not have come into being without some sort of civil strife, even though they belonged to the same family. Breakaway groups always diminish the power of the core from which they branch out and some amount of animosity between the two will always remain in these circumstances.

In the case of the Chalukyas, Pulakesin II emerging victorious in the civil war but not yet fully confident of his hold on power had to pacify the Vengi branch through granting autonomy and ceding further territory to them. It is also seen that this collateral branch kept carefully out of the conflict when the Pallava king defeated the same Pulakesin and overran Badami in their victorious march against the core dynasty. The Chalukyas of Vengi did not offer any assistance in this hour of need of the primary family. Similarly it was the incompetence of the Lata branch that permitted the rise to power of the Rashtrakutas that ultimately culminated in the demise of the Chalukyas as a whole. Permitting the sub-branches to assume autonomy and greater power than they were able to wield to good effect proved to be a short-sighted and wrong policy for the Badami Chalukyas in the long-term. It only contributed to the gradual erosion of political influence of the core family and weakened what was effectively a centralised system of administration.

#### **3.2.8.5. Rise of Regional Powers**

By the 8th century powerful rulers had started to establish themselves in North India—Lalitaditya of Kashmir, Yasovarman in North India and the Rajput families like the Paramaras in the north-west. All of them were vying for political influence and brought about increasing pressure to the northern parts of the Chalukya holdings. The South was unanimously opposed to the Chalukya hegemony and did not miss any opportunity to challenge their overlordship, even though several Chalukya expeditions had brought about devastation in an unprecedented scale to the region. The Southern kingdoms had been defeated repeatedly and had to pay tribute to the Chalukyas, but managed to keep up the pressure on the larger kingdom. The Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras normally joined forces to present a united front in opposition to Chalukya invasions. Over a period of time the Chalukya Empire started to be hemmed in by the pressures from both the north and the south. At the same time the capacity of the kingdom to deal with this twin-threat was continually eroding.

Over time the balance of power shifted against the Chalukyas, gradually but definitely. Two hundred years of autocratic rule had lulled the Chalukyas into a sense of false security aided by complacency brought about through a blind belief in their own power. During the reign of the last monarch, Kirtivarman, the Chalukyas lacked the strength to even push back the Southern confederacy, which itself was transient in nature and clubbed together only to oppose the Chalukyas. This should have rung warning bells in a politically clever king, which Kirtivarman unfortunately for the Chalukyas was not. Events overtook a somewhat tired dynasty—as is always the case in history.

By the middle of the 8th century, the Badami Chalukyas were without doubt a declining power. Their final fall was not a revolutionary event but the evolutionary culmination of a number of events and long time in the making. The factors enumerated above are the major ones that influenced their decay and fall in differing degrees and strength of influence. The Rashtrakuta rebellion under Dantidurga by itself was not a cataclysmic event that spelled doom, but the catalyst that brought the once illustrious dynasty to an unseemly end—the grand finale in a succession of events that went unnoticed or were ignored as unimportant at the time of their occurrence.

#### **3.2.9. Art & Architecture under Chalukya**

The political stability, abundant material prosperity combined with peaceful atmosphere, and a high level of religious tolerance in the Chalukyan dominion fostered all round cultural development.

This is especially reflected in the fields of art, architecture, literature, administration and other such arenas. For the first time in South Indian context, there was a spurt in the religious architecture, both in the rock-cut and structural media. Experimentation in arriving at functionally viable and aesthetically appealing temple models was carried out in the three main centers of architecture viz., Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal.

A number of indigenous elements were harmoniously blended with the architectural and sculptural traits of the northern and southern styles, then in vogue. The greatest contribution of the Chalukyas of Badami thus, is the evolving of the two main temple styles-the southern *dravida-vimana* and the northern *rekha nagara prasada* types through a series of experimentations that commenced at Aihole, continued at Badami and culminated at Pattadakal. The political conflicts with the Pallavas of Kanchipuram had a positive effect in so far as the efflorescence and diffusion of architectural and sculptural styles, proving beneficial to both.

### **3.2.9.1. Temple at Aihole**

The first efforts of Chalukyan are represented by a group of stone-built shrines and temple at Aihole, the first capital of Chalukyans situated on the bank of river Malaprabha. Majority of these temples are Brahminical, although a few are Jain and all appears to have been erected in the period between A.D 450 to 650. The temples of Aihole consists of some seventy buildings about thirty of which are contained inside a walled and bastioned enclosures while the remainder owing to wants of space, are disposed within its vicinity.

**Mandapa:** The simplest form can be seen in the so called Mandapa type temples at Aihole. These resembles the cave temples to some extent. They consist of a simple cella in an open construction along with a sort of verandah. Gradually this developed into the mature prasada and vimana forms of temple, having a Mukhamandapa, a closed sabhamandapa, an antarala and a pradakshina patha. Both type of sikhara, the pyramidal and curvilinear may be seen here.

**The Konti-gudi Group of Temple:** This group of temples looks more primitive. Out of the three temples one faces east and the other west, while the third one standing near the one facing east. The temple facing east has an oblong plan, with the entrance in the centres of a long plan, with the entrance in the centres of a long open verandah. There are six pillars at the east side, while other three side has solid walls. In the centre eight pillars are stand on a platform. The sanctum adjoins the rear wall on the west. The second temple facing west is square in plan and has a open verandah in front. The sanctum is at the rear wall. The square platform like structure on the top of the sabhamandapa is a novel features. The third one adjacent to the one facing east is oblong in plan, seems to be the latest of the group. Here one can find latticed wall formed by pillars. Here the sanctum is still attached to the back wall of the temple.

**The Ladh-Khan Temple:** The Lad Khan Temple, dedicated to Shiva, is a one of the oldest Hindu temples and is located in Aihole. It was built in the 5th century by the kings of the Chalukya dynasty. It is located to the south of the Durga Temple. The temple is named after a person named Lad khan, who turned this temple into his residence for a short period and this is the oldest temple of Aihole.

The temple consists of a shrine (garba griha) with mandapa in front of it. The mukha mandapa is situated in front of the sanctum and consists of a set of 12 carved pillars. The sabha mandapa leads to the maha mandapa and the pillars are arranged to form two concentric squares. The walls have floral patterns on them and the windows have lattice work done in the northern style. Facing the sanctum, a second smaller sanctum is situated above the center of the hall whose outer walls have many carved images.

Originally dedicated to Vishnu, now the main shrine houses a Shiva Linga with a Nandi. The temple was built in a Panchayatana style, indicating a very early experiment in temple construction. The special feature of this temple is that it starts with a rectangular structure and ends with a square

structure. Based on a wooden construction design, the square and rectangular plan has a steep roof, which is an adaptation of wooden styles in stone. The maha mandapa is open to exterior by large windows between the pillars. The roof above the maha mandapa shows a turret as a first version of the future towers *sikharas* and *vimanas*.

**The Durga Temple:** The Durga temple is an example of southern (Dravidian) architectural type, with a later northern type superstructure imposed upon it—an incongruity apparent from the fact that the superstructure is a square structure clumsily fitted over an apsidal cella. The temple stands on a high moulded *upapitha* (sub-base), apsidal on plan and carrying a peripheral row of columns on its edge that surround the moulded *adhishtana* and walls of an apsidal *vimana* and its front mandapa. Thus the colonnade forms a covered circumambulatory with a sloping roof. The open mandapa is continued forward on a base of smaller width. The peripheral pillars of the front mandapa and those at the forward end of the circumambulatory have large statuary on them. The *adhishtana* inside is again apsidal, moulded with all the components, and carries the apsidal wall enclosing the inner apsidal wall of the cella or *garbha-griha* and a closed maha-mandapa in front of it, with two linear rows of four columns in each row that divide it into a central nave and lateral aisles.

The central nave has a higher flat roof raised over a sort of clerestory in front of the cella-entrance, and two lateral aisles have sloping roofs, at a lesser height than the central roof. The aisles of the maha-mandapa are continuous on either side, with a closed inner circumambulatory between the inner or outer walls of the cella, which again has a sloping roof. The *adhishtana* of the apse is projected forward into the porch like front mandapa of a lesser width with four pillars in two rows. The reliefs on the *adhishtana* and outer wall are cantoned by pilasters and enclose niches which are framed by shrine-fronts of all the patterns of northern and southern *vimanas*, *kuta*, *sala*, *panjara*, *udgama*, etc., and contain bold sculpture. The four recesses, two each between the three bays on the north and south sides and two more between the three bays round the apse-end, are provided with perforated windows. Over the inner wall of the cella perhaps rose the original apsidal *griva* and *sikhara*, as in the temples at Ter and Chejarla either with a wholly-solid core or supported by props inside.

The advanced features of the temple, the variety of evolved shrine-fronts displayed in its niches, the style of its sculpture, its diverse corbel-forms and the existence in it of a chute, water-spout and the gargoyle-like *pranala*—a late feature—would justify placing the temple in the eighth century. This is also indicated by an inscription of Chalukya Vikramaditya II (733-46) on the ruined *gopura* at the south-eastern part of the enclosing-wall. The name 'Durga' for the temple is misleading, since it was not dedicated to Durga, and is due to the fact that till the earlier part of the last century the temple formed part of a fortification (*durga*), probably of the Marathas.

**Huchimalli-Gudi Temple:** This is also an important temple. For the first time *antarala* appeared here. Besides the *Garbhagriha* and *antarala*, the rectangular plan of this temple includes a *pradakshina* patha, *Mukhamandapa* and a *Sabhamandapa*. The *Sikhara* was added at a later date. The *Kaksasanas* on both sides of the portico have an exceptionally elegant *ghata pallava* design signifying the bowl of plenty symbolic of prosperity. This temple built in the 7th century shows an evolution in the temple plan, as it shows an *ardhamandapa* or an ante-chamber annexed to the main shrine. It is in this temple the *shukanasa* or the vestibule was introduced for the first time.

**Meguti Temple:** Meguti Jain temple stands on a hillock. It is the only dated monument built in 634. The temple sits on a raised platform, and a flight of steps leads one to the *mukhamandapa*. The pillared *mukhamandapa* is a large one. A flight of stairs leads to another shrine on the roof, directly above the main shrine. From the roof, one can have a panoramic view of the plain with a hundred temples or so. The temple which was possibly never completed gives important evidence of early development in dravidian style of architecture. The dated inscription found on the outer wall of the

temple records the construction of the temple by Ravikeerthi, a scholar in the court of emperor Pulakeshi II. In the Meganagudi group of temples, there are several ancient temples on Megutigudda, a small hillock to the southeast of the village. A two-storeyed structure here has a natural cavern inside. The first floor includes a pillared hall, and at the wall behind it are three cells. The central room is the shrine cell, the second floor similarly has a verandah and a square cell behind. This is an ordinary structure and is assigned to the 5th century. The Meguti or the Meganagudi is a Jinalaya in the Dravidian style enclosed by a stone wall. It has a pillared hall in front, and antarala and the sanctum behind, with pradakshinapatha. On one of the outer walls is found the famous Aihole inscription dated 634 A.D. recording the construction of the Jinendra temple by Ravikeerti, who was a commander and minister of Pulakeshi II. The record makes a mention of Kalidasa and Bharavi and is composed in an ornate style in Samskrita by Ravikirti himself. To the south-east of Meguti is a small Jaina cave, which has a porch, a wall behind and a sanctum in the back which houses a five-foot tall-Bahubali figure and other Tirthankaras are also engraved in other parts against walls.

### **3.2.9.2. Temples at Badami**

The city of Badami or the Vatapi was the second capital of the Early Western Chalukya from 540 to 757 AD. This was a picturesque town nestling at the foot of steep cliffs besides a small lake or tank. With its close neighbor Muktesvara, Badami possess the first examples of Dravidian order. Here first known vimana temples of early western Chalukyas, namely the upper Shivalaya, lower Shivalaya and the Malegitti Shivalaya perched on an outer cliff of the Badami hills. These temples were constructed during the reign of Mangalesa, the son of Pulakesin-I, who selected this site for his capital. The group of Badami proves, by the high standard of workmanship. Badami is also famous for rock cut architecture. The north fort which is on the opposite side of the town is penetrated by deep canyon-like crevices, through which climbs a straight path. The first features to be seen along this path are two freestanding, multi-storeyed mandapas, seemingly unconnected with any temples. They are possibly vestiges of an early ceremonial complexes. Lower Shivalaya stands on a nearby rocky terrace, surveying the houses beneath. At the summit of north fort, upper Shivalaya is sited majestically overlooking the town beneath. Both these were probably erected in the early 7th century, but appear to have partly dismantled mostly by conquering pallava forces; and maybe they have been pillaged for building blocks to strengthen north fort by later occupiers. The ruinous condition these monument contrast with comparatively complete Malegitti Shivalaya, which crowns on as isolated boulder beneath the western flank of the North fort, this temple also be dated to the first half of the 7th century and is of historical interest for its well- preserved carvings.

**Lower Shivalaya:** Only the towered sanctuary of the temple does exist today; its outer walls have been dismantled. The sanctuary was originally surrounded by a passageway on three sides, possibly with a mandapa extension to the east which can be predicted by observing the broken roof slabs set into its walls and the stumps of beams with friezes of ganas. The temple's doorway is framed by bands of lotus ornament. An unusual, elliptical shaped pedestal is seen within which happens to be empty now. The outer walls have flat pilasters but there are no signs of projections or sculptures niche. The roof is an octagon to dome topped by a tiny amalaka finial. It is framed by corner model elements topped by kuta roofs containing miniature nidhis.

**Upper Shivalaya:** The outer walls of the temple create a rectangle containing a sanctuary with a passageway on three sides, opens into a columned mandapa on the east, missing all its internal columns. The walls are built on a basement with a central recessed course containing foliate ornament and narrative scenes. On the south face, Ramayana episodes are pictured, like, wakening of Kumbhakarna, Rama fighting with forest enemies. Panels on the west face depict the birth and childhood of lord Krishna, including Krishna sucking Putana's breasts. Though there are no narratives seen on the north. The walls above have narrow projections by pilasters carried up into

the parapet, four on the south and three on the west. The central pilastered projections have panels depicting Krishna lifting Mount Govardhana (south), Narasimha disemboweling his victim (north), etc. These support miniature eaves and kudus, the latter intruding in the kapota eaves. The square tower over the sanctuary has pilastered walls. It is crowned by a large kuta, without finial, the earliest and best preserved example of this type of Dravida styled roof in Early Chalukya architecture.

**Malegitti Shivalaya:** This temple is the earliest surviving example of the Dravida style in Early Chalukya architecture. It consists of a sanctuary, without passageway, opening into a triple aisled mandapa. Walls of sanctuary and mandapa have a curved course and a central recessed portion, divided into panels, some filled with gana musicians, dancers and warriors. The mandapa walls have three projections on the north and south, among which the middle one accommodates panels portraying Shiva (south) and Vishnu (north). Each god is accompanied by a pair of diminutive companions. The mandapa walls, beside the porch, have a corner pilastered projection and a single niche containing a swaying dvarapala. The sanctuary and mandapa walls are overhung by continuous kapota eaves on a frieze of ganas. Two recessed moldings support a parapet, with a set of corner kutas and central shalas over the mandapa walls, and a similar, kuta-shala-kuta parapet over the sanctuary walls. There is a tower rising over the sanctuary, above which rises the octagon-to-dome roof, exactly like that of upper Shivalaya, but without amalaka finial. The mandapa interior has a central east-west aisle, defined by raised floor strips linking the free-standing and engaged columns. Two additional columns define a small bay in front of the sanctuary doorway. Transverse beams carried on open-mouthed makara brackets carry the raised and horizontal roof slabs, with vishnu on flying Garuda carved onto the central bay. The sanctuary doorway is framed by jambs, including those with serpent bodies culminating in a flying Garuda over the lintel, with male and female figures beneath at either side. A linga on a pedestal, perhaps replacing a sculpted icon, is seen within the sanctuary.

**Rock cut caves Badami:** The Early Chalukyas chose the finely-grained and horizontally-stratified sandstone cliffs of Badami (Bijapur District), for rock excavations, which facilitated excavation of comparatively large cave-temples and the execution of fine sculptures and intricate carvings in them. There are four such cave-temples, three Brahmanical and the fourth Jaina. The earliest of them (Cave 3), dedicated to Vishnu, is the largest of the series and was excavated, according to its inscription, in Saka 500, i.e. A.D. 578, by Mangalesa, a powerful ruler. It was followed in quick succession by the other two, Cave 2, the smallest, also dedicated to Vishnu, and Cave 1, of medium size, dedicated to Siva. The Jaina cave-temple at the very top of the hill is later by about a century from the rest.

These cave-temples essentially consist of a rectangular pillared verandah (mukha-mandapa), a more or less square pillared hall (maha-mandapa) and a small almost square shrine-cell (garbhagriha) at its rear, all in an axial plane and entirely rock-cut, constituting the flat-roofed mandapa type of temples. The facade-opening is wide and sufficiently high. The facade-pillars are tall and massive, often carved and of square section carrying brackets (potika) below the beam, the massive over hanging ledge in front forming a sort of eaves or cornice (kapota) with a framework imitating wooden cribs below. The beam over the brackets as also the under-frame of the cornice are often strutted up, as it were, by bold caryatid-like supports of human, celestial and animal figures sculptured almost in the round. The ceilings of the verandah are formed into coffers by cross-beams and filled with relief-medallions. The inner pillars, especially the inner row of the verandah, though square at base, are complete with capital-components of circular section, viz. the vase-shaped kalasa and the cushion shaped bulbous kumbha, to mention only the most prominent. The pillared hall in the interior shows slight variations in the disposition of the columns, but invariably, as on the

facade, intercolumniation between the central pillars is slightly greater than that between the lateral pillars. The inner pillars are polygonal in section.

### **3.2.9.3. Temples at Muktesvara**

Muktesvara, on the outskirts of Badami, also possess typical early Chalukyan temples. Here a group of prasada or Northern and southern style temples stand side by side in the same walled enclosure. Mahakutesvara and Sangamesvara are two important temple built by the early western Chalukya.

### **3.2.9.4. Temple at Pattadakal**

Pattadakal witnessed the third stage of building art in the Chalukya time. Pattadakal served the third capital of the early Chalukya. Here temples of no mean order and in both the northern and southern styles stand side by side. The group of temples at Pattadakal comprises 10 temples, 8 in one cluster, one about half a km north of the main cluster and another located about 1.5 km northwest of the main group. These temples stylistically resolve into two distinct categories. The dravida vimana type represented by the Virupaksha, Mallikarjuna and Sangameswara temples and the rekhanagara prasada type represented by the Kadasiddeswara, Jambulinga, Galaganatha, Kasivisweswara and Papanatha temples. The Sangameswara temple, earliest dateable structure in the group is a perfect example of dravida vimana type. The Virupaksha temple is built by Lokamahadevi, the chief queen of King Vikramaditya II (A.D.733-745). This is an example in which all the canonical elements pertaining to the plan, elevation and the style are crystalised. The exterior wall surface of the temple is symmetrically relieved with sculptures of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon exhibiting vitality and graceful anatomy. The pillars in the interior are similarly embellished with narrative panels depicting selected epic episodes. The adjoining Mallikarjuna temple is another exemplary edifice. The Galaganatha temple in the complex illustrates the fully developed rekha nagara prasada form and shares many features of the then contemporary temples of Alampur in adjacent Andhra Pradesh.

The epigraphs record the date and persons responsible for the temple construction besides containing information on the architects and artists of the period, enhancing the significance of these structures. In a nutshell, the temples of Pattadakal “provide a striking illustration of the co-existence of different building styles and artistic traditions”.

The sculptures are characterised by grace, rich imagination and delicate anatomical and ornamental details. The beautifully proportioned sculptures of Mithuna, Dikpalas and Surya in the ceilings, gracefully carved Durga, Nataraja, Lingodhbhava, Ardhanarishvara, Gajasuramardana, Andakasuramardana and other Saiva sculptures. Vishnu as Varaha in a variety of moods, vibrant Trivikrama, Vishnu seated on Garuda and other forms are carved on the walls. These bear ample testimony to the mastery of the Chalukyan sculptors in depicting rhythm, beauty, vigor, romance and other various moods in stone. In these temples, we see the narrative panels illustrating various episodes from the epics - Ramayana, Mahabharata and also from Bhagavata, Kiratarjuneeya and Panchatantra being introduced for the first time.

**Sangameswara Temple:** Founded by King Vijayaditya around A.D.720 as Vijayeswara temple, this structure remained incomplete despite several building phases (the columned hall is clearly a later addition). On plan, this temple has a sanctum (garbhagriha) housing a linga, a small vestibule (antarala), a sub-shrine each on either side of the vestibule and a hall (mandapa) having massive pillars. A circumambulatory path (pradakshinapatha) surrounds three sides of the garbhagriha, which is lit by three windows in each of the north, west and south sides. The hall seems to have had entrance porches (mukha-mandapa) on north, south and east. Only the western and part of the southern walls of the hall are intact. To the east of the hall is a small plinth housing a Nandi image.



The temple is built on a high plinth with five mouldings. The walls are symmetrically relieved into four projections with niches (devakoshthas) housing sculptures of Vishnu and Siva in various stages of carving. The three intervening recesses have perforated windows. An exquisitely carved frieze of dwarfs (ganas) runs below the eave (kapota). The round-bodied ganas appear struggling, as it were to carry the superstructure. The parapet consists of a string (hara) of architectural elements called karnakutas (square) and salas (oblong) corresponding to the relieved bays below. These elements and the curved linking courses (harantaras) are adorned with kudus with miniature shrines (panjaras) carved in their interior. The superstructure over the sanctum is a perfect example of two tired dravida-vimana repeating certain elements of the parapet and wall below and crowned with a four sided kuta-sikhara with a finial (kalasa).

**Mallikarjuna Temple:** This temple, called Sri Trailokeswara Maha Saila Prasada in an inscription was built around 740 A.D. by one of the Queens, Trailokyamahadevi of Vikramaditya II (733-45 A.D.) to commemorate her husband's victory over the Pallavas of Kanchipuram. In general appearance and style it resembles the Virupaksha temple built for the same purpose, at the same time, and most probably by the same guild of architects. These two temples stand side by side, closely resemble each other in their plan elevation, decoration and even the arrangements of sculptural art. Presenting the fully developed southern vimana style, this temple consists on plan a sanctum (garbhagriha) with circumambulatory path (pradakshinapatha) an antechamber (antarala) with a sub-shrine each on either side in front, a sabha-mandapa with entrance porches on the east, north and south and a separate Nandi-mandapa in front. The sub-shrines, originally dedicated to Ganesa and Mahisasuramardhini, are now empty. Only a portion of the enclosure walls (prakara) is intact on the southern side and two upright pillars and a few huge stone blocks mark the once existence of the western gateway (pratoli).

The temple is built on a high plinth comprising five fully evolved mouldings and its wall surfaces are divided into projection and recesses accommodating sculptures and windows as in the case of the Virupaksha temple. These sculptures are mainly Saivite and unfinished in some cases. Even though the parapet and the superstructure of this temple are similar to those of the Virupaksha temple, there are one or two noticeable differences. Thus, the topmost storey of the superstructure of the Mallikarjuna temple is completely bereft of hara elements like kuta, sala etc., which is considered a transitory stage in the development of southern temple style. Likewise, this temple has a hemi-spherical roof (sikhara) as against the square roof of the Virupaksha temple. Further, Nataraja is depicted in the shallow arch of the sukanasa of this temple.

The epic and puranic episodes carved on the pillars of the sabha-mandapa include goddesses fighting Mahisasura, churning of the ocean (samudra-manthana), Narasimha fighting Hiranyakasipu "exploits of Krishna" slaying of Maricha etc., . The amorous couples relieved on the engaged columns here are slightly bigger in size and better preserved than those in the Virupaksha temple.

Even in its ruined state, the well conceived and skillfully executed Nandi-mandapa presents an elegant piece of architecture. Its basement (adhistana) has beautifully carved figures of elephants and other animals. Its prominently projecting balconies show nicely shaped sixteen-sided pillars with scroll belts. Graceful female figures are carved in the ornate niches on the walls.

**Virupaksha Temple:** This temple, in worship, known as 'Shri Lokeswara-Maha-Sila-prasada' from the epigraphs, was built by Lokamahadevi, the Queen of Vikramaditya II (A.D.733-745) in about A.D.740 to commemorate her husband's victory over the Pallavas of Kanchipuram. It closely resembles the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram on plan and elevation and represents a fully developed and perfected stage of the Dravidian architecture.

Facing east, this temple has on plan a square sanctum (garbhagriha) with a circumambulatory path (pradakshinapatha), an antarala with two small shrines for Ganesa and Mahishamardini facing each other in front, a sabha-mandapa with entrance porches on the east, north and south and a

separate Nandi-mandapa in front. The complex is enclosed by high prakara walls. Against the inner faces of these walls there were small shrines (originally 32) dedicated to the subsidiary deities (parivaradevatas) of which only a few are extant now. The enclosure has been provided with ornate entrance gates ((pratolis) on both east and west.

The temple is built on a high plinth of five fully evolved mouldings. The outer faces of the walls of the sanctum are divided into a central projection, two intermediate projections and two corner projections with four recesses in between. Likewise, the mandapa walls on either side of the northern, eastern and southern proches are divided into two projections and two recesses. All these projections of the sanctum walls carry niches housing images of Saiva and Vaishnava deities like Bhairava, Narasimha, Hari-Hara, Lakulisa etc., while there are perforated windows of various design in the rest of the recesses. The parapet consists of architectural elements called kutas (square), panjaras (miniature apsidal shrines) and salas (oblong) corresponding to the projections below and the linking courses (harantaras) above the recesses. The superstructure over the sanctum is a Dravida-vimana in three storeys with a sukasana projection over the antarala. It is square in plan and repeats in its elevation many elements of the parapet and walls beneath. It has a beautifully shaped square roof (shikhara) with a round finial kalasa above.

The whole of the interior of this temple is embellished with elegant carvings and aesthetically modeled sculptures. Episodes from the Ramayana (e.g. abduction of Sita) Mahabharata (e.g. Bhishma lying in a bed of arrows), Bhagavata (e.g. Krishna lifting the Govardhan mountain) and Kiratarjuniya (e.g. Arjuna receiving the Pasupatastra from Siva) are depicted on the pillars of the sabha-mandapa and the pilasters here have the sculptures of amorous couples and Rati and Manmatha. Flora, fauna and geometrical patterns adorn various parts of the temple. Doorjambs (dwara-shakhas) with their delicate carvings, pillars and pilasters with various types of capitals and carvings on their faces, lintels relieved with animals, birds and architectural motifs, ceilings depicting divine beings and the majestically standing dwarapalas all unfold a rich world of plastic art before the connoisseurs and attest to the heights reached by the Chalukyan sculptures.

