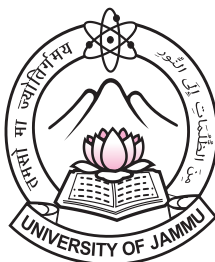


CENTRE FOR DISTANCE & ONLINE EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU
JAMMU



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL
SESSION 2026 ONWARDS
M. A. HISTORY

SEMESTER –I

Unit-I, II, III, IV
Lesson Nos 1-20
Credit : 6

COURSE NO. HIST 101

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COURSE CO-ORDINATOR

<http://www.distanceeducationju.in>

Printed and Published on behalf of the Centre for Distance & Online Education,
University of Jammu, Jammu by the Director, CDOE, University of Jammu, Jammu

Course Title: Understanding Early Indian History

Course no. HIST 101

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We duly acknowledge the reference books/web/internet sources from where the material has been taken for the academic benefit of the learner.

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Printed by: A-Won Printers August 2026 / 100 Books

December 2026, December 2027 and December 2028.

DETAILED SYLLABUS

COURSE NO. HIST101 - SEMESTER: FIRST

COURSE TITLE : UNDERSTANDING EARLY INDIAN HISTORY

Credit : 06

Maximum Marks: 100

(a) Major-Test Examination: 70

(b) Minor-I: 10

(c) Minor-II: 10

(c) IAA: 10

Duration of examination: 3.00 Hours.

Unit-I Reconstructing ancient Indian history

- I. The Indian subcontinent: landscapes and environments
- II. Sources and methods of historical reconstruction
- III. Historical interpretations: Change and Continuity
- IV. Understanding periodization in History

Unit-II Vedic Age:

- I. Geographical Context and social Order.
- II. Political Ideas and Institutions
- III. Pattern of subsistence
- IV. Religion systems and believes

Unit-III Material Culture and Social Formation (C600 B.C)

- I. Debate on the use of iron and its implication
- II. Process of second urbanization
- III. State formation: Monarchies and Gana-*Sanghas*
- IV. Rise of heterodox sects with special reference to Jainism and Buddhism

Unit-IV The Mauryas:

- I. Sources and the Origin of the Mauryas
- II. Asokan edicts and Dhamma of Asoka
- III. Administrative structures
- IV. Decline of the Mauryan Empire

SYLLABUS FOR THE EXAMINATION TO BE HELD IN THE YEARS
DECEMBER 2026, DECEMBER 2027 AND DECEMBER 2028.
DETAILED SYLLABUS COURSENO.HIST101

SEMESTER: FIRST

COURSE TITLE: UNDERSTANDING EARLY INDIAN HISTORY

NOTE FOR PAPER SETTING FOR MAJOR TEST

- The question paper will be divided into two sections i.e. Section-A and Section-B. It will contain short and long answer type questions.
- **Section-A**, This section will contain four short answer type questions (100 words per question) and will be compulsory. These short answer type questions will be from all the units. Each short answer type question will carry 2.5 marks. **2.5x4=10 marks**
- **Section-B**, There will be a total of eight long answer type questions (two questions from each unit with internal choice.) and the candidates will be required to answer one question from each unit. Each long answer type question will carry 15 marks. **4x15=60 marks.**

The students shall be continuously evaluated during the conduct of each course on the basis of their performance as follows:-

Theory	Syllabus to be covered in the examination	Time allotted for the examination	Weightage of marks
Minor Test-I	Unit-I and Unit-II	Sixty Minutes	10 marks
Minor Test-II	Unit-III and Unit-IV	Sixty Minutes	10 marks
IAA	Home assignment		10 marks (two questions of 5 marks each)
Major Test	Unit I-IV	Three hours	70 marks

PRESCRIBED READING:

1. D.D Kosambi: *An Introduction to the study of Indian History.*
2. Bridget and Raymond Allchin: *The Rise Civilization in India and Pakistan.*
3. G.L Possehl: *Harappan Civilization- A Contemporary Perspective.*
4. Romila Thappar: *Recent Perspective of Early Indian History.*
5. D.N Jha: *An Introductory outline of Ancient Indian History.*
6. B.N Puri : *History of Indian Administration V01.1-Ancient India.*

7. D.K Bhattacharya: *An outline of Indian Pre-History*.
8. Gordon Childe: *What happened In History*.
9. K.M Shrimali: *The Age of Iron and the religious revolution (700-C.35toB.C200)*.
10. R.S Sharma: *India's Ancient Past, Oxford, 2005*.
11. Irfan Habib & V .K Thakur :*The Vedic Age*.
12. Irfan Habib & V .Jha: *The Mauryan India*.
13. R.C Majumdar: *The Vedic Age;Th e Age of Imperial Unity*.
14. A.L Basham: *The Wonder that was India*.
15. R.S Sharma: *Origin of State inIndia*.
16. Romila Thappar:*From Lineage to State*.
17. George Eddosy: *Urbanization In Early Historic India*.
18. R.S Sharma: *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions inAncient India*.
19. Romila Thappar: *The Mauryan Indian*.
20. Romila Thappar: *Ashoka and decline of the Mauryas*.
21. Shreen Ratnagar: *End of Great Harappan Traditions*.

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RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

SEMESTER - I
COURSE NO. HIST 101

UNIT- I
LESSON 1

THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENTS

STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Different Names of Our Country
- 1.3 Landscapes and Environments
- 1.4 The Indian Ocean and the Monsoon
- 1.5 Let us sum up
- 1.6 Glossary
- 1.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.8 Lesson End Exercises
- 1.9 Answer Key
- 1.10 Suggested Readings

1.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine different names of our country
- discuss the diverse Landscapes and Environments of India
- explain the role of Indian Ocean and the Monsoon in the history of India

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the origin of different names of our country
- the geographical and environmental diversity in India
- the impact of Indian Ocean and the Monsoon on Indian society, economy and culture

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, as you know the Indian constitution uses the expression ‘India, that is Bharat’ for our country, which occupies the entire large landmass between the Himalayan Mountain range and Cape Comorin from north to south, and between Arunachal Pradesh and Rann of Kachch from east to west, excluding Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. The modern Indian geographical boundaries are generally taken for granted as existing from time immemorial. But it is noticeable that the nation-states of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had emerged only in recent past, and they were not present in pre-modern times. In a same way, ancient India was not politically as unified as present-day Indian nation-state. When we use the expression ancient or early India in this lesson, then it broadly refers to Indian Subcontinent or South Asia, and it is not used here in a sense of modern Indian nation-state. Students shall also keep in mind that ancient India even though had comprised present-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, but for a long period of its history several parts of the Northeast had remained outside of its social, political, and cultural purview.

1.2 DIFFERENT NAMES OF OUR COUNTRY

Our country today is known by several names, viz., India, Bharata and Hindustan, whose origin goes back to ancient times. In the Buddhist literature, Indian subcontinent is called Jambudvīpa (also known as Sudarsanadvīpa), literally meaning land of Jambu trees. The same expression, Jambudvīpa (‘the Rose-apple Island’) is employed by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (c. 273-232 BCE) for his empire in his Minor Rock Edict I. However, the name Jambudvīpa is no more in use for our country now. The expressions ‘India’ and ‘Hindustan,’ which are popular at present times for our country have been derived from the River Sindhu. In the Greek texts, Sindhu is called *Indos* and from *Indos* the name India evolved that was primarily employed for a region lying east of the Indus. The name ‘India,’ first appeared in the writings of a famous Greek historian, Herodotus (*circa* 5th century BCE), and after him, this name began to regularly appear in the writings of the Greek and the Roman scholars. For example, Megasthenes, who was an ambassador of the Greek king Seleucus Nikator in the court of Chandragupta Maurya (c. 324/21-297 BCE), wrote about his experiences in a book and named his book *Indica*. The name *Indica* here referred to the entire land east of River Indus. According to Megasthenes, India had a quadrilateral shape; it was surrounded by the great Sea in the east and the west, and by the great Himalayas (Mount Hemodos) on the north of it; River Indus is mentioned to have formed the western boundary of the country. Besides India, another name that is often used for our country is Hindustan, or the land of the Hindus. The expression Hindu too is derived from the River Indus (Sindhu). The term *Heptahindu* in the Iranian/Zoroastrian text *Avesta* is equivalent to *Sapta-Sindhu* (mentioned in the *Rigveda*) for the land, which was drained by seven rivers, and here the people known as Aryans first settled down in the mid-centuries of the 2nd millennium BCE. The Old Persian term *Hindsh*, derived from Sindhu, is recorded in the inscriptions of Achaemenid dynasty (c.

559-330 BCE) of Iran, and it refers to some parts of the North-western India. In the Persian inscription of Sasanian king Shahpur-I (reign 239-270 CE) the term *Hndstn* (read as Hindustan) refers to India's North-western region. In this way, from the Sanskrit term Sindhu has originated the Persian expressions, 'Hind' and 'Hindustan'. Furthermore, in Arab sources, *Al-Hind* is mentioned for the land beyond the Sindhu and the people living in this area came to be called Hindu. By the 14th century CE, the term Hindu was gradually applied to all those, who resided in *Al-Hind* but were not Muslims. As a result, entire population of non-Muslims came to be termed Hindus irrespective of their class, caste, and gender.

On the other hand, the name Bharatavarsha has been included in the Indian constitution along with the name India for our country, and it makes both India and Bharat synonymous and two officially accepted names of our country. The name Bharatavarsha (literally, the land inhabited by the Bharatas), and here the expression Bharata figures in two senses –first as a name of a Rigvedic tribe Bharata, and second, as a name of a king Bharata, who was a son of Shakuntala and Dushyanata. The name of Bharata tribe first appeared in the *Rigveda* (circa 1500-1000 BCE), in which the victory of chief Sudasa of Bharata tribe is described in a battle against a confederacy of nine kings. Sudasa defeated the confederacy of nine chiefs, which was formed against him, and in this way, he made the name of his tribe famous. Bharata is celebrated as a world conqueror, performer of Ashvamedha sacrifice, and also as a founder of Bharata lineage in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, and the *Mahabharata*. As it is evident from its very name, the *Mahabharata* is the grant story of the conflict among different descendants (e.g., Kauravas and Pandavas) of king Bharata. On the other hand, the Puranas too trace the origin of the name Bharatavarsha from the name of a fabled ruler Bharata; however, contrary to the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, and the *Mahabharata*, this king is mentioned to have been one of the several descendants of Manu Svāyambhuva. In the Jain stories, Rishabha is mentioned as the first king of mankind as well as the first Jain *Tirthankara*, whose son Bharata became a universal monarch (*chakravartin*) after conquering entire Indian subcontinent, and therefore, after this universal monarch, Indian Subcontinent was named Bharatavarsha. Despite of their differences, all the stories from Brahmanical and Jain literature suggest the wider popularity of the name Bharata for Indian Subcontinent in early India.

The *Vishnupurana*, a Sanskrit text dated to the mid-centuries of the 1st millennium CE, defines the boundaries of Bharatavarsha as between Himalayas in the north and the sea in the south. Here it is noticeable that the term *Bharatavarsha* was neither used for a politically and administratively unified Indian nation-state nor it referred to any particular religious-cultural group in the early Indian literature. Prior to the British crown, India (except the far South and parts of Northeast India) was politically unified twice, first time under the Mauryas and second time under the Mughals. Otherwise, during much of India's history different dynasties had ruled in different regions/sub-regions of the subcontinent at different times. Early Indians recognized the geographical and ecological diversity of India and accordingly, they conceptualized its different regions in the ancient Indian literature. The landmass of Bharatavarsha in the Brahmanical literature is usually divided into five major geographical divisions, which are 1) Middle country (*Madhyadesa*); 2) Northern India (*Udicya* or *Uttarapatha*); 3) Eastern India (*Pracya*); 4) Deccan or South India (*Dakshinapatha*) and 5) Western India (*Aparanta*). Sometimes, two more geographical divisions, viz., *Parvatasraya* or the Himalayan region and *Vindhyaprstha* or the Vindhya region,

are added to this five-fold division of Bharatavarsha in the Puranic literature.

On the other hand, the Buddhist Sanskrit literature mentions only three geographical divisions, which are *Madhyadesa*, *Uttarapatha* and *Dakshinapatha*, of India. In Southern India, the Sangam literature developed the *tinai* concept of geographical divisions of Tamilakam. The *tinai* refers to fivefold geographical divisions or landscape eco-systems – *Kurinci* (hilly backwoods), *Pallai* or *Palai* (arid zone), *Mullai* (pastoral zone), *Marutam* (wetland), and *Naital* (coastal zones) of the peninsular India. Despite of regional and ecological diversities, early India developed its distinctive cultural identity with the spread of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanism/Purnanic Hinduism in its different parts, and the movement of rulers, merchants, ritual specialists, monks/nuns and pilgrims had contributed in the formation of trans-regional cultural patterns in early India. Such cultural patterns, even though having regional and sub-regional flavours, had provided a distinct identity to the Indian landmass. The transregional identity of India, which is expressed by the expressions, Bharatavarsha, India and Hindustan, does not reject its regional diversity, rather it complements it and acts as a single reference point that subsumes the vast range of diverse, even conflicting, features of different localities, sub-regions and regions.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. Fill in the blanks:

- The expression _____ is employed by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka for his empire in his Minor Rock Edict I.
- _____ was a Greek ambassador of Seleucus Nikator in the court of Chandragupta Maurya.
- In the Greek texts, river _____ is called *Indos*, from which the name India is derived.
- The Sanskrit term *Aparanta* refers to _____

1.3 LANDSCAPES AND ENVIRONMENTS

Early civilizations in across the world had emerged in the river valleys, where both water and fertile land were available for cultivation, and it had made the production of surplus food possible to sustain large populations. It shows that landscapes and environments had played a key role in historical developments across the world, and same is true in the case of India, where river valleys of Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Godavari, Krishna and so forth had been the centre of habitation, cultural growth and political formations of diverse types throughout India's known history. Despite of its being broadly well-defined geographical landmass, Indian subcontinent is ecologically diverse and as a person moves from north to south India climate and landscape change enormously. Separated from the rest of Asia by the great Himalayan mountain range in north, Indian subcontinent has a shape of a triangle towards the south. In the east, it has Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea lays in the west of it. The subcontinent is known for greater climatic and ecological diversity ranging from alluvial plains to desert to humid tropical conditions to residual tropical forests to snowy mountain ranges to rocky hills and plateaux, to dry forest

and savannas type grasslands. The geographical differences due to various reasons had played an important role in the formation of cultural and linguistic differences between northern and southern India. These differences are still visible in various aspects of daily life.

India is divided into four major physical divisions. The first major physical division is Himalayas in the north. It protects India against the cold arctic winds blowing from Siberia through Central Asia and keeps its weather comparatively warm. It is a natural wall protecting the subcontinent from harsh climate. Though the Himalayas defended India from external invasions and extreme cold weather, it could be crossed via several natural passes. The mountain passes like Khyber, Bolan and Gomal in Hindukush, Sulaiman and Kirthar ranges facilitated the movement of people between India and Central Asia. Whether it was the Aryans, or the Shakas, the Kushanas, the Greeks, the Hunas, the Turks and the Mongols, they all entered the Indian subcontinent through these passes. From the point of view of India's history, the Northwestern frontier zone is most significant because here the rich cultural and political worlds of Iran and central Asia met the world of India, and it facilitated multifaceted interactions among the people of diverse socio-cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The total area of Himalaya mountain range is about five-lakh square km. It has some of the highest mountains going up to a height more than 8,000 metres, of the world. It is also a source of some of the mightiest and perennial rivers, viz., the Indus, the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Brahmaputra, of the Indian subcontinent.

The three of India's biggest rivers form the second major physical division: the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. These rivers are known for the vast alluvial plains built over a long span of time. These rivers along with others, originating in the Himalayas, deposit a thick and vast sheet of alluvial soil across the plains through which they flow before merging into the sea. There are two types of alluvial soil: *bhangar* or *bangar* (old alluvial soil) and *khadar* or Kadar (new alluvial soil). Indus valley, which witnessed the first urbanization and extensive trade, the Ganga valley, with its fertile alluvial soil and easy availability of irrigation facilities was the centre of the second urbanization. The Indus along with its five tributaries, viz., the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej, drains a vast geographical zone of the Pakistan and Punjab-Haryana in India. The drainage system of Ghaggar-Hakra, which is now dried-up, is located to the east of River Sutlej, and geological studies show that this now dried-up drainage system used to join the River Indus before falling collectively into the Rann of Kutch in ancient past. In the land drained by the Indus and its tributaries, the Aryan tribes first settled down after migrating from central Asia sometime in the course of the second millennium BCE. This region in *Rigveda* (composed in *circa* 1500-1000 BCE) is mentioned as Sapta-Saindhava (meaning the land of seven rivers).

In subsequent period (i.e., later Vedic period), several tribes of the Aryans moved eastward and settled down in Yamuna-Ganga *doab* region, and gradually, the River Ganga gained the status of a sacred river. In addition to Yamuna, Ghaghra (Sarayu), Gandak, Kosi and Son are other tributaries of the Ganga. The fertile alluvial plains of the Ganga and its tributaries are the most densely populated part of today's India; the western parts of it are known as the *doab* (land between the Ganga and Yamuna), and the middle part of the Ganga plains are roughly occupied by the state of Bihar and the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh. On the other hand, the eastern part of it comprises the delta of the Ganga and Brahmaputra, where are located the states of West Bengal, Assam and

Bangladesh. The Ganga and its tributaries are navigable in certain regions and therefore, were an important system of transportation in ancient times. Tamruk or Tamralipti was an important seaport situated on the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta with an opening in the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra that originates in the Tibetan plateau is called the Tsangpo in Tibet and it enters near Sadiya the Indian territory as Dihong. In India, Lohita River joins it and then it came to be known as Brahmaputra. In Bangladesh, Brahmaputra meets Padma, which is one of the two channels of Ganga. South of the Rajmahal hills, the Ganga bifurcates into two channels, which are Bhagirathi-Hoogly and Padma that flow almost parallel southwards.

The third division of Indian subcontinent is peninsular plateau, which roughly appears as a great triangle. Alluvial plains enclose it on the north and southeast. Similarly, the coastal plains of varying width are located on the southwest of it, and the Eastern and Western Ghats surround it in the east and the west respectively. Northern boundary of it is the Vindhya range of central India, which separates the north India from the Deccan. The Vindhya range is situated almost parallel in east-west direction to the Narmada valley covering a distance of more than twelve hundred km. As a result, Malwa region becomes a gateway to south in the west, and Bengal and Odisha region provides a path leading to Deccan and far south, in the east. The Vindhya mountain range in this way separates the Ganga river system from that of peninsular India. Like the Ganga valley in the north, the fertile river valleys of Krishna, Godavari and Kaveri of peninsular India witnessed the dense population settlements. The fourth and last physical division comprises the Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats. The Western Ghats are laying in north-south direction along the western coastline of India from Tapti valley to almost up to the Kanyakumari in south. The Sopara, Broach and Muziris were three of the important sea ports on the western coast of early India. These ports were linked to several of inland trading and political centres. An Ashokan inscription is found from a nearby region of Sopara. The perennial rivers, i.e., the Narmada and Tapti, flowing east to west direction across the central Indian plateau, fall in the Arabian Sea. Several passes like Bhorghat, Thalghat, etc., provide a passage from mainland to western coast. The Eastern Ghats also are situated parallel to eastern coastline from north to south direction. It comprises a series of hills broken at several places. The east coast comprises a deltaic coastal plain created by the three major rivers of peninsular India, which are Mahanadi, Krishna-Godavari, and Kaveri (Cauvery). Sisupalgarh in Mahanadi delta, Amravati and Nagarjunakonda in Godavari delta and Kaveripattanam and Uraiyur in Kaveri delta were the important urban centres of early India.

1.4 THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE MONSOON

The subcontinent of India (along with Sri Lanka) is situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean, where the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal are situated along its western and eastern coastlines respectively. India's eastern and western coastlines meet at Kanyakumari, which is the southernmost tip of the Indian Subcontinent, and it gives a typical triangular shape to our country. In a way, the Indian Ocean appears as the sea-face of Asia and to the south of Kanyakumari, it stretches southwards to the Antarctica. From the Indus delta to Kanyakumari, the west coastline of India comprises the Indus delta and the lower Indus valley, the Gujarat, the Konkan, the Kanara and the Malabar coasts. On the other side, the eastern coastline comprises the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta, the Odisha-Andhra coast, and the Coromandel coast. River Indus and Narmada form deltas on the western

coastline, and the river Ganga, Mahanadi, Godavari-Krishna, Kaveri and Vaigai-Tamraparni form deltas on the eastern coastline of India. While the western coastline has numerous creeks, inlets and backwaters suitable for the establishment of natural ports, the eastern coastline is studded with deltas consisting of rich agrarian tracts and fluvial networks. These fluvial networks have historically sustained networks of inland interactions and outlet to the sea. The eastern and western coastline of India are one of the several segments (the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and Southeast Asia) of the Indian Ocean extending from Eastern coastline of Africa to Australia, and historically these segments had been connected to each-others by maritime routes in ancient times.

One system that had tremendously impacted the maritime trade in Indian Ocean and the agrarian production in the Indian Subcontinent was the regime of the monsoon winds. In the Greco-Roman texts, the expression Hippalus Wind is used for the southwestern monsoon wind system (June to September), which had greatly benefitted the ship voyages from the Red Sea to the ports on the west coast of early India. Monsoon forms one of the important characteristics of Indian subcontinent and it had played a crucial role in determining the patterns of agriculture as well as of natural vegetation here. Since the irrigation facilities were not much in use in ancient India people depended upon the Monsoon rains for it. The *kharif* crop in north India depended upon the south-west monsoon while the *rabi* crop received rain from the western disturbances in winter. The northeast monsoon brought rain to most of the peninsular India particularly the coastal region of Tamil Nadu. The long seacoast surrounding India from three sides had numerous seaports and harbours. These ports and harbours connected the subcontinent to Africa and Mediterranean region on the west and to Southeast Asia as far as China in east. In the summer month, Southwest monsoon winds blow from the Indian Ocean to the Indian Subcontinent and cause heavy rains, and the pattern of winds reverses in the winter months, when northeast monsoon winds blow from the Indian Subcontinent to the Indian Ocean. The northeast monsoon winds had historically facilitated the ships voyage from the eastern coastline of India to Sri Lanka and to Southeast Asia across the Bay of Bengal between the months of October/November and February. The return journey was made possible by the southwest monsoon winds between the months of May/June and September. On the other hand, ships could sail from the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and the East African coastline to the ports on the western coastline of India and Sri Lanka between the months of November and April.

Early Indians actively participated in the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean, and this is evident from a recent discovery of about 193 epigraphs of the Indian travellers at the Hoq cave on the Socotra Island at the entrance of the Red Sea. Majority of the epigraphs simply record personal names of visitors. Majority of these epigraphs of Indian travellers are written in the Brahmi script, and these are dated between 1st/2nd century and 4th/5th century CE. From these epigraphs, it appears that most of the Indian travellers had come from either Bharukaccha (Broach/Barygaza) or Hastakavapra (Hathab near Bhavnagar) in Gujarat to Socotra Island. While majority of these Brahmi epigraphs are in Sanskrit with few Prakrit features, the language of about 21 epigraphs from Hoq cave has been identified as Prakrit. Names of several Indian visitors of Socotra Island end with the suffix, Sharman or Sharma, which suggest their brahmin identity, and from this it appears that brahmins too were present at Socotra Island in the early centuries CE. Contrary to the Dharmashastras that prohibit sea voyage, brahmins

in early India did travel distant lands and undertook journeys across the Indian Ocean. It shows that the Dharmashastric norms were not insurmountable in early India. Buddhist literature, particularly the Jataka tales, use the expressions, viz., Suvarnadvipa or Suvarnabhumi (land of gold) for Southeast Asia, and ships are mentioned to have sailed from Varanasi in the Ganga valley and Bhargukachchha (Broach in Gujarat) to Southeast Asia. Noticeably, the boats that Indians used in the Indian Ocean for maritime activities were of distinctive type, and the planks that were used for building Indian boats were not held together with nails; rather, these planks were stitched together with coir rope. Available evidence clearly shows that the way mountain passes in the Hindukush, Sulaiman and Kirthar ranges had facilitated the movement of people from West and Central Asia, in a same manner maritime routes across the Indian Ocean had facilitated the arrival of traders, artisans and pilgrims from foreign lands to early India. Therefore, the Indian Ocean appears to have acted as a bridge – and not as a barrier – between India and various other countries around it in India's ancient past.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. Write a note on the Himalaya mountain range.