The Nandi-mandapa situated to the east of the temple, is a square pavilion open on all the four sides. It houses a large image of Nandi on a raised floor. Its flat roof is supported by four pillars and short lengths of walls whose outer surfaces are carved with attendant figures and Kinnara-mithunas (couples). There are a number of inscriptions big and small, engraved in different parts of this temple. Inscriptions in the porch of the eastern gateway record the victory of Vikramaditya II over Kanchipuram and the royal honour and the title of 'Tribhuvanachari' conferred on Anivaritachari Gunda, the architect of the temple and the extol the virtues of Sarvasiddhi Achari, the architect of the southern portion of the temple.

**Papanatha Temple:** Dedicated to Mukteswara according to inscriptions, this modest temple seems to have been completed around 740 A.D. There seems to have been a change of intention during the course of construction of this temple as can be known from its too narrow circumambulatory path whose floor slabs conceal the external moulding of the garbhagriha walls and the buttress like projections of the north and south garbhagriha-walls into the ardha-mandapa, both of which are unusual features.

Facing the east, this temple has on plan a sanctum (garbhagriha) surrounded by a circumambulatory path (pradakshinapatha) with devakoshtha pavilions in its three walls, an ardha-mandapa, a sabha-mandapa and an entrance porch (mukhamandapa) provided with kakshasana. Curiously, there is no Nandi-mandapa but an ornate image of Nandi is housed in the eastern half of the sabha-mandapa.

The temple is built on a plinth of five mouldings, embellished with animal motifs, floral designs and kudus. The wall surfaces are relieved with niches (devakoshthas) housing Saiva and Vaishnava deities and depicting episodes from the Ramayana. These niches are topped by various

designs of chaitya-arch motifs and interspersed with perforated windows. The three devakoshtha pavilions house images of Siva in different forms. A characteristic feature of the temple is its well-developed rekha-nagara (northern) shikhara with an elaborately carved Chaitya-arch enshrining Nataraja on the frontage of the sukanasa. The amalaka and kalasa are, however, missing.

Introduction of narrative panels depicting the episodes from the Kiratarjuniya and the Ramayana on the outer wall surfaces is another noteworthy feature of the temple. Significantly, names of the main characters of the episodes as also those of the sculptures like Baladeva, Devaraya, Changama, Revadi, Ovajja, etc., are found engraved in right places.

Pillars of the entrance porch bear Kinnara couples and engaged columns have the figures of Dvarapalas. Lions and sardulas are carved at the corners above the entablature and the ceiling panel depicts dancing Siva with Parvati and musicians and flying figures. Pillars and pilasters of the other mandapas are relieved with medium-sized graceful sculptures of damsels and couples (mithunas) in playful moods. The central bay ceiling of the sabha-mandapa is adorned with panels depicting Anantasayana surrounded by the Dikpalas, nagaraja and Gajalakshmi from east to west. Here figures of rearing lions are carved projecting from above the entablature. Central ceiling of the ardha-mandapa has relief sculpture of dancing Siva in the company of Parvati and musicians. The western ceiling here has figure of Nagaraja. Both the mandapas and the sanctum have ornate doorframes.

The Chalukyas were great patrons of art. They developed the vesara style in the building of structural temples. However, the vesara style reached its culmination only under the Rashtrakutas and the Hoysalas. The structural temples of the Chalukyas exist at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal. Cave temple architecture was also famous under the Chalukyas. Their cave temples are found in Ajanta, Ellora and Nasik. The best specimens of Chalukya paintings can be seen in the Badami cave temple and in the Ajanta caves. The reception given to a Persian embassy by Pulakesin II is depicted in a painting at Ajanta.

### **3.2.10. Conclusion**

Some sources state that the Chalukya kings received only limited income from the land and other taxes. However, this is an untenable argument considering the records of the pomp and ceremony that attended all Chalukyan monarchs; the availability of a large and powerful standing army at all times; the conduct of expensive expeditions against the neighbours; and the chronicles of extensive and profitable trade within the sub-continent and with outside nations. The image that emerges is of a dynasty of pious, serious and well-meaning but militarily ambitious kings who were not averse to being ruthless when it was required. The times dictated the streak of ruthlessness without which the dynasty could not have survived for the long duration of its rule. It is noteworthy that no king of the dynasty has been accused of moral corruption.

The Chalukya kings were also astute enough to recognise natural boundaries that could be fortified and easily defended. Further, they relied on the circle of feudatories to effect collective defence while being extremely careful to emphasise their own greater status and stature within the collective. They were the quintessential 'Mandala Kings', perambulating the borders of their kingdom constantly, while also being actively involved in the welfare of the people. The dynasty was laid low primarily because of the enduring long term rivalry with the Pallavas and subsequently with the Cholas. A constant state of war can never be sustained for long and it is a credit to the Chalukya kings that they managed to maintain a state of military readiness for such long period of time before finally succumbing to fatigue—both military and financial.

The Chalukya rule was undoubtedly the golden age of the Deccan, being the last of the glorious empires of the medieval age in the Indian sub-continent. This is particularly remarkable considering that at the same time North India was gradually but surely sliding into veritable anarchy. The Chalukyas were not defeated and overrun by external elements but declined and came

to an end because of a sense of lethargy and extreme tiredness in holding a large and troublesome empire together—they effectively imploded on their own. This event, paved the way for the Islamic invasion into the Gujarat region.

### **3.2.11. Summary**

- *The Western Chalukyas ruled over an extensive area in the Deccan for about two centuries after which the Rashtrakutas became powerful. Pulakesin I was the real founder of the Chalukya dynasty. He established a small kingdom with Vatapi or Badami as its capital. Pulakesin II (608-642 A.D.).*
- *The most important ruler of this dynasty was Pulakesin II. The Aihole inscription issued by him gives the details of his reign. He fought with the Kadambas of Banavasi and the Gangas of Mysore and established his suzerainty. Durvinita, the Ganga ruler accepted his overlordship and even gave his daughter in marriage to Pulakesin II. Another notable achievement of Pulakesin II was the defeat of Harshavardhana on the banks of the river Narmada.*
- *In his first expedition against the Pallavas, Pulakesin II emerged victorious. But he suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Narasimhavarman I near Kanchi. Subsequently, the Chalukya capital Vatapi was captured and destroyed by the Pallavas. The most important event in the reign of Pulakesin II was the visit of Hiuen Tsang to his kingdom.*
- *The successor of Pulakesin II was Vikramaditya. He once again consolidated the Chalukya kingdom and plundered the Pallava capital, Kanchi. Thus he had avenged his father's defeat and death at the hands of the Pallavas. Kirtivarman II was the last of the rulers of the Chalukyas. He was defeated by Dantidurga, the founder of the Rashtrakuta dynasty.*
- *The Chalukya administration was highly centralized unlike that of the Pallavas and the Cholas. Village autonomy was absent under the Chalukyas. The Chalukyas had a great maritime power. Pulakesin II had 100 ships in his navy. They also had a small standing army.*
- *The Badami Chalukyas were Brahmanical Hindus but they gave respect to other religions. Importance was given to Vedic rites and rituals. The founder of the dynasty Pulakesin I performed the asvamedha sacrifice.*
- *A number of temples in honour of Vishnu, Siva and other gods were also built during this period. Hiuen Tsang mentioned about the decline of Buddhism in western Deccan. But Jainism was steadily on the path of progress in this region. Ravikirti, the court poet of Pulakesin II who composed the Aihole inscription was a Jain.*
- *The Chalukyas were great patrons of art. They developed the vesara style in the building of structural temples. However, the vesara style reached its culmination only under the Rashtrakutas and the Hoysalas. The structural temples of the Chalukyas exist at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal.*
- *Like other ruling power of Indian history, the Chalukya of Badami also declined owing to several factors and gave away the political reins to the Rashtrakuta.*

### **3.2.12. Exercise**

- Give a brief account of the achievements of Pulakesin II.
- Give an account of the development of art and architecture under the Chalukyas of Badami.
- Evaluate the cultural contributions of the Early Chalukya.
- Discuss the causes, course and significance of Harsa-Pulakesin War.
- Examine the sources for the study of the Early Western Chalukya.

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**Unit-3**  
**Chapter-III**  
**THE PALLAVAS**  
**Polity, Administration, Society and Art**

**Structure**

- 3.3.0. Objectives**
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### 3.3.0. Objectives

*This chapter discuss the polity of south India under the Pallava. After completion of this chapter the learners will acquire knowledge about*

- *the different theories about the origin of the Pallavas.*
- *the political history of the Pallavas and their military accomplishments*
- *administrative system under the Pallavas.*
- *their cultural contributions.*
- *architectural achievements of the Pallavas.*

### 3.3.1. Introduction

After the decline of the Sangam Age in the Tamil country, the Kalabhra rule lasted for about 250 years. Thereafter, the Pallavas established their kingdom in Tondaimandalam with its capital at Kanchipuram. Their rule continued till Tondaimandalam was captured and annexed by the Imperial Cholas in the beginning of the tenth century A.D. The period between the latter half of the sixth and first half of the tenth century A.D., an interval of four hundred years, marks an important epoch in the history of South India and its culture. Three important dynasties viz., the Chalukyas of Badami, Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai rose to power. Alongwith their paramount authority the revival of Hinduism was also heralded. These dynasties were the great contributors to the development of art and architecture in their respective regions. In fact they were also rivals in the realm of art, not as the destroyers of each other's art productions but as patrons. Their keen competition paved the way to the affluent output of permanent artistic monuments in stone. The Pallavas of Kanchi became the central power geographically, politically and culturally. They developed for the first time architecture and sculpture in the hard rock, in this area. The Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas continued the pre-existing tradition of rock-cut art. The Pallava art stood distinct in contemporary styles in material and technique. This will chapter discuss the history and contribution of the Pallava in the growth of south Indian culture.

### 3.3.2. Sources of Pallava History

The sources for the history of the Pallavas may be classified as native and foreign sources. The native sources may further be classified as literary and archaeological sources. The literary sources for the study of Pallavas include both Tamil and Sanskrit literature. They provide a lot of information about the Pallavas.

**Tamil Literature:** The Tamil literature consisted of the songs composed by Azhalvars and Nayanmars. They had lived during the Paliava period. The compositions of Azhalvars are known as Nalayira Divya Prabhandam. The songs of Nayanmars are compiled into Panniru Thirumurais. These works describe the social and religious life of the people during the Pallava rule. The Periyapuranam written by Sekizhar is also another important literary source for this period.

**Sanskrit Literature:** The Sanskrit works Avani Sundari Katha written by Dandin and Loga Vibagam written by Sarva Nandi provide a lot of information about the importance of Simhavishnu and his rule, The famous Pallava monarch Mahendravarman I himself wrote the Mathavilasa Prakasanam in Sanskrit language. It provides information regarding the social and religious condition during the Pallava period.

**Foreign Sources:** The foreign sources for the Pallava period include the Sri Lankan books, namely, Deepavamsa and Mahavamsa. These books are written in Pali language. They describe about the relationship between the Pallava kings Narasimhavarman I and the Sri Lankan king Manavarman. The Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang had visited the Pallava kingdom and his travel accounts are known as Siyuki. He had given a detailed account of the capital city of the Pallavas, Kanchipuram. He also mentioned about the Buddhist Viharas in Kanchi and described the social and economic conditions of the Pallava kingdom.

**Archaeological Sources:** Copper plates, inscriptions, monuments and coins remain the important archaeological sources: for the study of the Pallavas. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta mentions about the Pallava king Vishnu Gopa. The Aihole Inscription of the Chalukyan king, Pulakesin II gives details about the Pallava Chalukya conflict. The Kenthoor Stone Carving of Keethivarman also belonged to the Pallava period. Apart from these popular inscriptions, there exist hundreds of Pallava inscriptions throughout South India. They depict the military achievements of the Pallava kings. These inscriptions also explain the social and economic conditions of the Pallava period.

The copper plates of the Pallava period remain useful historical sources. The Kuram Copper Plates issued by Parameshwaravarman and the Velurpalayam copper plates of Nandivarman III record their military achievements. The temples, sculptures and other monuments of the Pallava period also provide valuable historical information. The coins of the Pallava period remain important sources to study the economic conditions of this period.

### **3.3.3. Origin of the Pallavas**

Very little reliable information on the origin of the Pallavas is available. They appear to have intruded into the south. Katyayana (fourth century B.C.) mentions the Pandyas and the Cholas, but not the Pallavas, Ashoka (third century B.C.) refers to the Cholas, the Pandyas and Keralas, but not the Pallavas. The Pallavas were a branch of the Pahleves of Parthians is the opinion of some scholars, like father Heras; but there is no positive evidence for the Phalava migration into the south. That Pallavas were an indigenous dynasty which rose to power after the dismemberment of the Andhra empire, is another opinion. Probably their leaders gathered around themselves the Kurumbas, the Moravars, the killers and other predatory tribes in order to form one great community. According to Srinivas Aiyangar, the Pallavas belonged to the ancient Naga people who themselves were composed of a primitive Negri, an element of Australisian and the later mixed race. To start with they lived in the Tondaimandalam districts around Madras. Later, they conquered Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts. The Pallavas recruited their troops from the martial tribute of pallis of Kurumbas. The Pallavas were the hereditary enemies of Tamil Kings. Even now the term pallava means a rogue in Tamil language; and a section of the Pallavas who settled in the Chola and pandya countries came to be known as kallar or thieves. All these people doubtless belong to a Naga race.

The third is that the Pallava dynasty emerged and owed its origin to a Chola prince and the Naga princess of Manipallavam an island near Ceylon. According to this theory, the son born out of the wedlock was made the king of Tondaimandalam by his father, and the dynasty was so named after his mother's home land. Dr. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar argues that the Pallavas are mentioned as Tondaiyar in the literature of the Sangam era and that they were descended from the Naga chieftains but owed allegiance to the Satavahana kings. But this theory, too, is doubtful because of their continual fight with the cholas and their striking northern character as compared to the Cholas.

Dr. K.P.Jayaswal argues that the pallavas were a branch of the Brahmin dynasty of the Vakatakas. Except for their early copperplate charters which are in Prakrit. All the other epigraphic records are in Sanskrit. Hiuen-Tsang says that their language and literature differed very slightly from that of northern India. The Talagunda inscription, however, states that the Pallavas were Kshatriyas.

Thus, we noticed that there are different views on the origin of the Pallavas. They were equated with the Parthians, the foreigners who ruled western India. Another view was that the Pallavas were a branch of the Brahmin royal dynasty of the Vakatakas of the Deccan. The third view relates the Pallavas with the descendants of the Chola prince and a Naga princess whose native was the island of Manipallavam. But these theories on the origin of the Pallavas were not supported by adequate evidences. Therefore, the view that the Pallavas were the natives of Tondaimandalam



itself was widely accepted by scholars. They are also identical with the Pulindas mentioned in the inscriptions of Asoka. When Tondaimandalam was conquered by the Satavahanas, the Pallavas became their feudatories. After the fall of the Satavahanas in the third century A.D., they became independent. The Pallavas issued their earlier inscriptions in Prakrit and Sanskrit because of their Satavahana connections, and also patronized Brahmanism.

#### **3.3.4. Political History of Early Pallava**

The history of the Pallavas could be broadly divided into two major sections. First those who ruled before AD 600 and second those that came after A.D 600. The former could be called the early Pallavas and the latter the Imperial Pallavas. The word Imperial is used here to indicate powerful rulership over an extended kingdom.

The earlier among the early Pallavas could be further divided into those who issued the Prakrit charters and those who issued the Sanskrit charters. In fact there are only three rulers who are known to us to be connected with the Prakrit charters. The first ruler clearly mentioned is Sivaskandavarman. Many historians shorten his name to Skandavarman without warrant. The Sivaskandavarman is also mentioned as Yuvaraja and so it is obvious that his father whose name is not known to us was also a ruler. A Prakrit stone inscription from the Guntur district mentions a **Simhavaraman** who was perhaps the father of **Sivaskandavarman**. This Sivaskandavarman had a son Buddhavarman, who had a son called Buddhyanura born to the queen Charudevi. This Charudevi's grant in Prakrit, a gift to temples, mentions the early Pallava! Rulers beginning with one Bappa, and we do not know if he was the founder of the Pallava power, for Bappa merely means father.

A study of the Pallava charters, the Mayidavolu copper plate grant and the Hirahadagalli copper plate grant both issued by Sivaskandavarman from Kanchi indicate the very early Pallava contact with Kanchi. This Sivaskandavarman assumed the title of Dharma Maharaja and performed the Asvamedha and other Vedic sacrifices. Vijayaskandavarman known to us from the British Museum plates was not perhaps the same as Sivaskandavarman who issued the above-mentioned copper plates. Thus we are left with two lines of rulers, a Sivaskandavarman, son of Simhavaraman, a Buddhyanura, son of one Buddhavarman, descendant of one Bappa.

There is a third ruler who belongs to the middle of the fourth century AD by name **Vishnugopa**. He is unconnected with the others. He is known to us through the Allahabad pillar inscription which mentions him as one of the princess defeated by Samudragupta in the course of his Digvijaya. The view that Vishnugopa was a son of Sivaskandavarman has no basis nor is it proper to equate this Vishnugopa with the Kumaravishnu of the Sanskrit charters. When all attendant factors are taken into consideration we can say the Prakrit charters mention five rulers; Simhavaraman and his son Sivaskandavarman; and Bappa, his son Buddhavarman and his son Buddhyanura. The Allahabad pillar inscription mentions Vishnugopa; so that we have six rulers anterior to the rulers mentioned in the Sanskrit charters of the Pallavas.

The main source for the history of the later rulers among the early Pallavas is a number of Sanskrit charters of which some are genuine and a few others doubtful. The dependable Sanskrit charters are, the Ongodu I grant of Skandavarman; the Uruvapalle and Singarayakonda plates of Yuva Maharaja Vishnugopa issued in the reign of a Simharvarman; the Ongodu II, the Pikira, Mangaduru, Vilavatti plates of Simhavaraman; the Chura grant; the Udayendiram plates of Nandivarman I; the Chendalur plates; and the Pallangoil plates. These work out to eleven grants. They mention only the names of kings, and grants of a purely socio-religious nature.

Thus from these sources it is not possible to construct the political history of that age and of that dynasty to any extent. Some of the inscriptions we come across outside the Tamil country like the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta, the Talagunda inscription of Kakusthavarman, the

Penugonda plates of the Western Gangas mention two of the Ganga rulers being anointed and crowned by two Pallava monarchs, **Simhavarman** and his son **Skandavarman**.

These Penugonda plates which are assigned to the 3rd quarter of the fifth century AD on scriptal grounds help us to assign these two Pallava rulers to the late fifth century. Another source for nearly precise dating in pre-Simhavishnu Pallava chronology is the Lok Vibhaga, a Digambara Jain work, written in AD 458.

This work was composed in the 22nd regnal year of Simhavarman Pallava. So the initial year of this Simhavarman must have been AD 436. With the help of these certain dates the early Pallava chronology can be roughly indicated. The Velurpalayam plates of Nandivarman III give a long list of early Pallava rulers and it includes an Asokavarman mistaken by some for the Mauryan Emperor. These plates also speak of a Chutu-Pallava; Virakurcha who it is alleged acquired political power by marrying among the Nagas. These details belong to Pallava proto-history and are incapable of verification from other sources. Even from the meager information we get in these charters it is possible to glean some facts relating to the government and social life of the early Pallavas. We hear of Yuvarajas evidently crown princes who perhaps participated in government and issued charters. The king had a title Bhattaraka. Many other official designations are mentioned but their exact functions are not known. Gift of tax-free lands to Brahmins was an important act of philanthropy. The general political system was certainly a continuation of the Satavahana tradition and the Pallavas were Hindus who worshipped either Siva or Vishnu and performed Vedic sacrifices.

We get to know more details of the political happenings, government and social life of the Pallavas only after Simhavarman, father of Simhavishnu. The Pallangoil copper plates introduce Simhavarman as the father of Simhavishnu. We do not know how these two rulers were related to the early Pallava rulers of whom the Prakrit and Sanskrit charters speak. The Pallavas from Simhavarman of the sixth century AD to Kampavarman of the early tenth century can be collectively called the later Pallavas and they were the most important power in half the Tamil country, i.e., to the north of the Kaviri, for a period of five centuries.

Their contribution to the art and letters of the Tamils was very significant. The Bhakti movement started and took shape and ran its course mostly during their period and this makes their reign period a significant era in the cultural history of the Tamils. The historical source material for this period is different from that of the previous period.

The latter is illuminated by copper plate grants only; the former on the other hand is known to us through stone inscriptions, copper plate grants and some literature. The stone inscriptions are found mostly in cave temples and later in structural temples; they are short records which mention only regnal years. Their importance consists in their mention of some social institutions of those times.

Contemporary records of other dynasties like the Gangas and the Pandyas also occasionally and incidentally refer to the Pallava. The Udayendiram plates of Nandivarman II are more informative and historically relevant. The literature of this period was largely the product of devotionism and hence the quantum of historical material therein is little though some sociological information of limited value can be gleaned from them.

Still literary works like the Mattavilasa Prahasanam by Mahendravarman I, Avanti Sundari Kathasara by Dandin, the Bharatavenba by Perundevanar and Nandikkalambakam by an anonymous author throw some light on the political activities of the contemporary kings. Hiuen-Tsang's account written sometime in the middle of the seventh century AD gives us some facts about the religious and social conditions under the Pallavas of Kanchi.

**Simhavarman:** The first among the later Pallava rulers was Simhavarman (c. 550-600) who is identified with the Saiva devotee Aiyadigal Kadavarkon whose history is narrated in the Periyapuranam and who has to his credit 24 verses in praise of Siva.

These verses are collected into the Kshetra Tiruvenba which is part of the eleventh Tirumurai of the Saiva canon. The expansion of the Pallava kingdom began even in the days of Simhavarman but this expansion was achieved by the crown prince. According to tradition Simhavarman abdicated the throne and left his son Simhavishnu to look after the government.

**Simhavishnu:** Simhavishnu, also known as Avanisimha, Chatrumalla, etc., is mentioned in the Velurpalayam plates as the son of Simhavarman. The Mattavilasa Prahasanam in its prologue mentions him. Bharavi, the great Sanskrit poet, adorned his court. He had a brother by name Bhimavarman. The descendants of these two brothers are known to us.

There is no uncertainty about the succession of kings during the Simhavishnu-Aparajita period which continued roughly till AD 880, i.e., for three centuries. Simhavishnu is mainly noted for the first large southern extension of the kingdom; he is famous like Kadungon for having destroyed the Kalabhras.

His kingdom, thus extended, reached down to the Kaviri as witnessed by the Pallangoil plates. He also defeated the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Malavarayas. He was a Vaishnava. He excavated the Siyyamangalam Cave Temple. It is possible that either Simhavishnu or some other member of his family interfered in a dispute between Durvinita, the Ganga and his step-brother.

We get sculptural representations of this king and his son Mahendravarman in the Adivaraha Temple at Mahabalipuram. It is probable that this monolithic temple was excavated by him; so that the architectural and sculptural traditions of Mahabalipuram go back to the days of Simhavishnu.

### **3.3.5. The Heydays of Pallava**

From the mid-6th century, for the next 200 years the Pallavas were the dominant South Indian power with the other three dynasties having only subordinate status. The Pallava king, Simhavishnu Pallava recorded a boast in the last quarter of the 6th century that he had 'vanquished the Pandyas, Cholas, and the Cheras as well as the ruler of Ceylon'. At the greatest spread of its territorial expansion, the Pallava kingdom encompassed the whole of Arcot, Chinglepet, Madras, Trichinapolly, and Tanjore districts and stretched from the Orissa frontier in the north to the River Pennar in the south. Its eastern border was the Bay of Bengal and in the west the kingdom bordered an imaginary line drawn through Salem, Bangalore and Berar. In the 7th century it attained the highest point in its power and fame. However, during the same period the Pallavas also lost the Vengi province to the Chalukyas, which was never recovered. Some prominent rulers of this period are discussed below.

#### **3.3.5.1. Mahendravarman I (600-630 A.D.)**

The long-drawn Pallava – Chalukya Conflict began during his period. Pulakesin II marched against the Pallavas and captured the northern part of their kingdom. Although a Pallava inscription refers to the victory of Mahendravarman I at Pullalur, he was not able to recover the lost territory. Mahendravarman I was a follower of Jainism in the early part of his career. He was converted to Saivism by the influence of the Saiva saint, Thirunavukkarasar alias Appar. He built a Siva temple at Tiruvadi. He assumed a number of titles like Gunabhara, Satyasandha, Chettakari (builder of temples) Chitrakarapuli, Vichitrachitta and Mattavilasa. He was a great builder of cave temples. The Mandagappattu inscription hails him as Vichitrachitta who constructed a temple for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva without the use of bricks, timber, metal and mortar. His rock-cut temples are found in a number of places like Vallam, Mahendravadi, Dalavanur, Pallavaram, Mandagappattu and Tiruchirappalli. He had also authored the Sanskrit work Mattavilasa Prahasanam. His title Chitrakarapuli reveals his talents in painting. He is also regarded as an expert in music. The music inscription at Kudumianmalai is ascribed to him.

All available information point to Mahendravarman I being one of the greatest South Indian kings of all times. Militarily he was the counter-point to the offensive ambition of the Chalukyas; by converting to the Shaiva belief system he provided a new impetus to the building up of its

dwindling fortunes; being himself an artist and a litterateur, he glorified the practice of poetry and music through his patronage; and he created the rock-cut temple structures, a concept that had its origins in the banks of the River Krishna and which the king imported from his ancestral Telugu lands to the banks of the Rivers Palar and Kavery in the Tamil South. This style of construction came to be subsequently named Pallava art. Further, his reign was relatively peaceful and he opened a new era of prosperity in an otherwise difficult age.

#### **3.3.5.2.Narasimhavarman I (630-668 A.D.)**

Narasimhavarman I was also known as Mamalla, which means 'great wrestler'. He wanted to take revenge the defeat of his father at the hands of Chalukyan ruler Pulakesin II. His victory over Pulakesin II in the Battle of Manimangalam near Kanchi is mentioned in Kuram copper plates. The Pallava army under General Paranjothi pursued the retreating Chalukya army, entered Chalukya territory, captured and destroyed the capital city of Vatapi. Narasimhavarman I assumed the title 'Vatapikonda'. He regained the lost territory. Another notable achievement of Narasimhavarman I was his naval expedition to Sri Lanka. He restored the throne to his friend and Sri Lankan prince Manavarma. During his reign, Hiuen Tsang visited the Pallava capital Kanchipuram. His description of Kanchi is vivid. He calls it a big and beautiful city, six miles in circumference. It had 100 Buddhist monasteries in which about 10,000 Buddhist monks lived. According to his account the people of Kanchi esteemed great learning and the Ghatika at Kanchi served as a great centre of learning. Narasimhavarman I was the founder of Mamallapuram and the monolithic rathas were erected during his reign.