Q. 2. Mention the names of five tributaries of the Indus River.

Q. 3. Write a note on the Western Ghats.

Q. 4. Write a short note on India's coastlines.

Q. 5. Discuss the impacts of monsoon on India.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

Our country is vast and known for its geographical, environmental and cultural diversity, which makes it distinct from other countries of Asia. Snowy mountains of the Himalayas, the Thar desert, the Deccan plateau, the Eastern and Western Ghats, the alluvial plains of the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers, and the long coastline in the west and east have historically constituted the background of diverse cultural, economic, and political developments in early India. Our country's geographical and environmental diversity corresponds well to the diversity of Indian culture, religions, food habits, dressing styles, and social practices. The names, viz., India, Hindustan and Bharatavarsha of the Indian Subcontinent, had evolved from the Greek, the Persian and the Indic cultural backgrounds in ancient times, and from these India and Bharata have been adopted in the Indian constitution as two official names of our country. These names do not reject our country's regional diversity, instead they complement it and act as a single reference point that subsumes within its fold the vast range of diverse, even conflicting, features of different regions of Indian subcontinent.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Jambudvipa – the land of Jambu trees, or the Rose-apple Island

Sapta-Sindhu - the land of seven rivers

Bharatavarsha - the land of Bharatas

Parvatasraya - the Himalayan region

Vindhyaprstha - the Vindhya region

Tamilakam – the Land of the Tamils

1.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Why our country is called Bharatavarsha?
- Q. 2. Discuss the origin of the name 'India' of our country.
- Q. 3. Comment on the environmental diversity in our country.
- Q. 4. Discuss the importance of monsoon rains.
- Q. 5. Highlight the key features of India's geography.

1.8 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Comment on the origin of the expressions, Hind and Hindustan.
- Q. 2. Write a brief note on the *tinai* concept.
- Q. 3. Mention the names of any four ports of ancient India.

Q. 4. Write a note on the four major physical divisions of India.

Q. 5. Discuss the origin of the term 'Bharatavarsha'.

1.9 ANSWER KEYS

CYPI

I. Fill in the blanks:

- a) Jambudvipa
- b) Megasthenes
- c) Indus
- d) Western India

CYPII

Q. 1. See Section 1.3.

Q. 2. See Section 1.3.

Q. 3. See Section 1.3.

Q. 4. See Section 1.4.

Q. 5. See Section 1.4.

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

- B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Concept of Bharatavarsha and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, 2017.
- F.R. Allchin, ed. *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and State*. Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 10-25.
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RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

SEMESTER - I

COURSE NO. HIST 101

UNIT- I

LESSON 2

SOURCES AND METHODS OF HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

STRUCTURE

2.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Archaeological Sources

2.3 Numismatic Sources

2.4 Epigraphic Sources

2.5 Literary Sources

2.5.1 *Brahmanical Literature*

2.5.2 *Buddhist and Jain Literature*

2.5.3 *Secular Literature*

2.6 Let us sum up

2.7 Glossary

2.8 Examination Oriented Questions

2.9 Lesson End Exercises

2.10 Answer Key

2.11 Suggested Readings

2.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine the sources for the reconstruction of India's ancient history

- discuss the diverse types of sources and methods of historical reconstruction
- explain the nature of archaeological and literary sources

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the different types of archaeological sources
- the different types of literary sources
- the importance of archaeological and literary sources in historical studies

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, What is History? This is the question that first appears in our mind when we talk about India's ancient past. Our present life is a result of diverse types of past human developments in the field of society, economy, politics and technology, and the actions of human beings in present times are going to shape our future existence on planet earth. But no one can go into the past to study it. The entire past cannot be recreated and much of it is now lost and survives in the form of memories, practices, literature and material remains. Memories and practices are short lived and are useful only for writing the history of recent past. Therefore, they are not useful for the study of India's ancient past. A historian uses a variety of textual and archaeological sources to reconstruct India's past, and then this reconstructed past of our country is made available for reading to wider populations in a narrative format (for example, history textbooks). Since sources do not speak themselves, it is the task of a historian to critically analyse, interpret and organize the relevant evidence to write the history of India's ancient past. Unlike modern times, early Indian did not use printing and paper for writing their texts; instead, they had used palm leaves, the bark of the birch tree and copper plates for writing, and their writings are also found written on rocks, stone or metal pillars, terracotta tablets. For the study of a period prior to the invention of writing, a historian relies on the study of artefacts (e.g., their weapons, ceramics and tools, etc.), which have been left behind by people of that time. We can study the remnants of the past that are available in the form of textual and archaeological material and develop our knowledge of human past. History, therefore, is an unending and a continuous dialogue between the present and the past.

2.2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

Students shall remember that archaeology is the study of human past through a critical analysis of diverse types of artefacts including remains of monuments, tools, jewellery, pottery, bones, food and so forth, which are either discovered in surface surveys or in archaeological excavations. Early Indians had left behind diverse types of material remains, and historians use these past remains to learn about ancient Indian people and their societies. Early Indians had used diverse types of artefacts (tools, weapons, utensils, etc) in their day to day lives; they built variety of structures including houses, forts, embankments, shrines, etc., for their different needs. Several of these artefacts and structures have either completely or partially survived till now, and a historian studies the remains of these artefacts and structures to reconstruct a historical image of ancient India for students, researchers and

general public.

A historian studies the remains of dwellings, palaces, workshops, shrines, and granaries of ancient times to understand the nature of ancient settlements. A settlement with a fort, a palace and a market place is usually identified as an urban centre and likewise, remains of shrines (temples, monasteries) of ancient times allow a historian to understand the nature of religious practices, beliefs and rituals of early Indians. We know that the Harappan script is not deciphered yet; therefore, the entire history of the Harappan urbanization, economy, society, culture and technology is written on the basis of archaeological evidence. The traces of fortification walls, broad roads in Harappan cities, great bath at Mohenjodaro, granaries at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, and remains of a dockyard at Lothal are some of the major archaeological discoveries that have helped historians in the study the urban character of the Harappan civilization. As we know, the layout of a city is different from a village, and therefore, when some or all the major characteristics of cities (e.g., roads, workshops, drains, palaces and fortification walls) are unearthed of a settlement, then that settlement can be identified as a city. Following the same approach, historians have identified the presence of several cities, for instance, Ropar, Ujjain, Pataliputra, Indraprastha, Mathura, and Takshila and several others in ancient India. Sacred buildings of different types (e.g., stupas, temples, monasteries) exhibit their different religious affiliations. The remains of religious structures are studied by historians to understand the architectural styles and building techniques in early India. A historian studies changes, continuities and new innovations in science and technology by undertaking a comparative analysis of architectural styles, and tool making of different periods. A comparative study of the temples that are located in different parts of India has helped historians in writing the history of Nagara, Dravida and Vesara types of religious architecture.

Early human beings lived in natural caves in the Palaeolithic Age, and they had left their rock-paintings on the walls of the natural caves that are found, for instance, in central India (e.g., Bhimbetaka). Contrary to these, the rock-cut caves were constructed by rulers and other resourceful persons for different religious communities in the historical period, and the remains of these rock-cut caves are found in Barabar and Nagarjuni hills (in Bihar) and Western Ghats (Karle, Bhanja, Nasik, Kanheri, Junar, Udaigiri and several other places). The Buddhist paintings in Ajanta caves are world famous for their aesthetics and charm, and these were made in a period from about first century BCE to sixth century CE under the Satavahana and the Vakataka kings. Although stone sculptures, for instance, Priest King were made in the Harappan period, but early Indians started to produce stone sculptures under the royal patronage of the Mauryan kings and the sculptural art acquired a regional character with the appearance of Gandhara, Mathura and Amravati as three contemporary key centres of sculptural art in the early centuries CE. Based on his analysis of a sculpture from early India, a historian can identify its religious and regional affiliation, date and artistic style. The study of sculptural art is important because it helps a historian to understand better the developments in the art and architecture as well as in the social and religious beliefs in the Indian society.

A variety of pottery types were used by early Indians in their day-to-day activities, such as storing, cooking and transportation of goods. Several types of pottery including the Red Ware and the Northern Black Pottery Ware

(NBPW) were produced in early India, and out of these, the remains of NBPW are discovered in the excavation of ancient cities. Therefore, the NBPW is identified by historians as a pottery type that was associated with the second urbanization in the Ganga valley. Along with pottery, diverse types of implements, craft products, ornaments, and weapons are unearthed by archaeologists, who use these for the study of craft specialization and technology as well as the nature of trade and industries in early India.

2.3 NUMISMATIC SOURCES

Although coins and inscriptions are broadly included in the category of archaeological evidence, they both are subjects of specialized study and require technical expertise. The coinage that was associated with different dynasties and had been in circulation in different parts of ancient India constitutes the numismatic evidence, which are useful for writing economic history of early India. Early Indians used different types of metallic currencies as a medium of exchange for purchasing goods in market. Coins were issued by legitimate authorities including kings, guilds, and cities in early India for market transactions, and the authenticity of coins depended on their prefixed size, shape, metal content, and weight standard. The coins tended to carry specific marks of authentication such as certain figures, emblems, legends and dates on its surface. Numismatic evidence is useful for writing dynastic histories because they often carried names and dates of rulers belonging to different ruling houses. However, the earliest coins that were issued in India from the 5th century BCE onwards, did not carry image of rulers and their names and dates, rather they simply carried certain punch-marked symbols, and therefore, they were known as the punch-marked coins (*panas* or *karshapanas*). Metal sheets of silver, bronze and copper were cut into small pieces (each of 32 *ratas*, or 57.6 grains weight), and each piece was punched with certain symbols for authentication; in this way, punch-marked coins were minted in early India. The production of punch-marked coins was discontinued by the late centuries BCE, when the Indo-Greek rulers introduced mould-casting or die-striking technique for the production of their coins in early India. The mould-casting technique made possible the production of coins with images of kings, their names as well as dates and images of their revered divinities. The mould-casting technique remained in use under the Shaka, the Kushana and the Gupta rulers for the production of their gold, silver and copper coins.

2.4 EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

The nature of epigraphic sources is different from numismatic evidence, and an inscription refers to any writing that is found engraved on varieties of material, for example, stone, wood, metal, bronze statues, bricks, clay, shells, pottery, etc. The texts of inscriptions are deciphered and then the information that they contain is analysed for historical reconstructions. Epigraphy also includes palaeography, which is primarily a study of ancient writing. The Mauryan king Ashoka issued the earliest inscriptions in ancient India and these are found written on stone pillars and rock surfaces in India (Brahmi script), Pakistan (Kharoshthi script), and Afghanistan (Greek and Aramaic script). These inscriptions are used by historians to understand the life, activities and philosophy of king Ashoka. Alongside rulers, merchants, artisans, monks and nuns are known to have issued inscriptions in the centuries following the fall of the Mauryan Empire, and majority of these inscriptions are found at Buddhist sites in central India and western Deccan. A historian uses the inscriptions of different royal dynasties of early India to

write political, economic and social history. We learn about dynastic genealogies (e.g., the Guptas, the Vakatakas, the Chalukayas, the Pallavas, and the Cholas, etc.) from inscriptions, which also throw valuable light on the military achievements of different rulers, their religious beliefs as well as donative acts. Besides kings, ministers, queens, professional guilds, and individual traders had issued inscriptions for diverse purposes in early India. A majority of inscriptions were written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil in early India, and a historian learn from these inscriptions about their issuing authority, purpose, act of writing and also their date. Despite of their being a valuable source of India's history, scholars have identified several limitations of epigraphic evidence. Confusion is caused when kings of same name are mentioned in multiple inscriptions. Or, when a name of a king is omitted from the genealogy section of an epigraph, then it causes confusion. For example, Ramagupta, whose name is not included in the genealogy section of the Gupta inscriptions, is known from the numismatic evidence and inscriptions on Jain images of Tirthankaras from Central India as a member of the ruling house. It is the responsibility of a historian to understand the limitations of epigraphic evidence, while using these for writing the history of ancient India.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. What is Archaeology?

Q. 2. Write a brief note on *karshapanas*.

Q. 3. Comment on the scripts used by Ashoka in his edicts?

2.5 LITERARY SOURCES

Early Indians had produced a vast corpus of literature in diverse languages (e.g., Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Tamil) and in Brahmi script or its regional variants, which makes the study of literary sources a highly specialized skill requiring appropriate training, regular practice and coherent approach. In addition to literature in Indian languages, writings of foreign travellers in Greek, Latin, Chinese, Arabic and Persian languages are used by historians for writing the history of early India. We not only learn about early Indian society, culture, polity and economy from the literary sources, but also sometimes about their writers, patrons, and readers. Since the ancient texts were

written by different writers at different times and for different purposes, they exhibit a variation in their nature, orientation, agendas, and authors' attitude towards their contemporary surroundings. For example, the nature and orientation of religious literature was different from the nature and orientation of secular literature comprising plays, grammars, stories, medical treatises, and foreign travel accounts. The Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain literature exhibit explicit contrast in its outlook towards human existence, social beliefs and religious practices. A historian critically analyses the religious literature to ascertain its authorship, temporal and spatial contexts, and its wider philosophical outlook before using it for the study of India's ancient past.

2.5.1 Brahmanical Literature

In the Brahmanical tradition, *shruti* (meaning heard) and *smriti* (meaning remembered) are conceptualized two distinct categories of literature. The four Vedas whereas belong to *shruti* category, the Puranas, the Hindu epics and the Dharmashastras are considered *smriti* texts. Vedas are believed to contain an eternal truth, which was revealed to learned seers by the gods. These seers then preserved the Vedic knowledge and passed it to following generations. Having derived from the root 'vid' (i.e., 'to know'), the term Veda implies knowledge or wisdom. The four Vedas are known as Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva and had been composed in a period from 1500 to 600 BCE. Yaska composed the *Nirukta* in the 6th century BCE, and it deals with the etymology of the terms in the *Rigveda*. The texts known as Brahmanas (shall not be confused with brahmin caste) discuss the origin and meaning of diverse Vedic hymns. The Aranyakas refers to the forest books, which elucidate the symbolic and philosophical essence of sacrificial ceremonies. On the other hand, the Upanishads mainly deal with the philosophical concepts pertaining to sacrifices, the universe, the body, and particularly, the ideas of *Atman* and *Brahmana*.

The supplementary compositions that are known as *Vedangas* ('limbs of Vedas') and had been developed between circa 600 and 200 BCE for helping the priests in the proper use and understanding of the four Vedas, include texts on phonetics (*siksha*), ceremonies (*kalpa*), grammar (*vyakarana*), etymology (*nirukta*), metre (*chhanda*), and astronomy (*jyotisha*). In early India, a distinct concept of legal codes was theorized, according to which, certain natural law governs the entire universe and the ethical laws of human society should be in agreement with the natural law. The Sanskrit term Dharma (from the root *dhri*, implying to maintain, or support, or sustain) referred to norms that were supposed to be followed by a person living in society to live an ideal and proper life. Four goals, viz., Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, of an individual were conceived as the Purusharthas, and the *Dharmasutras* (c. 600-200 BCE) and *Dharmashastras* or *Smritis* (c. 200 BCE- CE 900) were composed to lay down norms for the functioning of individuals as well as society. Apastamba, Baudhayana, Gautama and Vasishtha are four Dharmasutras, and in the category of Dharmashastras are included texts (*smritis*) of Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Katyayana and Brihaspati. The *Dharmasutras* and the *Dharmashastras* consider Vedas, *Smriti* texts and customs or practices of good people as the legitimate source of Dharma. The Vedic and Dharma literature are useful for a historian interested in the history of political philosophy, religious ideas, and social institutions in early India.

The study of the popular epics, the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa (c. 400 BCE-CE 400) and the *Ramayana* of Valmiki (c.5/400 BCE- CE 300), throws a valuable light on political ideas, gender roles, family ties, cultural conflicts, religious differences, and social hierarchies in early India. The *Mahabharata* whereas revolves around a conflict for throne between Kauravas and Pandavas of Hastinapura, the *Ramayana* focuses on the royal family of Ayodhya (king Dasharatha and his sons Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughana). In the *Mahabharata*, a fierce war resolved the succession struggle between Kauravas and the Pandavas, but the succession struggle was amicably resolved in the *Ramayana*, when Bharata accepted his elder brother Rama's right on the throne of Ayodhya. The Puranas (literally meaning 'old') constitute a distinct category of Brahmanical literature, and it is encyclopaedic in nature. The Puranic literature is useful for the study of a variety of topics like theism, folk beliefs, philosophy, astronomy, dynastic genealogies, Hindu mythologies, geography, legal ideas, pilgrimage, and so forth. Among the 18 major Puranas are included *Matsya*, *Vishnu*, *Markandeya*, *Bhagavata*, *Brahmanda*, *Bhavisya*, *Agni*, *Narada*, *Garuda*, *Padma*, *Varaha*, *Kurma*, *Linga*, *Shiva*, *Skanda*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Vamana* and *Brahma*. For historians, the section on dynastic genealogies in the Puranas is particularly important because it contains details of several dynasties, such as, the Nanda, the Maurya, and the Gupta of Pataliputra, the Satavahana of Deccan, and the Indo-Greek, Shakas, and Kushana of non-indigenous backgrounds.

2.5.2 Buddhist and Jain Literature

The Brahmanical literature is mainly composed in Sanskrit language, and the language of the canonical literature of the Buddhists is Pali. The Tripitaka (literally, 'The Three baskets'; dated between c. 500 – 300 BCE) constitutes the core of the Buddhist canonical literature, which contains norms for the day-to-day activities of Buddhist monks, nuns and lay-followers. The *Vinaya*, the *Sutta* and the *Abhidhamma* are three Buddhist Pitakas. The *Vinaya* whereas prescribes norms for monks and nuns, the *Sutta* deals with Buddha's teachings, and the *Abhidhamma* focuses on the philosophical discourse. Five Nikayas (Digha, Majjhima, Samyutta, Anguttara, and Khuddaka) are part of the Sutta Pitaka, and the Jataka tales on the past births of Buddha are contained in the Khuddaka Nikaya, which also contains the poems of monks (*theragatha*) and nuns (*therigatha*) and the Dhammapada (a collection of verses). In the category of non-canonical literature are included the *Milindapanha* (c. 100 BCE), which is a text based on a conversation between the Indo-Greek king Menander (Milinda) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena, on philosophical themes. Likewise, the *Mahavamsa* (c. 500 CE) and the *Dipavamsa* (c. 4/500 CE) deal with a mythological-cum-historical account of Buddha's biography, the three Buddhist assemblies, the Mauryan king Ashoka, the rulers of Sri Lanka and the arrival of Buddhism on the island. The *Buddhacarita* of Asvaghosa (c. 200 CE) and the *Lalitavistara* (c. 100-200 CE) are biographies of Buddha, which are useful for a historian interested in the life, ideas, and activities of Gautama Buddha. On the other hand, the Jatakas are valuable source for a historian, who is interested in study of ancient Indian society, culture, and economy.

The Jains have produced a voluminous literary corpus, and the earliest Jain texts were written in Prakrit language (Ardha-Magadhi) that was spoken in eastern India in ancient times. The sacred Jain texts are collectively called the Siddhanta or Agama. The Jain community was divided into Shvetambara and Digambara by the 3rd century CE and the Shvetambara canon comprised texts called Angas, Upangas, Prakirnas, Cheda Sutras, Mula Sutras

and several others. It is believed that the Shvetambara canon was compiled at Valabhi (in Gujarat) in the 5th/6th century CE. The study of Jain canon is useful for a historian, who is interested in the history of Jain community, its religious practices, conduct of Jain monks and nuns, and the Jain philosophy. In addition to canonical literature, the Jain literature comprises stories of Jain renouncers and adventurous traders, several epics, and the Puranas (or *Charitas*). The *Paumacaria* (circa 400 CE) is a Jain version of the *Ramayana*, and in the same way, the Jain Puranas (e.g., the *Padma*, *Maha* and *Harivamsa*) are written with a focus on the lives of Jain Tirthankaras (literally, ‘ford makers’). The Purana named *Harivamsa* (circa 800 CE) narrates the story of Pandavas, Kauravas, Krishna, and Balarama from Jain perspective, and thereby, creates a Jain version of the *Mahabharata*. The adventurous tales of traders, princes and kings constitute the main story lines in the texts like *Vasudevahindi* (circa 600 CE), the *Samaraicchakaha* (circa 800 CE), and the *Kuvalayamala* (circa 800 CE) of the Jains, and these adventurous tales are valuable source of information about ancient Indian society, culture and economy.

2.5.3 Secular Literature

In the category of the secular literature are included the texts on grammar (e.g., *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini, *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali, and *Varttikas* of Katyayana), Sanskrit lexicon (*Amarkosha* of Amarasimha), theatre (*Natyasastra* of Bharata), lives of urban elites (*Kamasutra* of Vatsayayana), plays of Kalidasa, Sudraka, Dandin, Vishakhadatta and several others. The biographies of Harshvardhana of Thanesar and Kanauj (*Harshcharita* by Banabhatta, c. 700 CE), Yashovarman of Kanauj (*Gaudavaha* of Vakpati, c. 800 CE), and Chalukaya kings, particularly, Vikramaditya-VI (*Vikramankadeva-charita* by Bilhana, c. 1200 CE) are useful for writing dynastic histories. Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* and the *Kamandakiya Nitisara* are useful for the study of political economy and philosophy of statecraft. On the other hand, Varahamihira’s *Brihatsamhita* (circa 600 CE) is used by a historian for learning about astrology and astronomy in addition to north Indian culture, economy and society of the Gupta period. The text named *Krisiparasara* throws light on agricultural practices and techniques. Historians learn about the interactions between early Indians and different communities of West, Central and Southeast Asia as well as Europe and Africa from the writings of the foreign travellers (for example, Megasthenes, Faxian, Xuanzang) of India.

The Greek ambassador of Seleucus Nikator, named Megasthenes had provided in his book *Indica* an eye-witness account of the Mauryan India under the king Chandragupta Maurya (circa 321/21-297 BCE). On the other hand, the Buddhist travellers from China (Faxian, 399-414 CE; Xuanzang, 629-641 CE; and Yijing, c. 700 CE) inform us about Buddhist centres and throw valuable light in their travelogues on the sacred geography of early India. The monastic establishment at Nalanda is particularly mentioned as a major education centre in eastern India. Historians depend on the Sangam literature (circa 200 BCE – 300 CE) for writing the history of early South India. The *Melkannakku* (eighteen major narrative texts and *Kilkanakku* (eight minor didactic works), which are part of the Sangam literature, are useful for historians for the study of the Pandya, the Chera and the Chola chiefdoms of peninsular India. The Sangam literature is believed to have been created and compiled in three assemblies that were held in Madurai (two assemblies) and in Kapatapuram (one assembly) under the patronage of the Pandya rulers. Tamil literature also comprises philosophical text (*Tirukkural*), a text on Tamil grammar (*Tolkappiyam*), and two sixth century CE epics, the *Silappadikaram* (‘the Song of the Anklet’, by a

Jain monk Ilango Adigal) and the *Manimekalai* ('the Jewel Belt' by a Buddhist monk Sattanar), which are used by historians for the study of South Indian society, economy, and culture.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. Fill in the blanks:

- a) Rig, Sama, _____ and Atharva are the four Vedas.
- b) The *Buddhacarita* of Asvaghosa is the biography of _____
- c) The *therigatha* contains poems of _____
- d) The *Silappadikaram* was authored by _____
- e) _____ is the biography of Harshavardhana.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

The history writing is a craft, and the object of history by nature is human beings, their actions and their interactions, and therefore, the primary source for the study of human past is constituted by textual and archaeological remains that have been left behind by human beings in diverse forms. Every nation has a history, which teaches its citizens about their country's past. Same is true with India's history. Our knowledge about our country's past is based on India's history, which help us in learning about our ancestors; how they had lived and overcame various types of problems. A historian is required to study, understand, analyse and interpret diverse types of literary and archaeological evidence for historical reconstruction of India's ancient past. By studying the past actions that have shaped our present lives, we can learn about human actions and their consequences and following it, we can develop better strategies, programmes and plans for our present as well as future.

2.7 GLOSSARY

Panas/ Karshapanas – a type of metallic currency, also known as punch-marked coins

Vedangas – supplementary compositions on the Vedas

Dharmasutras/ Dharmashastras – legal treatises

Tripitaka – Buddhist canonical literature

Tolkappiyam – a text on Tamil grammar

2.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Highlight different types of archaeological sources.
- Q. 2. Discuss the importance of numismatic sources in history writing.
- Q. 3. Comment on the relevance of epigraphic sources.

- Q. 4. Discuss the nature of Buddhist and Jain literature.
- Q. 5. Write an essay on different types of literary sources.

2.9 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. What is history?
- Q. 2. Discuss the use of archaeological sources for the study of Harappan civilization.
- Q. 3. Comment on the mould-casting or die-striking technique.
- Q. 4. Write a note on Vedangas.
- Q. 5. Comment on Sangam literature.

2.10 ANSWER KEYS

CYPI

- Q. 1. See Section, 2.2.
- Q. 2. See Section, 2.3.
- Q. 3. See Section, 2.4.

CYP II

Fill in the Blanks:

- a) Yajur
- b) Gautam Buddha
- c) Buddhist nuns
- d) Jain monk Ilango Adigal
- e) *Harshcharita* by Banabhatta

2.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

- E. H. Carr, *What Is History*. Penguin Books, 2008 reprint.
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RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

SEMESTER - I

UNIT- I

COURSE NO. HIST 101

LESSON 3

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

STRUCTURE

3.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Colonial Interpretations

3.3 History and Nationalism

3.4 History and Archaeology

3.5 Indian History and Marxism

3.6 Writing New Histories

3.7 Let us sum up

3.8 Glossary

3.9 Examination Oriented Questions

3.10 Lesson End Exercises

3.11 Answer Key

3.12. Suggested Readings

3.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine different types of historical interpretations
- discuss the colonial, nationalist and Marxist approaches to India's history
- explain the impacts of socio-economic and political developments on history writing

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the colonial approach to India's history
- the nationalist response to colonial historiography
- the Marxist approach to India's ancient past
- new approaches to India's history

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, in the previous lesson, we discussed varieties of sources (archaeological and literary) that are used by historians for writing Indian history. The sources are remnants of the past, and a historian although cannot resurrect the past, but he/she can comprehend and explain it through historical narratives. As past is not available to us in its totality, our knowledge of it is limited by the nature and availability of the sources. The act of history writing and its results is shaped by the questions that a historian asks to his/her sources. The nature of the questions in turn depends upon a historian's motives. Students shall remember that historians are an integral part of society, and they tend to engage with diverse types of historical aspects of social issues and problems in their history writing. As a result, history writing becomes an active interaction between a historian and his society as well as between a historian and his sources. Therefore, approaches to history writing are bound to change over the period with a change in the social conditions of a historian.

3.2 COLONIAL INTERPRETATIONS

The *Diwani* rights were granted to the East India Company by the Mughal emperor in 1765, and following it, when the Company received the rights to administer the civil justice in Bengal, Bihar and Odisha, it became

necessary for the Company officials to learn about India's past to manage the local administration and revenue system. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in 1784 with the efforts of Company officials such as Sir William Jones (1746-1794) for the study of India's society and history. Sir William Jones, one of the leading Indologists, identified the origin of the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Persian, and various other European languages ('the Indo-European language family') from a common source, and according to him, all the speakers (the Aryans) of the Indo-European languages had a common origin in ancient past. The colonial institutions including the Calcutta *Madrassa* (1781), the Sanskrit College in Banaras (1794), the Bombay Asiatic Society (1804) and the Asiatic Society of Great Britain (1823) had performed a significant role in familiarizing the Europeans with the Indian society, cultures and history. Several Indian texts, for example, the *Manusmriti* (1776), the *Bhagavad Gita* (1784), the *Hitopadesa* (1787), and Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* (1789) were translated into English and other European languages. Gradually, the study of Indian history gained wider popularity in Europe, and it was called Indology. Scholars like Henry T. Colebrook, Anquetil Duperron, Eugene Burnouf, Max Muller and others, involved in the Oriental studies were labelled as Indologist or Orientalist. James Prinsep (1799-1840) was an assay-master of Calcutta mint, and he successfully deciphered the Old *Brahmi* script in 1834 and read the Ashoka's Brahmi inscriptions in 1837. A German Indologist Max Muller (1823-1900) looked after the translation and publication of non-Christian oriental books into different European languages.

In the view of early Indologist scholars, Indian civilisation had been equal to European civilisation despite of their being different in nature from each-other. Unlike Indian civilization, which was 'spiritual' the European civilization was identified as 'materialistic' in character. The approach of colonial officials changed towards Indian civilization in the early decades of the 19th century, when the East India Company gradually expanded its territorial control in India to secure its economic interests. James Mill (1773-1836) criticised the Indologists for having favourable attitude towards Indian society. Mill argued that early Indians could never attain a higher stage of civilisation because they lacked the art of history writing. India's history was divided into three distinct, but successive periods, Hindu, Muslim, and British. While first two periods of India's history were conceptualised along the religious lines, the third period was projected as a secular and modern phase in India's history. James Mill introduced in India's history the concepts of 'Oriental Despotism' and 'Self-sufficient village economy'. He argued that all the Asiatic civilisations had been ruled by the despotic rulers, who were the sole owners of the entire land and irrigation facilities in their kingdoms. The villages were isolated and self-sufficient. These villages depended upon the state for irrigation. The autocratic rulers and officials collected revenue in return of irrigation facilities from the peasantry. In pre-Modern times, trade and urban centres were absent in India as cities had

been mainly the administrative centres, and private property in land too did not exist in ancient India. The Haileybury College in Britain, where Civil Servants had been trained to serve in India, Mill's history book was made a part of the curriculum, and as a result, the biases of Mill significantly influenced the policies of Civil Servants in the colonial government of India.

India was called a country that lacked history and Vincent. A. Smith (1843-1920) identified the external factors ranging from the Aryan to Macedonian invasions as responsible for the changes in an otherwise changeless and stagnant society of early India. Despite of its cultural and geographical unity, India was argued to have had never been united under a single political power before the establishment of the British Raj. Same views were endorsed by Mortimer Wheeler. The Graeco-Roman merchants were argued to have had dominated the maritime trade between India and the Roman west in the Western Indian Ocean. Because early Indians were prohibited by the Hindu Shastras from overseas journeys, the Graeco-Romans were argued to have introduced all the artistic, economic and technological developments in early India. The aim of the writings of the European scholars was to justify the British Raj and its control over Indian resources in the name of civilizing mission.

3.3. HISTORY AND NATIONALISM

For its diverse types of administrative works, the colonial government required trained Indian clerks and therefore, western education was introduced in colonial India. The British government introduced the university system in the 1850s onwards, and it trained clerks for the colonial administration as well as native historians, who had an expertise in western philosophy and indigenous customs and languages. Under the influence of the western education, English educated Indian elites led several social reform movements against the custom of *sati* and *purdah*, enforced widowhood, pre-puberty marriage, polygamy, and caste discrimination in the 19th century. R. G. Bhandarkar (1837-1925) wrote several books on India's ancient history and he associated the Gupta period with the resurgence of Brahmanism. On the other hand, R. C. Dutt (1848-1909) argued that the Aryan race invaded early India, fought against the aborigines and conquered them. In Dutta's works, Aryans were projected as the founder of India's Hindu civilization. In the late 19th century, nationalist historians wrote histories to make Indians aware of their ancient past, and they believe that the British government could be persuaded to introduce social reforms as well as to make policies to benefit the Indian people.

In the early decades of the 20th century, Indian historians adopted a more aggressive attitude in their writings under the influence of rising nationalist movement against the British Raj. The Swadesi Movement was launched against the Partition of Bengal in 1905, which had a wider impact on the nationalist historians. Gradually history

writing became a tool to mobilise the Indian masses against the colonial state. Nationalist historians began to glorify Indian past and challenged negative portrayal of early India in the colonial histories. The military achievements of Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, and Samudragupta were highlighted to glorify early Indian's military achievements. The idea of golden age was invented to magnify the cultural, political and artistic achievements of the Gupta rulers (circa 319 – circa 550 CE). While the presence of an empire was accepted as evidence of peace, growth, prosperity, and stability, contrary to it, the periods of small kingdoms in early India were called the dark ages, when society had degenerated and economy declined. Nationalist histories tend to show the presence of institutions similar to European institutions, like, mercantile guilds, republics, democracy, and imperialism, in ancient India. These histories aimed to glorify the Indian way of life. Contrary to colonial scholars, R. K. Mookerji (1880-1963) highlighted the indulgence of early Indians in the Indian Oceanic trade.

Similarly, another nationalist historian namely R. C. Majumdar (1888-1980) discussed the formation and functioning of diverse types of professional guilds (*sreni*) akin to mercantile guilds of medieval Europe in early India. Both Mookerji and Majumdar had rejected the colonial theories of 'Oriental Despotism' and 'Self-sufficient village economy.' They also glorified the Hindu imperialism in Southeast Asia, where early Indian kshatriyas and brahmins were argued to have had established their colonies and civilized the native populations prior to the arrival of Islam. Similarly, K. P. Jayaswal (1881-1937) argued the presence of republics (*gana-sanghas*) in early India. These republics were argued to have had functioned in democratic manner under restricted monarchy, and they had been similar in nature to the Greek city-states and constitutional monarchy of the Great Britain. On the other hand, K. P. Jayaswal and U. N. Ghoshal drew attention to the efficient organization of revenue system and private property in early India. The region-specific histories, for instance, of Bengal, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu were written in the late 19th and early 20th century and in these regional histories, the 'region' was studied as a microcosm of the nation. Early regional histories of the Bengal and Tamil Nadu generally eulogised the local kings, dynasties, and cultures, and S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1871-1953) and K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (1892-1975) were among the nationalist historians, who had made south India the focus of their history writing. Nationalist scholars -whether writing India's history or regional history- tended to glorify the achievements of early Indians and they used history writing as a tool to mobilise Indian people against the British Raj; but at the same time, they projected the Muslim rule as a cause of India's Hindu civilization's degeneration in medieval period.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. When was the Asiatic Society of Bengal established?

Q. 2. Who deciphered the *Brahmi* script and read Ashoka's Brahmi inscriptions in 1837?

Q. 3. Mention the name of the college in London, where Civil Servants were trained to serve in India?

Q. 4. Mention the names of any four Nationalist historians.

3.4 ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

In the 19th century India, the archaeological studies were primarily conducted by a distinct government department, the Archaeological Survey of India (hereafter, ASI), which was founded under Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) with the approval of the Viceroy Lord Canning in 1861. The civil as well as military officials of the British Raj practised archaeology as a hobby, more like a part-time, or a post-retirement activity, and therefore, majority of these Company officials were not trained archaeologists. After the decipherment of Brahmi and Kharoshthi scripts by James Prinsep, the view increasingly gained ground among the European scholars that the artifacts like coins, epigraphs, and archaeological remains could be studied to unravel the past mysteries. In the formative years of colonial archaeology, it was primarily a text-based exercise. In 1830s, the deciphering of Ashoka's edicts (in 1837), and translation of Faxian's travel accounts (in 1836) and Xuanzang's travelogue (in three volumes between 1835 and 1858) provided valuable information about Buddhism as well as ancient Indian geography. Cunningham as well as later colonial archaeologists such as John Marshall (1876-1958) utilised the

accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang for identifying ancient sites for excavation, for example, Taxila, Shravasti, Vaishali, Rajgriha, Sarnath and Nalanda.

The discovery of the Harappan civilisation in 1920s pushed back the date of Indian civilisation to the third millennium BCE. The partition of India in 1947 created several problems for the ASI. One of the major problems faced was the fact that a large geographical area of the Harappan civilisation (including both the major cities: Harappa and Mohenjodaro) had gone to Pakistan. India was left with almost nothing related to the Harappan civilization to show to the world as its past heritage. Hence, the priority of the ASI in the post-Independence era was to find as many as possible the Harappan sites. Because of the extensive work of the ASI, now more than 600 sites have been found in India, and the presence of the Harappan culture in the Indus and now dried Ghaggar-Hakra (usually identified with Sarasvati) river valleys is firmly established. In 1953, when A. Ghosh became the Director General of ASI, he made clear that the agenda of the ASI would be to solve the problem of the Aryan and the Astro-Asiatic migration into India by finding related material remains in the subcontinent. As a result, the periodic gap between the Harappan civilisation and the early historical period became the focus of archaeological studies.

In the post-Independence era, the ASI remained a government institution, receiving physical as well as monetary support from the Indian Government. The text-based archaeology remained in practice as being one of the legacies of the colonial past. Sites like Hastinapur and others, mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, were excavated to corroborate the information gleaned from the epics and the *Puranas*. H. D. Sankalia conducted excavations at sites like Nasik, Maheswar, Dwarka, and Tripuri in order to prove the *Puranic* legends. In a same way, B. B. Lal found remains of the Painted Grey Ware in excavation at Hastinapur, which he affiliated with the Aryans and the epic as well as the *Pauranic* legends. Archaeology, based on modern scientific methods, thus was employed to prove Hindu myths, legends, and stories with an aim to prove their historicity. The Northern Black Polished Ware culture (hereafter, NBPW) was a deluxe pottery, and it was identified as a trademark of the second urbanization in early India. The tendency to correlate pottery type with distinct ethnic people has been criticised in recent writings, which question such a correlation and argue to study the changes in pottery type as a result of technological advancement of a society, or group of people, who may or may not have had a same ethnic identity.

3.5 INDIAN HISTORY AND MARXISM

Independence of India on 15th August 1947 ended the colonial rule, and when scholars and politicians began rebuilding their nation, they soon realised the grim realities of Indian society. Freedom from the foreign rule did not automatically end social inequality, poverty, and communalism in India. The 1950s and 1960s India, primarily

due to the re-organization of Indian states, witnessed several linguistic movements (e.g., Punjab, Tamil Nadu, etc.). These movements generated a great interest in regional histories. Concerns related to the reconstruction of Indian economy and the social worldview of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-1964 in office) influenced the history writing in varying grades. Historians, particularly those influenced by the Marxist methodologies, began to study India's ancient past more critically. The end of the World War II (1939-1945) was followed by the rise of the third world, decolonisation of Asia and Africa, advent of the Cold War, and emergence of America as a hegemonic power. These developments created conditions for the far-reaching changes in the craft of history writing, and now social and cultural developments increasingly became the focus of historical studies. Old colonial theories (e.g., Oriental despotism, insular Indian society, and the Golden Age of the Guptas) were questioned by the Marxist scholars, who argued that not everything was as good in ancient India as it had been projected in the nationalist histories.

A renowned Marxist historian, D. D. Kosambi (1907-1966) rejected the colonial idea of self-sufficient village economy. Since majority of Indian villages did not produce metal and salt, they had always imported these commodities from other places either by trade or exchange. In other words, an inter-village exchange networks had always been present in early India, and it questioned the portrayal of early Indian villages as self-sufficient in the colonial histories. He also emphasised upon an inter-disciplinary approach (he termed it as, 'combined methods in Indology') and the use of *Marxist methodology as a tool of thinking, not as a substitute of thinking*. The focus of historical enquires was shifted from dynasty-centric themes to social, cultural and economic topics. R. S. Sharma (1919-2011) made those sections (*shudras*) of early Indian society that had been oppressed and marginalized, a part of historical studies. Unlike the nationalist historians who identified kings alone, or the authors of the Dharmashastra as the key factor in the origin of state in early India, the Marxist historians argued that the state in early India emerged due to the changes in agrarian production, wider use of iron technology, appearance of private property, and formation of social hierarchy. Instead of identifying it as the Golden Age, Marxist scholars characterised the Gupta period as an age that witnessed the advent of feudalism in early India. R. S. Sharma introduced the feudal model for the study of Indian history and according to him, the decline of the Indo-Roman trade due to the fall of the Roman Empire in Europe had caused urban decay and ruralisation of economy in early medieval India. As the income of state decreased, rulers began to make land grants in lieu of salaries to their officials, and subordinate kings were allowed to manage their own territories on the condition that they would remain loyal to the king. The centralized state apparatus was argued to have had collapsed in the Gupta and the post-Gupta period due to land grants by rulers to their subordinates and religious functionaries. In a decentralized state, kings transferred the rights to maintain troops and law-and-order, and also to collect taxes

to feudatories, who were expected to pay tributes and military services in exchange. In context of south Indian history, scholars like M. G. S. Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat and R. N. Nandi rejected Nilakanta Sastri's centralized state model and adopted the feudal model for the study of south Indian history.

In the 1980s onwards, B. D. Chattopadhyaya (1939-2022) and Hermann Kulke criticised the feudal model and Chattopadhyaya particularly associated the early medieval India with the third urbanisation. He argued that diverse types of urban centres including periodical markets (*hatta*) and exchange centres (*mandapika*, *pentha* and *nagaram*) had been different from the early historical cities due to their distinct rural character. Since these urban centres were located in an agrarian milieu, usually agrarian products were traded here. Kulke and Chattopadhyaya developed the integrative-processual model, according to which, the early medieval period witnessed the emergence of state polities in areas peripheral or outside the Ganga valley. Such rise of state polities resulted in the integration of tribal population, and local-folk cults, as well as in the transformation of forests into cultivable land. The land grants to brahmanas, temples, and monasteries on the one hand caused the expansion of agriculture and on the other hand extended legitimation to the ruling authority.

3.6 WRITING NEW HISTORIES

In the post-Second World War scenario, the issues ranging from nuclear catastrophe to pesticide pollution to global warming completely stirred the public consciousness against environmental degradation. In the context of this worldwide development, a new discipline *environmental history* was developed. In India, environmental movements of the west as well as the local environmental struggles for the protection of forests, rivers and land shaped the study of environmental history. In 1973, the villagers residing in the Mandal village in the Garwal Himalaya began the *Chipko* movement against the massive felling of trees in their region for commercial use. In the 1980s government's dam projects like Tehri, Silent Valley, Koel Karo, and Sardar Sarovar faced a severe criticism and protest. Particularly, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada Movement) mobilised a large number of tribal and peasants. In the 1990s, amidst the struggles to protect environment the discipline of Environmental history, was developed. The Environmental history, having a belief that the nature is an essential component of human life, began to study the changes and evolution of varied environmental conditions in pre-modern and modern times. Scholars have highlighted that the state exploited the forests for resources that in turn shaped the settled society's relation with the forest, tribes, and wild animals, and human activities are argued to have had caused significant changes in the environment in early India.

Alongside the environmental history, the worldwide feminist movements contributed in the emergence of gender studies in India, where intelligentsia increasingly came out against dowry killing, rape, gender discrimination,

female infanticide, and other forms of atrocities in the 1970s onwards. These people's movements and struggles greatly influenced the academia and stimulated the rise of a strong feminist approach towards the Indian history. A critical study of the Brahmanical texts, written by upper caste/class brahmana males, was undertaken and the in-built bias in these texts towards the male authority over their female counterparts, was systematically dissected in the writings of feminist scholars, for example, Uma Chakravarti, Kumkum Roy, Vijaya Ramaswamy. Feminist scholars through their studies have showed that women's activities were not merely confined to household in ancient India. Rather, women were argued to have had been involved in diverse types of economic activities (e.g., agriculture, dairy farming, handloom industry, pottery making). It was argued that in spite of being subjected to patriarchy, male authority was never expressed in a uniform manner over women everywhere and every time. Feminist scholars have highlighted the internal hierarchy among women based on their caste and class identities as well as their position within patriarchal social structure in relation to man as well as other women. Particularly the trend emphasising on the study of women, not as a victim of male authority, rather a social agent performing diverse roles in ancient Indian society has gained scholar's recognition in recent years.

The close association of Buddhism with cities and trade was highlighted by historians (Himanshu Prabha Ray, Xinru Liu, Jason Neelis, Ranabir Chakravarti, Radhika Seshan, and other) in 1980s onwards, and along with it, the active participation of early Indians in maritime trade in the Indian Ocean was firmly established. In fact, Buddhist monasteries required diverse types of commodities (incense, flowers, silk, precious jewels, food items, etc) for the performance of rituals and worship, and it established a close tie between the monasteries and the traders. The exclusive control of the Graeco-Romans on the trade between India and the Red Sea was challenged, and it was shown that the Graeco-Roman traders had participated in the Western Indian Ocean trade along with Indians, Arabs, and Persians. Early Indian traders not only traded with the Greeks and the Romans, but also with the Arabs, Persians, Africans, Chinese, and different communities of Southeast Asia. The portrayal of early Indians in the nationalist histories as a civilizing force in Southeast Asia has been abandoned. Now scholars emphasise more on the connected history of India and Southeast Asia by identifying early Indians and Southeast Asians as co-participants in the maritime trade and cultural exchange in the Eastern Indian Ocean. The spread of Buddhism that had emerged in the mid-Ganga valley, across Asia along the trade routes is particularly underlined in recent historical writings, and the Buddhist monastic establishments have been identified as important meeting points for traders along the inter-and-intra regional trade routes. Even the monastic settlements in the Western Ghats and several coastal Hindu shrines in peninsular India are identified by Himanshu Prabha Ray as meeting zones of the maritime and overland trade networks in pre-modern times. In recent decades, the history of Indian Ocean has received sustained attention of historians, and it has emerged as a major area for historical enquiries.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. In which year, the Archaeological Survey of India was established?

Q. 2. Write a brief note on NBPW.

Q. 3. Write a note on Indian feudalism theory.

Q. 4. Define 'Environmental' history.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

Every human being is part of a society in which he/she is born, and same is the case with a historian, who from his/her earlier years is moulded by his/her society. The language that a historian speaks and uses to write is socially acquired and the topics that are studied by him/her too are related to a society in which he/she operates. The changes in society impact its members and shape their worldview. Being a member of a society, a historian tends to engage with diverse types of issues, themes, and problems of his/her society, and he/she reflects on these in the light of available sources of the historical past. Every generation writes its own history, and renew its understanding of the past. The colonial histories whereas portrayed early India in negative light, the nationalist histories tended to glorify everything that was Indian in ancient times. Marxist historians engaged with the social realities of the post-Independence India; they criticised the nationalist glorification of ancient India and traced the roots of social inequality in modern India back to the ancient times. The trend in history writing changed in the late decades of the 20th century, when historians began to engage with verities of themes (gender, environment, Indian ocean

trade, and so forth) in their writings. It is evident from above discussion that both, a historian and his/her history writings, are part of history, and historical interpretations change with the changes in the society over a period of time.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Indology – study of Indian history, literature, philosophy, and culture

Orient – refers to ‘the East’ (i.e., Asia, which is opposite of Occident, i.e., the West)

Brahmi – an Indian script that was in use in ancient India

3.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Discuss the salient features of colonial approach to India’s history.
- Q. 2. Analyse the role of colonial officials in the development of archaeological studies in India.
- Q. 3. Assess the impacts of national movement upon the history writing in colonial India.
- Q. 4. Highlight the salient features of Marxist approach to India’s history.
- Q. 5. Discuss the new approaches to India’s history.

3.10 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Define ‘oriental despotism’.
- Q. 2. Write a brief note on James Mill’s views on India’s history.
- Q. 3. Which Marxist scholar characterised ‘Marxism’ as a tool of thinking?
- Q. 4. Write a note on R. S. Sharma’s views on Indian history.
- Q. 5. Comment on the feminist approach to India’s history.

3.11 ANSWER KEYS

CYPI

- Q. 1. See Section, 3.2.
- Q. 2. See Section, 3.2.
- Q. 3. See Section, 3.2.

Q. 4. See Section, 3.3.

CYP II

Q. 1. See section, 3.4.

Q. 2. See section, 3.4.

Q. 3. See section, 3.5.

Q. 4. See section, 3.6.

3.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 4

UNDERSTANDING PERIODIZATION IN HISTORY

STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Tripartite Division of India's Past
- 4.3 Periodization of India's Ancient Past
- 4.4 'Early Medieval Period' in India's History
- 4.5 Let us sum up
- 4.6 Glossary
- 4.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 4.8 Lesson End Exercises
- 4.9 Answer Key
- 4.10 Suggested Readings

4.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine the tripartite scheme of periodization of Indian history
- discuss the changes in the periodization of India's history
- explain the relevance of 'early medieval period' in India's history

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the origin of the religion-based periodization of India's history
- the importance of periodization in history writing
- the debate on the tripartite periodization of Indian history

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, remember that history is primarily a study of the past with a focus on people, their lives, activities, and changes in their lives. Historians usually divide the past into distinct, but successive, periods to organize their study of it. The ancient period is usually divided into pre-historical, proto-historical and early historical period. On the other hand, the period that is known as medieval is divided into early Medieval and late medieval periods. In a similar manner, historians subdivide the modern period of India's history into early modern, modern, and contemporary periods. Scholars employ different criteria to periodize India's history. While colonial and nationalist scholars had used religion as a criterion to periodize India's history into Hindu/Ancient, Muslim/Medieval, and British/Modern history, the approach of Marxist scholars is different. Neither religion nor a ruling dynasty characterize the entire society in India's history, and therefore, Marxist historians argue that periodization of India's history should be based on certain fundamental features, such as types of political economy, social organizations, nature of production, and advances in technological knowledge. This lesson reviews the existing periodization of India's history, its origin and rationale, and also conflicting views of scholars on the nature of transition from one period to another.

4.2 TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF INDIA'S PAST

A systematic history writing of India began in the late 18th century, when officials of the East India Company began to collect and organize the information about India, its people and its past for administrative purposes. The *History of British India* was published in 1817, and its author James Mill (1773-1836) divided this multi-volume work into three main periods: Hindu, Muslim and British. While first two periods, Hindu and Muslim were conceptualized along the religious lines, the third period, i.e., the British, was projected as secular and modern in Mill's history. Mill's history mainly focuses on the ruling dynasties, foreign invasions, and the presumed dominant religion of the dynasties of northern India. In Mill's view, a value of any culture could be decided on the basis of its contribution in the development of rationalism and individualism. He found no contribution of the Hindu civilization in the development of rationalism and individualism in India, and therefore, he condemned the Hindu culture. While the arrival of the Aryans from central Asia into India was argued to have marked the beginning of Hindu period, in a same way the arrival and establishment of Muslim power in India was associated with the inauguration of the Muslim period in India's history. For James Mill, Indian society remained stagnant and

changeless under despotic rulers in the Hindu and Muslim periods, and India under the British period was argued to have been exposed to modern values, change, and material progress. The idea that the British rule ended the authority of despotic rulers in India and ended the insularity of Indian society was popularised by James Mill's history. Mill not only divided India's history into three distinct phases, but also segregated it into three competing and distinct cultures.