#### **3.3.5.3. Paramesvaravarman I (670-695 A.D)**

Narasimhavarman was succeeded by his son Mahendravarman II. He ruled for about two years from about 668-670. There is no important event of his reign. He was succeeded by his son, Paramesvaravarman I, who ruled from about 670 to about 695 A.D. The Gadaval Plates were issued by Vikramaditya Chalukya Vallabha while he was camped in the Chola kingdom in preparation for the third major incursion into the Pallava kingdom. Paramesvaravarman the ruling Pallava king initially managed to keep the Chalukya army at bay. However, in a decisive battle fought in 674, the Chalukyas were victorious and Paramesvaravarman escaped north to Andhra country, the original home of the Pallava dynasty. The Chalukya army marched through the heartland of the Pallava kingdom unmolested and captured the capital Kanchi. Vikramaditya celebrated his victory by inscribing the date and details of the capture of Kanchi at the base of the Kailasanatha temple there. Subsequently, in the long-drawn battle of Peruvallanattar, Paramesvaravarman put Vikramaditya to flight, forcing him to return to his own kingdom.

In the Pallava records, Paramesvaravarman is described as 'Ugradanda, the destroyer of the city of Ranarasika', obviously a reference to Vikramaditya who is referred in the Gadaval Plate as Ranarasika. Some sources maintain that this victory over the Chalukyas was orchestrated by a Confederacy of Tamil kings under the leadership of the Pallava king and that the Ceylon king Manvamma also took part in the battle.

#### **3.3.5.4.Narasimhavarman II or Rajasimha (695-722 A.D.)**

Narasimhavarman II became the ruler of the Pallava kingdom after death of his father Paramesvaravarman. He was also known as Rajasimha. His regime was peaceful and he evinced more interest in developing the art and architecture. The Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram were built in this period. He was also a great patron of art and letters. The famous Sanskrit scholar Dandin is said to have adorned his court. He sent embassies to China and the maritime trade flourished during his reign. Rajasimha assumed titles like Sankarabhakta, Vadhyavidyadhara and Agamapriya. He was succeeded by Parameswaravarman II, who ruled from about 722 to about 730 A.D.

### **3.3.5.5.Nandivarman II (A.D 730-780)**

Nandivarman had come to the throne as a minor, at the age of 12, and was only 22 when the Chalukyas set out to avenge their previous defeat at the hands of his grandfather. The war was initiated by the Chalukyas who achieved total surprise, arriving at the gates of Kanchi unexpectedly. The young king, who was left without any allies to call upon, fled to a fort leaving his capital unprotected-the Chalukya army captured Kanchi with ease and the Pallava kingdom was open to the invaders, left without protection. However, the Chalukyas did not annex the territory, but withdrew to their country with a sizeable booty. It is possible that they left a member of the Royal family as the de facto ruler of the Pallava territory, who acknowledged Chalukya suzerainty. The mention of one Chitramaya, as the Pallava king around this time gives credence to this story.

Nandivarman overthrew this Chalukya ruler and reclaimed his throne. However, he could not even attempt a revenge attack on the Chalukyas for his defeat, mainly for two reasons. One, the Pallava kingdom was by now a tired enterprise, war-weary and without the resources necessary to embark on a major campaign. Two, its southern borders were being constantly troubled by the harassment of the Pandyas whose growing power was becoming obvious. The southern incursions had to be countered through military might, leaving no spare capacity to plan or conduct a campaign against the Chalukyas. In combination, these two factors gradually brought the Pallava dynasty to a state of continuous decline.

### **3.3.5.6.Successor of Nandivarman**

Nandivarman was followed on the throne by a number of ineffectual kings who continued to lose territory and ruled an ever-shrinking kingdom. These kings were-Dantivarman (795-846) who lost most of the southern provinces to a Pandyan expedition; Nandivarman (846-69) who battled the Pandyan king for an extended period of time but ultimately lost the conflict; Kampavarman (870-85) of whose rule very little is recorded; and the last known Pallava king Aparajitavarman (888-903) who was overthrown by Aditya Chola. With this collapse, the Pallava dynasty became extinct. It is perhaps a quirk of fate that the last Pallava king who was overthrown and whose ultimate fate remains unknown was named 'Aparajita', which in literal translation would mean 'the one who cannot be defeated'. Perhaps the naming of the crown prince as someone who is invincible was wishful thinking on the part of his predecessor who must have seen the writing on the wall that the Pallavas were hurtling towards extinction.

The final outcome of the 100-year war between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas was the ultimate destruction of both dynasties. The Chalukyas were an inherently aggressive dynasty, raising the ire of all their neighbours and therefore being continually at war. By the middle of the 8th century, their energy was sapped and they became prey to the equally aggressive and ambitious Rashtrakutas. The Pallavas, who had arrived on the scene about a century after the Chalukyas had established themselves, survived for another century after the demise of the Chalukyas but in a state of exhausted decline. They were no match for the Pandyan ambition and went under without a whimper. The Pallava rule lasted till the end of the ninth century A.D. The Chola king Aditya I defeated the last Pallava ruler Aparajita and seized the Kanchi region. With this, the rule of Pallava dynasty came to an end.

### **3.3.6. Administration of the Pallavas**

The Pallavas had a well organized administrative system.

**King:** The king was at the centre of administration in which he was assisted by able ministers. Kingship was attributed to divine origin. The kings claimed their descent from the God Brahma. It was hereditary. Yet, on one occasion a king was elected. Most of the kings were accomplished scholars. Mahendrarman I wrote the famous burlesque, *Mastavilasa Prahasana*. Many of the vaishnava alvars and saiva nayanars flourished during their rule. The kings adopted high-sounding titles like maharajadhiraja, dharma-maharajadhiraja (great king of kings ruling in

accordance with the dharma), agnistomavajpeya, asvamedha-yaji (he who has performed the agnithoma-vajapeya and asvamedha sacrifices) They were assisted by ministers. History shows that the ministerial council played a great part in the state policy in the later period. He was the fountain of justice. The king maintained a well-trained army. He provided land-grants to the temples known as *Devadhana* and also to the Brahmans known as *Brahmadeya*. It was also the responsibility of the central government to provide irrigation facilities to the lands. A number of irrigation tanks were dug by the Pallava kings. The irrigation tanks at Mahendravadi and Mamandoor were dug during the reign of Mahendravarman I.

**Administrative Divisions:** The Pallavas had a vast empire. It had extended up to the Nellore district in the North and up to the river South Pennar in the South. On the west, it had extended up to the Western Ghats and on the east up to the Bay of Bengal. It was very difficult to have administrative control over such a vast empire. Therefore, the Pallavas had divided the empire into several administrative units. They were called as Mandalam, Kottam, Nadu and Ur. These administrative divisions may be compared with the modern administrative units, namely province, district, taluk and village. **Mandalam:** The biggest unit of the Pallava Empire was Mandalam or Rashtra. It had remained almost an autonomous unit. The Pallava king had appointed a prince or Yuvaraja as the governor of a Mandalam. This was done to have direct central control over the provinces. **Kottam:** Each Mandalam was divided into several Kottams or Vishayas. The number of Kottams varied according to the size of the Mandalam. For example, the Thondai Mandalam was divided into twenty-four Kottams. Officials were appointed by the king to administer each Kottam. **Nadu:** The next administrative unit was called Nadu. It was bigger than Oor or Village. There were several villages in each Nadu. A council called Naattar was in charge of the administration of Nadu. **Oor:** The Oor or village was the smallest unit of the Pallava administration. It was also under the control of the village committees called Sabhas, The village Sabha remained almost autonomous in looking after the day-to-day administration of the village.

**Officials Under the Pallava:** A hierarchy of officials in provincial administration, the governor of a province was assisted by district officers, who in turn worked in collaboration with autonomous local bodies. In local administration the meeting of assemblies were frequent, and the administration the meeting of assemblies were frequent, and the assemblies were of many varieties and of many levels. Often special meetings were held. As the village level the assembly was the sabha which looked after almost all the matters of the village, along with endowments, irrigation, crime, maintaining census and other necessary records, Courts at villages level dealt with minor criminal cases. The judicial courts of the town and districts were presided over by government officials, climaxing with the king as the supreme arbiter of justice. The sabha worked in close association with the urar, and informal gathering of the entire village. Above this unit was a district administration. Finally, the head man of the villages was the link between the village assembly and the official administration.

**Land pattern:** Theoretically the king owned the land. The status of a village depended on the prevalent land tenure. The first variety was the village with inter-caste population where in the people paid taxes to the king. The second was the brahmadeya village in which the entire land was donated to a single Brahmin or a group of brahmins. A variation of this village was the agraphars grant which, was an entire village settlement of brahmins. Both these forms were exempt from royal taxes. In the devadana village the revenue was donated to a temple, and the temple authorities in turn provided employment for the villagers in the temple whenever possible. In the Pallava period the first two categories of villages were in vogue.

Apart from these major points relating to land there was a special category of land, the sripatti or tank land. The revenue from such a land was sent apart for the maintenance of the village

tank. The tank itself was built by the efforts of the entire village. All shared the water stored in the tank. Very many inscriptions of the Pallavas refer to the up-keep of tanks.

**Taxation System:** There are two Points about taxes. The land revenue varied from one-sixth to one tenth of the produce of the land. This was paid to the State. The local taxes that were collected in a village were spent for the needs of the village. As land revenue was necessarily small, the State revenue was supplemented by additional taxes on draught cattle, marriage-parties, potters, makers of clarified butter, textile manufacturers, washer men and weavers. The major source of revenue was from land, since the revenue from mercantile activity was not fully exploited. Detailed information on the tax system could also be traced from the Pallava inscriptions. Land tax was the primary source of the government revenue. The *Brahmadeya* and *Devadhana* lands were exempted from tax. Traders and artisans such as carpenters, goldsmiths, washer-men, oil-pressers and weavers paid taxes to the government.

**Expenditure:** Regarding expenditure, most to the revenue went for the maintenance of army. The king preferred a standing army instead of feudal levies. The army primarily consisting of foot soldiers and cavalry along with a sprinkling of elephants. Indeed the Pallavas developed a navy although the mercantile activity was not great. Two dockyards were built at Mahablipuram and Nagabattinam. This pioneering effort of the Pallavas reached its climax during the days of Cholas. The navy served a double purpose. It was meant for defence and also assisted the maritime Trade with south-east Asia, particularly with the three kingdoms of Kambuja (Cambodia) Champa (Annam) and Shrivijaya (Malayan peninsula and Sumatra).

A well-organized administration had existed in the Pallava kingdom. We get a lot of information from the literature and inscriptions to know the various aspects of the Pallava administration. The Pallava kings had introduced several administrative institutions in the Tamil country. Mostly, they had adopted the Mauryan system of administration and suitably modified it. It can be said that generally there was peace and order in the Pallava kingdom due to their efficient administrative system.

### **3.3.7. Society under the Pallavas**

The Tamil society witnessed a great change during the Pallava period. The caste system became rigid. The Brahmins occupied a high place in the society. They were given land-grants by the kings and nobles. They were also given the responsibility of looking after the temples. The Pallava period also witnessed the rise of Saivism and Vaishnavism and also the decline of Buddhism and Jainism. The Saiva Nayanmars and the Vaishnava Alvars contributed to the growth of Saivism and Vaishnavism. This is known as the Bakthi Movement. They composed their hymns in the Tamil language. These hymns revealed the importance of devotion or Bakthi. The construction of temples by the Pallava kings paved the way for the spread of these two religions.

The Pallava rule had witnessed a drastic change in the social and economic life of the people. The emergence of the Bakthi Movement had significantly changed their way of life. It was further stimulated by the temple-building activity of the Pallava kings. There was also a remarkable growth of economy during this period. In general, there was a tremendous change in the society and culture during the Pallava rule.

#### **3.3.7.1. Social Structure**

The society under the Pallavas was chiefly divided into four, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Besides the four-fold division, there were also other sub castes in the society based on their occupation.

The Brahmins occupied the first place in the society. They were the learned and the most respected in the society. They had lived in a separate place called Agraharam. They had recited Vedas and performed pooja in the temples. The Pallava kings had made extensive land grants to

them. These land grants were known as Brahmadeyas. The Brahmins helped the kings in performing sacrifices. They had also enjoyed higher position in the government.

The Kshatryas had remained in the next position in the social hierarchy. Generally, they belonged to the ruling class. They had also become warriors. They also gave liberal donations to the temples and Brahmins.

Those who indulged in agriculture and trade were called as Vaisyas. They had contributed to the development of society by establishing Mutts and choultries. They also fed the poor and committed to public welfare and social progress.

The Sudras had occupied the last place in the social structure. They remained low-grade servants. The literature of the Pallava period refers to them as pulayar and chandalas. However, a few of them had become religious saints due to their devotion to God.

#### **3.3.7.2.Status of women**

The women from royal and rich families had enjoyed high status in the society. They were also given property rights. They remained pious and religious and granted liberal donations to the temples and Brahmins. Chastity was their noble virtue. However, other women in the middle and lower strata of the society had to work hard to earn their livelihood. They indulged in spinning, weaving and other similar works. There were also separate dancing girls in the society. They were employed in the temples because of their talent in music and dance.

#### **3.3.7.3.Food, Dress and Ornaments**

Rice was the staple food of the people during the Pallava period. They had also consumed milk, ghee, and curd. Generally, people wore simple dress made of cotton. The rich people were fond of wearing silk garments. The sculptures of this period indicate several types of ornaments used by the people. They include earrings, bangles, necklaces and anklets.

#### **3.3.7.4.Education and Literature**

The Pallavas were great patrons of learning. Their capital Kanchi was an ancient centre of learning. The *Ghatika* at Kanchi was popular and it attracted students from all parts of India and abroad. The founder of the Kadamba dynasty, Mayurasarman studied Vedas at Kanchi. Dinganaga, a Buddhist writer came to study at Kanchi. Dharmapala, who later became the Head of the Nalanada University, belonged to Kanchi. Bharavi, the great Sanskrit scholar lived in the time of Simhavishnu. Dandin, another Sanskrit writer adorned the court of Narasimhavarman II. Mahendravarman I composed the Sanskrit play *Mattavilasaprahasanam*. Tamil literature had also developed. The Nayanmars and Alvars composed religious hymns in Tamil. The *Devaram* composed by Nayanmars and the *Nalayradivya Prabandam* composed by Alvars represent the religious literature of the Pallava period. Perundevanar was patronized by Nandivarman II and he translated the Mahabharata as *Bharathavenba* in Tamil. *Nandikkalambagam* was another important work but the name of the author of this work is not known. Music and dance also developed during this period.

**Literature:** The age of Pallavas synchronised with the religious awakening in Tamilnadu. It was an age of religious movement. It was in this period a large number of devotional hymns were sung by the vaishnava and Siva leaders. It was an age of Renaissance in Sacred literature. The Siva and Vaishna literature were mostly composed during this period. The Language of Tamil grew well under the Pallavas Side by side with the Tamil language Sanskrit also made progress. The Pallava rulers patronized. Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil. Kanchi was a great centre of learning. It imparted Sanskrit knowledge. Many people were attached to the learning centres of Kanchi. Vatsayana, Dinnaga and Mayurasarman were some of the noted figures who had studied at Kanchi. Kanchi produced eminent scholars. They were employed in North India and other places. Dharmapala was one among them Dharmapala served as the Vice-Chancellor of the Nalanda University.



**Ghatika:** The Pallava capital Kanchi was an education centre in South India. Yuan Chwang, the Prince of Pilgrims visited Kanchi in the days of Mahendravarman I. There was a college at Kanchi called Ghatika. Several neighbouring monarchs studied in the Ghatika. In Kanchi Vedas, Grammar and Upanishads were taught. All those subjects were taught only Sanskrit, Yuan Chwang says that Dharmapala the Vice-chancellor of Nalanda University was a native of Kanchi. Apart from Kanchi several Sanskrit colleges were established and patronized by the Pallavas in Kaveripakkam and Pahur.

**Hindu centres of learning:** The Brahmadya villages the Hindu temples and the mathas served as centres of learning. The Brahmins were well read in Vedic text and they imparted Sanskrit education. The Kailasanatha temples at Kanchi was a store house of public documents. The mathas provided boarding and lodging to students and teachers.

**Buddhist centres of learning:** Yuan Chwang mentions the presence of Buddhist learning centres in Tamil Nadu Vinaya Pitaka was taught in the Buddhist centres of learning. In Kanchi the Buddhist centres of learning flourished. Like the Buddhist centres there were also Jain centres of learning.

### **3.3.8. Pallava Art and Architecture**

It was a great age of temple building. The Pallavas introduced the art of excavating temples from the rock. In fact, the Dravidian style of temple architecture began with the Pallava rule. It was a gradual evolution starting from the cave temples to monolithic *rathas* and culminated in structural temples. The development of temple architecture under the Pallavas can be seen in four stages. Mahendravarman I introduced the rock-cut temples. This style of Pallava temples are seen at places like Mandagappattu, Mahendravadi, Mamandur, Dalavanur, Tiruchirappalli, Vallam, Siyamangalam and Tirukalukkunram.

The second stage of Pallava architecture is represented by the monolithic *rathas* and Mandapas found at Mamallapuram. Narasimhavarman I took the credit for these wonderful architectural monuments. The five *rathas*, popularly called as the *Panchapanadava rathas*, signifies five different styles of temple architecture. The mandapas contain beautiful sculptures on its walls. The most popular of these mandapas are Mahishasuramardhini Mandapa, Tirumurthi Mandapam and Varaha Madapam. In the next stage, Rajasimha introduced the structural temples. These temples were built by using the soft sand rocks. The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi and the Shore temple at Mamallapuram remain the finest examples of the early structural temples of the Pallavas. The Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi is the greatest architectural master piece of the Pallava art. The last stage of the Pallava art is also represented by structural temples built by the later Pallavas. The Vaikundaperumal temple, Muktheeswara temple and Matagenswara temples at Kanchipuram belong to this stage of architecture. The Pallavas had also contributed to the development of sculpture. Apart from the sculptures found in the temples, the 'Open Art Gallery' at Mamallapuram remains an important monument bearing the sculptural beauty of this period. The Descent of the Ganges or the Penance of Arjuna is called a fresco painting in stone. The minute details as well as the theme of these sculptures such as the figures of lice-picking monkey, elephants of huge size and the figure of the 'ascetic cat' standing erect remain the proof for the talent of the sculptor.

#### **3.3.8.1. Architecture**

The achievements of the Pallavas in the field of architecture is very important. It was the period of the origin of Dravidian architecture. Several kinds of religious buildings were constructed. Generally, they are classified into cave temples and structural temples. Again the cave temples can be classified into Mahendra style and Narasimha style. Likewise the structural temples can be classified into Rajasimha Style and Nandivarman style or Aparajuta style.

**Mahendra Style:** Mahendravarman I was the originator of the Pallava Architecture. He was curious minded and followed the style of the cave temples at Vihayawada Sithaput and Undavallu.

Cave temple were created by Mahendravarman at Trichirapalli, Mahendravarvadi, Mamandur and Mantagapattu. The temples of Mahendravarman had many pillared halls. These pillars were slender, tall and round in shape. These were not well decorated.

The first cave temple was constructed at Mantagapattu. The temple consisted of separate, garbagiraha for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The Tiruchirappalli cave temple is known for its fresco in stone. It is two square meters in size. In the middle of the sculpture there is an image of Gangatharar or Siva. The figure of Siva is standing on the body of the [www.onlinecampus.net.in](http://www.onlinecampus.net.in) Mugalakan. Generally the Pallava period is recognised so the origin of South Indian architecture.

**Narasimha Style:** Unlike his father Narasimhavarman constructed many temples out of rocks and stones. The temples constructed by him can be classified into 3 types. 1. Cave temples. 2. Mandapas 3. Monolithic shrines or Single stone temples.

**Cave Temples:** Cave Temples are Mandapas. All these buildings are found Mamallapuram or Mahabalipuram. The city itself was named after Narasimhavarman or Mamalla. The pillars of Narasimha style are more decorative and square or octagonal in shape.

**Mandapas:** Several Mandapas were created by Narasimha. They are Tirumurthi Mandapa, Kottikal Mandapa, Varaha Mandapa and Mahidassura Mandapa. The Tirumurthi Mandapa was constructed for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The Kottikal Mandapa was dedicated to Kottiravai. The Mahidasura and Varaha Mandapa were constructed for Thirumal and Varaha respectively.

**Monolithic Shrines:** It was made out of single rocks. They were also known as rathas and Pagodas. There were 8 such pagoda. Generally, there were 7 recognised pagodas. They are the Panchapandava ratha Ganesha ratha Pindari ratha and Vialam Kuttai ratha. The Panchapandava rathas are situated in a row. They were dedicated to Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadeva and Draupati. The other rathas are situated in the opposite side. The Dharmaraja rathas are the most completed ones. They had several stories. The Gopuram had its origin from the Rathas.

**Sculptural Panels:** Narasimha also gave importance for the development of sculptures. These sculptures were carved in rocks and hills at Mahabalipuram. The important sculptures are Arjuna Penance or descend of the Ganges and Bahirratha Penance.

**Rajasimha Style:** Structural temple were introduced in the place of cave temples during the reign of Narasimhavarman I or Rajasimha. Huge rocks and stones were piled up in order to construct structural temples. The first structural temple was constructed by Parameswara I the father of Narasimhavarman II at Kurram. The days of Narasimhavarman II witnessed peace, and order and therefore he constructed many temples. The most important among them are the Kailasantha temple and Vaigunta Perumal Temple at Kanchi and the shore temple at Mamallapuram. The Kailasantha temple is the most decorative among them. It has a tower and a pillared hall. It is well proportioned and substantial. The Vaigunta Perumal Temple is slightly lower than the Kailasantha temple. Its sanctum is square. It is providing a portico. Its Vimana is square in plan and rises to a height of 60 feet. It is 4 storeyed.

**Nandivarman Style or Aparajutha Style:** The Mukteswara and Mukungeswara temples at Kanchi the Virathaneswara temple at Tirutani, the Vadamalliswara temple at Orgadam and Parameswara temple at Gudimallam belonged to the period of the Pallavas when the power was reeling. Those temples were mere copies of the earlier temples. But they were constructed bigger than the temples of Rajasimha style.

### 3.3.8.2.Fine Arts

Music, dance and painting had also developed under the patronage of the Pallavas. The Mamandur inscription contains a note on the notation of vocal music. The Kudumianmalai inscription referred to musical notes and instruments. The Alvars and Nayanmars composed their hymns in various musical notes. Dance and drama also developed during this period. The sculptures of this period depict many dancing postures. The Sittannavasal paintings belonged to this period.

The commentary called *Dakshinchitra* was compiled during the reign of Mahendravarman I, who had the title Chittirakkarapuli. The various poses of the Nataraja at Kaliasanatha temple speak about their taste to Dance. Dancing Girls were appointed in the temples. There are 24 dancing girls in the Muktesvara temple. Mattavilasaprakasana is a drama written by Mahendravarman in Sanskrit. Perunkathai speaks about dramas.

Mahendravarman was an excellent Painter. It is depicted through his title ‘Chitrakarapuli’. He was the author of a treatise on Painting. It is also proved by an inscription found at Mamandur. Traces of paintings on the roof of Sittanavasal and on the walls of Kailasanatha temple prove the taste of the Pallavas in painting.

### **3.3.9. Conclusion**

The Pallavas were absolute monarchs when they ruled and prided on being ‘dharma-maharajas’, righteous great kings. Their administration was remarkably similar to that established by contemporary kingdoms—the lowest level of administration being the Sabha at the village level; provinces being administered by governors called ‘Vyapritas’; and the king being assisted by a council of ministers appointed by him. While the reign of the Pallavas can at best be considered a brief interlude in the history of South India and of very limited and only indirect consequence in the broader sweep of Indian history, they left behind a remarkable legacy of architecture that is even today on display. Perhaps it is not the records numerous victorious battles, conquests and annexations that matter in the long term but the culture and beauty that you leave behind for posterity, which over a period of time transform into monuments of dynastic achievement.

### **3.3.10. Summary**

- *Pallavas ruled regions of northern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh between the 2nd and 9th centuries CE.*
- *The Pallavas gained prominence after the eclipse of the Satavahana dynasty, whom the Pallavas served as feudatories. A number of legends are associated with the origin of the Pallavas.*
- *The Pallavas were in conflict with major kingdoms at various periods of time. A contest for political supremacy existed between the early Pallavas and the Kadambas.*
- *There was long struggle existed between the Pallavas and Chalukyas of Badami for supremacy in peninsular India began. Both tried to establish control over the Krishna-Tungabhadra doab.*
- *The conflict between Pallavas and Chalukyas resumed in the first half of the 8th century with multiple Pallava setbacks. The Chalukyas overrun them completely in 740 CE, ending the Pallava supremacy in South India.*
- *The royal custom of using a series of descriptive honorific titles, birudas, was particularly prevalent among the Pallavas. The birudas of Mahendravarman I are in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu.*
- *All the early Pallava royal inscriptions are either in Prakrit or in Sanskrit language, considered the official languages of the dynasty while the official script was Pallava grantha. Similarly, inscriptions found in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka State are in Prakrit and not in Telugu or Kannada.*
- *Pallava power was well established at the time when Sivaskanda-varman is styled “supreme king of great kings,” a title which implies paramount authority over other rulers subject to him ; and the circumstance of his having offered the horse-sacrifice, which indicates his own personal appreciation of his great power.*
- *The Pallava king was assisted in his government by ‘ministers’ of state and “privy councillors”; and his throne was surrounded by “royal princes.”*

- *Direct extensive contacts with these regions were maintained from the maritime commerce city Mamallapuram, where Mahendravarman I and his son “Mahamalla” Narasimhavarman I built the Shore Temple of the Seven Pagodas of Mahabalipuram.*
- *Pallavas were followers of Hinduism and made gifts of land to gods and Brahmins. In line with the prevalent customs, some of the rulers performed the Aswamedha and other Vedic sacrifices.*
- *The Chinese monk Xuanzang who visited Kanchipuram during the reign of Narasimhavarman I reported that there were 100 Buddhist monasteries, and 80 temples in Kanchipuram.*
- *Mahendravarman I was initially a patron of the Jain faith. He later converted to Hinduism under the influence of the Saiva saint Appar with the revival of Hinduism during the Bhakti movement in South India.*
- *The Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram built by Narasimhavarman II The Pallavas were instrumental in the transition from rock-cut architecture to stone temples.*
- *The earliest examples of Pallava constructions are rock-cut temples dating from 610-690 CE and structural temples between 690-900 CE. A number of rock-cut cave temples bear the inscription of the Pallava king, Mahendravarman I and his successors.*
- *The greatest accomplishments of the Pallava architecture are the rock-cut temples at Mahabalipuram. There are excavated pillared halls and monolithic shrines known as rathas in Mahabalipuram.*

### **3.3.11. Exercise**

- Write a brief account on the military accomplishments of Narasimhavarman I.
- Examine the administration system of the Pallavas.
- Give an account of the political history of the Pallavas with special reference to reign of Mahendravarman I.
- Assess the cultural contributions of the Pallavas.
- Mention the salient features of the Pallava art.

### **3.3.12. Further Readings**

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**Unit-4**  
**Chapter-I**  
**ARAB INVASION OF SIND**  
**Course & Consequences**

**Structure**

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#### **4.1.0. Objectives**

*The chapter throw lights on the invasion of Sind by the Arab in 712 A.D. After reading this chapter the learners will be able to*

- *understand the condition on which the Arabian invaded India in 712 A.D.*
- *examine the factors which necessitated Arab invasion of Sind.*
- *describe the course of Arab invasion of Sind under Muhammad bin Quasim leadership.*
- *assess the aftermath and impact of Arab invasion on Sind.*

#### **4.1.1. Introduction**

Rise of Islam is an important incident in the history of Islam. Prophet Muhammad was not only the founder of a new religion, but he was also the head of a city-state. Muhammad left no male heir. On his death claims were made on behalf of his son-in-law and cousin Ali, but senior members of the community elected as their leader or caliph, the Prophet's companion, Abu Bakr, who was one of the earliest converts to Islam. Abu Bakr died after only two years in office, and was succeeded by Umar (r. 634-644 ), under whose leadership the Islamic community was transformed into a vast empire. Umar was succeeded by Usman (r. 644-656), who was followed by Ali (r. 656-661), the last of the four "Righteous Caliphs."

Owing to his relationship with the Prophet as well as to personal bravery, nobility of character, and intellectual and literary gifts, Caliph Ali occupies a special place in the history of Islam, but he was unable to control the tribal and personal quarrels of the Arabs. After his death, Muawiyah (r. 661-680), the first of the Umayyad caliphs, seized power and transferred the seat of caliphate from Medina to Damascus. Three years later the succession passed from Muawiyah's grandson to another branch of the Umayyad dynasty, which continued in power until 750. During this period the Muslim armies overran Asia Minor, conquered the north coast of Africa, occupied Spain, and were halted only in the heart of France at Tours. In the east the Muslim empire was extended to Central Asia, and, as we shall see, it was during this period that a part of the Indian subcontinent was annexed. In the course of these conquests, the Arabs became subject to older civilizations.

#### **4.1.2. The Arab Conquest of Sind**

It was against this background of rapid expansion that the first contacts between Islam and India took place. Since time immemorial spices and other articles from India and southeast Asia had been in great demand in Egypt and southern Europe, with the transit trade largely in the hands of Arabs, who brought merchandise from the Indian ports to Yemen in southern Arabia. The goods were then sent by land to the Syrian ports to be shipped again to Egypt and Europe. The rise of Islam did not, therefore, give rise to the connection with India, but it added a new dimension. Trade continued after the Arabs had embraced Islam, and the first major conflict between the Indian subcontinent and Muslim Arabia arose out of developments connected with Arab sailors plying their trade about the Indian Ocean.

#### **4.1.3. Causes for Invasion of Sind by the Arabs**

The Arabs had been the carriers of Indian trade to Europe for centuries. After conversion to Islam, they cast their covetous eyes on the fabulous wealth of India as well as they were eager to propagate their new religion in India. However, the opportunity to invade Sind came to the Arabians in the beginning of the eighth century.

With the passage of time, the History of India, after the occupation of Sind had entered into its medieval phase. The widespread political instability in India after the death of Harshavardhan, the last independent Hindu King had inspired the foreign elements once again to attack and enter India. The Arabs were no exception to it. After the rise of Islam, the Arabs having successfully implanting it in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Persia had cast a covetous eye on Sind. In 712 A.D. they

were successful in occupying Sind. Several factors were responsible for the Arab invasion on Sind. They are as follows:

#### **4.1.3.1.Propagation of Islam:**

Propagation of Islam was one of the key factors behind the Arab invasion of Sind. After the spread of Islam in Egypt and Syria, the Caliph Walid 1 of Damascus had permitted the Arabs to go ahead with their Indian mission. Further the followers of Islam were dead against idolatry practice of the Hindus of India. So they thought the spoliation of the idolaters would be a means of earning.

#### **4.1.3.2.Fabulous Wealth of India:**

India was known to the world for her fabulous wealth and splendor. So like other invaders of the past, it had tempted the Arabs to grab her wealth.

#### **4.1.3.3.Political Condition of India:**

The then Political condition of India was also a major factor behind the Arab invasion of Sind. There was mutual rivalry and wars among the kings of petty provinces of India. Dahir, the ruler of Sind was unpopular and not liked by many. The Arabs took full advantage of it.

#### **4.1.3.4.The Immediate Cause:**

The immediate cause of the Arab invasion of Sind was the looting of the eight Arab ships which carried the gifts and treasures sent by the king of Ceylon to the Caliph, at the port of Debal near Sind. Some Historians have opined that the ships were also carrying some beautiful women as well as valuable articles for the khalifa. This unlawful act of piracy was strongly protested by Hajaj, the governor of Iraq. He demanded compensation from Dahir, the king of Sind. But Dahir refuted Hajaj's demands by saying that he had no control over pirates. This infuriated Hajaj who decided to send military expeditions to Sind. He also obtained permission from the Caliph in this regard. However, the first two expeditions sent by Hajaj against Sind were beaten back by Dahir. Enraged at the repeated failures, Hajaj sent his nephew and Son-in-law Imaduddin Muhammad- bin-Qasim at the head of a huge army to Sind. Muhammad-bin- Qasim was an able and young commander-in-chief.

#### **4.1.4. Invasion of Sind by Muhammad-bin-Qasim:**

Muhammad-bin-Qasim was a young man of hardly seventeen years when he was entrusted with the work of invading Sind. He was very bold, courageous and ambitious. The story of his adventures, "Writes Stanley Lane-poole," is one of the romances of history. Reflecting of his rise to power, his achievements and his fall, Ishwari Prasad writes, "His blooming youth, his dash and heroism, his noble deportment throughout the expedition and his tragic fall have invested his career with the halo of martyrdom."

However towards the end of 711 A.D. Muhammad-bin-Qasim at the head of a huge army consisting of three thousand infantry, six thousand cavalry and six thousand Iraqi camelmén appeared at the north western border near Makran.

#### **4.1.4.1.Capture of Debal:**

Muhammad-bin-Qasim led his army towards Debal, a famous seaport, where the Arab's ships were looted by some pirates. The port town Debal was well protected by strong fortifications, and it was not easy on the part of the Qasim's army to penetrate into it so easily. A nephew of Dahir was the governor of Debal. Though he had an army of very small size with him, he tried to resist Qasim. But it became futile, when a treacherous Brahmin deserted the fortress and gave Qasim all the information's regarding the secrets of its defence. He also came to know from the Brahman that the strength of the Sind army lay in the massive Hindu temple inside the fort of Debal and as long as the red flag fluttered atop the temple, he could not defeat the Hindus. The temple was also garrisoned by 4000 Rajput's and 3000 Brahmins serving at the temple. However, after a fierce battle Qasim brought down the red flag and the Arabian army resorted to a massacre. Despite a bold fight, the Hindus of Debal were defeated by the Arabs. The nephew of Dahir who was the governor

fled away. Debal was captured and a huge booty with a large number of women fell into the hands of the Arabs. The people were given the option of accepting Islam or death. Many thousands of Hindus including Brahmans were mercilessly killed on their refusal to embrace Islam. The massacre continued for three days. It was very unfortunate that Dahir who had prior information of the Arabian attack, did not care at all.

#### **4.1.4.2.Fall of Nirun:**

Flushed with success, Muhammad-bin-Qasim marched towards Nirun, which was under the charge of Dahir's Son Jai Sindh. With the approach of the Arabs, Jai Sindh fled away after handing over the fort to a priest. Qasim captured it without a fight. It is said Nirun fell because of the treachery of some Buddhist citizens. Whatever may be the fact; Dahir had taken the matter lightly and did not attempt to check the further advances of the Arabs.

#### **4.1.4.3.Fall of Sehwan:**

After capturing Debal & Nirun, Muhammad-bin- Qasim marched against Sehwan, a town which was under the charge of the cousin of Dahir named Bajhra. The town was mostly inhabited by the merchant class and the priests. Bajhra could not defend the town in the face of the Arabian attack and fled away with panic. After his flight, the people of Sehwan surrendered to Muhammad-bin-Qasim. Sehwan fell because of poor defence.

#### **4.1.4.4.Fall of Sisam and Victory over the Jats:**

Sisam also met the same fate as had happened to Sehwan. It was the capital of the Jats of Budhiya and was ruled by Kaka, a jat king. Kaka had given shelter to Bajhra after his flight from Sehwan. Muhammad-bin-Qasim defeated the Jats who in turn surrendered to the Arabs. But during the encounter, Bajhra and his followers were killed. When so much had happened, yet Dahir did not raise his little finger to check the invader. Muhammad-bin-Qasim then reached the river Mihran where he was detained for some months because most of his horses of his army died of scurvy and he had to wait for fresh re-inforcement from home. Dahir could have taken the full advantage of this opportunity to attack and destroy the Arabs. But he remained inactive. He also did not check the Arabs when they crossed the river Mihran. Probably, Dahir was confident to defeat his enemy in a single encounter and that's why he was waiting for it at Rawar on the bank of the Indus.

#### **4.1.4.5.The Battle of Rawar:**

Dahir, the powerful king of Sind was waiting for the Arab invader with a huge army of 50,000 sword men, horsemen and elephantry at a place called Rawar. He was determined to finish the enemy once for all. He did not know that the Arab army led by Muhammad-bin-Qasim was also equally strong to face any Challenge. After waiting for some days, both the armies started fighting on 20th June, 712 A.D. It was a serious and severe battle. Dahir was a great warrior. He was fighting with a great spirit and was leading his army from the front. By riding on an elephant he was at the front and was attacking the opponent with great courage and valour.

In the mean while an arrow attached with burning cotton struck Dahir's 'howdah' and set it flame. At this the elephant got frightened and rushed towards the river Indus. This made Dahir very much disturbed at the mid of the war. He became restless, inconsistent and inattentive. At this moment he was injured by an arrow and fell from his elephant. Although the elephant was brought to control, Dahir did not wait for it. He immediately rode a horse and resumed fighting. But as he was not seen on the back of his elephant, his soldiers became panicky and fled away from the field of battle. However, Dahir gave a heroic fight and laid down his life after two days of his bloody battle. His widow Queen Ranibai refused to surrender the fort of Rawar and fought the invader to the bitter end.

She performed jouhar along with some besieged ladies of the fort. Muhammad-bin-Qasim became victorious. Nevertheless he took about eight months to acquire control over Sind because



his army had to face tough resistance by the local people of many other towns and palaces including Alor and Brahmanabad.

#### **4.1.4.6.Occupation of Multan:**

After conquering Sind, Muhammad-bin-Qasim marched towards Multan, a major city situated in the upper Indus basin. On the way he had to encounter tough resistance by the local people but over powered them. On reaching Multan he found the city strongly fortified and people in full revolt. But at Multan he was also fortunate to get the help of a traitor who gave him the information regarding the source of water supply to the city.

Muhammad-bin-Qasim cut-off the source. The people of Multan surrendered at last after fighting bravely against the Arabs. Thus the city fell into the hands of the invader in 713 A.D. The Arabs massacred and plundered the city. Women and children were made captives and a large quantity of gold was collected by the Arabs. He obtained so much gold that they named the city as the 'city of gold'. After completing his mission in Sind and Multan, Muhammad-bin- Qasim was planning to proceed more into the interior of India. In the mean while there came a tragic end to his life. He was put to death by an order of Calipha, the religious head of the Islamic world.

#### **4.1.4.7.Death of Muhammad-bin-Qasim:**

The Death of Muhammad-bin-Qasim has been put to debate as there are two divergent views by different Historians. Historian Mir Massum in his "Tarik Sind" has described an interesting story about the death of Muhammad-bin- Qasim. Muhammad- bin-Qasim during his campaign of Brahmanabad had captured the two virgin daughters of Dahir. They were Surya Devi and Parimal Devi. They were sent to the Calipha as gifts from Muhammad-bin-Qasim.

These two girls were determined to take revenge on Muhammad-bin-Qasim. So when they reached Calipha, they told him that they had been used and dishonored by Muhammad-bin-Qasim before they were sent to him. This made the Calipha so much angry that he at once ordered that Muhammad-bin-Qasim should be put to death and his body, being sewn up in the raw hide of an ox, should be despatched to him.

His order was immediately carried out. When Muhammad-bin-Qasim's coffin was opened before the calipha, the two girls were delighted at having avenged on the enemy and killer of their father. Their mission was completed and so they declared that Qasim was innocent. This made the Calipha furious. At his order, the two sisters were tied to the tails of horses and were dragged to death.

But the other view regarding the death of Muhammad-bin- Qasim has been ascribed to a political cause. Some modern historians believe that Muhammad had become a victim of the court intrigues of the Calipha. Calipha Walid died in 715 A.D. and was succeeded by his brother Sulaiman who had enmity with Hajaj, the governor of Iraq and father-in-law of Muhammad-bin-Qasim.

He could not tolerate the importance of Hajaj as a result of Muhammad's victorious campaigns in India. To bring an end to this Calipha might have ordered to kill Muhammad-bin-Qasim. Whatever may be the fact? Mohammad-bin-Kasim got a tragic end of his life.

#### **4.1.5. Causes of Arab Success in Sind**

Many factors have been ascribed to the success the Arabs in Sind and Multan. Sind had a heterogeneous population consisting of the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Jats, the Meds etc. There was no good relation among them as the subjects of Dahir lack unity at social level. Instead there prevailed hatred among them. So at the time of Arab invasion of Sind, they could not be united for the cause of their motherland. Some historians have opined that it was due to lack of social solidarity among the people of Sind; the country had to face the wrath of the Arabs.

#### **4.1.5.1.Unpopularity of Dahir:**

Dahir was not liked by some sections of his subjects as he was proud and arrogant and mainly as a son of an usurper. Dahir's father was a minister who had murdered his king and married the widow queen. Thus Dahir, being the son of an usurper, was not liked by the people.

Besides Dahir had enmity with his cousin brothers for the throne which had led the kingdom to a stage of civil war. Further Dahir's governors were almost semi-independent princes and did not co-operate him at the time of crises. Because of his personal nature he was also not liked by his subjects who were mostly non-Hindus. Owing to his unpopularity he did not get the support of the people of his own kingdom at the time of foreign invasion.

#### **4.1.5.2.Betrayal and Treachery:**

It was the betrayal and treachery of some Indian citizens that had contributed a lot for the success of the Arabs. Debal fell because of a Brahmin traitor who exposed secrecy of the Temple and flag which was inside fort of Debal. At Nirun the Buddhists played treacherous role by joining hands with the invader. At Multan, a traitor informed the invader the source of water supply to the city. Some historians have viewed this as the role of the Fifth column in bringing about the fall of their own country.

#### **4.1.5.3.Poverty and Backwardness:**

Sind was a poor, backward kingdom with a sparse population and limited resources. So it was not possible on the part of the Dahir to finance for a large army or to wage a protracted war. This also had tempted the Arabs to invade Sind.

#### **4.1.5.4.Isolation of Sind:**

Isolation of Sind from the rest of India was also a factor for the Arab's success in Sind. Though there were powerful dynasties like the Pratiharas of Malwa and Kanauj they did not come to the help of Sind. None of them bothered or cared for this incident which marked the beginning of Muslim rule in India.

#### **4.1.5.5.Religious Enthusiasm of Arabs:**

The Arabs were inspired by a new religion and had become fanatic. They thought that they were the forces of God and were engaged in a mission to destroy the faiths of the infidel and spared the blessings of Islam. The Arabs had also a great sense of patriotic feelings. The Indians on the other hand had no such religious enthusiasm or patriotism. Rather they had an indifferent, tolerant and cosmopolitan attitude towards other faiths and other people. Undoubtedly this had resulted, the Arab's success in Sind.

#### **4.1.5.6.Strong Army:**

The Arab army under the leadership of Muhammad-bin-Qasim was superior to that of Sind of Dahir in strength and technique. They were also well-equipped. Dahir's army only at Rawar was nearly on par in number with that of the invader. But they were very poorly equipped as the majority of them were hastily recruited on the eve of the war and had not sufficient military training. This had caused the defeat of Dahir.

#### **4.1.5.7.Responsibility of Dahir:**

Dahir was largely responsible for the success of the Arabs owing to his initial lethargy and foolishness. He had remained inactive while Muhammad-bin-Qasim was conquering Debal, Nirun and Sehwan one after another. Even he had remained inactive when Muhammad crossed the Mihran to enter into Rawar. It was foolishness on the part of Dahir to hope that he would finish the enemy in a single stroke at Rawar. At Rawar also Dahir committed a blunder by not commanding the army as its leader. Instead of commanding the army, he fought like a soldier and died.

#### **4.1.6. Arab Administration in Sind**

The Arab administration in Sind followed the general pattern adopted by the Arab conquerors in other countries. The normal rule was to employ local talent and make minimum changes in local

practices. Caliph Umar, acknowledged as the chief creator of the Arab system of administration, had laid down the working principle that Arabs should not acquire landed property in conquered territories. Under his system the conquering general of a new territory became its governor, but "most of the subordinate officers were allowed to retain their posts." Available evidence about Sind shows that these injunctions were observed. The Arabs established themselves in large towns, which were also military cantonments, and provided the military garrisons, but civil administration was left largely in the hands of the local chiefs, only a few of whom had accepted Islam.

The administrative arrangements which Muhammad ibn Qasim made with the non-Muslims after his victory over Dahar are often referred to as "the Brahmanabad settlement." The basic principle was to treat the Hindus as "the people of the book," and to confer on them the status of the *zimmis* (the protected). In some respects the arrangements were even more liberal than those granted to "the people of the book" by the later schools of Islamic law. For example, according to later opinion the *zimmis* could not repair their places of worship, although existing ones were allowed to stand. The question of repairing a damaged temple came up before Muhammad, who referred the matter to Hajjaj. The latter, having consulted the 'ulama of Damascus, not only granted the permission asked for, but declared that so long as non-Muslims paid their dues to the state they were free to live in whatever manner they liked. "It appears," Hajjaj wrote, "that the chief inhabitants of Brahmanabad had petitioned to be allowed to repair the temple of Budh and pursue their religion. As they have made submission, and have agreed to pay taxes to the Khalifa, nothing more can properly be required from them. They have been taken under our protection, and we cannot in any way stretch out our hands upon their lives or property. Permission is given them to worship their gods. Nobody must be forbidden and prevented from following his own religion. They may live in their houses in whatever manner they like. According to one early Muslim historian, the Arab conqueror countenanced even the privileged position of the Brahmans, not only in religious matters, but also in the administrative sphere. "Muhammad ibn Qasim maintained their dignity and passed orders confirming their pre-eminence. They were protected against opposition and violence." Even the 3 percent share of government revenue which they had received during the ascendancy of the Brahman rulers of Sind, was conceded to them. In his arrangements for the collection of taxes, Muhammad ibn Qasim also made an attempt to provide some safeguards against oppression, by appointing "people from among the villagers and the chief citizens to collect the fixed taxes from the cities and the villages so that there might be the feeling of strength and protection."

When the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 750 they sent their own officers to Sind. The Abbasid governor, Hisham, who came to Sind in 757, carried out successful raids against Gujarat and Kashmir, but no permanent additions to Arab dominion were made. Later, through preoccupations at home, Arab control over Sind weakened, with the process of disintegration being accelerated by tribal conflicts among local Arabs. One governor went so far as to revolt against Caliph al-Mamun. The rebellion was put down, but Musa (son of Yahya the Barmakid, the famous wazir of Harun-al-Rashid), who was placed in charge of the affairs of Sind, nominated as his successor on his death in 836 his son Amran. The caliph recognized the appointment, but the beginning of the hereditary succession to governorship meant a weakening of the hold of Baghdad. An energetic ruler, Amran dealt firmly with the disturbances of the Jats and the Meds, but internecine quarrels among the Arabs flared up and he lost his life after a brief reign. In 854 the Hibbari family became hereditary rulers of Sind, with Mansura as their capital. In course of time, Multan became independent and the Hindus reestablished themselves in Rohri.

The severance of contacts with Baghdad made Sind and Multan a happy hunting ground for the emissaries of the rivals of the Abbasids, the Ismaili rulers of Cairo. Their first missionary came to Sind in 883 and started secret propaganda in favor of the Ismaili caliph. After the ground had been

prepared, military aid was obtained from Cairo, and through a coup d'etat Multan was captured in 977. Ismaili doctrines were now adopted as the official religion, and the khutba was read in the name of the Egyptian ruler. The Ismailis destroyed the old historic temple of Multan, which Muhammad ibn Qasim had left in charge of the Hindus, and built a mosque on its site. Mansura remained with the Hibbari family, at least until 985, but at a later date this also became a small Ismaili stronghold. The Ismailis suffered a setback with the rise of Mahmud of Ghazni, who in 1005 compelled the ruler of Multan to recant his Ismaili beliefs and some twenty years later conquered Mansura on his return from Somnath. The Ismaili creed regained strength as the Ghaznavids weakened, but in 1175 Sultan Muhammad Ghuri captured Multan and appointed an orthodox Sunni as governor. The area was incorporated in the Sunni sultanate first of Ghazni, and later of Delhi.

#### **4.1.7. Intellectual Achievements**

During the Umayyad and the early Abbasid period, when the Arabs were at the height of their political power, they were also active in the intellectual field, making every effort to acquire knowledge from all sources. Sind became the link through which the fruits of Indian learning were transmitted to the Arabs, and by them made available to the rest of the civilized world. Indo-Arab intellectual collaboration was at its height during two distinct periods. During the reign (753-774) of Mansur, embassies from Sind to Baghdad included scholars who brought important books with them. The second fruitful period was the reign (780-808) of Harun-al-Rashid, when the Barmakid family, which provided wazirs to the Abbasid caliphs for half a century, was at the zenith of its power. Arab bibliographers especially mention Harun's wazir, Yahya the Barmakid, Yahya's son Musa, and grandson Amran (both of whom governed Sind for some time) for their interest in India and Indian sciences. Besides sending scholars to India to study medicine and pharmacology, they brought Hindu scholars to Baghdad, made them chief physicians of their hospitals, and commissioned them to translate into Arabic, Sanskrit books on such subjects as medicine, pharmacology, toxicology, philosophy, and astrology.

The earliest recorded Indo-Arab intellectual contact came in 771, when a Hindu astronomer and mathematician reached Baghdad, bringing with him a Sanskrit work (Brahma Siddhanta by Brahma-gupta) which he translated into Arabic with the help of an Arab mathematician. Titles of three other works on astronomy translated from Sanskrit have been preserved by Arab bibliographers, but Siddhanta, which came to be known in Arabic as "Sindhind," had the greatest influence on the development of Arab astronomy. In mathematics the most important contribution of the subcontinent to Arabic learning was the introduction of what are known in the West as "Arabic numerals," but which Arabs themselves call "Indian numerals" (al-ruqum-al-Hindiyyah).

Indian medicine received even greater attention; the titles of at least fifteen works in Sanskrit which were translated into Arabic have been preserved, including books by Sushruta and Caraka, the foremost authorities in Hindu medicine. One of the translated books was on veterinary science, and another dealt with snakes and their poisons. None of these translations are now known to exist, except a rendering of a book on poisons, which was originally translated into Persian for Khalid-al-Barmaki, the Abbasid wazir, and later was translated into Arabic. Indian doctors enjoyed great prestige at Baghdad, and although their names, like the titles of their works, have been mutilated beyond recognition in Arab bibliographies, their number was very great. One of these men, Manka, was specially sent for when Harun-al-Rashid fell ill and could not be cured by Baghdad doctors. Manka's treatment was successful, and not only was he richly rewarded by the grateful caliph, but he was entrusted with the translation of medical books from Sanskrit. Another Indian physician was called in when a cousin of the caliph suffered a paralytic stroke and was given up for lost by the Greek court physician. Many Indian medicines, some of them in their original names such as atrifal, which is the Hindi tri-phal (a combination of three fruits), found their way into Arab pharmacopoeia.

Astrology and palmistry also received considerable attention at Baghdad, and titles of a large number of books translated from Sanskrit on these subjects have been preserved. Other books which were translated were on logic, alchemy, magic, ethics, statecraft, and the art of war, but literary works gained the greatest popularity. Some of the stories of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments are attributed to Indian origin, and Arabic translations of the Panchtantra, popularly known as the story of Kalila and Dimna, have become famous in various Arabic and Persian versions. The games of chess and chausar were also brought from India and transmitted by Arabs to other parts of the world.

Sind also made a contribution in spheres other than science and learning. While the debt of the Sufis, the Islamic mystics, to Indian religion in general is not certain, the links of Sind with Islamic Sufism are fairly definite. The great early Sufi, Bayazid of Bistam, had a Sindhi as his spiritual teacher. "I leamed," he said, "the science of annihilation (ilm-i-fana) and unity (tauhid) from Abu Ali (of Sind) and Abu Ali leamed the lessons of Islamic unity from me." The close association of Sind with Sufism is maintained to this day, and one of the most marked features of Sind is the dominant place which Sufism occupies in her literary and religious life.

Our knowledge of India's impact on Arab cultural life is based on contemporary Arab sources, but it is far from complete. No title of any Sanskrit book on music translated at Baghdad is available, but it is known that the music of the subcontinent influenced Arab music. That it was appreciated in the Abbasid capital is indicated by the famous Arab author Jahiz (fl. 869), who wrote in his account of the people of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent that "Their music is pleasing. One of their musical instruments is known as Kankalah, which is played with a string stretched on a pumpkin." This would seem to be a reference to an Indian instrument, the kingar, which is made with two gourds. Another indication of widespread knowledge of Indian music is a reference by an Arabic author from Andalusia to an Indian book on tunes and melodies.<sup>/10/</sup> It has even been suggested that many of the technical terms for Arab music were borrowed from Persia and India and that Indian music itself has incorporated certain Perso-Arab airs, such as Yeman and Hijj from Hijaz and Zanuglah, corrupted into Jangla.