This tripartite division of India's history was standardized in subsequent history writings of the colonial scholars like Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859) and V. A. Smith (1848-1920). Smith wrote the *Oxford History of India* (1919), in which the history of India was divided into 'Ancient and Hindu Period', 'India under the Muslim Period', and 'India in the British Period'. The religion based tripartite periodization of India's history justified the colonial view that the primary identity of Indian society was historically drawn from its religious communities, which had usually been antagonistic to each other. Following the conquest of India, the British rule was established in India and the British were projected as liberator of Hindus from Islamic tyranny. The framework of tripartite division of India's history was accepted by nationalist historians. In 1946 was published *An Advanced History of India* by R. C. Majumdar along with H. C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta, and in this book, the new labels, 'ancient' for Hindu, 'medieval' for Muslim, and 'modern' for British period were introduced for the study of India's past. The expressions, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern periods appear more secular, and after India's independence and partition in 1947, Indian historians increasingly preferred to use these secular sounding expressions in the environment of growing communalism. This change of nomenclature, however, did not make any characteristic change in India's history. The span of each period (Ancient, Medieval, and Modern) remained the same as before. Ancient history was equated with Hindu period, and in a same way, Medieval history with Muslim period.

Similar to Mill's history, the ancient period ends with the establishment of Muslim rule in Majumdar's history. In other words, in Majumdar's history, the Hindu period became Ancient, the Muslim period became Medieval and the British period became modern. The so-called Muslim rule did not establish in all parts of India at the same time: the Arabs conquered Sind in the 8th century CE; the Turks and Afghans occupied Punjab by the end of the 10th century, northern India by the 13th century, and Deccan by the 14th century. Now scholars argue that the religion of the rulers or ruling class had not always been the religion of masses in India. There are several conceptual problems with Mill's tripartite schema of periodization and the major flaw of this scheme was that at no time in India's history the entire population of the subcontinent was either exclusively Hindu or Muslim. The Vijayanagara (1336-1646 CE) was a major political power in peninsular India at a time, when much of northern India was under the Delhi Sultanate. Scholars have highlighted that Hinduism was not the only religion that was professed

by people in ancient India. Alongside Hindu cults, Buddhism and Jainism were popular among early Indians. In a same manner, the Indian society in medieval period was not exclusively Muslim. While the rules of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire professed Islam, a large population of India continued to follow diverse Hindu cults. Many nobles and officials in the Mughal administration were Hindu Rajputs. Jainism too remained popular among people (particularly traders) in certain parts of India, and settlements of Parsis, Jews and Christians had also been present along the western coastline of India. Sikhism emerged as a new religion in late medieval Punjab and it is one of the minority religions in today's India.

4.3 PERIODIZATION OF INDIA'S ANCIENT PAST

In the context of India's history, we currently divide India's past into ancient, medieval and modern periods, and these periods are further subdivided into smaller time segments. Starting with the first appearance of Human beings and Human like species on earth, the ancient period continues up to about the sixth century CE, and it is divided into pre-historical period, Proto-Historical period, and Early Historical period. Pre-historical is a period, when human beings did not use writing to record their activities. Because writing was not invented in pre-history, historians mainly study the human activities in this period from archaeological evidence. Usually, the period of pre-history covers the study of human evolution and Palaeolithic Age up to Mesolithic and Neolithic Ages of human past. The period, when humans invented script and had started recording their activities in writing is called historical period. In the case of Indian history, the earliest people, who had invented script and used writing to record their activities, they belonged to the Harappan or Indus Valley civilization (c. 2600-1900 BCE). However, historians have not been able to decipher the Harappan script, and despite the discovery of artefacts with writings (seals, sealings, tablets, inscribed pottery, etc) from different Harappan sites, we do not know what is written on these. Therefore, historians use the label 'proto-historical' for that period, when people knew the art of writing, but we have not been able to decipher their script. The period from circa 1500 to 500 BCE, which was associated with orally-transmitted Vedic literature, but with no evidence of writing, too is included in the Proto-history.

Scholars now recognize regional variations in historical developments in early India. For instance, the Harappan civilization which is an integral part of India's history was not a pan-India civilization, and geographically it covered parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the areas of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat in India. In a same way, the Vedic culture was confined to the land of Indus and its tributaries in the Northwest India, Indus-Ganga divide, and upper Ganga valley between 1500 and 500 BCE, and it did not impact the entire Indian Subcontinent at that time. In fact, the period that is usually attributed to the Vedic cultures, witnessed the presence of diverse types of Chalcolithic, and Megalithic cultures in different parts of Deccan and Peninsular India. In her textbook, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* (2009), Upinder Singh therefore studies the period

from about 2000 to 600 BCE under a single chapter, titled 'Cultural Transitions: Images from Texts and Archaeology, c. 2000 -600 BCE'. By discussing the Vedic cultures along with Chalcolithic and Megalithic cultures in a same chapter, Upinder Singh's book diverges from earlier histories, in which the period of about 1000 years (1500-600 BCE) had exclusively been conceptualized as an age of the Vedas. The exclusive emphasis on the literary sources for the study of this period, according to her, tended to give undue importance to the northern and northwestern India, while ignoring the other areas of Indian Subcontinent. This text-centric approach for the study of human life in early India in the 2nd and 1st millennium BCE had resulted in the undermining of the considerable archaeological evidence from chalcolithic and early iron age cultures. Therefore, Upinder Singh suggests to incorporate both types of evidence (archaeological and literary) for the study of early India. Although the Vedic literature is a good source of information about religious practices, philosophy, and cultural ideas, but we mainly depend upon the archaeological evidence for learning about the material life of the early Indians.

While humans use language for verbal communication, the script is used to record the verbal communication, in the form of fixed visible symbols, or signs associated with pre-specified meanings or sounds, on some material surface. Writing was and still is a specialised craft, which required training. In the human history, the beginning of writing marked a new stage in human communication, and it allowed a communication between individuals and communities located in different localities and times. Kings had employed writing to manage their territory, finances, and propaganda; merchants used scripts to record their commercial and business transactions, and priests had used it to preserve religious texts and philosophical ideas. The writing is used by poets and writers to produce creative expressions (songs, poems, stories, novels, plays, etc). Writing allowed one generation to pass on knowledge to next generations, and the invention of writing in human past had coincided with the first emergence of cities and state-polities across the world. With the fall of the Harappan civilization, the use of Harappan script too discontinued, and writing again appeared on pottery-sherds in the fifth-fourth century BCE onwards. The Ashokan edicts are found written on rock-surfaces and stone pillars across India in the third century BCE, and the period, when people knew writing and used it for recording their activities is called early historical period in India's history.

Romila Thapar (*The Penguin History of Early India*, 2002) characterizes the period from circa third century to seventh century CE as 'threshold times', which witnessed a transition from early historical to early medieval period in India's history. In other words, the end or the beginning of any period in India's history does not mark a sharp break between preceding and succeeding periods. Rather the end or beginning of a period implies a transition, not a sharp break, in human lives. Human lives in every historical period are associated with certain distinctive social, political, economic and cultural practices that make that specific period different from preceding

as well as succeeding period; however, the evolution of these distinctive features can be traced back to preceding period, when these distinctive features first began to acquire some sort of a preliminary shape. In a same way, the traces of these features can also be identified in the social, political, economic and cultural practices of the succeeding period, when they get amalgamated in the newer forms of human practices. As a result, the history of India becomes a continuous process, in which each period and its sub-periods are connected to each-other, despite each period having certain specific and distinctive features. For instance, land grants that began to be made in north India (e.g., the Guptas and their subordinates) and Deccan (e.g., Satavahanas and the Vakatakas) to religious institutions, temples, and brahmins in early historical period, they became wide spread and their number increased manifold under regional polities (e.g., the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Chalukyas, the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Rashtrakutas, the Palas, etc.) across India in early medieval period. In a similar manner, sculptural art and temple architecture that first appeared in the early historical period not only further developed, but also regionalised (Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara types) in early medieval times.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. Fill in the blanks:

- a) _____ authored the *History of British India*
- b) *An Advanced History of India* was written by _____ along with H. C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta.
- c) In the tripartite periodization, the term 'ancient' corresponds to Hindu, 'medieval' to Muslim, and 'modern' to _____ period.
- d) In India's history, the expression 'Proto-history' refers to the _____ civilization.
- e) Romila Thapar has written the textbook named, _____

4.4 'EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD' IN INDIA'S HISTORY

In the writings of nationalist scholars (R. D. Banerji, R. C. Majumdar, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, K. M. Munshi, and R. S. Tripathi), the advent of Turkish Muslim rule in India usually marked the end of ancient period and beginning of medieval period. Often the period from the fall of the Gupta empire to the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate is described as a phase in India's history, which witnessed the fall of Hindu kingdoms due to the Islamic invasions. The Gupta period was identified as golden age in the nationalist historiography, which characterised the period after the fall of the Guptas as an age of political and cultural degeneration under different regional Hindu kingdoms in India. The Islamic invasions followed by the establishment of Turkish rule in India were identified as an instrumental force behind the transition of Indian society from ancient to medieval period. In the mid-1950s, Marxist perspective

became influential in Indian history writing, and the focus of historical analysis shifted from dynastic history to social and economic history of India. As a result, scholars increasingly realised the problems with the religion-based tripartite periodization. A need was felt to redefine periodization of India's history to develop a better understanding of class structure, class struggles, mode of production, and technology and its connections with social change, etc., in early India. Therefore, the expression 'early medieval' was introduced, which referred to an immediate period between the 'ancient period' and the 'medieval period.' The 'early medieval period' is usually characterised in India's history as a period, when Indian society and economy transitioned and acquired distinct character. The period from about 6th century CE to the 12th century CE was labelled as early medieval period in R. S. Sharma's writings, and Sharma characterized early medieval period as feudal age in India's history. The process of feudalization began in the Gupta period (c. 300-550 CE), thrived under the Rashtrakutas, the Palas and the Gurjara-Pratiharas (c. 750-1000 CE), and ended in 12th century CE with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.

R. S. Sharma had identified the practice of land grants as the central factor that transformed ancient Indian society into a medieval society. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, the demand of Indian commodities in the west drastically reduced and it caused the decline of cities in India, when urban professionals increasingly lost their employment and migrated to rural areas in search of work. The decline of cities impacted the income of the state, and as the tax collection reduced, kings found it impossible to pay salaries to their officials and rewards for ritual services to priests in cash. Therefore, kings now began to make land grants to priests, temples and monasteries for their ritual services, and land grants to officials in lieu of their salaries. Due to a financial crisis, kings instead of directly ruling all their territory allowed their subordinates to manage their land in return of loyalty, tributes and military services. To increase state's income, it became necessary to bring forest areas under cultivation, and land grants to officials and priests in forest areas caused the expansion of agriculture, and transformation of tribal population into agricultural labourers. The land grants with fiscal, administrative and judicial rights to officials, priests and institutions caused political fragmentation or decentralization in early medieval times. With the expansion of agriculture in regions outside the Ganga valley, Brahmanical ideas, ritual practices, production techniques, and varna-jati social system were introduced in new areas, and it caused the formation of new regional identities.

With the absorption of tribal population in Hindu society, new castes came into existence and the number of castes, particularly in Shudra category, multiplied manyfold. Several new kshatriya lineages, for instance, the Rajputs, too came into existence. Tribal divinities were assimilated into Hindu pantheons, and the mythologies about these divinities found a space in the Puranic literature. Brahmanisation or Sanskritization of tribal divinities played a key role in the growth and expansion of Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, and Tantrism along with the

temple-centric worship. In R. S. Sharma's view, the society, economy and polity of the early medieval period was characteristically different from that of the Mauryan times, and therefore, early medieval was different from early historical period. However, several features of polity, society and economy (e.g., feudal state organization, control of landlords over production, proliferation of castes, regional cultures, religious practices, etc.) continued in medieval period even under the Muslim Turkish rule. For instance, the land grants which first appeared between the 4th and the 7th centuries CE, continued and came to be called under the Turks and the Mughals as Iqta, Jagir, Mansab, Madad-i-Maash, Inam, etc. In a same way, temple centric worship continued and social hierarchy based on varna-jati further crystalized in the medieval period. The early medieval period that was associated with the Indian feudalism, is portrayed by R. S. Sharma as an age of decline and degeneration in India's history.

B. D. Chattopadhyaya's approach to 'early medieval' is different and he has used the expression 'decline syndrome' to define the approach of the nationalist and Marxist scholars towards early medieval period. The time span from about 2nd/3rd century CE to 6th century CE is called as 'Classical' by Chattopadhyaya, according to whom, in this period Sanskrit literature, monarchical institution, social classification (varna-dharma), Puranic Hinduism, and the idea of the country (Bharatavarsha) were standardized and systematized. Having acquired a certain level of standardization, the political, social, economic and cultural elements converged in society and came to represent the stage of the formation of a civilizational model in India. This civilizational model, although had taken a long span of time to get crystallized, it may be used by historians for studying the specific patterns of change in subcontinent stage. Chattopadhyaya has identified three inter-related processes that had been operational across India in the early medieval times, and these are 1) expansion of state-society through the process of local state formation; 2) peasantization of tribes and proliferation of caste, and 3) appropriation of cults and their integration into Brahmanical tradition. By the 4th-5th centuries CE, the oligarchic (gana-sangha) types of polities disappeared and the monarchical form of polity emerged as the most successful political system. We learn about fifty to seventy monarchical polities that were spread over Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka and Bengal, from land grant charters of a period between c. 400 and c. 650 CE. Several of these state polities had evolved from obscure tribal backgrounds, which necessitated its rulers to patronise brahmins and Hindu shrines for legitimization.

The land grants (*agraharas*, *brahmdeyas*, or *shasanas*) to brahmins and land donations (*devadana*) to Hindu shrines were made by rulers caused the expansion of agriculture, and as more land was brought under cultivation, state's income too increased. The land grants to brahmanas caused their migration into new areas, and with the migration of brahmana families/groups into different regions outside the Ganga valley, Brahmanical culture too expanded into new territories and among new communities. Land grant charters were composed and written in

Sanskrit language under royal patronage, and it gradually now transformed Sanskrit into a language of political discourse. The state formation in regions outside the Ganga valley was accompanied by the integration of local tribal population and cults, and formation of new castes. Here the expression state formation refers to the emergence of state-like polity in regions/sub-regions where they had been absent previously. With the absorption of tribal population in state-society, new castes came into existence and the number of castes, particularly in Shudra category, increased manifold in early medieval period. Chattopadhyaya has associated the 'early medieval' period with the formation of regional polities and culture, and third urbanization. As the agricultural activities expanded, local level exchange centers like Hatta, Mandapikas, and Penthas emerged in different regions of early medieval India. Hatta were periodical local markets, while Mandapikas and Penthas were exchange centers, where agricultural products and manufactured goods were brought for trade. At these centers, dues and taxes were also levied on the exchanged products by the officials. Thus, Mandapikas and Penthas acted as both exchange and administrative centers. Noticeably, while Mandapikas were located in northern India, Penthas were mostly found in the Deccan. 'Early medieval' is associated by B. D. Chattopadhyaya with certain trans-regional political, social and economic processes that integrated people, land and resources under different regional and sub-regional political powers.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. Fill in the blanks:

- a) The 'early medieval' referred to an immediate period between the _____ and the _____ period.
- b) R. S. Sharma characterized early medieval period as _____ in India's history.
- c) The exchange centers like Hatta, _____, and Pentha emerged in different regions of early medieval India.
- d) The author named _____ has associated the 'early medieval' period with the formation of regional polities, and culture, and third urbanization.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Historians have periodized India's history for their convenience and according to the needs of their theoretical models. Tripartite division of India's history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods allowed colonial officials to portray British period as secular compared to first two periods, each corresponding to a specific religious community. The colonial periodization, which was accepted by nationalist historians, communalized India's history, and therefore, Marxist historians argued to use certain fundamental features, such as types of political economy,

social organizations, nature of production, and advances in technological knowledge, to periodize India's history. The limitation of tripartite division of India's history was recognized in decades following India's partition, and therefore, scholars identified phases of transitions from one to another period. The immediate period after ancient and before medieval was identified as a transition period and it was named 'early medieval', but scholars have different views on the nature of Indian society, polity and economy in the early medieval times. Some scholars (supporting Indian feudalism theory) identify early medieval as an age of political decentralization, urban decay, and economic decline; but for another group of scholars (advocates of integrative-polity model), it was a period of political integration and third urbanization. In brief, our above discussion shows that periodization of India's history is a historiographical construct, and it has undergone significant changes with the changes in the approaches of historians to India's ancient past.

4.6 GLOSSARY

Prehistory – the period of human existence prior to the invention of writing

Protohistory – the period of history, when writing existed but it has not yet been deciphered, for example, the Harappan civilization

Early Medieval – the transition period between ancient and medieval period

agraharas – land grants

brahmdeyas - land grants to brahmins

devadana - land donations to temples/divinities

4.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Discuss the salient features of tripartite periodization.
- Q. 2. Analyse the nationalist approach to the periodization in India's history.
- Q. 3. Discuss the relevance of 'early medieval' in India's history.
- Q. 4. Why has Upinder Singh characterized the period from about 2000 to 600 BCE as a period of 'Cultural Transitions'?
- Q. 5. Define the expression 'threshold times.'

4.8 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Why had James Mill identified the British period as secular and modern?
- Q. 2. Highlight the shortcomings of the religion-based periodization of India's history.
- Q. 3. Discuss R. S. Sharma's views on 'early medieval period'.
- Q. 4. Discuss B. D. Chattopadhyaya's views on 'early medieval period'.
- Q. 5. Analyse the relevance of 'periodization' in history writing.

4.9 ANSWER KEYS

CYP I

Fill in the blanks:

- a) James Mill
- b) R. C. Majumdar
- c) British
- d) Harappan
- e) *The Penguin History of Early India*

CYP II

Fill in the blanks:

- a) Ancient; Medieval
- b) Feudal Age
- c) Mandapika
- d) B. D. Chattopadhyaya

4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

- B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Making of Early Medieval India*, second edition 2012.
- E. Sreedharan, *Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC to AD 2000*. Orient BlackSwan, 2004.
- R. S. Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation*. Orient Longman, reprint 2007.
- R. S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Penguin Books, 2002.
- Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson, 2009.

VEDIC AGE

SEMESTER-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-II

LESSON 5

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND SOCIAL ORDER

STRUCTURE

5.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Geographical Expansion during the Vedic Age

5.2.1 The Vedic Age's Geographical Setting

5.2.2 How important the rivers were in the Vedic Age

5.2.3 Conflict between Tribes

5.3 Social order in the Vedic Age

5.3.1 The social order's structure

5.3.2 The Condition of Women

5.3.3 The institution of marriage

5.4 Let us sum up

5.5 Glossary

5.6 Examination Oriented Questions

5.7 Lesson End Exercises

5.8 Answer key

5.9 Suggested Readings

5.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to

- understand how the geographical factors played a decisive role in shaping the Vedic age.
- explain the spatial significance of rivers in the early and later Vedic Age
- explain the difference between early Vedic and later Vedic social structure.
- understand the position and role of females in the Vedic Age
- Compare and contrast the status of women in the early Vedic and later Vedic ages
- Discuss the marriage institutions in the Vedic Age

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding of

- Geography shaped the economic life by encouraging pastoralism in the early Vedic Age and agriculture in the later Vedic Age.
- Rivers were the lifeline of the Vedic Age. They supported agriculture and cattle rearing, and rivers played a key role in the economic, social, and cultural development of Vedic society.
- About the evolution of the social order to the varna system.
- The social rights enjoyed by women in the early Vedic age, and how their position gradually declined in the later Vedic Age.
- content about the position and role of women within the institution of marriage.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the Vedic Age constitutes one of the earliest and most formative phases of Indian history. Deriving its nomenclature from the Vedas—the oldest extant corpus of sacred literature in the Indian tradition—this period offers invaluable insights into the religious, social, political, and economic life of early Indo-Aryan communities. Broadly spanning from c. 1500 BCE to 600 BCE, the Vedic Age is conventionally divided into two distinct phases: the Early (Rigvedic) period and the Later Vedic period.

During this *longue durée*, the Indo-Aryan groups initially settled in the north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent and gradually expanded eastward into the Gangetic plains. This transition was not merely geographical but deeply transformative in nature. It witnessed a gradual shift from a predominantly pastoral economy to a more settled agrarian system, accompanied by the emergence of more complex political institutions and increasingly stratified social structures. These developments laid the foundational framework for subsequent civilizational patterns in the Indian subcontinent.

5.2 GEOGRAPHICAL EXPANSION DURING THE VEDIC AGE

5.2.1 *The Vedic Age's Geographical Setting*

Geographical factors played a significant role in shaping the trajectory of the Vedic civilisation. The interplay of rivers, fertile plains, forests, and mountains in the north-western part of the subcontinent provided both sustenance and opportunities for expansion. References in the Rigveda suggest that the earliest Aryan settlements were concentrated in regions encompassing eastern Afghanistan, Punjab, and the fringes of western Uttar Pradesh. The limited geographical awareness reflected in these texts indicates an early stage of settlement and gradual territorial expansion.

The Early Vedic communities were primarily located in the Sapta-Sindhu region, comprising the Indus River system and its tributaries. This ecological zone, characterised by open grasslands and riverine networks, was particularly conducive to a pastoral mode of life. Consequently, cattle rearing emerged as the principal economic activity, while agriculture remained secondary and relatively underdeveloped.

In contrast, the Later Vedic period witnessed a significant eastward movement into the Ganga–Yamuna Doab and the middle Gangetic basin. These regions, endowed with fertile alluvial soil, dense forests, and favourable climatic conditions, proved ideal for agricultural expansion. The introduction and increasing use of iron technology facilitated large-scale forest clearance, thereby enabling the cultivation of crops such as rice, wheat, and barley. This transition from pastoralism to settled agriculture not only ensured surplus production but also encouraged the growth of permanent settlements.

Thus, the shift in geographical focus from the north-western plains to the Gangetic basin profoundly influenced the socio-economic and political organization of Vedic society. It contributed to demographic expansion, the emergence of territorial polities, and the gradual consolidation of hierarchical social structures.

5.2.2 *How important the rivers were in the Vedic Age*

Rivers occupied a central place in the economic, cultural, and religious life of the Vedic people. The Rigvedic corpus makes frequent references to several rivers, including the Gomati (Gomal), Krumu (Kurram), Kubha (Kabul), and Suvastu (Swat), indicating a broad geographical horizon. However, the core region of Rigvedic activity appears to have been the Punjab and adjoining areas, where rivers such as the Sindhu (Indus), Saraswati, Drishadvati (Ghaggar), and the five tributaries of the Punjab—Shutudri (Sutlej), Vipas (Beas), Parushni (Ravi), Asikni (Chenab), and Vitasta (Jhelum)—were of paramount importance.

The concept of *Sapta-Sindhu*, or the “land of seven rivers,” encapsulates the geographical heartland of Early Vedic civilization. These rivers sustained pastoral life by providing water for cattle and facilitating limited agricultural practices. They also shaped patterns of settlement and mobility.

In the Later Vedic period, the eastward expansion into the Ganga-Yamuna plains further enhanced the significance of river systems. Rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Gomati, Kosi, and Gandak became vital for irrigation and agricultural intensification. The fertile alluvial tracts along these rivers supported permanent settlements, leading to the emergence of villages, towns, and eventually territorial states.

Beyond their economic utility, rivers held deep religious and symbolic significance. They were revered as divine entities and frequently invoked in Vedic hymns as life-sustaining and purifying forces. Rituals and sacrificial

ceremonies were often conducted on their banks, reinforcing their centrality in both material and spiritual domains.

5.2.3 Conflict Between Tribes

The struggle for control over the resource-rich Sapta-Sindhu region frequently led to conflicts among Aryan tribes. The Rigveda contains numerous references to such inter-tribal rivalries, the most notable being the *Dasarajna* or the Battle of Ten Kings, fought on the banks of the river Parushni (Ravi). This conflict exemplifies the competitive nature of tribal polities and the importance of territorial and economic resources.

With the transition to a settled agrarian economy in the Later Vedic period, the nature of conflict underwent a significant transformation. Disputes were increasingly centred on territorial control rather than purely tribal affiliations. This shift contributed to the rise of more centralized political structures and the consolidation of early kingdoms.

I. Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. Explain the geographical context in the later Vedic age?

Q2. “Rivers were called the lifeline of the Vedic age.” Explain.