No connected history of Sind and Multan after the recall of Muhammad ibn Qasim is available, but works of Arab travelers and geographers enable us to fill the gap. In particular Masudi, who visited what is now West Pakistan in 915-916, has left a brilliant account of the conditions in the Indus valley, from Waihind in the north to Debul in the south. Ibn Haukul, another traveler, visited the area some years later. Both agree that the principal Arab colonies were at Mansura, Multan, Debul, and Nirun, all of which had large Friday mosques. Non-Muslims formed the bulk of the population, and were in a preponderant majority at Debul and Alor. The relations between the Arabs and the non-Muslims were good. Unlike the historians of the sultanate period, the Arab travelers refer to the non-Muslims as zimmi and not as kafirs (infidels). Soon after the conquest of Sind and Multan, the killing of cows was banned in the area. The reason may have been a simple desire to preserve the cattle wealth, but regard for Hindu sentiments may also have been partly responsible for this step. Some Hindu chiefs showed a sympathetic interest in Islam, for in 886 a Hindu raja commissioned an Arab linguist from Mansura to translate the Quran into the local language. Another indication of the integration of the population into the general life of the ruling class was the use of Sindhi troops in Arab armies. Contemporary records mention their presence in areas as distant as the frontiers of the Byzantine empire.

Arab rulers adopted local practices to a much greater extent than the Ghaznavids did later at Lahore, or the Turks and the Afghans at Delhi. According to Masudi, the ruler of Mansura had eighty war elephants and occasionally rode in a chariot drawn by elephants. The Arabs of Mansura generally dressed like the people of Iraq, but the dress of the ruler was similar to that of the Hindu rajas, and, like them, he wore earrings and kept his hair long.

After Muhammad ibn Qasim there were no large-scale Arab immigrations, and Arab influence gradually diminished; but Sind and Multan remained in contact with the Arab countries, particularly Iraq and Egypt. At the time of Masudi's visit Arabic and Sindhi were spoken in Sind, but Iranian influences were also strong, particularly after the rise of the Dailamites, when the use of Persian became more prevalent, especially in Multan.

Arab rule produced men of note in Sind and Multan, some of whom achieved fame and distinction in Damascus and Baghdad. One of them, Abu Maashar Sindhi (fl.787), an authority on the life of the Prophet, was so eminent that when he died in Baghdad the reigning caliph led the prayers at his funeral. A number of other scholars and poets connected with Sind are also mentioned in Arabic anthologies. Some of them were from the immigrant families, but many were of Sindhi origin and included descendants of captives taken as slaves during the Arab conquest or the later wars. The most notable Arabic poet of Sindhi origin was Abul Ata Sindhi, who was taken to Syria as a captive during his childhood, and earned his manumission with a qasida or ode. In spite of his command of literary Arabic, his pronunciation of Arabic words bore such traces of his origin that he had to engage a ravi to recite his verses. He wrote forceful qasidas in praise of the Umayyad rulers and poignant elegies on their downfall.

Life in the Arab dominion of Sind and Multan was simple, but agriculture and commerce were highly developed. Masudi mentions a large number of hamlets in the principalities of Multan and Mansura, and apparently the whole country was well cultivated. There was active commerce between Sind and other parts of the Muslim world, with caravans going to Khurasan, most commonly by the route of Kabul and Bamian. There were also communications with Zabulistan and Sijistan through Ghazni and Qandahar. Sindhi Hindus, who were excellent accountants and traders, had a major share in this commerce, and Alor is mentioned as a great commercial center. The prosperity of the area may be judged by the fact that Sind and Multan contributed eleven and a half million dirhams to Abbasid revenue, while the total revenue from the Kabul area in cash and cattle was less than two and a quarter million dirhams.

#### **4.1.8. Consequences of Arab Conquests of Sind**

The Arab conquest of Sindh is quite significant in the history of India as well as an Arabia undoubtedly it did not help in the future establishment of Muslim empire in India. According to Stanley Lane-Poole, "The Arabs had conquered Sindh but the conquest was only an episode in the History of India and of Islam, a triumph without results."

According to Sir Wolseley Haig, "Of the Arab conquest of Sindh, there is nothing more to be said. It was a mere episode in the History of India and affected only a small portion of the fringe of that vast country. It introduced into one frontier tract the religion which was destined to dominate the greater part of India for nearly five centuries, but it had none of the far-reaching effects attributed to it by Tod in the Annals of Rajasthan.

Mohammad-bin-Quasim never penetrated to Chitor in the heart of Rajputana; the Caliph Walid First did not 'render tributary all that part of India on this side of the Ganges'; the invader was never on the eve of carrying the war against Raja Harchund of Kanauj much less did he actually prosecute it; If Harun-ur-Rashid gave to his second son, al-Ma'-mun, 'Khorasan, Zabullisthan, Cabulisthan, Sindh and Hindusthan', he bestowed on him at least one country which was not his to give; nor was the whole of Northern India, as Tod maintains, convulsed by the invasion of the Arabs.

One of these, as we have seen, advanced to Adhoi in Cutch, but no settlement was made, and the expedition was a mere raid: and though the first news of the irruption may have suggested war-like preparations to the princes of Rajasthan their uneasiness cannot have endured. The tide of Islam, having overflowed Sindh and the lower Punjab, ebbed, leaving some jetam on the strand. The rulers of states beyond the desert had no cause for alarm. That was to come later and the enemy was

to be, not the Arab but the Turk, who was to present the faith of the Arabian prophet in a more terrible guise than it had worn when presented by native Arabians."

According to Prof. Habibullah, "The Arab was not destined to raise Islam to be a political force in India. Whatever its cultural implications, politically the Sindh affair led to a dead end. It touched only a fringe of the Indian continent and the faint stirrings it produced were soon forgotten. In the Islamic Commonwealth the Arab soon began to lose ground; geography stood in the way of his expansion in India; and by the tenth century, his conquering role having been played out, the Indian princes recognised in him only the enterprising and adaptable merchant of old."

When the Arabs settled in Sindh, they were dazzled by the ability of the Indians. Instead of influencing them, they were themselves influenced by them. The Arab scholars sat at the feet of the Brahmanas and Buddhist monks and learnt from them philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, etc., and later on transmitted the same to Europe. It is contended that the numerical figures which the Europeans learnt from the Arabs were originally learnt from the Indians.

The Arabic name for figure, *Hindsa*, points out to its Indian origin. During the Khilafat of Mansur in the 8th century A.D., Arab scholars went from India to Baghdad and they carried with them the *Brahma Sidhanta* and *Khanda-Khandvaka* of Brahma Gupta and those were translated into Arabic with the help of Indian scholars.

The Arabs also learnt from them the first principles of scientific astronomy. Hindu learning also was encouraged by the ministerial family of Barmaks during the Khilafat of Harun from 786 to 808 A.D. They invited Hindu scholars to Baghdad and asked them to translate Sanskrit books on medicine, philosophy, astrology etc., into Arabic. They also put the Hindu physicians in charge of their hospitals.

According to Havell, from a political point of view, Arab conquest of Sindh was a comparatively insignificant event but its importance on account of its effect upon the whole culture of Islam was great. For the first time, the Nomads of the Arabian Desert found themselves in the holy land of the Aryans in close contact with Indo-Aryan civilization, which from all points of view politically, economically and intellectually had reached a far higher plane than their own.

To the poetic imagination of the Arab tribesmen, India seemed a land of wonders. In all the arts of peace, India then stood at the pinnacle of the greatness. The Arabs were charmed by the skill of the Indian musicians and the cunning of the Hindu painter. The dome of the temple Mandapam became the dome of the Muslim mosque and tomb. The simplified symbolism of Muslim ritual was all borrowed from India. The pointed arc of the prayer carpet and mihrab was a symbolic arc of the Buddhist and Hindu shrines.

The cathedral mosques of the Muslim royalty were like the Vishnu temple. The entrances of the mosque corresponded to the temple Gopuram and gates of the Indian villages. The Minars of the Mosques were adaptations of the Indian towers of victory. Havell points out that in Sindh, the Arab Shaikhs had their first practical lessons in Indo-Aryan statecraft under the guidance of their Brahman officials. They learnt to adapt their own primitive patriarchal policy to the complicated problems of the highly organised systematic government evolved by centuries of Aryan's imperial rule.

The court language, etiquette and literary accomplishments were borrowed from the Iranian branch of Aryan civilisation. All these scientific elements which made the Arabs famous in Europe were borrowed directly from India. Islam was able to tap the inexhaustible resources of India, spiritual and material and became the agent for their distribution over the whole of Europe. The Indian Pandits brought to Baghdad the works of Brahmaputra and those were translated into Arabic. In the palmy days of the great Harun, the influence of Indian scholars was supreme at the Baghdad court.

Hindu physicians were brought to Baghdad to organise hospitals and medical schools. Hindu scholars translated Sanskrit works into Arabic. The Arabs also went to Indian universities for acquiring knowledge. Havell points out that it was India and not Greece that taught Islam in the impressionable years of its youth formed its philosophy and esoteric religious ideals and inspired its most characteristic expression in literature, art and architecture. The Arabs never won for themselves a permanent political footing in India nor did the Western School of Islam ever take any strong hold upon the mentality or religious feeling of the Indian Muslims.

It is wrong to maintain that the Arab conquest of Sindh had absolutely no effect on India. It cannot be denied that the Arab conquest of Sindh showed the seed of Islam in India. A large number of persons in Sindh were converted to Islam. The footing got by Islam in Sindh proved to be permanent. The legacy of the Arab conquest of Sindh lies in the "debris of ancient buildings which proclaimed to the world the vandalism of the destroyer or a few settlements of a few Muslim families in Sindh as the memorial to Arab conquest of Sindh."

A question has been raised whether the Arab invasion of Sindh was inspired by religion or not. The view of Dr. Tarachand is that it was not. In support of his view, he points out that a number of prominent and influential Hindus favoured Quasim. Among them were Sisakar, the Minister of Dahir, Moka Bisaya, chief of a tribe, Ladi, Dahir's queen, who married Quasim after her husband's death and actually induced the besieged Hindus of Bahmanabad to surrender. On the other side, Allafi, an Arab Commander of Arab horsemen, fought on the side of Dahir and was his advisor. No Hindu rule came forward to help Dahir against the Arabs. His son also appealed for help to his brother and nephews and not to the Hindu chiefs of the country.

The Hindu chiefs surrendered in many cases without resistance merely on the assurance that they will be treated kindly. The Hindu defenders submitted and were not molested. The only exceptions were men bearing arms. Quasim took Sisakar into his confidence and told him all his secrets. He relied upon Moka Bisaya to lead foraging parties against Jaisiya. He appointed Kaksa, a cousin of Dahir, as his Vazier with precedence over all Muslim nobles and army commanders. All these facts show that the invasion of Sindh was not a religious crusade.

Dr. Tarachand says that even the results do not justify this conclusion. It is doubtful whether many Sindhis were converted to Islam by the invaders. Their places of worship were not damaged as is proved by the case of the temple at Multan. Many Brahmans were employed in the administration. The Sumras who ruled over Sindh bore Hindu names. The Hindu Amils were the official class under the Kalhoras and Talpurs.

The history of Sindh shows that the factor of religion has been exaggerated. It is stated in Chach Namah and Futuh at Buldan of ATBH adhuri that Hajjaj, the Governor of Iraq, who had dispatched Quasim had a balance sheet of the war prepared which showed that 60,000 silver Dirhems was the expenditure and 120,000 Dirhems was the income from the campaign. The expedition was as much a business enterprise as a venture for the expansion of the empire.

#### **4.1.9. Conclusion**

The Arabs had been the carriers of Indian trade to Europe for centuries. After conversion to Islam, they cast their covetous eyes on the fabulous wealth of India as well as they were eager to propagate their new religion in India. However, the opportunity to invade Sind came to the Arabians in the beginning of the eighth century. The death of Harshavardhana, resulted in political instability in India, this situation inspired the foreign elements once again to attack and enter India. The Arabs were no exception to it. In 712 A.D. they were successful in occupying Sind. The Arab conquest of Sindh is quite significant in the history of India as well as an Arabia undoubtedly it did not help in the future establishment of Muslim empire in India. According to Stanley Lane-Poole, "The Arabs had conquered Sindh but the conquest was only an episode in the History of India and of Islam, a triumph without results."



#### 4.1.10. Summary

- *The religion Islam was born at Mecca in Arabia. Its founder was Prophet Muhammad. But his teachings made the wealthy people of Mecca his enemies.*
- *Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina in 622 A.D., which was the starting point of the Muslim calendar and the Muslim era called hijra. After eight years he returned to Mecca with his followers. He died in 632 A.D.*
- *The followers of Muhammad set up an empire called the Caliphate. The Umayyads and the Abbasids were called the caliphs. They expanded their rule by conquests and spread their religion Islam.*
- *In 712 A.D., Muhammad bin Qasim invaded Sind. He was the commander of the Umayyad kingdom. Qasim defeated Dahir, the ruler of Sind and killed him in a well-contested battle. His capital Aror was captured.*
- *Qasim extended his conquest further into Multan. Qasim organized the administration of Sind. The people of Sind were given the status of zimmi (protected subjects).*
- *There was no interference in the lives and property of the people. Soon, Qasim was recalled by the Caliph. However, Sind continued to be under the Arabs. But the Muslims could not expand their authority further into India due to the presence of the powerful Pratihara kingdom in western India.*
- *Conquest of Sind did not lead to further conquests immediately, it had resulted in the diffusion of Indian culture abroad. Many Arab travelers visited Sind. Indian medicine and astronomy were carried to far off lands through the Arabs.*
- *The Indian numerals in the Arabic form went to Europe through them. Since Sind was a part of the Arab empire, the inflow of Indian knowledge was great.*

#### 4.1.11. Exercise

- Assess the impact of the Arab conquest of Sind.
- Analyse the causes for the failure of Hindu states against the Arab invasion.
- Discuss the causes and course of Arab invasion of Sind.
- Describe the pattern of administration introduced in Sind by the Arab after its occupation.
- Assess the intellectual development that took place in Sind in Post-Arab conquest.

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**Unit-4**  
**Chapter-II**

**GENERAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS**

**Social Structure and institutions, Caste System, Position of women, Education and learning in  
Post-Gupta India.**

**Structure**

**4.2.0. Objectives**

**4.2.1. Introduction**

**4.2.2. Society**

**4.2.2.1. Crystallization and further Stratification of Caste System**

**4.2.2.2. Origin of untouchability**

**4.2.2.3. Practice of Slavery**

**4.2.2.4. Status of Women**

**4.2.3. Culture**

**4.2.3.1. Development of Vernacular Language**

**4.2.4. Religious Development**

**4.2.4.1. Origin of Bhakti Cult**

**4.2.4.2. Decline of Buddhism & Jainism**

**4.2.4.3. Origin and Growth of Tantrism**

**4.2.4.4. Advent of Islam**

**4.2.5. Philosophy**

**4.2.6. Art Tradition**

**4.2.7. Growth of Sciences**

**4.2.8. Education & Learning**

**4.2.9. Conclusion**

**4.2.10. Summary**

**4.2.11. Exercise**

**4.2.12. Further Readings**

#### 4.2.0. Objectives

*The chapter throw lights on the changing socio-religious and cultural scenario of India on the post-Gupta time. After reading this chapter the learners will be able to*

- *understand the changing social condition of India in post Gupta phase;*
- *examine the notion of Caste and Jati in India society;*
- *describe the status of women in India under the period of discussion,;*
- *assess the cultural development witnessed in India during Post-Gupta period.*

#### 4.2.1. Introduction

With the decline and fall of the imperial Guptas came the demise of the imperial idea. From the middle of the sixth century onwards, large and small regional kingdoms were to dominate the north Indian political and state apparatus, and their authority was to last for several centuries. Individual kings dreamt about the attraction of pan-Indian control, and many of them, out of sheer egotism, adopted pompous titles; but just one of them, Harsha, in the seventh century, came near to realising such control, and that only for the duration of his reign. In contrast to north Indian post-imperial fragmentation, however, the south assumed greater prominence with the rise of two great kingdoms. The first was that of the Chalukyas who, following in the footsteps of the Satavahanas and the Vakatakas, established their authority in the Deccan. The second was that of the Pallavas in the far south: after a long period of acculturation and political gestation, the southern peninsula emerged from political obscurity and began to assert its influence. Our historical knowledge of this period is dependent on a variety of interlocking interpretations drawn by historians, linguists, archaeologists and anthropologists from their respective type of sources. Based on the information retrieved from various sources, In this chapter, we shall survey the socio-cultural changes noticed during the post Gupta period of Indian history that marked the transition to early medieval India.

#### 4.2.2. Society

A number of important social changes have been identified in the post Gupta period. These changes are best approached through the composition, character and scope of the caste system, and the status of women within it. As you know, Jati is the basic unit in the caste system. People are grouped in endogamous Jatis, i.e. members of a Jati marry within and not outside their Jati. Often a number of Jatis in an area that are similar to each other in status and occupation make up a Jati cluster; and these Jatis and Jati clusters form part of one of the four *Varnas*-Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. At the bottom of this caste hierarchy, i.e. Jati-based *Varna* hierarchy, are the Untouchables, who are placed outside and in an inferior relation to the fourfold *Varna* order, although they are also termed as 'impure Shudras'.

##### 4.2.2.1. Crystallization and further Stratification of Caste System

Identifying the nature of caste society and the direction of social changes during our period demands a careful analysis of the sources. The terms jati and *varna* are not always used there in our sense of these categories, and their exact import has to be ascertained each time. A text by itself may give the impression of a static society, and it is only through a critical collation of all pieces of relevant information that one is able to see the processes of change.

A comparison of the evidence across our period shows that state society-the society of kingdoms and empires, which was by and large caste society, as distinct from the non-state, casteless societies of hunter-gatherers and tribes-was expanding significantly during our period. First, a considerable number of immigrants from outside the subcontinent, such as the Hunas, the Gurjaras, etc.were settling down. The Gurjaras, the ancestors of the present Gujar community, seem to have been particularly widespread in western and northwestern India. In some regions a gradual transformation of the original structure of Gurjara society was well under way during our period as at the end of it we see not only the emergence of a small section of them as rulers (the Gurjara-

Pratiharas)but also the rest as humble peasantry. The recognition of the Hunas as one of the traditional thirty-six Kshatriya clans took a longer time. There were probably other peoples too. For instance, the Kalachuris who figure as an important political entity and had even founded an era called Kalachuri-Chedi Era are supposed to have been such immigrants, and the term 'Kalachuri' is interpreted as a derivative of the Turkish title 'kulchur'.

Large parts of India continued to remain covered with forests, in which small, scattered groups of hunter-gatherers and tribal people practising pastoralism and/or primitive agriculture lived. For instance, in calling southern Andhra Pradesh a sparsely populated jungle territory infested by highwaymen, Xuan Zang referred to one such area dominated by aboriginal population, who did not lead a settled life and for whom plunder was a legitimate source of livelihood. Similarly, for an extensive country in the northwest, he reports the presence of people who are stated to live solely by pastoralism, be very warlike, and 'have no masters, and, whether men or women, have neither rich nor poor'. Quite a few of the aboriginal groups were in regular touch with the members of caste society, and vivid descriptions of their lives are recorded, though not without bias, in contemporary works of literature, such as the Dashakumaracharita of Dandin and the Kadambari of Banabhatta.

A number of the aboriginal peoples were also being assimilated in the caste society, some wholly, some in part. For instance, while the name 'Shabara' continued to stand for a tribe or a number of tribes till well after our period, the reference to a Shabara king with a Sanskrit name, Udayana, in our sources suggests the integration of a section of Shabara people into caste society. In general, the majority of the members of a tribe were converted into a Jati belonging to the Shudra *Varna* (some into an Untouchable caste), while a tribal chief, if he was sufficiently resourceful, could claim a Kshatriya status for himself and his close kinsmen.

The caste society was also being transformed from within in response to political, economic, and cultural-ideological changes. An interesting example is the crystallisation of the professionals called kayastha as a Jati. Kayasthas come into view as important officials from the Gupta period onwards, and just after our period are seen as a caste. Our sources suggest that they came from a number of communities, including tribes (especially Karanas) as well as brahmins. The names of a considerable number of brahmins in Bengal in the Gupta and post-Gupta inscriptions end with suffixes such as Vasu, Ghosha, Datta, Dama, etc., which are today the surnames not of Bengali brahmins but of Bengali Kayasthas. The absence of these surnames among the brahmins of the region suggests that it was the case not of people of lower *Varnas* adopting the surnames of their superiors in a bid for upward mobility, but one of the formation of a caste through fission of brahmin and non-brahmin kayastha families from their parent bodies and fusion into a caste of Kayastha. In other words, the Kayastha caste began to form as the families belonging to this profession started marrying among themselves and stopped marrying within their own original Jatis or tribes.

As you know, each *Varna* was associated with some specific functions; for instance, priestly functions were considered the preserve of brahmins. Historians have noted a remarkable change in this matter during the transition, which is registered both in the brahmanical treatises as well as attested by foreign observers. Agriculture, which was considered earlier generally the work of the Vaishyas, now comes increasingly to be seen as the occupation of the Shudras. However, the meaning of this is not easy to understand, or rather is capable of being understood in at least three different ways. First, this has been interpreted as amounting to a marked improvement in the status of the Shudras. From being slaves, servants, and agricultural labourers they now become landholding peasants like the Vaishyas. Second, this may represent the decline in the status of peasantry as a result of extensive land grants. There was, it is said, such a downgrading of the Vaishya peasants that they were considered no different from the Shudras. Third, this could refer to the phenomenon of the absorption of tribal people in caste society as Shudra peasantry. It is of

course hypothetically possible that the different statements in our sources may collectively represent in some, hitherto unexplained, way the sum total of all these inferences. However, the point is that the problem of the exact correlation of this shift in *Varna* theory with the historical reality, especially the mutually contradictory nature of the first two inferences, has so far not been realized by historians, and needs to be sorted out.

#### **4.2.2.2. Origin of untouchability**

From about the third to the post-Gupta centuries, a number of developments take place in the history of untouchability. Although the practice had been known earlier, the term 'untouchable' (*asprishya*) for them is used for the first time now. The number of untouchable castes increases through the period, largely through the absorption of aboriginal groups in the caste society. However, the Chandalas and the Shvapachas (literally, 'dog-cookers') remained the most conspicuous of them. The miserable life of these people seldom failed to attract the attention of shocked foreign observers. Early in the Gupta period, Fa Xian noticed it, and in the seventh century Xuan Zang observed: 'Butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioners, and scavengers have their habitation marked by a distinguishing sign. They are forced to live outside the city and sneak along on the left when going about in the hamlets.'

#### **4.2.2.3. Practice of Slavery**

The practice of slavery seems to have continued without much remarkable change. This may be inferred from the treatment of the subject in the legal digests called shastras: the topic is treated in more or less the same manner in a Gupta-period work as in a twelfth-century one, the *Mitakshara*, which is otherwise very particular about recording change. Slaves seem to have mainly been used as domestic labour.

#### **4.2.2.4. Status of Women**

As with the other social groups, the status of women did not remain unchanged during the transition to the early medieval period. The changes that are noticed mainly pertain to the womenfolk of the upper classes of society; of course these changes did not occur uniformly everywhere. The brahmanical attitudes betray certain unmistakable tendencies of further depreciation of women's status, one of the most intolerable things being a woman's attempt to have independence (*svatantrya*). There was an increasing tendency to club them together with either property or Shudras, just the Chandalas were coming to be bracketed with dogs and donkeys. Post-puberty marriages were deprecated, with one authority prescribing the age of the bride as one-third of the bridegroom's. Wives would considerably outlive husbands in such cases, and detailed provisions were accordingly made for regulating the lives of widows. An extreme provision was that she should become a sati, i.e. commit suicide with her husband's dead body on the funeral pyre (or without it if it had already perished, as Harsha's sister Rajyashri tried to do). Although not unknown in the earlier periods, the practice of sati gained ground steadily in early medieval times as instances of it begin to multiply. However, this did not win universal approval even in Brahmanism. Baanbhata and Shudraka, the leading literary figures of the times, criticised it strongly, and the strongest protest was beginning to develop in tantrism, which was to declare it a most sinful act.

A general indication of the depreciation in the social standing of upper caste women is the deliberate erasure of their pre-marital identity after marriage. Till the Gupta period there is evidence that a woman did not need to lose her gotra identity and affiliation after marriage; thereafter, however, such marriages seem to have gone 'gradually gone out of use, at least among the ordinary people'.

Sometimes a certain 'improvement' in the status of women in early medieval times is perceived in the fact that they were allowed, like the Shudras, to listen to certain religious texts and worship deities. However, this seems to have served, by making them religious-minded, mainly to strengthen the brahmanical religions and enhance the income of the officiating priests rather than

to improve the quality of women's lives. Much cannot also be made of the increase in the scope of *stridhana*, i.e. the wealth that a woman could receive as a gift, for this did little to empower them in relation to men; their dependence and helplessness remained unaffected. While some authorities tried to get inheritance rights for the widow or daughter of a man dying sonless, actual historical instances make it clear that their prescriptions were routinely disregarded in favour of the contrary opinion by the early medieval kings, who would confiscate the property of such persons except for some privileged few; this provision, however, like those against widow remarriage and advocating *sati*, did not apply to the women of *Shudra Varna*. In fact, as in the previous and following periods, women of the labouring masses, simply for the reason that they had to work in the fields, pastures, etc. along with men in order to keep body and soul together, could not be subjected to the same kind of subordination and helplessness as was the fate of women of the privileged classes.

#### **4.2.3. Culture**

It is for the multi-faceted cultural activities that the documentation in our period-literary and monumental-is the richest, liveliest, and most vivid. It is best appreciated firsthand, visually via the sites of monuments or by reading up the literature-through a colourfully illustrated narrative at a pinch-rather than through an investigation into the transitional aspects of it. However, such investigation helps us place the creative-aesthetic-scientific achievements of the age in their proper historical contexts, enriching our sensibilities thereby, and therefore comes in very useful whenever we decide to descend on the monuments or dive in the literature. There exists a highly technical and voluminous scholarly output on the different aspects of these activities, and, in the limited space at our disposal, we can do no more than describe some broad trends.

##### **4.2.3.1. Development of Vernacular Language**

There were a number of significant linguistic developments. First, there was the onset and growth of the third stage of Middle Indo-Aryan languages, i.e. the Prakrits, from about AD 600. This third stage of the Middle Indo-Aryan is termed *Apabhramsha* by the linguists, out of which the New or Modern Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi and Marathi began to evolve from the tenth century. Second, the predominance of Sanskrit continued to grow as the official language of the states and one used for trans-provincial communication throughout the culture region of South and South-east Asia, apart from as a language of literature and religion; towards the end of our period even the Jinas were beginning to give up their *Ardha-Magadhi* Prakrit in its favour. In the history of Sanskrit legal literature, our period marks a watershed, during which the last of the *Smritis*, the *Katyayana Smriti*, was composed, and towards the end of which the great tradition of Sanskrit commentaries on these *Smritis* made its first beginning with the commentary of *Asahaya* on the *Narada Smriti*.

Third, there was the continuing ascent of Tamil along with the foundations of Kannada and Telugu as a literary language. The growth of Tamil received a great fillip from the *Bhakti* movement. Although no extant works can be ascribed to our period, epigraphic references as well as the later literary ones show nevertheless that Kannada was flourishing as a literary language, aided by state patronage and royal participation. For instance, *Durvinita*, who is mentioned as a celebrated literary figure of the language, was probably the sixth-century Ganga king *Durvinita* of southern Karnataka. As for Telugu, the discovery of fragments of an early text on prosody, called *Janashrayachhandas*, points to a strong likelihood that its rise as a literary language may have commenced as early as the first references to Telugu words in stone inscriptions of the fifth and sixth century AD.

#### **4.2.4. Religious Development**

In the field of religion, the Puranic temple-based Brahmanical sects, about the nature and rise of which you have already read in the previous lessons, continued to be in the ascendant. Of these the *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva* sects were the most important. Taking the evidence of royal

patronage as an indicator, the various Shaiva sects appear to have been moving ahead of the Vaishnava ones during our period.

#### **4.2.4.1.Origin of Bhakti Cult**

A major new development of great importance was Bhakti movement in the Tamil south. The idea of bhakti or devotion to a deity was basic to most sects of the period, but it was in the south during our period that it was invested with an unprecedented emotional intensity and became the focus of a powerful religious movement. It was espoused by both Shaiva saints called Nayanars and Vaishnava ones called Alvars. They journeyed extensively in propagation of their faith; debated with rivals; sang, danced and composed beautiful lyrics in praise of their deities; and converted kings and commoners alike to their faith, exhorting them to bring disgrace to the other faiths. Besides fulfilling the religious cravings of the people, the idea of bhakti served to tone down the severity of the iniquitous caste system as well as helped, as the central doctrine of temple-based religiosity and in calling forth the unquestioning loyalty of the subjects, the monarchs to shore up their rule.

#### **4.2.4.2.Debate of Buddhism & Jainism**

There is a perceptible decline in some areas of Buddhism, which had gradually been falling out of royal favour since the Gupta period. In many others, however, it continued to retain a substantial presence. There was a century of lavish royal patronage by the Maitraka state of Saurashtra in the west, and in the east the importance of Nalanda reached its peak during this time as the most outstanding of all the centres of Buddhist learning, to which some more like Vikramashila, Oddantapuri, and Somapura were added. In Gujarat and Rajasthan regions, Jainism too seems to have done reasonably well among the people despite the dwindling royal support.

It is in the South that the two religions lost out to Brahmanism in a major way, although the Kannada territory remained a Jaina stronghold. There was never any love lost between them and the Brahmanical religions, and religious rivalry and persecution have long been identified as distinct features of our age, despite a certain general reluctance to accept it and a rather desperate bid by some scholars to see nothing but religious tolerance and harmony. There were no doubt kings during these centuries who were evenhanded in their attitudes to the various religions, but so were those with partisan views bordering on bigotry. For instance, the following quote from one of the earliest studies on South Indian Jainism represents a standard view of the downfall of the faith in the region, about which students of history tend to be unfamiliar these days: The vast remains in South India of mutilated statues, deserted caves, and ruined temples at once recall to our mind the greatness of the religion in days gone by and the theological rancour of the Brahmins who wiped it out of all active existence. The Jains have been forgotten, their traditions have been ignored; but, the memory of that bitter struggle between Jainism and Hinduism, characterised by bloody episodes in the South, is constantly kept alive in the series of frescoes on the wall of the mantapam of the Golden Lily Tank of the famous Minakshi Temple of Madura. As though this were not sufficient ... the whole tragedy is gone through at five of the twelve annual festivals at the Madura temple.

#### **4.2.4.3.Origin and Growth of Tantrism**

Tantrism was well on way to becoming a salient feature of religious life all over the subcontinent. In Tantrism the cult of female divinities, who were in general known as Tara in Buddhism and Shakti or Devi in Brahmanism, was combined with a set of esoteric beliefs and magical practices. A graphic portrayal of Tantric religion is seen in the Harshacharita where a Sascetic from the South performs what may clearly be identified as a Tantric rite for Harsha's ancestor Pushpabhuti. The ascetic lived near an old temple of the Mothers (matri and performed a fire-rite in the mouth of a corpse in an empty building near 'a great cremation ground' on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight.

#### **4.2.4.4. Advent of Islam**

Among the other features of religious life in this period of transition, one was the coming of Islam on the west coast and in Sindh, and the other was the expansion of Christian communities from Malabar and some other places on the west coast in early sixth century to the east coast of the peninsula by the eighth.

#### **4.2.5. Philosophy**

Philosophy continued to be enlivened and enriched by debates and discussions. Apart from the six major schools of philosophy in Brahmanism, there were, as you already know, three 'heterodox', i.e. non-Brahmanical ones: Buddhist, Jaina, and Charvaka. No works of the Charvakas have come down to us and their views are known only through refutation by others. A major representative of this school was Purandara, who probably lived in the seventh century and is known to have composed texts on his school of philosophy. In the same century flourished Dharmakirti, the outstanding Buddhist philosopher. In Vedanta philosophy we have Gaudapada, who is reputed to have been Shankaracharya's paramaguru, the teacher of his teacher. Some greatest names in Mimamsa philosophy also belong to our period: Shabara, Prabhakara, and Kumarila.

#### **4.2.6. Art Tradition**

In stone architecture, there were two major forms: rock-cut and structural. Rock architecture, as you probably already know, refers to the creation of architectural forms in living rock. These rock-cut temples and monasteries usually look like artificial caves in hills and cliffs. These were distinct from 'structural' architecture, which refers to building freestanding structures with dressed-stone (or brick) masonry. Occasionally these two forms could be combined, but normally they remained separate, and have different chronological spans. Rock architecture, which over its long career was a virtually pan-South Asian phenomenon, goes back to the Mauryan period, but it is from about mid-fifth century (beginning at Ajanta and Ellora) that it entered its most active phase. By the end of our period the great age of rock architecture in Indian art history was by and large drawing to a close, even though its greatest achievement – the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora – comes just after it. It was during these centuries that construction of structural buildings in stone and brick got under way in an important way, but the really magnificent and classic phase of structural temples begins after the age of rock architecture was over. Generally speaking, there was an overlap between the two types of construction during our centuries, except in the south under the Pallavas, where the structural phase begins in the eighth century only after the rock-cut phase comes to an end in the seventh.

As the fine examples from Ajanta and Ellora testify, major advances were made as the artists stopped imitating wooden prototypes and achieved increasing perfection of design and execution; in some instances, it has been observed, 'lines are straighter, angles more correct, and surfaces more true than in any other examples'. Further, two monasteries at Ellora are the only examples we have of three storeys in rock-cut art. Till about the end of the sixth century Buddhism largely dominated the rock-cut mode of architecture, and then gradually Brahmanism became more important, followed by Jainism. Despite the different religious affiliations, the architectural style remained common, except for some adaptation for ritualistic purposes.

Examples of freestanding structures, built of stone or brick, are known from an earlier period. A most remarkable development of our period was the evolution of the typical brahmanical temple of the medieval era. The medieval temple was a very elaborate structure with several typical features. The process began, about the turn of the sixth century, with the addition of a tower called shikhara to the flat roofs of the shrine-rooms of the Gupta period. The earliest examples of such an addition come from Bhitargaon near Kanpur (brick) and Deogarh near Jhansi and Aihole near Badami (stone). The remaining features were gradually added till about AD 740, when at the



Vaikunthanath Perumal shrine at Kanchipuram we see a combination of all the standard attributes of the medieval temple. The evolution occurred at different pace in various regions. For instance, an important stage in the evolution was the connection of the pillared assembly hall called mandapa with the sanctum by means of a vestibule called antarala. As late as AD 700 this had not become a general practice as it is absent in both the Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha at Kanchipuram (this Kailasanatha temple was used as an inspiration for the one at Ellora).

In sculpture, the classical tradition with its emphasis on fully rounded volume by and large continued. The medieval style, in which rounded volume and smooth convex lines give way to flat surfaces and sharp curves, is seen occasionally in isolated examples, such as in a sixth-century frieze at the Dhamek stupa at Sarnath, but it did not come into its own till a later period, and even then remained confined to certain regions only.

The same is true of painting. It was quite a developed art by the onset of our period, and the Vishnudharmottara Purana, a contemporary text from Kashmir, provides a detailed account of its various aspects. Literary references show that there were both murals (paintings on walls and ceiling) of different types in private homes, royal palaces, and religious places as well as popular portable galleries of pictures drawn on textiles. However, although several examples of paintings from our period have survived, they all are murals in religious establishments. The best-preserved specimens come from the sixth-century Buddhist caves (rock-cut halls) at Bagh in Madhya Pradesh, Ajanta, and Badami, the seventh-century rock-cut Jaina temple at Sittanavasal in Tamil Nadu (a good part of the extant paintings, it has now been found out, belong to the ninth century), and the seventh-century Shaiva Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. Outside India, Sigiri in Sri Lanka furnishes beautiful instances. The tradition of classical painting continued in all these and many other cases through the seventh century and beyond. In the classical mode, there was an attempt at three-dimensional representation by employing several techniques, such as chiaroscuro (use of light and shade by means of colour shades and tones). Through these centuries, however, the medieval style, which was to find a foothold in many regions, was also developing; it appears in an eighth-century Ellora painting with a completeness that suggests a long period of prior evolution. As in sculpture, the classical and the medieval were to coexist in South Asia after our period.

#### **4.2.7. Growth of Sciences**

In the scientific field, Brahmagupta is the most outstanding figure in our period. He made a number of seminal contributions in mathematics. He was the first mathematician in the world to recognize negative numbers, which he presented as 'debts' in contrast to positive numbers, which he called 'fortunes'. In many other ways he was ahead of the mathematicians of the time. For instance, one of his methods for proving Pythagoras' theorem remained unknown to the western world till the seventeenth century. Astronomy was closely linked to mathematics, the word for the mathematician-ganaka-being also the term for the astronomer. Like his equally eminent predecessor Aryabhata, Brahmagupta was thus an astronomer also. He headed a major observatory, and grappled with such questions as lunar and solar eclipses, conjunctions of the moving planets with each other as well as with fixed stars, etc.

However, although he was characteristically dazzling in applying mathematical techniques to astronomy, Brahmagupta failed to achieve the same success in astronomy. He in fact strongly argued for the wrong conclusion that the earth does not rotate on its axis. The reason for this was his inability to go beyond and question the religion-sanctioned knowledge. It has been shown how Brahmagupta was prevented from achieving the same success in astronomy by the stranglehold of scriptural authority. Thus while he attempted a careful calculation of the diameter of the shadow of earth in order to see how the moon is eclipsed by it, he also condemned the 'heretics' who mock

and reject the view that the demon Rahu swallows celestial bodies! Evidently the same need to uphold religious authority led him to revile and reject Aryabhata's findings.

The Surya Siddhanta, which provided the basis of medieval astronomy in India from the fifth century onwards by replacing the Vedanga astronomy, continued to undergo gradual changes; it was its later version, one that evolved between AD 628 and 960, that was to gain immense popularity. In Tamil region, an old system of astronomical calculations by means of certain numerical schemes continued as a parallel tradition, as distinct from the trigonometrical tradition of the Surya Siddhanta. Apart from Brahmagupta, Bhaskara I, who was a contemporary of Brahmagupta and a disciple of the great Aryabhata, and Lalla (AD 748) were the leading astronomers of our times.

In medicine, Vagbhata claimed, or was claimed, to have become the leading authority for his age, rendering superfluous the previous masters. There are two Vagbhatas, the first of whom wrote a treatise called the Ashtanga-sangraha, and who flourished in the seventh century. Scholars place the other Vagbhata, the author of Ashtanga-hrdaya-samhita, about a century later. Both were Buddhists, and thus bear witness to the close links of Buddhism with the medical tradition; medicine was avidly studied in the monasteries of Nalanda and Vikramashila.

#### **4.2.8. Education & Learning**

Art and education made great strides in the post Gupta Period. Many rulers and ruling dynasty during post-Gupta period encouraged education at all levels; education was given in temples and monastries and higher education in universities of Taxila, Ujjain, Gaya and Nalanda. In Nalanda, Hiuen Tsang spent several years studying Buddhists sculptures. Shilabhadra, a renowned scholar was its head. In the seventh and eighth centuries, 'ghatikas', or colleges attached to the temples emerged as new centres of learning. The 'ghatikas', provided Brahmanical education. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit. Entry to these temple colleges was open only to the upper castes or 'dvijas' (twice born). Use of Sanskrit as the medium of instruction distanced the common people from education. Education became the privilege of only the uppermost sections of society.

The Chinese travelers of ancient India mentioned a number of educational institutions. The most famous among them were the Hinayana University of Valabhi and the Mahayana University of Nalanda. Hiuen Tsang gives a very valuable account of the Nalanda University. The term Nalanda means "giver of knowledge". It was founded by Kumaragupta I during the Gupta period. It was patronised by his successors and later by Harsha. The professors of the University were called panditas. Some of its renowned professors were Dingnaga, Dharmapala, Sthiramati and Silabhadra. Dharmapala was a native of Kanchipuram and he became the head of the Nalanda University.

Nalanda University was a residential university and education was free including the boarding and lodging. It was maintained with the revenue derived from 100 to 200 villages endowed by different rulers. Though it was a Mahayana University, different religious subjects like the Vedas, Hinayana doctrine, Sankhya and Yoga philosophies were also taught. In addition to that, general subjects like logic, grammar, astronomy, medicine and art were in the syllabus. It attracted students not only from different parts of India but from different countries of the east. Admission was made by means of an entrance examination. The entrance test was so difficult that not more than thirty percent of the candidates were successful. Discipline was very strict. More than lectures, discussion played an important part and the medium of instruction was Sanskrit.

Recent archeological excavations have brought to light the ruins of the Nalanda University. It shows the grandeur of this centre of learning and confirms the account given by the Chinese pilgrims. It had numerous classrooms and a hostel attached to it. According to Itsing, the Chinese pilgrim, there were 3000 students on its rolls. It had an observatory and a great library housed in

three buildings. Its fame rests on the fact that it attracted scholars from various parts of the world. It was an institution of advanced learning and research.

In south India in the period under discussion the Pallavas were great patrons of learning. Their capital Kanchi was an ancient centre of learning. The Ghatika at Kanchi was popular and it attracted students from all parts of India and abroad. The founder of the Kadamba dynasty, Mayurasarman studied Vedas at Kanchi. Dinganaga, a Buddhist writer came to study at Kanchi. Dharmapala, who later became the Head of the Nalanada University, belonged to Kanchi. Bharavi, the great Sanskrit scholar lived in the time of Simhavishnu. Dandin, another Sanskrit writer adorned the court of Narasimhavarman II. Mahendravaraman I composed the Sanskrit play *Mattavilasaprahasanam*. Tamil literature had also developed. The Nayanmars and Alvars composed religious hymns in Tamil. The *Devaram* composed by Nayanmars and the *Nalayradivyaprabandam* composed by Alvars represent the religious literature of the Pallava period. Perundevanar was patronized by Nandivarman II and he translated the Mahabharata as *Bharathavenba* in Tamil. *Nandikkalambagam* was another important work but the name of the author of this work is not known. Music and dance also developed during this period.

Another establishment during this period is the Uddandapura institute established during the 8<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of the Pala dynasty. The institution developed ties with Tibet and became a centre of Tantric Buddhism. During the 10-11<sup>th</sup> centuries the number of monks reached a thousand, equaling the strength of monks at the sacred Mahabodhi complex. During this period in the university at Nalanda, Takshashila University, Ujjain, and Vikramshila subjects such as the art, the architecture, the painting, the logic, the grammar, the philosophy, the astronomy, the literature, the Buddhism, the Hinduism, the arthashastra, the law, and the medicine were taught. Each university specialized in a particular field of study. For instance, the Takshila specialized in the study of medicine, while the Ujjain laid emphasis on astronomy. By the time of the arrival of the Islamic scholar Al Biruni India already had an established system of science and technology in place. By the 12th century, invasions from India's northern borders disrupted traditional education systems as foreign armies raided educational institutes, among other establishments.

#### **4.2.9. Conclusion**

In this and the previous lesson, you have studied how the lives of people in early India were being transformed in several significant ways over the two hundred odd years. Our concern was with identifying the dynamics of change rather than providing a detailed description of economy, polity, society, and culture. For instance, no attempt has been made to give an account of the numerous works of literature that were produced during these centuries. The purpose has been to discuss change, not narrate details. You must not imagine, however, that the changes occurred in a uniform fashion all over the subcontinent. The transition to the medieval era occurred at different points of time in different spheres and regions, and the pace at which change occurred also varied. Moreover, historical change seldom occurs in a sweeping, wholesale fashion. Remnants of the past, including the remotest past, somehow manage to cling to us; the scientist D. D. Kosambi in fact would always urge historians to detect clues to the past in the present. All the same, the patterns of change that we have outlined above made early Indian society recognizably different about mid-eighth century from what it was about mid-sixth. As you read on, you shall see how the processes of transformation continued to operate in the times ahead.

#### **4.2.10. Summary**

- *The political scene in India from the decline of the Guptas until the rise of Harsha was bewildering. Large scale displacement of peoples continued for some time. Small kingdoms vied with each other for the heritage of Guptas.*

- Northern India was divided into four kingdoms of later Guptas of Magadha, the Maukharis, the Pushabhutis and the Maitrakas.
- All the kingdoms came into prominence after the Huna invasion since it left a political vacuum in northern India.
- Although the political picture was discouraging, there were a few formative trends in this period.
- The university of Nalanda flourished in the sixth century. Dharmapala, who extended his patronage to the university in the latter half of the century was an eminent scholar. As a matter of fact, Nalanda witnessed its golden period in this period.
- It is also to be kept in mind that classical Sanskrit reached its perfection in the sixth century. Bharavi, Kumaradasa and Dandin among the poets and Vishakhadatta among the dramatists lived in the sixth century A.D. Some historians ascribe the development of Indian mathematics and astronomy to the sixth century. Varahamira is said to have died in 587 A.D. Aryabhata was born in 476.
- It can equally be said that philosophy, logic and mimamsa matured during this period. Buddhist and Hindu systems of logic witnessed their golden age. It is also noteworthy that vernacular literatures began to grow. Prakrit evolved into a literary language possessing its own grammars. It was this development that enabled Rajasekhara and others to create classical literature of Prakrit in the next century.
- Thus the old view that the sixth century was a period of anarchy and the age of Harsha that followed it was the last glow of ancient period, cannot be sustained. On the other hand the sixth century was a germinal period which sowed the seeds of later developments.

#### 4.2.11. Exercise

- Discuss the changing social scenario of Indian subcontinent in the post-Gupta phase of Indian history.
- Write an essay on the social stratification as noticed in the Post-Gupta India.
- Describe the condition of women in India during 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.
- Examine the religious and cultural condition of India in the post Gupta age.
- Give an account on the status of education and learning in the post Gupta phase of Indian history.

#### 4.2.12. Further Readings

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**Unit-4**  
**Chapter-III**

**LAND SYSTEM & AGRARIAN RELATION**

**The concept of Indian Feudalism, Land Grants and Agrarian Relation, Trade and Commerce.**

**Structure**

- 4.3.0. Objectives**
- 4.3.1. Introduction**
- 4.3.2. Emergence of New agrarian Structure**
- 4.3.3. Origin of Feudalism**
  - 4.3.3.1. Causes of Subjugation of Peasants**
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  - 4.3.4.1. Land ownership**
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  - 4.3.4.3. Sources of Revenue**
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  - 4.3.4.5. Rate of Land Tax**
  - 4.3.4.6. Assessment of Land Revenue**
  - 4.3.4.7. Different Taxes**
  - 4.3.4.8. Religious Grants**
  - 4.3.4.9. Secular Grants**
  - 4.3.4.10. Position of the Peasantry**
  - 4.3.4.11. Results of Land Grants**
- 4.3.4. Trade & Urban Centre**
- 4.3.5. Conclusion**
- 4.3.6. Summary**
- 4.3.7. Exercises**
- 4.3.8. Suggested Readings**

#### **4.3.0. Objectives**

*The chapter throw lights on the changing socio-economic scenario of India on the post-Gupta time. After reading this chapter the learners will be able to*

- *understand the changing political and socio-economic condition of India in post Gupta phase;*
- *examine the notion of land grants and feudalism in India during early medieval time;*
- *describe the status of peasant under the feudal setup in India under the period of discussion;.*
- *assess the impact of land grant and other feudal aspects on trade and trade during Post-Gupta period.*

#### **4.3.1. Introduction**

In this chapter we will be discussing one of the most controversial questions in the early medieval context of Indian history, the ‘Indian Feudalism’. The aspect of feudalism in Indian context is directly linked with the changing agrarian relation of the post-Gupta period. The debate on ‘feudalism’ too revolves around the urban decay as the land grant and rising feudal setup help the growth of self sufficient village economy. The question of feudalism and its links with the land grants and the question of intermediaries will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs. Thus, in the subsequent discussion the students will be informed about the condition of Indian economy in the Post-Gupta with special reference to agrarian relations, land pattern, trade & commerce, urbanization and the aspect of feudalism as opined by some historians.

#### **4.3.2. Emergence of New agrarian Structure**

The most important reason for the emergence of anew agrarian economy in the post-Gupta period was the growing practice of land grants. The practice had its origins in the period, grew in the Gupta age and became quite frequent in the post-Gupta period. Though religious merit was often quoted as the reason for making these land grants in the contemporary records themselves, the real reason behind them was a serious crisis that affected the ancient social order. Contemporary Puranic texts (third fourth century AD) complain of a situation in which *varnas* discarded the functions assigned to them. Among the numerous measures adopted to overcome the crisis, the most crucial one was to grant land to priests and officials in lieu of salaries and remuneration. The measure had the advantage of throwing the burden of collecting taxes and maintaining law and order in the granted lands on the recipients. Besides, it could bring new cultivation.

However, the land grantees could neither cultivate the land themselves nor collect revenues. Hence, the actual cultivation was entrusted to peasants or sharecroppers who were attached to the land but did not legally own it. Itsing, the Chinese pilgrim to India in the late seventh century AD informs us that most of Indian monasteries got their lands cultivated by servants and others. From the sixth century peasants and share-croppers were specifically required to stick to the land granted to the beneficiaries. So they could not move from one village to another, instead they had to live in the same village to cater to all its possible needs.

Consequently a new agrarian economy emerged in the pos-Gupta period. This new agrarian economy, and the new agrarian structure in particulars to be characterised by a number of salient features, such as the grant of barren as well as cultivated land, transfer of peasants to the grantees, imposition of forced labour, restrictions on the movement of the peasants, delegation of fiscal and criminal administrative power to religious beneficiaries, remuneration in land grants to officials, growth of the rights of the grantees, multiplicity of taxes, growth of a complex revenue system and wide regional variations in the agrarian structure.

### 4.3.3. Origin of Feudalism

The origin and development of feudalism is to be sought in the land grants made to Brahmins from the 1st century AD onwards. Their number becomes considerable in northern India in the Gupta period and goes on increasing afterwards. The monastery of Nalanda owned 200 villages in the reign of Harsha. Brahmins and temples were apparently granted land revenues not for rendering civil and military services to their patrons but for spiritual service. In the benefices granted to them they were allowed fiscal rights and such administrative rights as the maintenance of law and order and collection of fines from criminals. Hiuen Tsang states that high officers of the state were paid by land grants, but such grants are wanting because of the perishable nature of the material on which they were recorded.

The process of creating a class of landlords spread unevenly over the country. The practice first appeared in Maharashtra around the beginning of the Christian era. It seems that in the 4th-5th centuries A.D land grants covered a good part of Madhya Pradesh. In the 5th-6th centuries they became prominent in West Bengal and Bangladesh, in the 6th-7th centuries in Orissa, in the 7th century in Assam, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Tamil Nadu and in the 9th-10th in Kerala. In order to find new avenues of wealth for Brahmins and to bring virgin land under cultivation, the process of land grants started in outlying, backward and tribal areas first. When it was found useful by the ruling class, it was gradually extended to central India or Madhyadesa which was the civilised part of the country and the epicenter of Brahmanical culture and society.

What distinguished early Indian feudalism was the provision for fiscal units often, ten or twelve, or sixteen villages and their multiples. The law book of Manu, a work of the 1st-2nd century AD lays down that collectors in charge often villages or their multiples should be paid by land grants. These units persisted in the Rashtrakuta and to some extent in the Pala dominions.

The socio-economic aspect of feudalism in India was intimately connected with the transformation of the Sudras, who were treated as the common helots of the three higher *varnas*, into peasants from the Gupta period onwards. In the older settled areas Sudra labourers seem to have been provided with land. In the backward areas a large number of tribal peasantry was annexed to the Brahmanical system through land grants, and they were called Sudras. Therefore Hiuen Tsang describes the Sudras as agriculturists, a fact corroborated by al-Beruni about four centuries later.

#### 4.3.3.1. Causes of Subjugation of Peasants

The subjection of the Indian peasantry in late ancient and early medieval times, especially in older settled regions, was a striking development connected with the socio-economic dimensions of feudalism. It can be explained by several factors, the most important of which was the increase in the burden of taxation on the villagers. The grants mention as many as eleven taxes in the villages; if all these were extracted by the state we doubt whether the peasants were left with even a bare subsistence. In addition to the transfer of these taxes in many cases the donees were given the right to fixed and unfixed, proper and improper taxes. The list of taxes in many grants was not exhaustive, and the grantees were authorised to collect taxes covered by the term '*et cetera*' (*adi*) and 'all sources of income' (*sarv-aya-sameta or samasta-pratyaya*). All this implies that they could make new impositions. What the peasants paid as revenues to the state was converted as a result of grants into rents to the beneficiaries, many of whom, being priests or religious institutions, did not have to pay any portion of their income as tax to their donors.