Q3. Name the Vedic names of the Chenab and Sutlej?

Q4. What is meant by the term *Dasarajna*?

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a. The ----- and ----- rivers became important in the post-Rigvedic age.
- b. The war of ten Kings was fought on the banks of the ----- river.
- c. The ----- witnessed the transition from a mainly pastoral life to a more settled agricultural economy.

5.3 SOCIAL ORDER IN THE VEDIC AGE

5.3.1 The social order's structure

The social organization of the Early Vedic period was relatively simple, flexible, and largely based on kinship ties. Society was structured around tribal units (*jana*), which were further subdivided into clans (*vis*) and villages (*grama*). At the familial level, authority rested with the *grihapati* or *kulapati*, who exercised considerable control over household affairs.

Political authority during this phase was not territorial but tribal in nature. The *raja* functioned primarily as a protector and military leader, deriving legitimacy from his ability to safeguard the tribe and ensure its prosperity. The term *gopati janasya* (lord of cattle) underscores the centrality of pastoral wealth in defining leadership.

The varna system, though present in embryonic form, was neither rigid nor hereditary. Social divisions were based on occupation and merit rather than birth, allowing for a degree of mobility. The society thus retained a relatively egalitarian character, with cooperative social relations reinforced through rituals and communal activities.

However, in the Later Vedic period, the social structure became increasingly hierarchical and stratified. The varna system evolved into a rigid, birth-based order, with Brahmanas and Kshatriyas occupying dominant positions, while Vaishyas and Shudras were relegated to subordinate roles. This transformation curtailed social mobility and institutionalized social inequalities.

Simultaneously, the consolidation of patriarchal norms further altered the social fabric, reducing the autonomy of women and strengthening male dominance within both familial and societal structures.

The joint family system became more common, which gave men more power and control over social and economic life. So, the Vedic social order changed from a flexible, kin-based tribal structure to a rigid and hierarchical system. This set the stage for the caste-based social structure that would later develop in Indian society.

The Dasas and Panis in the Vedic Age

The Dasas were very important to the study of early Vedic society. The Rigveda, the oldest source of evidence that describes the social, political, and economic life of the Vedic people, has the most references to them. Historians can learn about early wars, social change, and the start of social stratification in ancient India by

looking at how the Dasas were portrayed. The Dasas and Panis were at the bottom of society and were often hostile. The Aryans thought of the Dasas as enemies or people they had conquered. The Rigveda often called them non-Vedic and against Aryan culture. When the Aryans moved to northwestern India, they met native groups like the Dasas and Dasyus. The Dasas lived in fortified settlements called Pur and were rich in cattle, which made them both enemies and targets of Aryan raids. The Rigveda talks about these groups in a negative and hostile way, calling them dark-skinned, full-lipped, and aggressive. The Panis were rich traders or cattle owners who didn't want to take part in Vedic ceremonies, so Vedic texts highlighted them in a bad light. People thought that Dasas and Panis were not part of the main Vedic social order and were often linked to violence, exploitation, and being left out of society.

As the society became multifaceted and started dividing into the Varnas, Dāsas' role was formalized into the position of the Śūdras, the fourth varna in the new social hierarchy. The Śūdras had to serve the three higher varnas: Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. Nevertheless, they were not permitted to participate in Vedic rituals or learn sacred things. The change from Dāsa to Śūdra shows how society changed from having fluid tribal relationships in the early Vedic period to a strict varna system in the later Vedic age. This marked the institutionalization of caste distinctions and the solidification of social inequality.

Evolution of the Ashram system

In the Rig Vedic age, life was estranged into binary parts: Brahmacharya, the period of learning and discipline, pupils had to live with their guru in the ashram. There, they were imparted the knowledge of the Vedas, and Grihastha was the time of marriage, yajnas, family duties, and social duties. These stages were based on the real needs of society, such as learning and keeping a family together. They were the building blocks of the āśrama system. Later, this structure grew into four stages. Brahmacharya and Grihastha continued the same. Vanaprastha (forest-dweller) was added to show that someone had left the world after doing their household duties, and Sannyasa (renunciate) came along to stress complete detachment and the search for moksha. This change shows how the Vedic period changed from being mostly about the world to being more about spirituality and asceticism in the later Vedic age.

5.3.2 The Condition of Women

The position of women in the Vedic Age was dynamic and underwent significant transformation over time. In the Early Vedic period, women enjoyed a relatively high status, as evidenced by their participation in intellectual, religious, and social spheres. Textual references indicate that women had access to education, engaged in philosophical debates, and even composed hymns. Figures such as Gargi and Maitreyi exemplify the intellectual agency of women during this period.

Women actively participated in religious rituals alongside men and were regarded as equal partners in household and spiritual life. Marriage practices were relatively liberal, with provisions for widow remarriage and the absence of strict seclusion.

In contrast, the Later Vedic period witnessed a gradual decline in the status of women. The increasing importance

of agriculture, private property, and patriarchal family structures led to greater restrictions on women's mobility and participation in public life. Access to education diminished, and their role in religious practices became limited. The growing emphasis on male authority further entrenched gender inequalities. Social norms and laws stressed the power of male guardians, such as fathers, husbands, and sons. Child marriage and widow remarriage became more common, which limited women's social and personal freedom even more.

5.3.3 The Institution of Marriage

Marriage in the Vedic Age was regarded as a sacred and socially significant institution. In the Early Vedic period, marriage practices were relatively flexible, with an emphasis on mutual consent and maturity. Women had a degree of agency in choosing their partners, and practices such as *niyoga* reflected the importance of lineage continuity. In other words, this practice, it allowed a childless widow to live with her brother-in-law until she had a son, showing how important it was to keep the family line going

In the Later Vedic period, however, marriage became more formalized and ritualistic, with increased control exercised by family elders. The emergence of the *gotra* system introduced new restrictions, particularly the prohibition of marriage within the same lineage (*gotra exogamy*). At the same time, the gradual prevalence of practices such as child marriage further curtailed women's autonomy.

I. Check your Progress (CYP) II

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. Explain the Four Ashrams of the later Vedic age?

Q2. What do you understand by the term gotra?

Q3. Explain the importance of the family in the Rig Vedic age.

Q4. Explain the position of women in the later Vedic age?

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a. Gopati Janasya means _____
- b. The lowest Varna in the later Vedic social hierarchy was _____
- c. The Dasas lived in fortified settlements called _____

5.4 LET US SUM UP

In the Rig Vedic Age, settlements were largely concentrated in the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent, especially along the Indus River and the Saraswati River. These river valleys provided abundant water, fertile land, and rich grazing grounds, which supported a predominantly pastoral economy. In the post-Vedic Age, there was a marked eastward shift in the spatial focus of Vedic culture towards the Ganga River and the Yamuna River plains. Rivers occupied a central place in the spatial organization of Vedic society and played a decisive role in shaping both Early and Later Vedic culture. Fertile plains, rivers, forests, and grasslands supported pastoralism and agriculture.

In the Early Vedic Age, society was simple and flexible, with social divisions based on occupation and merit. In the Later Vedic Age, society became more complex and hierarchical, and the varna system turned hereditary. This transformation led to social inequality and laid the foundation for later Indian social institutions. Women enjoyed a dignified position with access to education and participation in rituals. In the Later Vedic period, as communities became settled and agricultural, social order became more intricate, introducing the Varna classification and the *gotra* system. In the early Vedic age, only Brahmacharya and Grihastha were emphasized, reflecting the practical needs of education and family life. By the later Vedic age, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa were also added.

5.5 GLOSSARY

Egalitarian- A social system where everyone is considered equal and has the same rights and status

Endogamy- Marriage within the tribe

Exogamy- Marriage outside the gotra

Gopati janasya- Lord of cattle

Kubha- Modern Kabul

Patriarchy- Refers to societies or periods where men held primary power.

Sapta Sindhu- Land of seven rivers

Varna- Social division or class system

5.6 EXAMINATION-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Describe the geographical context of the Vedic Age.
- Q2. Analyse the importance of rivers in the geographical context of the Vedic Age.
- Q3. How did the position of women change from the early to the later Vedic Age?
- Q4. Compare the social order of the early Vedic and later Vedic Ages.

5.7 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Explain the importance of the rivers of the early Vedic Age.
- Q2. Discuss the role of society during the later Vedic Age.
- Q3. Write a short note the social position of Dasas?
- Q4. What do you mean by niyoga?

5.8 ANSWER KEY

CYPI

- Q.1 See sub section 5.2.1
- Q.2 See sub section 5.2.1
- Q.3 See sub section 5.2.2
- Q.4 See sub section 5.2.3

Fill in the blanks

- a) Ganga, Yamuna
- b) Parushni (Ravi)
- c) Vedic age

CYP II

- Q.1 See sub section 5.3.1

Q.2 See sub section 5.3.3

Q.3 See sub section 5.3.1

Q.4 See sub section 5.3. 2

Fill in the blanks

a) Lord of cattle

b) Shudras

c) Pur

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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VEDIC AGE

SEMESTER-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-II

LESSON 6

POLITICAL IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONS

STRUCTURE

6.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Political ideas and institutions

6.2.1 Tribal Chiefdom

6.2.2 Role of Assemblies

6.2.3 Role of Priests

6.2.4 Tribal conflicts

6.3 Let us sum up

6.4 Glossary

6.5 Examination Oriented Questions

6.6 Lesson End Exercises

6.7 Answer Key

6.8 Suggested Readings

6.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The motive of the present lesson is to make the learners

- Understand the evolution of Jana and Rashtra to the later emergence of the Mahajanapadas in ancient India.

- explain the formation of larger tribes, such as the Kurus and Panchalas, and their significance in shaping the Ganga–Yamuna doab as the core of Later Vedic culture.
- Explain the transition from small kin-based tribes (Jana) to larger territorial kingdoms (Rashtra) in the later Vedic age.
- Explain the shift in kingship, from limited authority in the Early Vedic period to hereditary and more centralized power in the Later Vedic period.
- Explore the status of Rajadharma
- Discuss the position of ministers and priests, and how they gained influence in Later Vedic politics.

Learning Outcomes

After the completion of the lesson, learners will be able to

- Explain the consolidation of tribes such as the Kurus and Panchalas in the Ganga–Yamuna region.
- Understand the transformation from tribal and clan-based organisation to territorial states and eventually to *Mahajanapadas*.
- Analyse the evolution of kingship from a functional role of protection to a hereditary institution.
- Evaluate the changing role of assemblies and the increasing dominance of priests and ministers in governance.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, during the Vedic Age, society was primarily organised along tribal and clan-based lines. The king (*rajan*) functioned as a protector and war leader, whose authority was moderated by deliberative bodies such as the *Sabha* (council of elders) and the *Samiti* (general assembly). These institutions reflect an early participatory form of governance in which decision-making was not entirely centralised.

Over time, however, significant transformations occurred. Tribal groupings gradually evolved into more complex political formations, leading to the emergence of territorial kingdoms. Kingship became hereditary, and royal authority expanded considerably, while the importance of assemblies declined. Concurrently, ministers and priests acquired greater influence, and the concept of *Rajadharma*—the moral and political duties of the ruler—emerged as a guiding principle of governance. In the later Vedic age, the concept of Rajadharma (the duties of a king) evolved significantly as society transitioned from tribal, clan-based structures to a more complex kingdom. The king was seen as the protector of dharma (the cosmic and social order) and as responsible for maintaining peace and security. In the Later Vedic period, important changes took place in the political and social organization. This transition was closely associated with broader socio-economic changes. Small kin-based tribes of the Rig Vedic period gradually coalesced into larger territorial units. For instance, the Krivis and the Purus combined to form the Kuru tribe, which subsequently allied with the Panchalas. These groups settled in the Ganga–Yamuna doab, which became the core region of Later Vedic political and cultural development.

6.2 POLITICAL IDEAS AND INSTITUTION

6.2.1 Tribal Chieftdom

In the early Rig Vedic period, political authority was centred in tribal chieftdoms. The chief, known as the *Rajan*, exercised authority over the people (*Jana*) rather than over a defined territory. His primary function was providing military leadership to the tribe in warfare and the protection of cattle, which constituted the principal form of wealth. Accordingly, he was often described as *gopajanasya* or *gopatijanasya*, meaning the guardian of the tribe and its herds.

The Later Vedic period witnessed a gradual but significant transformation in political organisation. Tribal groupings expanded into settled agrarian communities, leading to the formation of larger political entities known as *Rashtra*. This shift marked the transition from a kinship-based organisation to a more centralised territorial state. The evolution from *Jana* to *Rashtra* laid the foundation for the emergence of the *Mahajanapadas* in subsequent centuries.

With this transformation, the *Rajan* assumed a more powerful and hereditary role, exercising authority over a defined territory (*janapada*). To legitimise and reinforce their authority, kings performed elaborate rituals such as the *Rajasuya*, *Ashvamedha*, and *Vajapeya*. These sacrifices symbolised sovereignty, territorial supremacy, and prosperity, thereby enhancing the political and ritual authority of the king. The *Rajasuya* was a consecration ceremony that gave a king legitimacy and declared his sovereignty. The *Ashvamedha* was the horse sacrifice, performed to show territorial supremacy—where a consecrated horse roamed freely, and lands it entered were claimed by the king. The *Vajapeya* was a ritual for prosperity and abundance, believed to ensure food, wealth, and strength for the kingdom. Together, these rituals symbolized power, authority, and the king's duty to protect and provide for his people.

Economic changes accompanied these developments. In the early period, the king relied on voluntary tribute (*bali*). However, in the Later Vedic Age, this evolved into a structured system of taxation, including *bali* (now compulsory), *bhaga* (a share of agricultural produce), and *shulka* (custom duties). This shift indicates the emergence of a more organised administrative machinery.

6.2.2 Role of Assemblies

In the Early Vedic Age, the authority of the king was not absolute. It was balanced by assemblies such as the *Sabha*, *Samiti*, and *Vidatha*, which performed deliberative, military, and religious functions. Notably, these assemblies allowed participation beyond elite circles, and evidence suggests that women also had a role in such gatherings.

However, in this period, these institutions transformed. The *Sabha* became increasingly aristocratic, dominated by nobles and priests, while the *Samiti* gradually declined in significance. This led to the marginalisation of popular participation in governance. Next in rank was the *senani*, the commander of the army. The king did not maintain a permanent standing force; instead, militias were raised during times of conflict, composed of tribal groups such as *vrata*, *gana*, *grama*, and *sardha*. The *Vraja-pati* supervised the pasture. Simultaneously, military

organisations became more structured, shifting from temporary militias to more organised forms of warfare aimed at territorial expansion. These developments contributed to the rise of monarchical states and the eventual emergence of the *Mahajanapadas*.

6.2.3 Role of Priests

The transformation of political institutions was closely linked to the rising importance of priests, particularly the *purohita*. In the Rig Vedic period, priests assisted the king by performing rituals and invoking divine favour for prosperity and success in warfare. He performed sacrifices (*yajnas*) and prayers to please the gods. They also preserved and transmitted sacred knowledge through the recitation of Vedic hymns.

In the Later Vedic Age, the role of priests expanded significantly. They became custodians of elaborate ritual practices, requiring specialised knowledge and multiple officiants. Their mastery of sacred texts enhanced their authority, enabling them to exert considerable influence over both political and social life. Their growing wealth and prestige from gifts and land grants further strengthened their role. Kings increasingly depended on priests for legitimisation of their authority, thereby strengthening the nexus between religion and politics.

The performance of major sacrifices such as the *Rajasuya*, *Vajapeya*, and *Ashvamedha* further reinforced this relationship. The *Rajasuya* was a royal consecration ceremony that affirmed the king's sovereignty and symbolized his divine sanction to rule. It involved elaborate rituals, including chariot races, games, and feasts, which projected the king's authority and prestige. The *Vajapeya* was a ritualistic offering of conquest, serving to declare military power and political strength. Its highlight was a grand chariot race, which elevated the king's status above rival rulers. The *Ashvamedha* was the most powerful and complex ritual. A horse was set free to wander, and territories it entered were compelled either to acknowledge the king's authority or engage in battle. Successful completion of this *yajna* established the king's dominance over vast regions. Alongside these grand ceremonies, smaller domestic rituals were performed daily in households to ensure prosperity, health, and divine favor. Collectively, these *yajnas* reinforced the king's legitimacy, enhanced the influence of priests, and maintained the social and cosmic order of the Later. These rituals not only affirmed the king's sovereignty but also elevated the status of priests, who controlled the knowledge necessary for their execution. As the social hierarchy became more rigid, the Brahmins occupied a pre-eminent position, consolidating their dominance in both religious and political spheres.

6.2.4 Tribal conflicts

Conflict was a defining feature of the Vedic Age, particularly in its early phase. Tribal societies competed for resources such as cattle, grazing land, and water. These conflicts, often referred to as *gavishti* (cattle raids), were central to the pastoral economy. The *Rajan*, as a war leader, derived prestige and authority from success in such conflicts. Religious rituals and invocations, especially to deities like Indra, were closely associated with warfare.

In the Later Vedic period, the nature of conflict transformed. With the expansion of agriculture and the establishment of settled communities, warfare became more organised and territorial in character. Conflicts were no longer limited to cattle raids but increasingly involved struggles for land and political dominance. These developments

played a crucial role in the transition from tribal polities to early states.

I. Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. What was the role of the Rajan in the Rig Vedic age?

Q2. Differentiate between the functions of the Sabha and the Samiti in Vedic polity.

Q3. Explain the importance of the Rajasuya and *Ashvamedha* sacrifices in legitimizing kingship.

II. Fill in the blanks

- a. Winning battles also gave the _____ more prestige and power, making his tribe stronger.
- b. The authority of the *raja* was not absolute. His power was constrained by tribal assemblies like _____, _____ and _____.
- c. Yajna means _____
- d. In the Rig Vedic age, the king had very limited resources. He depended on tribute called _____.
- e. *Gopa janasya* or *gopati janasya*), means _____

6.3 LET US SUM UP

The political ideas and institutions of the Vedic Age reveal a gradual but significant process of transformation. The Early Vedic period was characterised by tribal organisation, participatory governance, and limited kingship.

Over time, however, political authority became centralised, kingship became hereditary, and territorial states emerged.

Simultaneously, the role of assemblies declined, while priests and ritual practices gained prominence in legitimising political authority. Tribal conflicts evolved into organised warfare between territorial states, reflecting broader socio-economic changes. The most common cause was cattle raids, because cows were seen as wealth, and stealing them made a tribe richer. Another reason was territorial expansion—as tribes moved east, they wanted fertile land in the Gangetic plains, which led to disputes. Winning battles also gave the *Rajan* (chief) more prestige and power, making his tribe stronger. In the Later Vedic period, important changes took place. Kingship became hereditary and more powerful, political authority became centralized, and large territorial units known as Janapadas emerged. Religious rituals and sacrifices further strengthened royal authority, while the importance of popular assemblies declined. These developments laid the foundations for later political structures, including monarchy, administrative systems, and state formation in ancient India.

6.4 GLOSSARY

Bali - the tribute or tax offered by the people to their king

Bhaga - a share of the harvest

Gopa janasya or gopati janasya - guardian of the herds and the tribe

Rajadharma - the duties of a king

Rashtra, - large political kingdom or territory beneath the rule of a king.

Vajapeya - It was a sacrifice of victory, performed to demonstrate military supremacy and political strength

6.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. What was the role of assemblies in the Rig Vedic Age?
- Q2. How did kingship change from the Rig Vedic to the later Vedic Age?
- Q3. Explain how the power of the Raja grew stronger over time?
- Q4. What was the connection between religion and politics in the Vedic period?

6.6 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Discuss the role of priests (Purohita) in the Vedic age.
- Q2. Compare Early and Later Vedic political institutions
- Q3. Explain the importance of the *Rajasuya* and *Ashwamedha* sacrifices in legitimizing kingship.

6.7 ANSWER KEY

CYP-I

Q.1. See sub section 6.2.1

Q.2 See sub section 6.2.2

Q.3 See sub section 6.2.3

II. Fill in the blanks

- a) Rajan,
- b) Sabha, Samiti, and Vidatha.
- c) Sacrifice
- d) Bali
- e) guardian of the herds and the tribe.

6.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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VEDIC AGE

SEMESTER-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-II

LESSON 7

PATTERN OF SUBSISTENCE IN EARLY VEDIC AGE

STRUCTURE

7.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Pattern of Subsistence

7.2.1 Pastoral Economy

7.2.2 Agriculture as a secondary occupation

7.2.3 Animal Husbandry and Role of the Horse

7.2.4 Absence of Iron

7.2.5 Tribal conflicts

7.3 Let us sum up

7.4 Glossary

7.5 Examination-Oriented Questions

7.6 Lesson End Exercises

7.7 Answer key

7.8 Suggested Readings

7.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of the lesson is to enable you to

- Explain about the cattle rearing as a main source of wealth and conflict.
- Discuss agriculture as a subordinate occupation.

- Explain how animal husbandry supports the everyday life and role of the horse
- Discuss the absence of iron affecting agriculture
- Explain the main reasons for tribal conflicts

Learning Outcomes

After completing the lesson, learners will have a clear understanding

- The content of cattle was the main measure of capital in the Rig Vedic period.
- In what way did agriculture play a supporting role, and farming was practiced on a limited scale
- How animal husbandry supports the daily life, and the role of the horses and chariots played in warfare and mobility
- Absence of iron tools limited large-scale agriculture and forest clearing
- Tribal conflicts were mainly fought for cattle and assets

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the Rigvedic Age marks the formative stage of ancient Indian history following the decline of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Dated approximately between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE. The hymns during this age were the primary source for reconstructing the socio-economic, political, and devout life of this age. The Age marks the formative stage of Vedic civilization in the north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent. This period is primarily reconstructed from the hymns of the Rigveda, which offer valuable understanding about the social, economic, political, and religious life of the Aryan communities. The society was principally a pastoral society. Cattle rearing was the main sustenance of survival, while agriculture remained secondary due to ecological constraints. Tribal organization, kinship ties, and clan-based leadership shaped the political structure, while religion revolved around nature worship, sacrificial rituals, and hymns. Thus, the Early Vedic Age represents a crucial phase in Indian history, laying the foundations of later cultural and institutional developments.

7.2 PATTERN OF SUBSISTENCE

The subsistence pattern of this age was primarily pastoral, with cattle rearing constituting the dominant occupation and the central axis of economic life. Unlike later phases of Vedic society, agriculture played only a subsidiary role, as ecological and geographical conditions limited its scope. The frequent shifting of river courses, inadequate irrigation facilities, and the prevalence of forested terrain constrained the expansion of settled farming practices. In this context, pastoralism developed as the most feasible and sustainable strategy of livelihood.

7.2.1 Pastoral Economy

The Rigveda highlights cattle as the most valued possession and the foremost form of wealth. A prosperous individual was termed a *gomat* (owner of cows), and hymns frequently contain prayers for the increase of cattle, underscoring their centrality to survival and prosperity. Cattle were not only a viable source, but they

were also a primary cause of conflict. Most wars were fought over cows, and the Rigveda uses the term *gavishthi*—literally “search for cows”—to denote war. Other related expressions, such as *goshu gavyet*, *gavyu*, and *gaveshana*, further exemplify how cattle shaped the vocabulary of conflict. Brahman were rewarded with cows, which functioned as a medium of exchange, reinforcing their role as currency.

In early Vedic culture, cows were not merely livestock but a chief economic resource, serving as a main medium of exchange and a portion of wealth. Brahmins, as curators of ritual and divine authority, were often pleased with cows, strengthening their emblematic and practical value as currency.

The possession of large herds conferred reverence, high social status, and marked the power of clans and individuals. Cattle were prayed in hymns as a symbol of wealth and success, revealing that they were not only animals but a symbol of wealth, status, and devotion. They functioned as economic resources by providing food, dairy, and draught power; as social markers by determining wealth and prestige; and as ritual symbols by being central to sacrificial practices and religious hymns. Their importance extended even to politics and warfare, as conflicts were often fought over cattle, with terms for war in the Rigveda derived directly from livestock. In this way, cattle bound together the material and spiritual dimensions of Aryan society, making pastoralism the defining feature of the Early Vedic subsistence pattern.

People expressed loyalty to their Raja through voluntary tributes and gifts, known as *bali*, which were usually offered in cattle or agricultural produce. Importantly, *Bali* was voluntary and occasional, not a fixed tax. It was more like a gift offered out of respect or during rituals. The raja did not have a regular taxation system; instead, he relied on these offerings and on booty gained from cattle raids to maintain his position. This shows that political authority was still based on personal loyalty and clan ties rather than organized institutions.

7.2.2 Agriculture as a secondary occupation

Agriculture in this period played a secondary role, supplementing the pastoral economy rather than replacing it. The term *krishi* (to cultivate) appears rarely in the *Rigveda*, indicating its limited significance. The Aryans cultivated primarily one variety of grain, *yava* (barley). Cultivation methods were simple and primitive, involving wooden ploughs drawn by oxen.