A second factor that undermined the position of the peasants was the imposition of the forced labour. In the Maurya period slaves and hired labourers were subjected to such labour. But from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D the practice seems to have been extended to all classes of subjects. Down to the 10<sup>th</sup> century the grants of western and central India indicate the prevalence of *Visti*. Occasionally imposed by the ruling chiefs upon the villagers, impressed labour was bound to prove

oppressive when transferred to local beneficiaries who had a direct interest in the exploitation of the rural resources.

A third factor that worsened the condition of the peasants was the right of sub-infeudation. The donees were authorised to cultivate land and get it cultivated. Some late ancient. Some late ancient and early medieval lawbooks refer to as many as four stages of landed interests between the king and the actual tiller of the soil, which can be also inferred from the epigraphs. The right to cultivate the land or get it cultivated also implies the right to eject. A well established practice in Malwa, Gujrat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it tended to reduce the permanent tenets to the position of tenants-at-will.

What adversely affected the peasants in the donated areas was the transfer of communal rights, presumably from the villagers to the donees. The boundaries of many gift-villages were left undefined, and thus could be taken advantage of by the beneficiaries to increase the land in their personal possession. Similarly the right to barren land, jungles, pastures, trees and water reservoirs would enable them to tax the peasants for using these. The transfer of such rights obviously flowed from the theory of royal ownership, which came to be emphasized in Gupta and post-Gupta times.

That there existed certain communal rights can be inferred from the fact that in the Gupta times land could not be sold in Bengal without the consent of the community. Thus the transfer to the beneficiaries of agrarian rights enjoyed by the village tended to erode peasant rights and created new property titles.

These factors may be taken as various modes of extracting surplus from the peasants for the benefit of either the king and or his secular and religious beneficiaries. They gave rise to new property relations and a new mechanism of economic subordination from which there was no escape.

#### **4.3.3.2. Reaction of Peasants**

How did the peasants react to the process of disposition and impoverishment? Land grants provide answer to this questions, nor do most literary texts, which belong mainly to courtly literature. Some texts, however, indicate two possible forms of reaction, however, indicate two possible forms of reaction. One was to leave the country-an old practice preferred to in the *Jatakas*. A passage from the 6<sup>th</sup> century astronomer Varahamihira quoted in *subhashitaratnakosha* presents the pitiable plight of desolate villages which contain only the dilapidated walls of the houses deserted by unwilling peasants on account of the unwarranted oppression of the fief-holder (*bhogapati*), whose atrocities are also mentioned in the *Harshacharita* of Bana. Similarly the *Brihannaradiya Purana* states that on account of families and oppressive taxes peoples in misery migrate to more prosperous lands. Peasants, however, could not leave villages which were granted along with their inhabitants, for the donees had the legal possible authority to restrain them.

The other possible form which the peasants reaction to oppressive conditions might take is the ascertain of their land rights, as can be inferred from the revolt of the Kaivartas in Eastern Bengal, described by Sandhyakaranandi in the *Ramacharita*. The significance of the event can be appreciated better if we bear in mind that the Kaivartas were deprived of their plots of land given as service tenures and were subjected to heavy taxes. It was probably a peasant uprising directed against the Palas, who made a common cause with their vassals against the Kaivartas. But we cannot make too much of this single event, for we have hardly anything else to illustrate this form of reaction on the part of the peasants.

The usual form of reaction therefore may have been migrations. However, these could not be of much avail in the face of the self-sufficient, almost closed, economic systems to which the peasants were tied down in late ancient and early and early medieval times. Economic conditions and political organization being basically the same everywhere, migration did not liberate the peasants from the oppression of the princes and beneficiaries.



#### 4.3.3.3. Self-sufficient Economic Units

The feudal order was based on more or less self-sufficient economic units functioning in various parts of the country. This is indicated by the rarity of coins, the prevalence of local weights and measures, and the transfer by the kings and chiefs of income in cash and kind from trade and industries to the temples.

The decline of trade and petty commodity production is also indicated by the decay of the urban sites. Archaeological evidence shows that the Kushana layers belonging to the 1st to the 3rd centuries A.D. are flourishing. In many urban sites habitation disappeared after the 6th century A.D. This is true of a number of towns such as Hastinapura, Mathura, Kausambi, Varanasi, Vaisali, Chirand, Rajagriha, and Champa. The same position obtains in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra. It is significant that *nigama* which earlier meant a town came to mean a village in early medieval times.

If we take into account all these factors it would appear that marketisation had reached a low ebb and local needs had to be satisfied on a local scale. Therefore it was in this period that there developed the *jajmani* system. Since artisans did not have much scope for the sale of their products in towns they moved to villages where they catered to the needs of the peasants who paid them at harvest time in kind. The *jajmani* system was reinforced by the charters which insisted on peasants and artisans sticking to their villages. Monasteries and temples formed wide economic units, some of them comprising more than a hundred villages. Apparently some villages supplied grain, others cloth, and still others labour for the repair of buildings; or else every village furnished part of these articles.

#### 4.3.3.4. Role of Early Feudalism

The historical role of early Indian feudalism was significant for several reasons. First, land grants served as an important means of bringing virgin soil under cultivation in central India, Orissa and eastern Bengal. The same was true of south India. All in all, early feudalism was a phase of great agrarian expansion. Enterprising Brahmins were given useful employment in the backward, aboriginal tracts where they could spread new methods of cultivation. Some beliefs and rituals sponsored by the priests helped material progress among the tribal people. The priests taught the primitive people not only the use of the plough and manure but also fostered agriculture by giving them the knowledge of seasons and planets, especially of the recurrence of the rains. Much of this knowledge was written down in the form of the *Krisi-Parasara*, which seems to have been a product of this period.

Second, land grants provided the administrative mechanism for maintaining law and order in the donated areas, in which all such powers were delegated to the donees. Both in the settled and backward areas the religious donees inculcated among the people a sense of broad loyalty to the established order. On the other hand secular vassals helped their lords by governing their fiefdoms and supplying troops in times of war.

Third, land grants led to the Brahmanisation and acculturation of the tribal peoples, who were given scripts, calendar, art, literature and a new way of higher life. In this sense feudalism worked for the integration of the country. One of the main reasons why the four *varnas* proliferated into numerous castes and the number of the mixed castes shot up to about a hundred according to the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* was the necessity of finding a place in Brahmanical society for various tribes which were brought into direct contact with the Brahmins through land grants.

Indian feudalism, thus, passed through several distinct stages. The age of the Guptas and the following two centuries saw the beginning of land grants to temples and Brahmins, and the number of such grants increased steadily and their nature changed basically in the kingdoms of the Palas, the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. In the earlier period only usufructuary rights were, generally given but from 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards proprietary rights were transferred to the donees. The process

culminated in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries when northern India was parceled into numerous political and economic units largely held by secular and religious donees, who enjoyed the gift villages as little better than fiefs.

#### 4.3.3.5. Samanta System

**Origin and Meaning:** The institution of the *samanta* was the main innovation which distinguished the post-Gupta period from the other periods of ancient India. The term *samanta* originally meant 'neighbour' and referred to the independent ruler of an adjacent territory in the Maurya period, as is evident from its use in the Arthashastra of Kautilya and the Asokan edicts. In the pre-Gupta period the term was used by law-givers in the sense of a neighbouring proprietor of land. Even the 'border kings' mentioned by Samudragupta in his Allahabad *prasasti* were such *samantas* in the original sense of the term. By the end of Gupta rule and definitely by the 6th century AD, a new meaning of the term had gained universal currency. *Samanta* had come to mean a subjected but reinstated tributary prince of a realm.

The rise and growth of the *samanta* was a distinctive structural feature of the growth of feudal regimes. Whereas in the earlier periods of ancient India administrators had been imposed from above by imperial appointment, the feudal realms from the post-Gupta period onwards were controlled by princes who had once been subjected but then reinstated and were then obliged to pay a tribute and to serve the king loyally. In the late Gupta period, this type of administrator was occasionally found in the border provinces but in Harsha's time and later on they became powerful figures even in the core area of the kingdom. They enjoyed a great deal of autonomy within their territory and soon surpassed the old type of provincial governor in wealth and prestige.

In order to integrate these over mighty subjects (*samanta*) into the hierarchy of the realm, they were often high positions at the court of the king. Thus the king of Valabhi in western India who was defeated by Harsha not only gained recognition as a *mahasamanta* (Guardian of the Royal Gateway) *mahadandanayaka* (Royal Field Marshal). Conversely, the high officers of the central court demanded similar recognition as the defeated kings and princes and obtained it in due course. But magnificent title alone would not do, the officers also wanted some territory to go with it. This then was the process of the 'samantisation' of the realm, which we may regard as the Indian variety of feudalism.

This process of 'samantisation' was accelerated by two factors: the lack of money for the payment of salaries and the new ideas that royal prestige depended on the size of a king's *samantachakra* (circle of tributary princes). Old treatises on the art of government, like the *Arthashastra*, provide detailed list of the salaries of officers and Hiuen Tsang reported that certain high officers received their salaries in cash even in the seventh century. But the recession of international trade and the reduced circulation of coins made it necessary for officers to be paid by the assignment of revenue of some villages or of whole districts which they held as *prefend*. Some of the contemporary works tell us that kings were eager to cancel such assignments, particularly if the officer concerned had displeased the ruler. However, the process of samantisation was generally stronger than the will of the central ruler.

**Epigraphic Evidence:** As early as the third quarter of the 5th century A.D the term *samanta* was used to mean vassal in south India for the phrase *samantachudamanayah* (best feudatories) appears in a Pallava inscription of the time of (A.D 455-470). In the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D also, the term occurs in some grants of southern and western India in the sense of vassal. In north India the earliest use of the term in a similar sense seems to have been in a Bengal inscription, and in the Barabar Hill Cave Inscription of the Maukhari chief Anantavarman (early 6th century A.D), in which his father is described as *samanta-chudamani* (the best among feudatories) of the imperial Guptas. The next important mention of the term is found in the Mandasor Pillar Inscription of Yasodharman (A.D 525-535), in which he claims to have subjugated the *samantas* (feudatories)

in the whole of northern India. During the sixth and seventh centuries A.D the rulers of Valabhi, as mentioned already, bore the title of *mahasamanta* or *samantamaharaja*. Gradually the application of the term was extended from defeated chiefs to royal officials. For example, in the inscriptions dated in the Kalachuri-Chedi era, from A.D 597 onwards *samantas* and *rajas* took the place of *uparikas* and *kumaramatyas*. Later, in the land grants of Harsha the terms *samantamaharaja* and *mahasamanta* appear as titles of great imperial officers.

**Literary Evidence:** Bana in his *Harshacharita* speaks of several types of *samantas*. Of them, the *samanta* was the lowest and ordinary type of vassal. *Mahasamanta* was obviously a step higher than the ordinary *samanta*. *Satru-mahasamanta* was a conquered enemy chief. *Aptasamantas* were probably those who willingly accepted the vassalage of the overlord. *Pradhanasamantas* were the most trusted hands of the emperor, who never disregarded their advice. *Pratisamanta* was probably a vassal opposed to the king or merely a hostile vassal, though it cannot be said with any amount of certainty. *Anuraktamahasamantas* referred to by Bana only once, might be those who were especially attached to their overlord.

**Functioning of the System:** Bana is the first writer to indicate the obligations of the *samantas* to their overlord. It is evident from his *Harshacharita* that the first obligation of the *samantas* is to pay yearly tributes to the emperor. For we learn from it that Harsha had made his *mahasamantas* his tributaries (*karada*). In the areas administered by the *samantas* the emperor realised annual taxes from them and not from the subjects. Though it is not clear whether the vassals were free to increase the taxes or to impose fresh ones, they were certainly held responsible for royal taxes in their areas. According to Bana, the second obligation of the *samantas* is to pay homage to the emperor in person. He informs us that the defeated *mahasamantas* greeted the conqueror by removing their crowns and head-dresses (*sekhara* and *mauli*). It appears that they were subjected to various kinds of humiliation in the court of Harsha. Some served as bearers of fans, others prayed for life by tying a sword to their neck, and still others were always eager to salute the emperor. Bana in his *Kadambari* mentions four modes of saluting the king (*pranam-agamana*) by the vanquished chiefs. These included salute by bowing the head, bowing head and touching the feet of the emperor, bowing the head and taking the dust from the feet of the emperor, and finally placing the head on the earth near the feet of the emperor. Again, in the same work Bana enumerates three modes of service undertaken by the defeated kings (*parichariki-karand*). They held chowries in the court of Harsha, served as door-keepers in the court, and also served as reciters of auspicious words uttering *jaya* (success).

According to Bana, the third obligation of the defeated *samantas* is to furnish their minor princes or sons to the conqueror. These were probably to be trained in the imperial traditions, so that they might grow loyal to their overlord. But, by and large, the obligations of the vassals known from Bana relate to the defeated chiefs called *satrumahasamanta*, who were required to serve the conqueror in various ways in consequence of their defeat.

Generally one of the most important obligations of the *samantas* was to render military aid to their overlord. Bana's description of the march of Harsha in *Harshacharita* shows that the army was made up of the troops supplied by the *rajas* and *samantas*, and their number was so huge that Harsha was amazed at the sight of the concourse. The only probable explanation seems to be that his army was a feudal militia which was mustered only in times of war. This view is supported by Pulakesin's Aihole Inscription, which describes Harsha as equipped with the troops supplied by his vassals.

However, it is not clear either from Bana's works or from the lawbooks whether the *samanta* had the obligation to perform any administrative or judicial functions in peace time. But from the *Harshacharita* we learn that on the advice of the *pradhanasamanta*, whose voice could not be disregarded, Rajyavardhana took food when he was afflicted with grief on the imprisonment of

his sister Rajyasri. So, if the counsel of the vassals could not be ignored in personal matters, it could be less so in administrative affairs where not only their advice but also help and cooperation were badly required.

It seems that the samantas living in the court of the overlord even had to carry out certain social obligations as well. It is recorded in the *Kadambari* that they took part in the various amusements such as gambling, dice-playing, playing on the flute, drawing portraits of the kings, solving puzzles, and the like. Similarly, it is mentioned in the *Harshacharita* that the wives of the *samanta* had to attend the court on festive occasions. Thus, the vassals were linked with the overlord not only financially and militarily but also administratively and socially.

**Impact of 'Samantisation':** Samantisation gradually eroded the power base of the ruler even in the core area of his realm as the assignment of revenue-bearing lands diminished the area directly controlled by the central administration. This process of the fragmentation of power occurred in other countries too, but in India it became a legitimate feature of kingship. The great emphasis placed on the *samantachakra* made a virtue out of necessity. The contemporary inscriptions and works are full of enthusiastic descriptions of the glitter of the crowns and jewels of the *samanta* who surrounded the king when he held the court. The court emerged in this way as special features of the display of royal glory. The greater the number of *samantas* and *mahasamantas* who attended the court, the greater the fame of the overlord. Such a *samantachakra* was, of course, inherently unstable. As soon as the power of the central ruler declined, a *mahasamanta* would strive for independence or would even dream of stepping into the centre of the *samantachakra*.

#### **4.3.4. New Agrarian Economy**

##### **4.3.4.1. Land ownership**

The subject of land-ownership in the post-Gupta period is highly controversial matter and the contemporary sources make it more confusing. Medhatithi, a prominent law-giver of the ninth century, for instance records at one place that the king was the lord of the soil, and elsewhere states that the field belonged to him who made it fit for cultivation by clearing it. But land was commonly granted by with rights of varying degrees, to Brahmins and religious institutions for religious and ideological purposes, vassals and princes for military purposes and to officials for administrative purposes. Thus, there developed a great variety of rights over land, claimed by various degree of intermediaries.

With the increasing extent and the changing complexion of the king's right of ownership over issue of the royal ownership over land, the issue of royal ownership of land became very complicated in actual practice owing to increase in the claim of the ruling *samanta* hierarchy and the rural landed aristocracy in this respect. Some post-Gupta inscriptions reveal that the monarchs and overlords gave land grants in the territories and estates of their *samantas*. So, the rights enjoyed over land by the overlords and the *samanta* of different grades depended upon their actual power and prestige.

As a practice of granting lands gained increased currency, the theoretical ownership of land, the grass and including the grass and pasture-land, reservoirs, groves and dry land, also went to the beneficiaries. Such increasing land grant may be interpreted as a general indication of an increasing claim of the king over the land. Under such circumstances, sometimes cultivators of the land were also transferred to the donees.

However, there is also evidence, both literary and epigraphic, of private individual ownership of land by the aristocracy in the post-Gupta period. Some literary sources have stray references suggesting individual ownership, while several inscriptions record cases of land grants and land sales by private individuals. In some inscriptions, lands owned by private individuals are mentioned in connection with the demarcation of the boundaries of the donated land.

Thus the state was deemed to be the owner of all lands as a general proposition, but individuals or groups that cultivated lands in their possession were regarded practically as owners thereof, subject to the liability to pay land tax and the right of the state to sell land for non-payment of tax.

#### **4.3.4.2.Types of Land**

Land can be variously classified as cultivated, cultivable, fallow, barren, low, high, hilly, marshy, and the like. The inscriptions from Bengal mention ksetra which probably suggests cultivated land. That the ksetra was certainly better than the other types can be inferred from the fact that the sale price of ksetra was four dinaras per kulyavapa, and the sale price of other types of land varied between two and three dinaras.

Besides ksetra other terms which we come across in the inscriptions from Bengal are khila ksetra, vas-tubhu, aparahata, talabhumi, hajjikakhilabhumer. The term khila also finds place in Amarakosa, which explains khila as land which has not been cultivated. Narada lays down that 'a field that has not been cultivated for one year, is called ardhakhila and that which lies uncultivated for three years is termed khila; khila and khilya appear to have the same meaning. In the Amarakosa the term usara is used to explain barren land, or uncultivable or unploughable land. Therefore, khila land may be taken as a cultivable waste, which was cultivated previously, but is now lying uncultivated for some reason or other.

Another term, which is used along with khila in the inscriptions from Bengal is aparahata. The Amarakosa defines the term khila along with aparahata as land which has not been ploughed. Therefore these two terms may be explained separately. Khila, when used alone in inscriptions may be considered as land whose cultivation has been stopped for some time, and the term aparahata may be considered as land never tilled (or not tilled for a long period).

Vastu bhu or habitable land is also referred to in the Bengal inscriptions. It may be said that vastu land was a dwelling site, and was quite different from cultivated or waste land.

In the Gunaighar grant of Vainyagupta, the term hajjika-khila-bhumer occurs. DC Sircar has explained it as marshy land. So, the term hajjikakhilabhumer may be taken to mean a marshy uncultivated land. In the same inscription 'low' land has been described as talabhumi. We also find a reference, panika, to marshy lands in, the Amarakosa.

#### **4.3.4.3.Sources of Revenue**

Treasury has been considered by our ancient lawgivers as one of the main organs of the state. Being so, the treasury or kosa naturally presupposes the existence of many sources of revenue. The Mitaksara, while commenting on Yajnavalkya lists gold, mines and others, as sources of income to the king. Kamandaka lays down that 'the quality of the land (fertility and soil resources) is the root of prosperity of the kingdom, and with the progressive prosperity of the kingdom flourishes the strength of the king himself. Hence the king should take necessary steps to develop land resources. Resource rich land includes land (*bhusam-pad or janapada sam-pad*) that is fertile (yielding abundant crops), productive of different types of commodities, rich with mines and mineral resources, and, due to the prevalence of irrigation system.' not dependent on rains (*adevomatika*) for cultivation.

#### **4.3.4.4.Principles of Taxation**

Besides enumerating the importance of kosa or treasury for the state and various sources of revenue, the law-givers have also laid down certain principles for the collection of revenue. These principles seem to have considerably restrained the kings in their demand for revenue.

Yajnavalkya says that the king takes the sixth part of the virtuous deeds (of his subjects) by protecting them with justice. While commenting upon Yajnavalkya, the Mitaksara say that by administering justice according to the scripture, and by protecting the subjects, the king takes up a

sixth share from the virtuous deeds. Vishnu starts with the protection of his subjects and Kamandaka regards protection of people and their gainful occupation as a prime importance.

However, Katyayana (6th century A.D) for the first time declares the king to be the lord of the land, but never of any other kind of wealth; therefore, he should secure the sixth part of the fruits of land but not otherwise.

This concept of the protection of the subject by the king seems to have survived even in the seventh century. This can be inferred from a verse in the fourth *vuchvasa* of Bana's *Harshacharita*, where, he describes the king as protecting the world so well that not even the meanest had ever to cry for help.

The king was thus entitled to revenue not only because of the protection he provided to the people but also because he was the lord of the land. This dual legality which the king had acquired by the end of the seventh century undoubtedly made him very powerful. However, the situation seems to have been greatly offset by certain admirable principles of taxation embodied in early Indian sources.

The main idea which seems to have guided by the law-givers in enunciating certain principles for the king in levying taxes on his subjects, was avoiding the oppression of the people. These deal with the fixation of the rates of taxation of various commodities, the realization of taxes in smooth manner and the censure of the king for oppressive taxation.

For those rulers, who demanded unlawful taxes in the form of revenue, and fill their treasuries, Yajnavalkya foresees ill lucks doom for the kingdom. The Mitaksara on this passage says that the sovereign, who increases his own treasure by taking property through illegal means from his kingdom soon being bereft of good luck, goes to destruction, or ruin, along with his kinsman.

The epigraphic records also indicate that these principles were followed in practice to a certain extent and the kings refrained from tyrannizing the people. The Nalanda Copper Plate Inscription of Samudragupta describes him as, 'equal to the (gods) the givers of the many crores of lawful acquired cows and gold'.

Further there are also inscriptions belonging to Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I, Skandagupta and Buddhagupta, which praise all these rulers for good conduct and ruling according to the law givers.

#### **4.3.4.5. Rate of Land Tax**

The law givers of this period have not only enunciated the principle of taxation, but have also recommended the rate at which the land tax may be collected by the king on land. Even Hiuen Tsang, while describing the conditions of the people, mentions that the king's tenants pay one-sixth of the produce as rent. It appears that a sixth part was traditionally as the rate of the share of the king to be taken as land tax. However, the probability that the king could levy different rates for different types of soil cannot be ruled out. Brihaspati lays down the rates of one-tenth and one-sixth on khilla land, on the land exposed to the rain water (*devomatrika*), and on the crops harvested in *vasanta* respectively.

The Epigraphic evidence of the period does not give any clue to the rate of land tax, which was actually taken by the rulers. Only in the inscriptions of Bengal do we find reference to one-sixth share of the merit, which would accrue to the king. The reference to the expression *dharmasadbhaga* in Gupta epigraphs may suggest that the king's normal grain share was one-sixth of the produce. It is, however, curious that we do not find any reference to any revenue terms in Bengal epigraphs belonging to the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, as in the land charter belonging to central and western India.

#### **4.3.4.6. Assessment of Land Revenue**

Regarding the mode of assessment, it seems that land revenue was assessed on individual holdings of land. The precision with which the granted fields and villages were marked on all the

four sides suggests this. Some of the inscriptions belonging to the Gupta period from Bengal are no doubt sale deeds and refer to fields belonging to individuals. About a dozen inscriptions from the region speak of individual holdings which could have been the basis of revenue assessment.

The land revenue having been assessed on brahmadeya or individual holdings leads us to the problem of whether the area of the individual holding was considered while fixing land revenue. The literary sources do not mention any unit of measurement. It is only in the pre-Gupta sources that we get references to various units of measurement.

Regarding the epigraphic evidence we have reference to the units of measurements, like *kulyavapa*, *dronavapa*, *adhavapa* and *pataka* from Bengal, *nivartana* and *bhumi* from central India, and to *nivartana* and *padavarta* from western India. Besides, we also have reference to fields requiring one *pitaka* full of grain as seeds. The reference to different units of measurement in different parts of northern India, undoubtedly suggests that government officers must have adhered to local standards of measurement.

The assessment of land revenue most probably on property measured individual holdings leads us to another important question of whether the share was taken on the profit of the cultivator or on the gross produce. A passage from Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha* suggests that the tax was most probably not levied on the gross produce but rather on that portion of the produce which remained with the cultivator after he had kept some part of his produce for himself.

#### **4.3.4.7. Different Taxes**

The epigraphs do not provide direct evidence of the taxes prevalent during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. But from references to exemptions from various kinds of royal dues, to their transfer to the donees and the retention of some of them by the donor himself, the system of land revenue can broadly be outlined.

In the inscriptions of eastern India belonging to A.D 400-700 we do not find any reference to revenue terms. In central India, however, the charters of the Parivrajakas, the Uccakalpas, the Vakatakas and the Sarabhapuriyas mention several important revenue terms such as *udranga*, *uparikara*, *bhogabhaga*, *kara*, *hiranya*, *dhanya*, *klipta* and *upaklipta*.

The omission of certain revenue terms from the text of inscriptions and reference to many terms seems to suggest that the listing of the exemptions was not taken for granted. Specific and particular taxes were listed as immunities. The king could, according to his wish or as the time and positions may permit, withhold or grant any tax to the donee.

In the Gangetic plains we do not find many inscriptions. It is mainly because land or villages were not granted in the heart of the Gupta empire. The two copper plates of Samudragupta refer to *udranga*, *uparikara* and *bhoga-bhaga*. In the seventh century, only two inscriptions of Harsha, the Madhuban and Banskhedha copper plate inscriptions, have been found, though Bana in *Harshacharita* refers to a number of land grants having been made by Harsha. The Madhuban Inscription mentions *udranga*, *sarvarajakulabhavya pratyaya sameta*, *samucit tulya maya bhaga-bhoga kara*, *hiranya adi pratyaya*. The most common revenue term in the inscriptions is *bhaga-bhoga*.

The most common revenue term in the inscriptions is *bhaga-bhoga*. Sometimes this expression is recorded in a reverse order as *bhoga-bhaga*. The *bhaga* may be taken to mean the customary share of the produce. The *bhoga* of the inscriptions may be taken as the periodical supplies of fruits, firewood, flowers and the like, which the villagers had to supply to the king, as is specifically stated in the Vakataka grants. Besides, it is also supported by Manu and his commentators Medhatithi and Kulluka.

*Kara* is another revenue term which we get in the inscriptions. It seems to have been of the nature of a periodical tax levied more or less universally from villagers, and it may have been

realised over and above the king's normal grain share. The Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman indicates that *kara* was an oppressive tax.