Although the Aryans were acquainted with copper and the wheel, they did not have much influence on agricultural operations. Fire was used to clear forests and prepare land for cultivation, but the absence of large-scale irrigation systems restricted productivity. Rivers such as the Sutlej and Indus frequently changed their courses, making permanent cultivation difficult. Due to this, agriculture remained subsistence-oriented.

The limited role of agriculture also explains the absence of rigid social stratification based on land ownership. Unlike later periods, where agrarian surplus contributed to hierarchical divisions, the Early Vedic society remained relatively egalitarian, with wealth measured in cattle rather than land.

Other means of subsistence included hunting, fishing, and gathering forest produce, which supplemented food resources. The diet of the Early Vedic people was varied and included milk products, meat, barley, fruits, and vegetables.

7.2.3 Animal Husbandry and the Role of the Horse

Besides cattle, other animals that were reared were sheep, goats, and horses. Sheep and goats provided wool, milk, and meat. For guarding and hunting, dogs were tamed. Animal husbandry met many daily needs. Milk, curd, butter (ghee), and meat were important items of food. Hides and wool were used for clothing.

The horse occupied an important place, though it was less economically important than cattle. Its importance was primarily used in mobility, warfare, and prestige.

7.2.4 Absence of Iron

In the early Vedic age, iron was indeed not in use. The society was still within what historians often call the “Bronze Age culture,” where tools and weapons were fashioned from copper, bronze, stone, and wood. Farming was relatively limited compared to later periods, and cattle rearing was the backbone of the economy. Cows were considered wealth, and even social prestige was tied to cattle ownership.

The Rigveda, our primary source for this era, uses the word *ayas*, but scholars generally agree that in this context it refers to copper or bronze, not iron. This is significant because iron only appears in the archaeological record in the later Vedic Age (after c. 1000 BCE), when it revolutionized agriculture and warfare.

Farming tools in the Early Vedic Age were simple, including wooden ploughs, stone blades, and copper or bronze sickles. Reliance on cattle meant agriculture was secondary, often practiced in river valleys with fertile soil. Life was pastoral, with small, mobile settlements and an economy centred on barter rather than coinage.

7.2.5 Tribal conflicts

In the Early Vedic period, tribal conflicts were mainly connected with economic needs, especially the importance of cattle. Cattle were the main source of wealth. They provided milk, ghee, meat, hides, and were essential for religious sacrifices. Wealth and gifts (*dakshina*) were measured in terms of cows. Because of this, tribes often fought to capture cattle from other tribes. These cattle raids were called *gavisti* and were considered a normal and accepted practice. Natural resources such as grazing land, forests, and water were limited. Tribes moved seasonally in search of better pastures, which often led to clashes with other tribes over grazing grounds and riverbanks. Land was held collectively by the tribe (*jana*), not owned privately. Since land could not be controlled permanently, economic competition focused mainly on cattle. Strong tribal loyalty encouraged conflicts to protect and increase wealth. After wars, the captured cattle and goods were shared among the chief (*rajan*), warriors, priests, and tribe members, which strengthened unity and the authority of the leader.

I. Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. Why was agriculture called the secondary occupation in the early Vedic period?

Q2. Why were cattle considered the chief measure of wealth in the early Vedic age

Q3. What factors prevented large-scale forest clearing during the early Vedic age?

Q4. In what ways did horses influence Vedic society and religion?

II Fill in the blanks

- a) The Aryans cultivated primarily one variety of grain called- _____
- b) Gavishti means _____
- c) People expressed loyalty to their Raja through voluntary tributes and gifts, known as _____
- d) The Rigveda, does not mention iron; the word _____ in it usually means copper or bronze.

7.3 LET US SUM UP

The subsistence pattern in this age was overwhelmingly pastoral, with cattle serving as the chief economic assets, social markers of wealth, and ritual symbols. Agriculture played a secondary role, constrained by environmental limits and technological simplicity, and was practiced chiefly for sustenance rather than surplus. Horses, though not a direct source of livelihood, enhanced tribal mobility, warfare, and political prestige, thereby complementing

the pastoral economy. Overall, the Early Vedic economy was simple, tribal, and largely self-sufficient. Its reliance on cattle reflects both the ecological realities of the northwestern subcontinent and the Aryans' cultural values, who viewed livestock as the foundation of prosperity, power, and social order. Tribal conflicts were mainly fought over cattle and resources, making warfare an important part of the pastoral economy.

7.4 GLOSSARY.

Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice)- Performed by kings to show their supremacy and expand their territory

Bali – It was a voluntary tribute or offering given by the people to the Raja.

Gavishti- Search for cows

Gomat- Owner of cows

Yava- Barley

Pattern of Subsistence - Refers to how a society produces food and meets its basic material needs

7.5 EXAMINATION-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Why was large-scale forest clearing not possible during this period?
- Q2. What do you understand by pastoral society?
- Q3. Describe the pattern of subsistence in the early Vedic age?
- Q4. What were the main causes of tribal conflicts in the Early Vedic period?

7.6 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Why did cattle rearing play an imperative role in the Rig Vedic age?
- Q2. Why was agriculture rudimentary and subsistence-based?
- Q3. What do you understand by the term Bali?
- Q4. Evaluate the statement: "The Early Vedic Age was more pastoral than agricultural."

7.7 ANSWER KEY CYP I

- Q1. See sub section 7.2.2
- Q2. See sub section 7.2.1
- Q3. See sub section 7.2.4
- Q4. See sub section 7.2.3

II Fill in the Blanks

- a) Yava (barley).

- b) search for cows
- c) Bali
- d) Ayas

7.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Ram Sharan Sharma, Aspect of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, Motilal Banarsidas, Reprint, 1999
- R.S. Sharma, India's Ancient Past,
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VEDIC AGE

SEMESTER-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-II

LESSON 8

PATTERN OF SUBSISTENCE IN THE LATER VEDIC AGE

STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Pattern of subsistence in the later Vedic Age
 - 8.2.1 *Agriculture*
 - 8.2.2 *Animal husbandry*
 - 8.2.3 *Introduction of Iron technology*
 - 8.2.4 *Growth of Crafts and Trade*
 - 8.2.5 *Emerging importance of land*
- 8.3 Let us sum up
- 8.4 Glossary
- 8.5 Examination-Oriented Questions
- 8.6 Lesson End Exercises
- 8.7 Answer key
- 8.8 Suggested Readings

8.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVE AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of the lesson is to enable you to :

- Explain the concept of subsistence patterns in historical contexts.

- Examine the emergence and consolidation of agriculture as the primary mode of livelihood.
- Understand the transition from pastoral nomadism to settled village life.
- Analyse the role of iron technology in facilitating forest clearance and agricultural expansion

Learning Outcomes

After completing the lesson, you will be able to :

- Comprehend the transition from pastoral to agrarian modes of subsistence.
- Evaluate the significance of iron technology in the expansion of agriculture.
- Identify the emergence of fertile agricultural zones as centres of economic activity

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the Later Vedic period, also known as PGW culture (c. 1000–600 BCE) marks a phase of profound transformation in the economic, social, and cultural life of early Indian society. One of the most significant developments during this period was the gradual shift from a predominantly pastoral and semi-nomadic mode of existence to a settled agrarian economy. While cattle rearing had earlier constituted the principal source of livelihood and wealth, agriculture increasingly assumed primacy as the dominant economic activity.

A critical factor facilitating this transformation was the introduction and widespread use of iron technology. Iron implements such as axes and ploughshares enabled the clearing of dense forests and the cultivation of extensive tracts of land, particularly in the fertile Ganga–Yamuna plains. This expansion of agriculture led to increased productivity and the generation of surplus, which in turn encouraged permanent settlement in villages, replacing earlier patterns of mobility.

Simultaneously, the growth of craft production—such as pottery, weaving, carpentry, and metallurgy—contributed to economic diversification and fostered systems of exchange and trade. Although cattle continued to retain ritual and symbolic significance, they ceased to be the sole determinant of wealth.

These economic changes were accompanied by the emergence of more complex social hierarchies and evolving forms of political organization. Religious practices also became increasingly elaborate, moving from relatively simple sacrificial rites to more structured ceremonial systems. Archaeological evidence, particularly the presence of Painted Grey Ware, suggests the existence of settled communities inhabiting wattle-and-daub structures. Collectively, these developments laid the groundwork for the eventual emergence of urban centres and early state formations in northern India.

8.2 PATTERN OF SUBSISTENCE IN THE LATER VEDIC AGE

The subsistence pattern of the Later Vedic period reflects a gradual yet decisive transformation in the economic life of society. The shift from pastoralism to settled agriculture was neither abrupt nor uniform; rather, it evolved under the influence of technological innovations, ecological adaptations, and social reorganization.

The introduction of iron tools significantly enhanced the efficiency of cultivation, particularly in the fertile regions of the Ganga–Yamuna plains. As agriculture expanded, it provided a more stable and reliable source of sustenance, thereby reducing dependence on pastoral activities. The production of surplus further stimulated economic diversification, encouraging the development of crafts and trade. Consequently, subsistence during this period became increasingly complex, integrating agriculture, animal husbandry, artisanal production, and exchange networks.

8.2.1 Agriculture

Agriculture emerged as the cornerstone of the Later Vedic economy. The migration of populations from the Sapta Sindhu region to the fertile plains of the Ganga–Yamuna valley played a pivotal role in this transformation, as these regions offered favourable conditions for cultivation, including fertile soil and access to water resources.

In contrast to the Early Vedic period, where pastoralism predominated, agriculture now became the principal mode of subsistence. Traditional crops such as barley continued to be cultivated, while new crops, including wheat (*godhuma*) and rice (*vrihi*), gained prominence. The mention of rice in Vedic literature is particularly noteworthy, as it reflects adaptation to diverse ecological conditions.

The adoption of iron ploughs and agricultural tools significantly enhanced productivity. The resulting surplus production had far-reaching implications: it facilitated storage and redistribution, supported population growth, and enabled sections of society to engage in non-agricultural occupations.

Moreover, agricultural surplus contributed to the consolidation of political and religious institutions. Chiefs and kings extracted tribute (*bali*) from agricultural produce, thereby strengthening their authority. Similarly, surplus resources supported the performance of elaborate rituals conducted by priests. Agriculture, therefore, functioned not merely as an economic activity but as a foundational element shaping social hierarchy, political power, and religious practice.

8.2.2 Animal husbandry

Despite the growing dominance of agriculture, animal husbandry continued to play a crucial complementary role in the Later Vedic economy. Domesticated animals such as cattle, oxen, sheep, goats, and horses remained integral to economic and social life. Oxen were particularly valuable for agricultural operations, serving as draught animals for ploughing and transportation. Cows continued to provide milk and dairy products, while their dung served as both manure and fuel. Sheep and goats contributed wool, meat, and hides, thereby supporting both subsistence and craft production.

However, a notable shift occurred in the conceptualization of wealth. While cattle had earlier been the primary measure of prosperity, land gradually emerged as a more significant indicator of economic and social status. Animal husbandry thus assumed a secondary role, functioning largely in support of agricultural production, reflecting broader structural changes in the economy.

8.2.3 Introduction of Iron technology

The introduction of iron technology in the Later Vedic age was a turning point in both subsistence and social development. With the use of iron tools—ploughshares, axes, sickles, and hoes—communities could clear the dense forests of the Gangetic plains and cultivate the fertile but tough alluvial soil. This marked a shift from pastoralism and limited agriculture to large-scale, settled farming. Iron ploughs increased efficiency, boosted crop yields, and made agriculture more reliable, leading to surplus production.

The surplus not only supported population growth but also encouraged the rise of permanent villages and towns. It laid the foundation for social stratification, as agricultural wealth became concentrated in certain groups, reinforcing the varna system. Politically, rulers could now command larger resources, which in turn supported the performance of grand rituals like the Rajasuya and Ashvamedha. Thus, iron technology was not just a technical innovation—it reshaped economy, society, and religion in the Later Vedic period, paving the way for the emergence of early states in northern India.

8.2.4 Growth of Crafts and Trade

The emergence of agricultural surplus created favourable conditions for the development of crafts and trade. As a segment of the population was no longer directly engaged in food production, specialization in various crafts such as pottery, weaving, carpentry, and metallurgy became possible.

Distinct types of pottery, including Black and Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Painted Grey Ware, and Red Ware, are associated with this period. Among these, Painted Grey Ware serves as a significant archaeological marker of the Later Vedic age. Artisans produced a wide range of goods, including tools, domestic items, weapons, and textiles.

Most craft production was localized and small-scale, often organized at the village level. Transactions were primarily conducted through barter, with goods exchanged in kind, particularly in grain. The expansion of trade networks facilitated interaction between different communities and contributed to increasing economic integration.

8.2.5 Emerging importance of land

One of the most significant developments of the Later Vedic period was the growing importance of land as a source of wealth and authority. While earlier wealth had been measured primarily in terms of cattle, land ownership gradually emerged as the principal determinant of social status.

Initially, land was held collectively by clans (*vis*), reflecting the communal character of early Vedic society. Over time, however, this system evolved towards individual ownership, with families exercising control over specific plots. The *grihapati*, or head of the household, emerged as a key figure in this process, exercising authority over land and resources.

This transition towards private ownership contributed to the emergence of a more hierarchical social order. Control over land conferred economic power, social prestige, and political influence, and laid the foundations for more structured systems of governance and taxation. Thus, the increasing significance of land reflects deeper transformations in the economic and social fabric of Later Vedic society.

I. Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1: How did iron technology influence subsistence patterns in the Later Vedic Age?

Q2. Explain the meaning of animal husbandry in PGW culture?

Q3. Write a brief note on surplus production during the Later Vedic Age.

Q4. What is meant by the term Wattle and Daub?

II. Fill in the blanks

1. _____ became the primary source of income, replacing cattle rearing as the main economic activity.
2. The chief crops of this age were _____ and _____.
3. Agricultural surplus formed the substance for the gathering of _____ by chiefs and kings.

8.3 LET US SUM UP

During the later Vedic age, two significant changes in pastoralism appeared. First, it became less central to daily life as agriculture gained importance and cattle were increasingly used for ploughing and farming rather than raids. This period marks a key shift in early Indian subsistence strategies, with pastoralism gradually giving way to a mainly agrarian economy. The widespread use of iron technology helped clear forests and expand crops, leading to surplus food production. Although cattle continued to serve economic, ritual, and symbolic roles, livelihood diversification through trade and craft specialization became more evident. Overall, subsistence practices during this time aimed to promote economic stability, social organization, and political unity, marking a move towards a settled, organized farming society. Collectively, these developments contributed to the formation of a more stable, organized, and stratified society, laying the groundwork for subsequent urbanization and state formation in early India.

8.4 GLOSSARY

Daub refers to the mud plaster used in house construction during the Later Vedic Age. It was made from a mixture of mud, clay, straw, and cow dung, and was applied over a framework of wood or bamboo. Daub helped strengthen walls and protect them from heat and cold.

Pastoral - These were nomadic or semi-nomadic groups that traveled with domesticated herds, such as goats and cattle.

Sapta-Sindhu — Land of Seven Rivers

Subsistence - How people survive and support themselves.

Wattle refers to the framework of wooden sticks, bamboo, or reeds used in house construction during this Age. These materials were intertwined to form the basic structure of walls, over which daub (mud plaster) was applied.

8.5 EXAMINATION-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Discuss the pattern of subsistence in the Later Vedic period.
- Q2. Analyze the shift from a pastoral to an agricultural economy during the PGW culture.
- Q3. Examine how iron technology contributed to the transformation of economy.
- Q4. Explain how agricultural surplus contributed to the growth of crafts and trade?

8.6 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Discuss the development of crafts.
- Q2. How did trade evolve during this Vedic Age?
- Q3. What changes took place in land ownership during the Later Vedic period?

8.7 ANSWER KEY CYP-I

- Q1. See sub section 8.2.3
- Q2. See sub section 8.2.2
- Q3. See sub section 8.2.1
- Q4. See Section 8.4

II. Fill in the blanks

1. Agriculture
2. Rice and Wheat
3. Bali

8.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Ram Sharan Sharma, Aspect of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, Motilal Banarsidas, Reprint, 1999
- R.S. Sharma, India's Ancient Past,
- D.N.Jha Ancient India in Historical Outline. Revised and Enlarged Edition, Manohar Publications, 2018
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VEDIC AGE

SEMESTER-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-II

LESSON 9

RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS AND BELIEFS IN THE EARLY VEDIC AGE

STRUCTURE

- 9.0 Learning Objective and Outcomes
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Religious systems and beliefs in the early Vedic Age
 - 9.2.1 *Major Rig-Vedic Deities*
 - 9.2.2 *Subordinate deities*
 - 9.2.3 *Status and role of Priest*
 - 9.2.4 *Sacrificial Practices (Yajna)*
 - 9.2.5 *Nature of divine Offerings to the deities*
- 9.3 Let us sum up
- 9.4 Glossary
- 9.5 Examination-Oriented Questions
- 9.6 Lesson End Exercises
- 9.7 Answer Key
- 9.8 Suggested Readings

9.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The motive of this lesson is to enable you to :

- explain the objectives of worshipping major deities in the Rig Vedic Age.

- know the role and significance of subordinate deities
- discuss the religious role of priests
- know the importance of sacrifices
- explain that offerings formed an essential part of religious worship in the Rig Vedic Age

Learning Outcomes

After completing the topic, you will have clarity about the

- early Vedic age, religion, which was mainly centered on the worship of natural forces, which were personified as powerful gods. These gods were known as the major deities
- sacred drink, named Soma, which was revered as both a divine substance and a deity.
- Besides major gods, Early Vedic religion included several subordinate (minor) deities with specific functions. These deities were worshipped for everyday needs rather than for major cosmic powers.
- Priests occupied a respected and influential position in Early Vedic society. Priests performed the rituals while chanting hymns from the Rigveda age.
- Sacrifices (yajnas) formed the core of religious life in the Early Vedic Age. They were performed to please the gods and seek blessings such as rain, prosperity, cattle, and victory in wars.
- Offerings formed an essential part of religious worship in the Early Vedic Age. They were mainly made through yajnas (sacrificial rituals).

9.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE EARLY VEDIC AGE

The Early Vedic Age, conventionally dated between c. 1500–1000 BCE, represents the formative phase of Vedic civilization in northern India. The socio-economic structure of this period was largely tribal and pastoral. Religion occupied a central position in social life, with rituals, hymns, and sacrificial practices forming the core of spiritual expression. Political authority was vested in tribal chiefs (*Rajan*), while priests (*Purohits*) exercised considerable influence over religious and social affairs. This historical period laid the foundation for the subsequent development of social, cultural, and religious institutions in the Later Vedic Age.

9.2 RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS AND BELIEFS IN THE EARLY VEDIC AGE

The religious system of the Early Vedic Age was marked by simplicity and an intimate engagement with natural forces. The Vedic people perceived nature as a powerful determinant of human existence and consequently deified its elements. Religion functioned as a mechanism to maintain harmony between humans and the natural world through ritual practices and sacrificial offerings.

Religious life was expressed through prayers, hymns, and yajnas, performed both by priests and household heads. These practices not only fulfilled spiritual aspirations but also reinforced social cohesion and moral order.

The objectives of worship were largely pragmatic, aimed at securing health, longevity, prosperity, protection of cattle, and success in warfare.

Natural phenomena such as wind, rain, fire, and thunder were anthropomorphized into deities, predominantly male, reflecting the patriarchal orientation of Vedic society. Although female deities were acknowledged, their role remained relatively marginal. Thus, Early Vedic religion may be characterized as a form of nature worship grounded in ritual practice rather than abstract theological speculation.

9.2.1 Major Rig-Vedic Deities

Indra

Indra occupied the foremost position among the Vedic deities. Associated with thunder, rain, and warfare, he was revered as *Purandara* (destroyer of forts) and protector of the Aryan tribes. The prominence of Indra is evident from the large number of hymns dedicated to him in the *Rigveda*.

Agni

Agni, the god of fire, constituted the foundation of Vedic religious life. He functioned as the mediator between humans and the divine, carrying offerings and prayers to the gods. His indispensability in sacrificial rituals made him central to both domestic and public religious practices. Agni symbolized purity and continuity of divine order and is second only to Indra in prominence in the *Rigveda*.

Varuna

Varuna was regarded as the guardian of *Zta*, the cosmic and moral order. He was conceived as an omniscient deity who regulated human conduct and enforced ethical discipline through reward and punishment.

Yama

Yama, the god of death, was believed to be the first mortal and the ruler of the afterlife. His presence reflects the Vedic concern with mortality and the continuity of existence beyond death.

Rudra

Rudra, associated with storms and destruction, was both feared and revered. Although less prominent in the Early Vedic period, his attributes foreshadowed the later development of Shiva in subsequent traditions.

Soma

Soma occupied a unique position as both a sacred ritual drink and a deity. Prepared from a special plant, it was offered to the gods and consumed by priests during rituals. Soma was believed to confer strength, vitality, and immortality, and is extensively praised in the *Rigveda*. It was prepared from the juice of a special plant and was mainly used in religious sacrifices. Soma was offered to the gods, especially Indra, and was also consumed by priests during rituals. It was believed to give strength, energy, and immortality. Soma is frequently praised in the *Rigveda*, where it is regarded as both a divine drink and a god.

9.2.2 Subordinate deities

In addition to major deities, Early Vedic religion included several subordinate gods associated with specific aspects of life and nature. Deities such as Surya (sun), Savitr, associated with the Gayatri Mantra, are related to Goddess Gayatri, the goddess of wisdom and knowledge, and Pushan (protector of cattle and pastoral life) played important roles in everyday religious practice.

Female deities like Aditi (mother goddess) and Usha (goddess of dawn) were also acknowledged, though their status remained secondary. These deities were invoked for specific needs such as health, protection, and prosperity, thereby contributing to the diversity of the Vedic pantheon. Hymns dedicated to these deities are found in the Rigveda, showing that they were respected and invoked for specific needs such as health, protection, and prosperity. Although subordinate in status, they contributed to the diversity and richness of early Vedic religious belief.

Thus, subordinate deities were secondary gods within the Vedic religious system, worshipped for particular purposes but not holding the supreme position enjoyed by major deities like Indra or Agni.

9.2.3 Status and Role of Priest

Priests occupied a position of considerable importance in Early Vedic society. As religion formed the centre of life, priests were responsible for conducting yajnas to please gods such as Indra, Agni, and Varuna. These rituals were believed to ensure rain, fertility, prosperity, protection from enemies, and success in wars. Priests carefully followed religious procedures and emphasized the correct chanting of hymns, as it was believed that even a small mistake in pronunciation could reduce the effectiveness of a ritual. They memorized and recited hymns from the Rigveda, preserving sacred knowledge through oral tradition. The precision of recitation and adherence to ritual procedures were considered essential for the efficacy of sacrifices.

The chief priest, or *Purohita*, held a prominent position in the royal court, acting as an advisor to the king in religious as well as political matters. Through their association with divine authority, priests legitimized royal power and reinforced social hierarchy.

In addition, priests preserved and transmitted sacred knowledge through oral tradition. Their elevated status was reflected in the rewards or gifts (*dakshina*), they received, including gifts of cattle, food, and clothing. Overall, priests were central figures in Early Vedic society, shaping its religious practices, influencing governance, and maintaining cultural continuity.

9.2.4 Sacrificial Practices (Yajna)

Sacrificial rituals formed the core of Early Vedic religion. These practices were rooted in the belief that harmony between humans, nature, and the divine was essential for a prosperous life.

Yajnas were generally simple and performed in open spaces, often at the household level. Offerings such as milk, ghee, grains, soma juice, and occasionally animals were made into the sacred fire, accompanied by the chanting of Vedic hymns.

The primary objective of these sacrifices was material well-being, including rain, fertility, prosperity, and victory in warfare. At a deeper level, yajnas were believed to sustain *Zita*, thereby maintaining cosmic and social order.

9.2.5 Nature of divine Offerings to the deities

Offerings constituted a fundamental aspect of Early Vedic worship and reflected the pastoral and agrarian economy of the period. Common offerings included milk, curd, ghee, barley, and soma juice, while animal sacrifice was also practiced in certain rituals.

Agni, as the divine mediator, played a crucial role in conveying these offerings to the gods. The underlying principle of these practices was one of reciprocity, wherein human devotion and sacrifice were expected to secure divine favour and blessings. These sacrifices were made to major deities like Indra, Agni, and Varuna with the expectation of securing rain, fertility, prosperity, protection, and victory in warfare. Offerings were thus based on a principle of reciprocal exchange, where devotion and sacrifice were believed to ensure divine favor, highlighting the practical, nature-oriented character of Early Vedic religion.

I. Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. What is the importance of Agni in the early Vedic Age?

Q2. Why was Indra called the destroyer of Forts?

Q.3 Write a short note on Sacrificial practices in the early Vedic Age

Q4 Why was the Soma considered a sacred drink?