Another fiscal term which we come across in the inscriptions is *hiranya*. This term is found in all the inscriptions of northern India except in those of the Vakatakas. *Hiranya* literally means gold, but in its technical sense, it means king's share of certain crops paid in cash as distinguished from tax in kind (*bhoga*) levied on ordinary crop. Here it may be inferred that most probably ginger, cotton was another commercial crop on which *hiranya* was levied.

Besides these fiscal terms, we also come across *uparikara* and *udranga*. These two terms occur in the inscriptions belonging to A.D 400-700, with the exception of only a few. One view is that *uparikara* is something like the Tamil *melavaram*, that is, crown's share of the produce. However, this view is not tenable as in the Karitalai plate (A.D 493-94) and the Khoh plate (AD 512-13) the terms *udranga* and *uparikara* occur along with *bhoga kara*. Therefore, *uparikara* can neither be equated with *bhoga*, the crown share of produce which is indicated by *melvaram* in Tamil, nor with *bhoga*.

The term *udranga* which appears along with *uparikara*, is also difficult to explain. Two explanations of this term are noteworthy. If it is the same as *dranga* which according to *Rajatarangini* is a watch station; it can be taken as a sort of police tax. It might also be suggested that it is an anomalous derivative of the Sanskrit word *udaka*, and in that case it may be a water tax. However, in view of the fact that it is recorded along with other normal royal dues like *uparikara*, *udranga* also may have been a levy over and above the usual grain share.

There are some other fiscal terms such as *ditya*, *meya* and *dhanya*. The word *ditya* means exempt from all dues, forced labour and making gifts. Accordingly *ditya* did not denote any particular tax, and many taxes may have been included in it.

The term *meya* also appears in some of the inscriptions from eastern and central India. It has been explained as the taxes, including the share of the produce and the cash money paid in lieu of the produce in proper time. The word *meya* may also be taken to be a substitute for the general land tax known as *bhaga*. The term *dhanya* also appears to have denoted the general land tax.

Thus, in the Gupta period several new taxes, such as *udranga* and *uparikara* appear along with *bhoga-bhaga*, *dhanya* and *hiranya*. In addition to these there may have been other taxes in the inscriptions as we get the word *adi* (meaning et cetera). These terms continue in the post-Gupta period in almost all parts of northern India, though we find variations in the list of taxes.

#### **4.3.4.8. Religious Grants**

From the pre-Gupta period, and especially from the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, certain political and administrative developments tended to feudalise the state apparatus. One of the most striking developments was the practice of making land grants to Brahmins, a custom which was sanctified by the injunctions laid down in the *Dharmasastras*, the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata*. Two significant features of such grants, which became more frequent from the fifth century A.D., were the transfer of all sources of revenue and the surrender of administrative and police functions.

The transfer of all sources of revenue by the ruler to the Brahmins is evident from the land grants made by the Vakataka rulers from the time of Pravarasena II (5th century A.D) onwards. In these the ruler gave up his control over almost all sources of revenue, including pasturage, hides and charcoal, mines for the production of salt, forced labour, and hidden treasures and deposits.

Certain land grants of the Gupta and post-Gupta periods provide clear evidence of the surrender of administrative power by the state to the Brahmin beneficiaries. Half a dozen land grants of the Gupta period, made to the Brahmins by the big feudatories in central India, show us that the residents of the gifted villages were asked not only to pay the customary taxes to the recipients but also to obey their commands. Two land grants of the post-Gupta period clearly direct



certain government officials (employed as *sarvadyaksha*), regular soldiers and umbrella-bearers not to cause any disturbance to the Brahmins in their gifted villages.

The surrender of police functions by the state to the Brahmins in the gifted villages was particularly done from the post-Gupta period onwards. Henceforth in central India some royal donors began to confer upon the Brahmins not only the right to punish thieves, but also the right to punish all offences against family, property and person. These grants, using the term *abhyantarasiddhi*, armed the donees with such powers that they could easily turn the benefices into practically independent pockets.

Gupta grants normally do not authorize the grantee to alienate or grant his rents or land to others. But the Indore grant (made in A.D 397 by a local merchant to a Brahmin with the consent of one Maharaja Swamidasa, probably a feudatory of the Imperial Guptas) authorises the grantee to enjoy the field, cultivate it and get it cultivated so long as he observes the conditions of the *brahmadeya* grant. This leaves clear scope for creating tenants on the donated land and provides graphic evidence of the subinfeudation of the soil. This process of subinfeudation increased in the western part of central India in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D and characterised the grants of the Valabhi rulers to their donees in the sixth and seventh centuries.

The priests, in return for land grants, were required in the charters to render religious services, which might secure the spiritual welfare of the donors or their ancestor. But their secular obligations were rarely mentioned in the charters for they were probably taken for granted. However, it is natural that the priestly beneficiaries more than repaid their generous donors by maintaining law and order in the donated lands and impressing upon the people the sacred duty of carving out their *varna* functions and of obeying the intentions of the donors, it would be wrong to think that these grants served only religious purposes.

#### **4.3.4.9. Secular Grants**

Another presage of the feudalization of the state apparatus was the practice of making land grants to officers for their administrative and military services. In the Gupta period there is no direct epigraphic evidence of such grants, though such a possibility can not be entirely ruled out. But during the post Gupta period a definite change had taken place in the mode of payment of officers employed by the state. At least during Harsha's reign high officers were not paid in cash for their services to the state as one-fourth of the royal revenues was earmarked for the endowment of great public servants. At one place Hiuen Tsang explicitly states that the governors, ministers, magistrate and officials had each a portion of land assigned to them for their personal support. These high officers, according to Harsha's inscriptions, would include *daussadha-sadhanika*, *pramatara*, *rajssthaniya*, *uparika* and *vishayapati*. Thus under Harsha revenues were granted not only to priests and scholars but also to the officers of the state. The existence of this practice is supported by the paucity of coins belonging to this period.

Some inscriptions of the post-Gupta period show that lands were granted to secular parties for different services. The two copper plate grants from east Bengal, roughly assignable to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries, mention quite a few secular assigners. They indicate that plots of land donated to the head of a Buddhist monastery were actually taken from several persons who were enjoying them till then. Though all such persons (from whom lands had been taken away) are named, the position and identity of only a few can be established. In one instance land had been given to the queen for probably maintenance, in another to a woman for some service rendered to the king, and still in another to a *samanta* for services rendered to the overlord. Apparently these and other persons held the plots of land in question as some kind of service grant which were retrieved either at the lapse of the term or on grounds, otherwise these could not have so easily transferred. All this suggests that during post-Gupta period in east Bengal some services were remunerated by means of land which was granted for a limited period.

These problem of payment to officers in grants of revenues can be further examined in the light of the designations of the administrative officers of the post-Gupta period. Bana's *Harshacharita* states that in course of the military march of Harsha, villagers made false complaints against *bhogapati*. Apparently in his anxiety to present the administration of his patron in a favorable light, Bana does not give credence to these complaints. Another feudal functionary in the time of Harsha was the *mahabhogi*, mentioned in some epigraphs from Orissa. In the Kadambari, Bana's description of the *antahpura* in the palace of king Tarapida refers to the presence at the doorway of hundreds of *mahabhogis*. These mahabhogis were probably those people who were granted land revenues in rural areas and who occasionally flocked to the royal palace to pay homage to their overlord. The early Kalachuri inscriptions introduce a new official *bhogikapalaka*, who may have acted as superintendent over the *bhogikas*. All such terms-*bhogika*, *bhogapatika* and *bhogikapalaka*-clearly smack of feudal relations.

Certain terms used for administrative units in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods also indicate land grants to officers. The typical feudal idea that land or territory was meant for the enjoyment of those who held it or governed it first comes into full view in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, though it is mentioned for the first time in Asokan edicts. The terms *ahara* literally meant 'food for its holders', but was actually an administrative unit (equivalent to a modern district or subdivision) from the time of Asoka, and continued to be so in Gujarat and Maharashtra even during Gupta and post-Gupta times as is evident from the early Kalachuri inscriptions. At the same time, several other terms signifying enjoyment came to be used commonly for territorial divisions. They include such terms as *bhukti*, *bhoga*, and *vishaya*.

The feudalisation of state apparatus is also evident from the feudal connotation of administrative titles like *amatya*, *kumaramatya* and others. As far as the *amatyas* are concerned this was certainly the position in the time of Harsha, for at least at two places the *Harshacharita* speaks of those *amatyas* who were anointed as feudatories. The office of *kumaramatya* originally meant a person who was attached to the prince, but later it became an independent position without having anything to do with the prince. By the late Gupta and post-Gupta times it came to denote a feudal rank of honour conferred on high functionaries, including even a *maharaja*. Whether the title carried some fiscal or other privileges is not clear. But towards the end of the reign of the imperial Guptas we find the *kumaramatyamaharaja* Nandana making a land grant without the permission of the overlord, which suggests that by the middle of the sixth century ad the *kumaramatyas* had emerged as de facto lords of villages which they could give away.

#### **4.3.4.10. Position of the Peasantry**

There is no evidence to show that peasants in the donated villages had the same position in relation to Brahmin landlords as peasants to their lords in west European manorial villages. But in certain respects the Indian peasant was completely subservient to the benefactor. In many cases, because of the right of getting their land cultivated by others, the landlords could replace old peasants by new ones, thus ousting their tenants.

The Gupta grants from central and western India implicitly show that the peasants had to render *visti* or forced labour to their king or land holder while some land grants from the post-Gupta period make the landlord's right to forced labour quite explicit. A grant of the Valabhi ruler Dharasena I (A.D 575) confers on the recipient of a religious grant the right to impose forced labour if the occasion arose. Exactly the same concession is granted by Siladitya I in his charters of the seventh century, the technical term conveying the recipient's right to forced labour is frequently mentioned in the Valabhi grants and even in grants made by lesser chiefs such as the Sendraka chief Allasakti of Gujarat. It also occurs in the land charters of the Chalukyas of Badami.

Quite a few radical changes took place in the nature of the forced labour in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. The practice was extended to the western part of central India, Maharashtra and

parts of Karnataka, as indicated by the Vakataka, Rashtrakuta and Chalukya records. It assumed a wide magnitude in central India, where it came to be known by the term *sarva-visti*. The right to forced labour, formerly confined to the king alone, was now extended to recipients of religious grants and their descendants. Its scope too was widened and the various kinds of work done by means of *visti* are enumerated in the contemporary texts. All upon the peasants.

While the peasants reduced to a servile position, the free peasant lost status because of the imposition of several new taxes and levies. It seems that during the Gupta and post-Gupta times the villagers had to pay forced contributions of money or supplies to royal troops and officials when they halted or passed through the villages. Further they had to furnish cattle in relays for transport. They were also under the obligation of supplying flowers and milk to the royal officers on tour. These forced contribution which were not sent to the state treasury but were consumed locally by royal troops and officers tended to set them up as another class of intermediaries and thus further lower the position of peasantry. The incidence of forced contributions, coupled with forced labour, would not be felt much under the direct jurisdiction of the royal representatives who were mobile and not hereditary, vested interest in the exploitation of the resources of the village. Moreover, the judicial and administrative authority which the landholders enjoyed must have added to their economic power over the inhabitants of the village.

However, what mainly led to the servitude of peasants was their transfer to the beneficiaries. According to the inscriptions, the practice of transferring peasants began in south India. A Pallava grant of the fourth century A.D informs us that four share cropper remained attached to a plot of land which was given away to the Brahmins, which implies that original cultivators were required to work on the land even when it was made over to the beneficiary. Gradually the practice came to embrace peasants, who seem to have been given away to the beneficiaries in Karnataka. A grant of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D from Bijapur district issued by an early Chalukya king of Badami donate 25 *nivartana* of land along with all its produce, garden-cultivation, water and house (*nivessa*). Here the term *nivesae* is used not merely in the sense of a house but also of peasants living there, as is still done in popular parlance in the countryside. This conclusion is supported by a Ganga grant of the same century from the Ganjam district. It states that six *halas* of land (land that tivated by six ploughs) along with four cottage (*hatur-nivesana-sahita*) were constituted into an *agrahara* and granted free of taxes in perpetuity to god Narayana.

From south India the practice of the transfer of individual peasants probably spread to central India. A Vakataka grant of the fifth century AD speaks of the gift of four houses meant for the use of cultivators (*karsaka-anivesanani*), which implies the making over of cultivators to the beneficiary.

In Odisha the practice of transferring all the cultivators of the village to the beneficiary can be traced back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In western India, particularly Gujarat, the land grants of the post-Gupta period imply the transfer of peasants along with the soil. The earliest instance can be referred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D, when a Vallabhi ruler Dharasena II records the gift of plots of varying sizes held by five person, all of whom are mentioned by name in the grant. Probably along with the plots their holders also changed hands, otherwise there was no point in mentioning their name.

The above three example concern the gift of fields and not of villages. The earliest grant which unequivocally transfers the villagers to the grantee is that of a feudatory ruler called *maharaja* Samudrasena (7<sup>th</sup> century A.D). According to it, a village in the Kangra area is made over as a grant with its inhabitants (*saprativasijanasameta*).

The earliest epigraphic reference to the transfer of peasants to a monastery belongs to the seventh century AD. The Ashrafpur grants from East Bengal, as noted already in some other context, mention the persons who were in the enjoyment of a plot and the cultivators who were

tilling it. They indicate that while the plot was taken away from the enjoyers and given to the Buddhist monastery, the cultivators were left undisturbed, for the monastery would have to get its land cultivated by peasants.

Serfdom, that is, the practice of transferring peasants along with land to the beneficiaries, seems to have been a feature of the grant of those pieces of land which did not form part of organised villages but were held independently by peasant families having their habitation in isolated houses rather than in a cluster of dwellings. In these cases all the lands cultivated by the peasants lay around their houses. When these lands were donated, the peasants working on them had to be retained. Otherwise the beneficiaries would be put to great difficulties. Some of these peasants were probably ploughmen. It is, therefore, possible to think of two types of serfs- those who possibly served as ploughmen and those who served as tenants living in villages. The former (ploughmen attached to the land), may be equated with the full-fledged serfs, while the latter (tenants specifically transferred along with villages) may be treated as semi-serfs. For the latter did not have to work on the private farms of the beneficiaries, and could normally leave the village to seek means of subsistence elsewhere except under difficult economic situations. On the basis of several epigraphic records, we can make the following observations on serfdom in India which became fairly common by the middle of the eighth century AD. At first, it began in the peripheral areas and then gradually spread to the heart of the country in northern India. Secondly, it was organised in mountainous or backward regions which did not have too many peasants to run the local economy, but because of the powers it gave to the landholders over the peasants it later spread to developed areas. Thirdly, it began with the share-croppers and then covered peasants in general. Finally it began with plots of land and then came to embrace whole villages.

Rise of Sudra peasants is another important development of the Gupta and post-Gupta times. There is sufficient reason to believe that Sudras were also becoming peasants in good numbers, though the traditional view that Vaishyas were peasants recurs in the contemporary literature. Several law-books show that land was rented out to the Sudra for half the crop. This would suggest that the practice of granting land to Sudra sharecroppers was becoming more common. Narada includes the *kinasa* (peasant) among those who are not fit to be examined as witnesses. A commentator of the seventh century AD explains the term *kinasa* as a Sudra, which shows that peasants were thought of as Sudras. Besides, Brihaspati provides very severe corporal punishment for the Sudra who acts as a leader in boundary disputes relating to fields, which again suggests that such Sudras were owners of fields. Finally, Hiuen Tsang describes the Sudras as a class of agriculturists, a description which is confirmed by the *Narasimha Purana* compiled before the tenth century A.D. Thus, this significant development, which began from the Gupta period, covered all the Sudras by the first half of the seventh century AD. The view that the farmer population was largely composed of Sudras seems to be more true of the Gupta and post-Gupta times than of earlier periods. Thus, from the point of view of the rise of feudalism the transformation of Sudras from the position of slaves and hired labourers into that of agriculturists should be regarded as a factor of great significance.

#### **4.3.4.11. Results of Land Grants**

As a result of land grants and certain other factors there arose independent, self sufficient economic units. The beneficiaries of land grants enjoyed several economic rights which cut the economic ties between the central authority and the donated areas. For the continuity and development of their economy they were more dependent on the central government. The main idea behind tying down the peasants and artisans to the lands and villages they inhabited was to preserve the self-sufficient village economy.

Further, the conditions obtaining in the village which were independent of the beneficiaries of land grants and were placed under the charge of the village headman were not very dissimilar.

According to Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* the headman might compel peasant women not only to work in his fields but also to spin yarn so that his clothes might be supplied to him locally. Some of the commodities thus produced were also put on sale, apparently to cater to the simple needs of the villagers.

That such local units' were coming into existence is also evident from the paucity of coins of common use from the Gupta period onwards. This factor can be linked up, on the one hand, with the decline of internal trade and the consequent necessity of produce local commodities to meet local needs and, on the other, with the weakening of the power at the centre, which gradually adopted the method of paying officials by grants of revenue or in kind. It is indicative of the growing disuse of coins in Post-Gupta times that the religious endowment which were made in cash by the princes and individuals in the first two centuries of the Christian Era, were now replaced by grants of land. Further, in the post-Harsha period hardly any coin can be ascribed with certainty to any ruling house. Of course, legal texts refer to the use of coins, and inscriptions mentioned taxes levied in *hiranya*, and some inscriptions speak of the cost of construction and purchase in terms of money; but very few actual finds can be ascribed to this period. In fact, the absence of coins during the period A.D. 600-900 has been noted by several scholars. It is therefore evident that coins in general became rarer from the time of Harsha onward, which leads us to the conclusion that trade suffered a decline and urban life began to disappear.

It seems that in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. silk was as good an earner of bullion for India as spices in the first century A.D. The drainage of gold from the Roman Empire in 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. was stopped by means of a legislation, which, though supplemented by diplomacy, failed to check it (the drain) in the Byzantine empire. The solution was however, found in A.D. 551 by the introduction of silk worms brought into the Byzantine empire secretly over land from China. It might have taken another 50 years to get the art of rearing silk worms spread in Byzantium, and by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the problem of obtaining silk from the east may have been finally solved for the Byzantine empire. This adversely affected Indian foreign trade, which as far as north India is concerned was confined to silk. Evidently the stoppage of its export to the Byzantine empire drastically reduced whatever remained of the shrunken foreign commerce of north-western India in Gupta times. Hence, so long as some new articles did not take the place of silk, there was no means to restore the balance, and retrogression in foreign trade was inevitable. The decline of foreign trade may also have been caused by the expansion of the Arabs under banner of Islam. The agitated state of western Asia, Egypt and Eastern Europe, at least in initial stages of the Arab conquests, was bound to tell upon India's foreign trade with the countries lying to the west. Only when the Arabs had settled down as rulers in these countries and Sind, did trade revive from the third century of the hijra era (i.e. 9<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.). But meanwhile there was nothing to arrest its decline. Thus we have clear indications of the decline of the foreign trade of northwestern India from the end of the Gupta period, and specially from the first half of the seventh century A.D.

Whatever internal trade and commerce existed had to be fitted into the emerging feudal structure. This is evident from the detailed rules laid down in the law books regarding the functioning of the guilds of artisans and merchants. It is symptomatic of the declining central authority that the king is required not only to observe the laws of the guilds but also to enforce them. What actually prevailed can be inferred from three charters granted to the guilds of merchants by the rulers of the coastal areas of western India. The first charter was issued at the end of the sixth century A.D., while both the second and third charters were issued at the beginning of the eighth century A.D. by Bhagasakti, the Chalukya king of the Konkan area.

On the basis of these three charters, we can make the following comments about the condition of merchants and their guilds in the post-Gupta period. The charters were made to the merchants among whom a few were elevated to the position of managers of the endowment or the

town as the case might be. They tied down the merchants to the management of villages, which in one case were attached to a temple and in another to the rehabilitated town. The merchants enjoyed practically the same immunities and privileges as were enjoyed by priests and perhaps by some feudal barons in the villages granted to them. But since they were encumbered with the management of villages, they could not pay full attention to their trade and commerce. The charters, therefore, show the feudalisation of merchants by turning them into some kind of landed intermediaries. The activities of every guild were restricted to its locality so that it had no freedom of competition, a feature characteristic of the closed economy of Europe in the Middle Ages.

#### **4.3.5. Trade & Urban Centre**

One of the key arguments used for characterising our period as feudal has traditionally been the notion of commercial decline and deurbanisation. The historic towns and cities that had developed during the second phase of Indian urbanisation, between the sixth century B.C and the fourth century AD, appeared to have lost their vitality and importance from the Gupta period onwards. The principal reason for this was considered to be the drying up of the profitable Indian trade with Rome and the extreme dearth of coinage. Hiuen Tsang's observations of urban decay during his travels in the seventh century are generally cited as evidence of the increase in ruralisation.

More recent research casts doubt upon the validity of this theory of decay. It is no longer believed that the Roman trade was so fundamental to the well-being of the country that its disappearance led to an irreparable commercial decline. Commerce never really died out; it merely changed its orientation. As was referred to earlier, as well as in the previous chapter, the great appetite for Indian goods in the Islamic markets and the Arab mercantile role in satiating it meant that the traditional Indian exports did not cease. The Chinese market remained buoyant too. There was no shortage of coins because all payments continued to be made in gold and silver specie.

Since, at this time, agricultural production generally expanded as a result of the opening up of new lands, partly through land grants and the drafting in of the newly constituted peasant labour, there was ample surplus for external trade. The epigraphic information concerning the mercantile classes, market centres, interest rates, merchant associations and the rates of levies and cesses belies greatly the notion of commercial wane. Even if we accept that the volume of trade could not have declined in our period, and that its value might in fact have increased, the issue of urban decay cannot be easily ignored. Whatever little that archaeology has yielded us from the post-Gupta sites has indeed confirmed a marked decay in urban architecture, particularly in north India. The historic cities of the earlier second phase, having grown from an epicentre, were located in the older imperial territories. They were centres of political power or of Buddhist patronage, with deep hinterlands and situated along the main trade routes.

With the fading away of the imperial idea, the decline of Buddhism, the growing importance of the coastal areas and the opening up of new hinterlands in different regional kingdoms, it was inevitable that the older cities would suffer decay. But this decay was not a reflection of a malady affecting the very idea of urbanism in general; it really was confined to the historic cities, such as Pataliputra and Taxila; and it did not prevent a new phase of urbanisation in our period. In fact, it is this third phase of Indian urbanisation, along with the incorporation of subsequent Islamic notions of urbanism, that gave rise to the pre-modern towns and cities of the Indian sub-continent. The absence of archaeological confirmation is amply compensated by numerous regional inscriptional records. They point to a methodology that gives us fresh insights into the new phase of urbanism.

We discover that the hierarchy of settlements, as symbolised by such terms as grama, pura, nagara or mahanagara, did not change substantially; and the Indians of this period were perfectly aware of the differences in urban scale of, say, a pura settlement and a nagara. Secondly, the details specified in the charters of land grants give us a spatial context of the land that was being gifted:

whether it was a purely rural space or a mixed rural–urban one. In the case of the latter, it would include such features as a market exchange point, residential quarters or manufacturing units. If these predominated in a kingdom's land grants, then that would allow us to determine the scale of urbanism. Thirdly, the records tell us about the various types of exchanges and, indeed, guilds of merchants and craftsmen. The market exchange in north India was generally called a hatta, and in the south it was the nagaram. The presence of market exchanges implied an urban population density, and exchanges could meaningfully continue trade only in the context of urban centres. Both barter and money were in common use. Fairs too could only be held in some sort of urban centres, however small. Fourthly, the inscriptions give us copious information about places of pilgrimage and the temples. Our period is profuse with the northern- and southern-style regional temples; and royal patronages were continually creating new sacred spaces that drew in people from the hinterlands. People generally like to live near a great cathedral, a mosque or a temple, and so it was in this period too; the sacred spaces also represented the continuity of an older tradition of sacred towns from the very early centuries of the second phase of Indian urbanisation.

In conclusion, therefore, we can say that, although the older towns and cities declined, the newer ones always arose, and some of these were to become even more bustling and busy during the following six centuries of the Sultanate and Mogul eras.

#### **4.3.6. Conclusion**

The two and a half centuries of Indian history covered in this chapter were characterised by two crucial developments that led to profound consequences for the succeeding years of history. Firstly, India became increasingly regionalised. Between the mid-eighth century and the end of the tenth century we see the growth of a number of regional kingdoms, of which some demonstrated unique features of state formation. Secondly, the regionalised society became highly feudal. Feudalism would long remain a persistent factor in the shaping of Indian society and its mindset, although its characteristics would undergo much transformation in succeeding centuries. The political economy of the kingdoms was substantially feudal; and, despite various dissenting views among historians, the inscriptions provide strong evidence of the way feudalism linked the state and its economy.

#### **4.3.7. Summary**

- *Feudalism became an important feature of the political system of North India in the post Gupta period of Indian history.*
- *This was because the authority of the rulers had been limited in many ways. The ministers were appointed on the hereditary basis and became all powerful.*
- *There were numerous feudal chiefs who had ties with ruling class. In the local and central govt these feudal chiefs had special privileges and powers which no ruler could ignore. This also led to the limited authority of the kings.*
- *The rulers were under the obligation to rule according to holy Sastras and Smritis could not enact or amend the laws at will. Thus rulers of this period were basically feudal lords with limited overall power.*
- *The basis of the sovereignty during this period was a mixture of Divine Right theory and contract theory. On the one hand the authors of treaties on polity regarded the ruler as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. On the other hand they also held that it the people who conferred sovereignty on the ruler. So the natural duty of the ruler was to rule in the interests of the people while the duty of the people was to be loyal to him.*
- *A king was usually succeeded by his elder son. If a king dies without an heir the kingdom passed to the head of next in kin to the ruling dynasty. There was little scope for disputed succession in this period.*

- *The powers of the king were limited in practice due to privileges and prerogatives of the feudal lords. Since he had the theoretical ownership of all the lands, the feudal lords needed his recognition but then this prerogative of the kings was limited as the feudal lords had hereditary rights.*
- *The king was helped in the administration by a council of ministers besides crown prince. The chief priest and the court astrologer were recruited from Brahmin while all over posts were held by feudal lords. They usually belonged to Kshatriya caste. Sudras or lower caste had no place in the political set up of the king.*
- *Land grant, rise of self sufficient village economy hamper the trade and commerce of this period which in result led to urban decay in India during this period.*

#### **4.3.8. Exercises**

- To what extent is European model of feudalism relevant in the Indian context.
- Discuss the concept feudalism in Indian context.
- Give an account on the pattern of land grant in Post-Gupta India.
- Write an essay on the condition of trade and commerce in India on the eve of feudal setup.
- Assess the agrarian relation prevail during the early medieval India.

#### **4.3.9. Suggested Readings**

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**The End**