II. Fill in the blanks

1. ----- is associated with storms and destruction.
2. Sacrificial offerings included _____ and _____ drink.
3. _____ and _____ were the female deities.
4. _____ was connected with the guardian of cattle and pastoral life
5. _____ was a sacred ritual drink of the Early Vedic Age.

9.3 LET US SUM UP

The religious system of the Early Vedic Age was characterized by its ritual orientation, naturalistic worldview, and patriarchal structure. Worship centred on deities such as Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Soma, while yajnas and offerings formed the core of religious practice. The absence of idol worship and temple institutions underscores the primacy of hymns, prayers, and ritual acts in Vedic religion. Overall, Early Vedic religion reflects a pragmatic and nature-oriented worldview grounded in the principle of divine-human reciprocity.

9.4 GLOSSARY

Purandara- destroyer of forts.

Rita- cosmic order and moral law

Soma- deity of plants and sacred drinks

Usha- goddess of dawn

9.5 EXAMINATION-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Write a note on any two gods of the early Vedic age.
- Q2. Discuss the importance of religion to the early Vedic people.
- Q3. Describe the nature and significance of offerings in the early Vedic age?
- Q4. “Priests occupied a central role in the early Vedic society”. Justify the statement.

9.6 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Discuss the major gods of the early Vedic age.
- Q2. Explain the significance of sacrifice in the Rig Vedic age?
- Q3. Examine the status of subordinate deities in understanding Early Vedic religious beliefs.

9.7 ANSWER KEY CYP-I

- Q1 See sub section 9.2.2
- Q 2 See sub section 9.2.2
- Q3 See sub section 9.2.3

Fill in the blanks

1. Indra
2. Ghee and Soma
3. Aditi and Usha
4. Pushan
5. Soma

9.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Ram Sharan Sharma, Aspect of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, Motilal Banarsidas, Reprint, 1999
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VEDIC AGE

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-II

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 10

RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS AND BELIEFS IN THE LATER VEDIC AGE

STRUCTURE

10.0 Learning Objective and Outcomes

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Religious Systems and Beliefs

10.2.1 Deterioration of Early Vedic Gods and Intensification of New Deities

10.2.2 Sacrifices and Rituals

10.2.3 Role of Brahmana (purohit)

10.2.4 Atharvaveda and Folk Tradition

10.2.5 Philosophical Thoughts

10.3 Let us sum up

10.4 Glossary

10.5 Examination-Oriented Questions

10.6 Lesson End Exercises

10.7 Answer Key

10.8 Suggested Readings

10.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The motive of this lesson is to enable you to :

- explain the transformation of gods
- understand how the Brahmins gained religious authority and explained the meaning and procedure of

rituals.

- discuss how religion became more ritualistic and complex than in the Early Vedic Age.
- Yajnas (sacrifices) became central to religious life, and large sacrifices like Rajasuya and Ashvamedha were performed by kings.
- explain how the Upanishads stressed philosophical ideas rather than rituals.
- discuss how the Atharvaveda reflects the folk beliefs and practices of ancient Indian society.

Learning Outcomes

After completing the topic, one would be able to know about the

- Deterioration of Early Vedic Gods and the Intensification of New Deities
- The Yajnas (sacrificial rituals) became central to religious life. Rituals grew more complex, increasing the power and influence of Brahmins (priests), who controlled the knowledge of hymns and ceremonies.
- transformation through the Upanishads. Earlier Vedic religion emphasized external rituals. conducted by priests. The Upanishads shifted focus to internal realization, teaching that true liberation (moksha) comes not from ritual but from knowledge.
- Unlike the Rigveda, Samaveda, and Yajurveda, which emphasize sacrifices and chants, the Atharvaveda preserves folk traditions and popular beliefs.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the Later Vedic Age (1000–600 BCE) represents a decisive turning point in the religious history of early India. While the Rig Vedic age was categorized by the worship of natural forces such as Indra, Agni, and Varuna through relatively simple rituals, this Age witnessed the systematization and expansion of religious practices. Sacrifices became gradually intricate, demanding specialized priestly knowledge, which elevated the status of the Brahmins and placed them at the centre of social and spiritual life. Alongside ritualism, this period also saw the rise of new divinities such as Prajāpati (Lord of Creatures), Vishnu (the preserver), and Rudra (the ferocious god, who was acknowledged with Shiva), reflecting a shift from nature worship to more nonconcrete and philosophical concepts of divinity. At the same time, profound philosophical ideas began to flourish, questioning the nature of existence, the soul (ātman), and the ultimate reality (Brahman). Concepts such as karma (the law of moral causation), samsara (the cycle of rebirth), and moksha (liberation from worldly bondage) took shape, marking the conversion from ritual-centered religion to a superfluous, introspective, and ethical system. Thus, this Vedic Age not only consolidated the ritualistic foundations of Vedic belief but also positioned the intellectual groundwork for the Upanishadic philosophy and the spiritual ethnicities.

10.2 RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS AND BELIEFS IN THE LATER VEDIC AGE

The religion of the later Vedic period marked an important stage in the evolution of Indian religious thought.

During this time, religious practices became more complex and ritualistic, and the role of the Brahmins grew significantly. The focus shifted from simple worship of nature gods to elaborate sacrifices, philosophical ideas, and moral concepts.

10.2.1 Deterioration of Rig Vedic Gods and Intensification of New Deities

The Post Rig Vedic age was a very important period in Indian history because religion changed in significant ways. In the Rig Vedic Age, people mainly worshiped natural forces such as the sun, rain, and wind. Gods like Indra, the warrior god who fought battles and brought rain, and Agni, the fire god who carried offerings to the heavens, were central to worship. However, in this Age, these gods gradually lost their importance, and new deities became more prominent. Prajapati was honored as the creator of the universe, Vishnu was regarded as the protector who maintained cosmic order, and Rudra (later known as Shiva) was respected as a powerful god who could both destroy and heal. This change shows that people began to think of gods not only as natural forces but also as universal powers that controlled the world. By the same time, the growing division of society into classes—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—shaped religious life, with certain deities being connected with specific groups, like Pushan with the Shudras.

Agni held a central and indispensable role in Later Vedic rituals. As the fire god, he was regarded as the divine messenger who carried offerings from humans to the gods. Every yajna (sacrifice) required the presence of Agni, since the sacred fire was the medium through which oblations of ghee, grains, and soma were conveyed to the deities. In household rituals like the Agnihotra, daily offerings were poured into the fire at sunrise and sunset, symbolizing continuity of cosmic order. In grand sacrifices such as the Rajasuya or Ashvamedha, Agni was invoked to sanctify the ritual space and ensure the efficacy of the ceremony.

Agni's role was not merely symbolic; he embodied purification, transformation, and communication between the human and divine realms. Priests (Brahmins) recited mantras from the Yajurveda and Samaveda to guide the offerings, believing that correct ritual performance through Agni maintained Rta (cosmic order). His presence reinforced the idea that fire was both a physical and spiritual.

10.2.2 Role of Brahmana (purohit)

During this Vedic age, the Purohit had an important place in society. As sacred practices grew multifaceted, their role increased because they knew the sacred texts and the correct way to perform yajnas and rituals. They performed sacrifices for kings and common people to help them gain wealth, power, and religious benefits. Kings depended on them because only they could conduct special ceremonies like the Rajasuya and Ashvamedha, which gave rulers religious authority. Brahmanas also advised kings and supported their rule through religious ceremonies. They were pleased with the property and gifts, which made them wealthy. Their growing influence increased social divisions, but they also facilitated in determining the Hindu religion and philosophy. They held the highest position in the Varna. In this way, Brahmanas became very imposing in the religious, public, and political life of the people.

10.2.3 Sacrifices and rituals

The sacrifices (yajnas) during this period became the dominant part of religious life. Unlike the Rig Vedic period, where worship was simple and focused on natural forces, the rituals were highly formal, complex, and controlled by priests in the post-Rig Vedic period. Sacrifices were accomplished with intense care and involved chanting hymns, reciting prayers, and offering items such as ghee, grains, or animals into the sacred fire. These offerings were believed to please the gods and maintain cosmic order. The person who performed the sacrifice, called the yajamana, was usually a king or wealthy patron. For rulers, yajnas were not only acts of devotion but also a way to show power, wealth, and authority. In this way, sacrifices became both religious and political events.

There were different types of sacrifices, ranging from small domestic rituals to large public ceremonies. Some of the most important included:

- Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice) Performed by kings to show their supremacy and expand their territory.
- Rajasuya (royal consecration) A ritual that established the king's authority.
- Vajpeyi (chariot race sacrifice) A ceremony symbolizing victory and strength.

10.2.4 Atharvaveda and Folk Traditions

Unlike the Rigveda, Samaveda, and Yajurveda, which emphasize sacrifices and chants, the Atharvaveda preserves folk traditions and popular beliefs. The Atharvaveda is an important source for understanding the folk traditions of early Indian society. It deals with the daily life, fears, hopes, and beliefs of common people. It reflects a world of magic, charms, and rituals closely connected with popular practices. The hymns of the Atharvaveda include spells for curing diseases, defending persons from malicious spirits, and ensuring long life. There are charms for success in love, marriage, and family life, as well as rituals to remove enemies and misfortune. Many hymns show belief in supernatural forces, demons, and spirits, which were thought to influence human life. The Atharvaveda also contains practices related to agriculture, fertility, and prosperity, showing its close link with village life. Its emphasis on healing, household rituals, and magical practices makes it a valuable record of folk beliefs and traditions, different from the elite sacrificial religion of the other Vedas.

Thus, the Atharvaveda provides a vivid picture of the popular religion and folk culture of ancient India, highlighting the concern towards the general public rather than only priests and kings.

10.2.5 Philosophical Thoughts

People have now become more thoughtful and want to gain deep knowledge about religion. The Upanishads were composed as a reply to the supremacy of priests and many complicated rituals. These texts said that rituals alone were not enough. What really mattered was true knowledge and right belief. They taught that a person should understand their own self (Atman) and see how it is connected to the supreme reality. During the later Vedic period, important philosophical ideas such as karma, rebirth, and moksha developed.

I. Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Based on your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. Explain the importance of sacrifices in the Later Vedic religious system.

Q2. Discuss the chief gods worshipped in the Later Vedic Age.

Q3. Examine the position of priests in the Later Vedic religion.

Q4. Explain the term Ashvamedha.

II. Fill in the blanks

- a) The supreme god of the Later Vedic Age was_____.
- b) The importance of _____ declined in the Later Vedic Age.
- c) _____ was closely associated with yajnas and religious rituals.

d) Religious authority in the Later Vedic Age was mainly in the hands of the _____

e) Gift or offering given to the priest after yajna is called _____

10.3 LET US SUM UP

The Later Vedic Age was a time of profound religious change. Older gods gradually lost their significance, while new deities such as Vishnu and Rudra rose to prominence. Sacrifices became the central form of worship, and the Brahmins, with their mastery of rituals and yajnas, gained immense authority. They guided kings, received dakshina, and stood at the core of religion, society, and politics. Meanwhile, the Upanishads introduced intrepid philosophical thoughts about the soul, karma, and liberation. Together, these shifts reformed the future of Indian thought. The Upanishads taught that true freedom (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death could be achieved not through sacrifice, but through self-knowledge and meditation. This marked a turning point, moving Indian religion and philosophy toward introspection, ethical living, and the pursuit of ultimate truth.

10.4 GLOSSARY

Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice)- Performed by kings to show their supremacy and expand their territory

Dakshina- Gift or offering given to the priest after yajna.

Deities- They are divine beings or gods worshipped by people

Upanishads- They are philosophical texts

Yajna- Sacred sacrifices or rites performed by offering ghee or gram into the sacred fire. They were performed to gain prosperity and power.

10.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Discuss the role of the Brahmins in the later Vedic age.
- Q2. Explain the change of religious practices and beliefs during the Later Vedic period.
- Q3. Throw light on the changing status of gods in the post-Rig Vedic age?
- Q4. Discuss the philosophical ideas reflected in the Upanishads.

10.6 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Discuss the importance of the priest in the later Vedic age.
- Q2. Explain the importance of sacrifice and rituals during the later Vedic age.
- Q3. Evaluate how Agni's presence in rituals reinforced both religious and social structures.

10.7 ANSWER KEY CYP I

- Q1 See sub section 10.2.3

Q2 See sub section 10.2.1

Q3 See sub section 10.2.2

Q4 See sub section 10.4

Fill in the blanks

a) Prajapati

b) Indra

c) Agni

d) Brahmins

e) Dakshina

10.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL FORMATION (C. 600 BC)

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-III

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 11

DEBATE ON THE USE OF IRON AND ITS IMPLICATION

STRUCTURE

- 11.0. Learning Objectives and Outcomes**
- 11.1. Introduction**
- 11.2. References to Iron in Early Indian Literature**
- 11.3. Early Iron-using Cultures**
- 11.4. Iron Age in South India**
- 11.5. Debate on the Use of Iron**
- 11.6. Let us sum up**
- 11.7. Glossary**
- 11.8. Examination Oriented Questions**
- 11.9. Lesson End Exercises**
- 11.10. Answer Key**
- 11.11. Suggested Readings**

11.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine the debate on the use of iron in early India
- discuss the geography of iron-using cultures in early India
- explain the nature of socio-economic changes caused by iron-technology

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the beginning of iron technology in early India
- the geographical background of early iron-using cultures
- the impact of iron on early Indian society

11.1. INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the Iron Age came after copper age across the world and marked a new technological advance in the human history. The basic difference between copper and iron technology is the requirement of heat for smelting. Iron requires much higher temperature i.e. 1534°C to melt in comparison to copper which melts at 1083°C . Therefore, the ancient societies needed an advanced technological stage before producing iron implements for mass consumption. Earliest evidences of iron implements found at sites such as Lothal, Mohenjodaro, Pirak, Allahdino, Ahar and Gufkaral show the familiarity of certain chalcolithic communities with iron. Though, it does not mean that they were acquainted with the iron technology. It appears that iron artifacts found at chalcolithic levels were accidentally produced while smelting copper ores with higher iron percentage. The scarcity of copper ores in comparison with iron ores, was one of the factors that had caused the replacement of copper with iron in everyday life of early Indians. Once the early Indians attained a required technological expertise, they realized the hardness of iron over copper and bronze. And, this facilitated a switch to iron from copper at large scale. How the switch from copper to iron tools impacted the society and economy of early India? This question has long been a matter of debate among Indian scholars. To familiarize you with this debate, we will discuss the use of iron and its implications in the following sections of the lesson.

11.2. REFERENCES TO IRON IN EARLY INDIAN LITERATURE

The later Vedic period is dated from circa 1000 to 600 BCE. It witnessed not only the composition of the *Samaveda*, the *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvaveda* besides the texts known as Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, but also a geographical shift of Indo-Aryans from pre-modern Punjab to the Ganga-Yamuna *doab* and the mid-Ganga Valley. The later Vedic literature shows a familiarity with the vast region comprising the Indo-Ganga divide, the upper Ganga Valley, and Ganga-Yamuna *doab* up to Allahabad in the East. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* narrates a story of Mathava of Videgha, who with the help of Agni Vaishvanara (fire) burnt the forest laying between the bank of Sarasvati and Sadanira (modern Ghaghara or Gandak) rivers. The brahmanas have never crossed this river before. This story, therefore, suggests the movement of the Indo-Aryan culture eastwards as far as the region drained by the river Sadanira and beyond. An analysis of the Later Vedic literature shows familiarity with iron and its use in production (e.g., agriculture, craft) activities. Some scholars have suggested that the term *ayas* mentioned in the *Rigveda* refers to iron; but not all scholars agree with this view. It has been argued that the term *ayas* in the *Rigveda* referred either to copper-bronze or to iron or both. Terms like *syamam* (black) or *syamenayasa* (black metal) in the *Black Yajurveda* refer to iron. Similarly, in the *Atharvaveda*,

terms like *syamena asina* (iron knife), *karmarah* (smith), and *dhamantah* (forging) are mentioned and they show the awareness of iron and iron working in the later Vedic period. The term *ayas* began to be commonly used for iron only from the *Satapatha Brahmana* onwards, which mentions about it in connection to ordinary people as well as agricultural activities. The Pali canonical literature, providing valuable information regarding the 5th-4th centuries BCE, mentions two general terms, i.e., *ayo* or *loha* for copper-bronze or iron or simply metal. The information provided by the early Indian literature is attested by the Greek sources of 5th century BCE. For example, the Greek historian Herodotus talks about the presence of Indian soldiers in the Achaemenid (Persian) army. According to Herodotus, Indian soldiers possessed arrows with iron points besides bows. Another Greek writer, Ctesias mentions the production of high-quality steel swords in India, which were exported to Persia.

11.3. EARLY IRON-USING CULTURES

For a long period, it was believed that iron technology reached India from outside and was first introduced by the Indo-Aryans, who had migrated from Central Asia to South Asia. The Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, Mortimer Wheeler (in office 1944-1948) argued that iron came into the Ganga valley as a result of the Persian influence by about late 6th and early 5th century BCE. Contrary to him, D. H. Gordon had dated the introduction of iron technology from the West into India not later than the 4th century BCE. But, on the basis of recent archaeological findings, it is now generally accepted that across the Indian subcontinent iron came in general use only in about 800/700 BCE. Though, its earliest date still can be pushed back to the 10th-11th centuries BCE, or even further in some parts of the subcontinent. For example, recent excavations at Raja-Nal-Ka-Tila have brought several iron objects into light, which are dated to the 16th- 14th centuries BCE. Here it is noticeable that the beginning of iron use does not imply the advent of iron age. It is believed that the iron age truly started in early India when iron technology began to be used for the production of production tools at large scale. Some of the important early iron-using sites are discussed in this section with a focus on their geographical distribution and types of iron artefacts that are found at these sites in archaeological excavations.

In the North-west India, remains of iron artefacts are found at Pirak (a site located in the Kachi plain of Baluchistan, Pakistan). The site shows a continuity from the chalcolithic phase to the iron phase. Gray wares are also found along with copper, bronze, gold and silver artifacts. The presence of a blacksmith's furnace clearly suggests the making of iron objects at Pirak. The beginning of iron use is dated at Pirak to circa 10th- 8th centuries BCE. Another iron using culture of North-West is the Gandhara Cave Culture, which is located in the Swat Valley and nearby regions of Pakistan. Here, a cultural continuity from chalcolithic to iron phase has been noticed. Iron artifacts (spearheads, arrowheads, pins/nails, spoons, and rings etc.) found here are dated to the beginning of first millennium BCE. Evidences of iron use are reported from Gufkral in Kashmir and they are dated to 10th century BCE. So is the case of Uleni in Almora district of Uttarakhand, where iron smelting and working was practiced from about 1100 BCE onwards.

The Painted Grey Ware (PGW; circa 1000-600 BCE) culture is generally associated with the beginning of iron use in the Indian subcontinent. But, excavations at the PGW sites in Ghaggar-Hakra valley as well as Bikaner

region display a lack of iron artifacts. Furthermore, iron artifacts are found in pre-PGW phases at Jakhera, Kaushambi and Noh. It is in the Ganga-Yamuna *doab* region, where iron artifacts are found from PGW levels. Iron use at PGW level has been dated to *circa* 800 BCE, though at certain sites it can be pushed back a century or so. There are about 700 PGW sites identified so far in the Indo-Ganga divide, the upper Ganga Valley and the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*. The PGW is a fine and smooth wheel thrown pottery type, made of well levigated alluvial clay fired under a uniformly high temperature. In the mid-Ganga Valley and eastern India sites like Malhar, Raja Nal ka Tila (in upper Belan Valley), Jhusi (near Allahabad), Ganweria, Koldihwa, Panchoh, Narhan (on the bank of Sarayu River), Chirand, Sonpur, Taradih, Bahiri, Mahisdal, Bharatpur, and Pandu Rajar Dhibi (in Ajay valley, West Bengal) have yielded iron artifacts. Both the sites Malhar and Raja Nal ka Tila provide evidences of iron smelting and iron working here. Several sites in Bihar and West Bengal like Chirand, Sonpur, Mahisadal, etc., show a cultural continuity from the Chalcolithic to the Iron Age. The beginning of Iron Age did not mean a virtual disappearance of copper tools. Rather available evidences suggest that development of iron technology also stimulated the development of copper technology as well as manufacturing of several other goods.

Iron artefacts are found at sites like Noh, Jodhpur, Ahar, and Rairh (in Rajasthan), Roper (in Punjab), Timbarva, Prabhaspatan, Jokha and Vadnagar (in Gujarat). At Noh, the PGW (Period III) phase witnessed a wider production of iron objects like spearheads, arrowheads, and axe. From Roper in Punjab are found several iron objects like knives, daggers, sickles, spears, hooks, rods and nails from PGW levels. Some 369 iron age sites including Timbarva, Prabhaspatan, Jokha and Vadnagar are identified in Kathiawar (Gujarat) and the beginning of the use of iron in Kathiawar is dated to about 800 -700 BCE. In central India sites like Nagda, Eran, Ujjain and Besnagar have yielded several iron artifacts, and available archaeological sources suggest that the Iron Age started in central India from about 10th century BCE onwards. Excavations at several sites suggest a cultural continuity from the chalcolithic to early iron phases in central India. The period- I at Nagda belonged to the chalcolithic culture, which was followed by iron using levels. The period –II (*circa* 700-500 BCE) has yielded several iron artifacts like axe, arrowheads, daggers, sickles, rings, a spoon and nails, and the number of iron artifacts (e.g., daggers, arrows, knives, sickles, chisels, and bowls, etc.) considerably increased in period –III (*circa* 500-300 BC) at Nagda. Iron artifacts are also brought into light at Prakash in the Tapti Valley, which are dated to *circa* 600-300 BCE. Our summarily discussion on the early iron-using sites in the North-west, North, Central, Eastern and Western India show the advent of iron-use around 10th -11th century BCE onwards in early India.

11.4. IRON AGE IN SOUTH INDIA

The iron-using Megalithic sites like Takalghat-Khapa, Naikund, Mahurjhari, Bhagimohari, Boragaon, Ranjala, Pimpalsati and Junapani in Deccan are dated to a period from 800 to 400 BCE and these sites have yielded several iron artifacts. People at these Megalithic sites were associated with agrarian cultures, which is suggested by the evidences of barley, rice, and lentil grains that are found at Naikund. Throughout the peninsular India numerous Iron Age burial sites have been brought into light spreading from Nagpur in the north to Tirnevelly in the South, and from Malabar in west to Coromandal coast in the east. Megalithic sites like Adichanallur,

Amritamangalam, Kunnattur, Sanur, Tenkasi, Kayal, Perumalmalai, and Pudukkotai are found in Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka Brahmagiri, Maski, T. Narsipur, and Hallur are important Megalithic sites. In Andhra Pradesh important sites are Kadambapur, Nagarjunakonda, Amravati, and Tadapatri. These Iron Age burial sites are associated with Megalithic culture, and generally characterized with the presence of huge stone boulders placed upon the graves. The term Megalithic is made up of two separate Greek words: *Megas* meaning great and *Lithos* meaning stone. It refers to a particular type of a burial monument built of large hewn or un-hewn stone(s). Several of these monuments are not 'Megalithic' in the literal sense of this word as are not built of large stones. The usage of this term therefore is symbolic. It defines the antiquity of as well as popular perception towards these ancient burial monuments. Traditionally in Tamil these burial monuments are called *Pandukal* (i.e. *Pandu* means old and *Kal* means stone).

The beginning of Megalithic burials can be pushed back to 1200-1000 BCE. Megalithic burials continued up to 300 BCE, and then onwards they gradually disappeared with the advent of the Sangam Age. Recent studies trace the origin of Megalithic culture in India from the south Indian Neolithic-Chalcolithic context. In Neolithic-Chalcolithic society dead was buried within the settlement and living premise. But in Megalithic society burials were made outside and away from the settlement areas. The findings of horse-bits and horse bones from several of burial sites like Kunnathur, Sanur, Adichchanallur, and Brahmagiri, etc., suggest the use of horse possibly by the warriors for quick movement. Complete skeletons of horse are found from the megaliths of Vidarbha for example Junapani near Nagpur. Megalithic people had a mixed subsistence base ranging from hunting-gathering to fishing to pastoralism to agriculture. They cultivated rice, *ragi*, *kodo*-millets, beans, barley, horse-gram, green-gram, black-gram, pea, legumes, lentil, wheat, and cotton etc. Iron implements like axes, ploughshare, hoes, sickles, spades, etc., are found which possibly were used in agricultural activities. They domesticated several animals like cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo, pig, and fowls etc. The finding of iron, copper, bronze, and gold objects suggests the high advances achieved by the Megalithic people in metallurgy. They employed folding and forging techniques in iron working and produced carbonized steel. The findings of heaps of iron slag furnaces from some of the Megalithic sites like Guttur in Dharmapuri district conclusively establishes the local production of iron objects. Besides copper smelting they also produced bronze. The geographical survey of Megalithic settlements shows their presence along or on the major trade and communication routes of early historic India. It suggests that these people also participated in the trade or exchange of different commodities comprising iron tools and weapons, copper and gold ornaments, semi-precious beads, and pottery items.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q.1. What is the basic difference between copper and iron technology?

Q. 2. Comment on the story of Mathava of Videgha.

Q. 3. Mention any two terms from early Indian literature for iron.

Q. 4. Write a note on Megalithic culture.

11.5. DEBATE ON THE USE OF IRON

In the 1950s and 1960s, D. D. Kosambi suggested a connection between the iron technology and the socio-economic changes in the northern India. It was argued that the use of iron in production activities caused the emergence of peasant societies, cities, and state-polities (Mahajanapadas) in the Ganga valley. Kosambi connected the iron technology with plough agriculture, and clearance of forests in Gangetic plains. Availability of surplus was argued to have made possible the expansion of trade networks, emergence of cities, wider use of metallic currency and the growth of heterodox sects (Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikas). Not only was this, Kosambi also attributed the success of Magadha Mahajanapada against its enemies to this Mahajanapada's proximity to and control over the iron ores, particularly of Dhalbhum and Singhbhum in the Chotanagpur region of eastern India. Subsequently, Kosambi's ideas were further refined and elaborated by other scholars including R. S. Sharma. Around 10th century BCE iron was argued to have begun to appear in archaeological contexts in North-west and North India, and according to R. S. Sharma, majority of iron artefacts found in excavation from the Painted Gray Ware levels (c. 1000-600 BCE) were weapons. Only from c. 500 BCE onwards northern India was argued to

have entered into full-fledged iron age, when iron technology associated with the Northern Black Polished Ware levels (c. 500-200 BCE) was put into use for the production of agricultural implements at large scale. In brief, Sharma has pointed out the use of iron technology in its first stage for the purposes of war, and in its second stage for agriculture and diverse types of handicrafts.

According to Sharma, the iron technology made possible the spread of agriculture across Gangetic plains and it eventually caused the availability of surplus. Now rulers could collect surplus from peasantry and it could be used for developing permanent army and administration. Iron tool including axes and adzes could be used to clear the forests of lower Ganga valley. In a same way, iron-plough share enabled the peasants to plough the heavy soil (*kewal*) of Patna in Bihar. Likewise, D. P. Agrawal has pointed out the geographical and ecological differences between the Indus valley and the Ganga valley. He mentions that whereas the Indus alluvium was soft and easily cultivable with a wooden plough, the Ganga valley was covered with thick and swampy forests due to heavy rainfall. In the Indus valley, copper and bronze tools were sufficient to undertake agricultural activities. Contrary to it, the Ganga valley could only be brought under cultivation by using iron tools for clearing the forests and for ploughing the hard soil of this region. Owing of this, the Harappans could not go beyond the Indo-Yamuna divide because they lacked the knowledge of iron technology. According to Agrawal, the first wave of Indo-Aryans, who used the Black and Red Ware (BRW), had lacked the knowledge of iron technology and as a result they could not colonize the Ganga valley. It was the second wave of Indo-Aryans, which introduced the Painted Gray Ware (PGW) and iron technology into India. Agrawal further argues that as the copper was scarce and expensive it could not be used at mass level, but it was not the case with iron. Iron was available in abundance, and therefore, it was cheaply available to make variety of tools particularly in the NBPW phase. The views proposed by scholars like Kosambi, Sharma, and Agrawal came under severe criticism in the 1970s and after.

Amalananda Ghosh questioned the ability of iron technology alone to introduce historical changes in the society of Ganga valley. Similar views were expressed by scholars like Niharranjan Ray, Dilip K. Chakrabarti, George Erdosy and K. T. S. Sarao. According to these scholars, the production of agrarian surplus leading to urbanization in the Ganga valley was not a result of iron technology alone. In Amalananda Ghosh's views, surplus could not simply be treated as a technical outcome of iron technology; rather, agricultural surplus shall be studied as a product of complex socio-political developments that happened in North India in the course of the first millennium BCE. When certain social and political institutions forced peasantry for the production of surplus, only then agricultural surplus began to be produced and it was subsequently diverted to diverse non-agricultural activities. Noticeably, iron technology although was known in the megalithic cultures of peninsular India, but it did not cause the rise of urban centres here. Evidently, mere presence of iron technology had not caused the rise of monarchies, urban centres, and heterodox sects in early India. In fact, the iron-plough-share is found at only four places (i.e., Ropar, Jakheda, Kaushambi and Vaishali dated to circa 600 BCE) in early north India, but hunting tool and weapons are found almost from all the PGW sites. It suggests that iron was used for military purposes in the first phase, and only at later stage, it came to be used for the making of agricultural and craft tools. Same is the view expressed by Vibha Tripathi, who argues that the earliest iron artifacts were generally made for hunting and

fishing. After initial developments, the importance of iron was gradually realized and efforts were made to develop the iron technology further. Gradually, it was put in use to make several new objects ranging from simple hunting-fishing tools to weapons for war, and subsequently agricultural and day to day domestic objects.

The association of iron with the emergence and expansion of agriculture has been brought to critical analysis by Dilip K. Chakrabarti. He argues that the Chalcolithic and Neolithic cultures of early India already possessed the knowledge of agriculture before the advent of iron age. Therefore, iron appears to have only stimulated the growth of already established village economy rooted in agricultural production in early India. Through his archaeological studies, Dilip K. Chakrabarti has shown the presence of iron ores for pre-industrial iron smelting and production of iron artefacts across India except the alluvial plains of river valleys. On the basis of this he has rejected the widely popular belief that the earliest iron was produced in India only by extracting the iron ores of eastern India. Hence, according to him, in the Indian subcontinent iron came into use in different regions at different times. Likewise, Makkhan Lal doubts the views that have associated the introduction of iron in the Ganga valley with the massive forest clearing to facilitate agricultural production. He argues that the forests in the Ganga valley had remained largely untouched prior to the beginning of the first millennium CE except limited use of some patches of land for agricultural activities. Not only was this, up to 16th century CE wild animals like lions, tigers, elephants etc., remained present in these forests, and in Lal's opinion, in last two hundred years only the region of Gangetic valley has experienced a massive deforestation.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. Write a note on D. D. Kosambi's view on iron technology.

Q. 2. Comment on Dilip K. Chakrabarti's view on iron technology.

Q. 3. Comment on K. T. S. Sarao's view on cities in the Ganga valley.

Q. 4. Write a note on George Erdosy's view on cities in the Ganga valley.

11.6. LET US SUM UP

Our above discussion shows that the shift from copper and bronze to iron tools widely impacted society, economy and polity of early India, particularly, in the Ganga valley. Although scholars like D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma credit the iron technology alone for bringing far-reaching changes in early Indian society, but not all scholars like Amalananda Ghosh, Dilip K. Chakrabarti and K. T. S. Sarao, have agreed with their view in India. Under the pressure of certain social and political institutions, iron technology is argued to have been used for the production of agricultural and craft tools. Once the agrarian surplus became available, a large urban population could be sustained and territorial kingdoms with permanent armies and bureaucracy could be developed. While the north India witnessed the rise of Mahajanapadas and the second urbanization, similar developments did not take place in southern India. The iron-using Megalithic cultures that flourished in peninsular India neither experienced urbanization nor emergence of territorial polities. Here it is noticeable that the beginning of iron around 10th century BCE in early India did not imply the advent of iron age; rather our discussion above shows that the iron age truly started from circa 600 BCE onwards, when iron technology began to be used for the manufacturing of production tools (agricultural and craft) along with weapons at large scale.

11.7. GLOSSARY

ayas - either to copper-bronze or to iron or both in the *Rigveda*

syamenayasa – Literally, meaning 'black metal', i.e., iron (later Vedic literature)

Megalithic – Literally, meaning *Megas* (great) *Lithic* (stone), Great Stone

11.8. EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

Q. 1. Discuss the geographical spread of Iron-using sites in early India.

- Q. 2. Analyse the role of iron technology in second urbanization.
- Q. 3. Analyse the association of iron with PGW culture.
- Q. 4. Discuss the debate on the use of iron and its impacts.

11.9. LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Explain the term, ‘*ayas*’.
- Q. 2. Write a note on the Megalithic culture.
- Q. 3. Write a note on the PGW sites.
- Q. 4. Comment on R. S. Sharma’s view on iron technology.
- Q. 5. Comment on A. Ghosh’s view on iron technology.

11.10. ANSWER KEYS

CYPI

- Q. 1. See Section, 11.1
- Q. 2. See Section, 11.2.
- Q. 3. See Section, 11.2.
- Q. 4. See Section, 11.4.

CYP II

- Q. 1. See Section 11.5.
- Q. 2. See Section 11.5.
- Q. 3. See Section 11.5.
- Q. 4. See Section 11.5.

11.11. SUGGESTED READINGS

- B. P. Sahu, ed. *Iron and Social Change in Early India*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
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MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL FORMATION (C. 600 BC)

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-III

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 12

PROCESS OF SECOND URBANIZATION

STRUCTURE

- 12.0. Learning Objectives and Outcomes**
- 12.1. Introduction**
- 12.2. Second Urbanization in Early India**
- 12.3. Agrarian background of the Second Urbanization**
- 12.4. Trade, Traders, and Other Urban Professionals**
- 12.5. Let us sum up**
- 12.6. Glossary**
- 12.7. Examination Oriented Questions**
- 12.8. Lesson End Exercises**
- 12.9. Answer Key**
- 12.10. Suggested Readings**

12.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine the process of second urbanization.
- discuss the geography of early historic cities.
- explain the nature of early historic urban centres.

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the beginning of second urbanization in early India.
- the archaeological remains of early historic cities.
- the nature of city residents and their professions.

12.1. INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, in the previous lesson 11, we discussed the debate on the use of iron and its implication on early Indian society, and we reached to a conclusion that the certain social and political developments (e.g., state formation, etc) in the later Vedic period (c. 1000-600 BCE) created conditions for the wider use of iron tools in agricultural and craft activities. As a result, the expansion of agriculture across the Gangetic plains became possible, and it facilitated the production of agrarian surplus to sustain non-agriculturalist people (rulers, priests, traders, craftsmen, etc) and urban professions. In this lesson, we will discuss the process of second urbanization. As you all know, the first urbanization in the Indian Subcontinent is associated with the Harappan Civilization (Mature/ Urban Phase, circa 2600-1900 BCE). After the fall of the Harappan cities, urban centres again appeared, but this time in the Ganga valley, in the mid-centuries of the first millennium BCE. What were the factors responsible for the rise of cities in the Ganga valley? What was the nature of these cities? These are the few questions that are answered in the following sections of this lesson 12.

12.2. SECOND URBANIZATION IN EARLY INDIA

A city is different from a village, and V. Gordon Childe has suggested ten criteria based on archaeological data to define the earliest cities. Childe's ten criteria are as follows: 1) large size, 2) non-agriculturalist residents – kings, priests, craftsmen, traders, 3) concentration of surplus in the form of taxes, 4) monumental buildings – palaces and temples, 5) presence of a ruling class – kings, officials, and priests, 6) scribes with expertise in writing, 7) scholars having knowledge of arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, 8) presence of artisans – painters, sculptures, 9) foreign trade, and 10) specialist craftsmen. These ten criteria of V. Gordon Childe identify the early cities as large human settlements, where resided diverse non-agriculturalist professionals including rulers, priests, traders, artisans, craftsmen, and so forth. The taxes were collected from peasants and they were deposited in the royal treasury located in the cities, which had also acted as administrative centres. The surplus collected from countryside was used by rulers and priests to build temples and palaces in the cities. Priests or religious functionaries legitimised the authority of rulers, and fulfilled the spiritual needs of the people. To sustain diverse types of administrative works including revenue collection, expert scribes were needed and they maintained written records. Writing was also useful for traders in carrying out their commercial activities. A class of experts in arithmetic, geometry and astronomy lived in cities besides the professional artists like painters, architects and sculptures. Commodities that were not locally available were brought from far-off foreign places to local markets in cities through trade networks. V. Gordon Childe had devised these ten criteria for the study of Bronze Age cities, but its usefulness for the study of early historic cities has been recognised by scholars. Even though not all ten features are visible in the archaeological remains of early historic cities in India, but Childe's criteria at least help us in distinguishing early cities from villages.

In the Pali literature, several types of urban settlements are mentioned such as Nigama, Nagara, Rajadhani, Pura, Mahanagara, Pattana, and Puta-Bhedana. While the Nigama referred to a market place or a small town, the term Nagara meant a city with or without fortification. Mahanagara referred to a big city, for instance, Champa, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saketa (Ayodhya), Koshambi, and Varanasi. The capital city was known as a Rajadhani, and a fortified settlement was called a Pura. Pattana was a port-town and Puta-Bhedana was a commercial settlement, where lids of the boxes or packages of merchandise were opened. Students you will learn about sixteen Mahajanapadas in the Lesson 13. While majority of the Mahajanapadas (Magadha, Kashi, Anga, Chedi, Vatsa, Kuru, Matsya, Surasena, Assaka, Gandhara) had only one capital city, the presence of two capitals in few Mahajanapadas (Avanti, Panchala, Koshala, Malla) too is evident from the literary sources. The *Mahaparinibbanasutta* of the Dighanikaya (Pali text) refers to 60 Nagaras, which were present at the time of Buddha's demise, and out of these 60, six cities (Varanasi, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Champa, Rajagriha and Kusinagara) are called Mahanagaras. Other important cities were Vaishali, Pavapuri, Suktimati, Kaushambi, Indraprastha, Viratanagara, Mathura, Ujjain, Mahishmati and several others. Besides literary evidence, we rely upon archaeological remains of ancient cities for the study of second urbanization in early India.

Excavations at Taxila, located in the Potwar plateau, have brought into light three different settlements: Bhir mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh, stretching the history of Taxila from the sixth century BCE to the third century CE. Among these three, Bhir mound represents the earliest occupation level (*circa* 600 -200 BCE). The city plan was irregular and haphazard. However, traces of four streets and five lanes, associated with blocks of houses are noticed. Elements of civic planning are clearly visible in the form of round refuse bins, placed in the open squares and streets. Houses consisted of open courtyards, enclosed by rooms, and terracotta pipes were used to carry off wastewater outside the houses. In different early historic cities, terracotta ring-wells (identified as soak pits or wells, etc.), belonging to the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) phase, are found. In the Ganga-Yamuna *doab* the maximum number of ring-wells are identified, while in Taxila their concentration is comparative less. The Hastinapura and Kaushambi developed into proto-towns by the end of the later Vedic period. For instance, Hastinapur during the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) phase occupied an area of about 6.5 hectares. Period III (*circa* 600-200 BCE) at Hastinapura witnessed the use of burnt bricks for the construction of houses; however, at small scale, mud bricks remained in use. Terracotta ring-wells are noticed, which were possibly in use as soakage pits as well as wells. Excavations show that Atranjikhhera, Rajgir, Champa, Ujjain, and Rajghat were fortified by *circa* 600 BCE. Likewise, the earthen rampart around Kaushambi, for protection from wars and floods, was built sometime prior to the 400 BCE. The rampart wall, rising up to a height of about 35 feet, consisted of 70-75 feet tall towers and eleven gateways. The rampart, surrounded by a moat and initially built of mud and burnt bricks, was later covered by a thick mud and lime plaster.

George Erdosy has conducted a field survey in Allahabad district of Uttar Pradesh. Based on his survey, he describes the changing pattern of settlement hierarchy in three phases. In the first phase (*circa* 1000-600 BCE), a two-tier hierarchy in Allahabad district was present. A single site, with a maximum size of about 10 hectares, dominated the landscape dotted with several smaller size rural settlements and it grew gradually into the capital Kaushambi of the Vatsa Mahajanapada. The Second phase (*circa* 550-400 BCE) witnessed the emergence of

a four-tier settlement hierarchy in Allahabad region. Kaushambi, with a size of about 50 hectares, was at the apex of this hierarchy. After Kaushambi, secondary centers, for instance, Kara and Sringaverapur, having a size of 12 hectares, were present. Next in the hierarchy, two sites of 6.75 and 6.12 hectares were identified. At last, there were sixteen sites of less than 6 hectares. Erdosy suggests that at the lowest level were present nucleated villages and minor manufacturing centers (engaged in crafts, e.g., pottery, lapidary, and iron smelting, etc.). Next in the settlement hierarchy were bigger towns, which were involved in full-scale manufacturing and production activities (e.g., production of luxury items for the consumption of urban elites). Kaushambi as being the seat of political authority and one of the biggest urban centers of the Ganga valley was at the top of this settlement hierarchy. In the third phase (*circa* 400-100 BCE), a fivefold settlement hierarchy developed in Allahabad district. The size of Kaushambi reached to about 200 hectares and it was placed at the top in the hierarchy. Centers like Kara, Sringaverapur, Jhusi and Bhita came next in hierarchy at second tier, and they occupied areas of 19 to 40 hectares. At the third level, three sites of an area between 5.15 and 9.17 hectares were present. At fourth level, seven sites with a size ranging from two to 4.15 hectares were identified. Below these, sites of less than two hectares were present. Erdosy's studies clearly establish the commanding position of Kaushambi in a settlement hierarchy, and it underlines the linkages of this early historic city with its sizeable hinterland in the Gangetic plains.

The capital of Magadha was Pataliputra, which lies beneath modern Patna (in Bihar), and excavations conducted at Kumrahar and Bulandibagh provide some glimpses of this ancient city. The archaeological remains found at Kumrahar comprise traces of a pillared hall, having some eighty pillars, and its wooden superstructure. In the Bulandibagh area, remains of a wooden palisade, surrounding the city from all sides, are found. Ujjain, another important city of the Mahajanapada era, has yielded remains of fortification and a coherent town-plan. Out of four cultural periods, period I (*circa* 700- 500 BCE) antedate the NBPW that came in wider use during period II (*circa* 500-200 BCE). The city was surrounded by an earthen rampart, having eight gateways, a moat on the east and south, and river Shipra on the western and northern sides. Houses inside the fort were made of mud, mud-bricks, stone, or burnt bricks. Remains of ring-wells, soak-pits, terracotta drainpipes, and soakage jars are also found. Evidence of bead making industry is quite explicit in Ujjain. The archaeological evidences thus provide an insight into the process of second urbanization, which coincided with the rise of state polities and a highly stratified society.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q.1. Write a note on V. Gordon Childe's ten criteria?

Q. 2. Comment on different types of urban centers.

Q. 3. Write a note on Taxila.

Q. 4. Write a note on Kaushambi.

12.3. AGRARIAN BACKGROUND OF THE SECOND URBANIZATION

The mid-Ganga Valley due to higher rainfall (an average 45-55 inches, and in some regions about 70 inches) was suitable for the cultivation of paddy. The high rainfall along with fertile alluvial soil and irrigation facilities from perennial rivers played an important role in the bumper harvests particularly of paddy in the Ganga valley. The 'Cullavagga' section of the *Vinaya Pitaka* describes the various processes associated with agriculture, starting with ploughing, followed by sowing, irrigation, removing the weeds/unwanted plants, reaping, threshing, chaff removal or winnowing, and storing the crop. Several implements were used in agriculture like plough with or without iron share, sickles, spade, and various digging tools. Large number of crops both Rabi (winter crops) and Kharif (autumn crops) comprising paddy, wheat, barley, millet, beans, rye, oats, lintels, sesame, and sugarcane were cultivated. Panini in the *Ashtadheyayi* mentions that the best quality of paddy called *sali* was grown in Magadha region. The paddy transplantation came into practice, which further boosted its production particularly in the mid-Ganga valley. Among oils, sesame oil, mustard oil and castor oil, and among fibres, cotton, flax and hemp were grown. Indigo and madder were grown to produce dyes, and we also learn from the Pali literature about the cultivation of several types of spices like long pepper, round pepper, beetroot, onion, turmeric, ginger, and garlic, etc., in the post-Vedic times. The availability of agrarian surplus stimulated the growth of territorial

polities (Mahajanapadas) and numerous urban centres in northern India in the mid-centuries of the first millennium BCE.

A systematic taxation was evolved by sixth century BCE, which allowed rulers of different Mahajanapadas to maintain regular armies and bureaucracy, and fortified cities became the seat of their political power. Without a strong agrarian base, these early cities in the Ganga valley could not have emerged and flourished. We learn about big land owners (mentioned as Gahapatis) and their large landed estates in countryside from the Pali-Buddhist canonical literature. The Buddhist texts also refer to Brahmana-Gahapatis and it suggests that as a social category Gahapati did not exclusively belong to either Buddhism or Brahmanism. Gahapatis accumulated much wealth from their vast landed resources, and they were present in royal courts as well as enjoyed close relations with royalty. As being the big land owners, they were also the chief tax payers. In fact, they are mentioned as one of the seven jewels (*sattaratana*) which were the symbol of king's sovereignty. The estates of Gahapatis were cultivated by Dasas (slaves) and Karmkaras (hired labourers), while they often lived in cities away from their estates in countryside. Over a period of time, Gahapatis began investing their wealth, drawn from agriculture, in trade and commerce, and from their ranks emerged Setthi-Gahapatis. Setthi-Gahapatis were involved in both agriculture in countryside and commercial activities in the cities, and when they gradually entirely shifted their focus on banking and financing services, then they came to be known as Setthis. Setthis lived in cities, acted as financiers and bankers, and even represented the interests of merchants in the royal courts. In this way, wealth generated by agriculture had played a significant role in the growth of the cities and urban professions.

12.4. TRADE, TRADERS, AND OTHER URBAN PROFESSIONALS

It appears from the Pali-Buddhist texts that the *Mahajanapadas* had comprised several types of rural as well as urban settlements. The terms mentioned in the Pali texts, like *kuti*, and *grama*, referred to rural settlements. The *kuti* possibly was a settlement comprising two or three small houses or huts. The term *grama* meant a village, or a hamlet, or a temporary settlement or even a caravan camped at one place for some month. Settlements of specific professionals or craftsmen, e.g., *aramika-grama* (village of park attendants), *vaddhaki-grama* (village of carpenters), *nalakara-grama* (village of reed makers), and *lonakara-grama* (village of salt makers) were also present. These settlements associated with specialized crafts had possibly appeared in a response to the ever-increasing demands of diverse commodities in bigger urban centres including capital cities. The villages of brahmanas and chandalas are mentioned and the village head is mentioned as *gamika/gramika* or *gama-gamani/grama-gramani* in the Pali texts. The emergence of sixteen *Mahajanapadas* and numerous cities in Northern India, with main concentration in middle Ganga valley was crucial in the rapid development of trade and commerce in the region. It generated greater wealth and prosperity to the merchants and artisanal classes, mostly residing in urban centres.

In the north-west Taxila (in present day Pakistan) was the entry point for traders coming from central and western Asia. Taxila was linked to the cities like Mathura, Kaushambi, Sravasti/Shravasti, Kashi, Vaishali, and Pataliputra in the Ganga valley. These cities were not only the political centres but also had big markets where goods were brought from far off places for trade. These cities were generally fortified for protection from invasions

as well as from floods as many of the cities were situated near to the rivers. The Ganga-river system also provided easy and cheap river transportation and stimulated the trading activities in the region. The major trans-regional route of northern India linking the port of Tamralipti on the Bay of Bengal to the Ganga Valley to north-western frontier region and beyond was known as *Uttarapatha*, and this route was also connected to several feeder or local routes. The *Dakshinapatha* (southern trans-regional route) traversed the Vindhyas and then ran through the fertile Malwa plateau to reach Deccan and further south, and to reach Sopara on the western coast of India. These routes were not only travelled by the monks and armies, but also by traders, craftsmen and other professionals.

As it is mentioned in previous section, *setthis* were the rich merchant financiers and they resided in urban centres. On the other hand, petty traders were either known from the commodity they traded like *asva-vanija* (horse dealers) or *go-vanija* (cattle-dealers), or from the place they hailed, *madra-vanija* and *gandhara-vanija* (merchants from *madra* and *gandhara*), as it is evident from Panini's *Ashtadheyayi*. The Buddha is shown in Buddhist sources as associating the prosperity of the cities with the activities of merchants, who were the redistributors of the commodities. Their success in their professional endeavours, according to Buddha, rested upon, a) their insight into product quality, pricing and profitability, b) their shrewdness and c) their dependability. The most influential members of merchant class were the caravan traders known as *sarthavahas*. They lead their caravan, and traded in remote areas. Overseas trade (*samudra-vanijja*) is also mentioned about in the Pali texts. India exported timber to Persia from about 6th century BCE onwards. The Greek texts often mention about the export of ebony from India to the West. Besides timber, ivory objects, dyes, and precious stones were also exported. Metallic currency, known as *karshapanas* or punch marked coins, came into wider use from circa 5th century BCE onwards in early India. Punch marked coins were struck at the weight standard of 32 *ratas* or 57.6 *grains* and had been mostly made of silver; however, copper coins too are found. Individuals, or group of merchants, kings, and in some cases city administrations had issued these coins. Punch marked coins carry various marks, but without any name, on one side of these, and in the Pali texts, they are called *nishaka*, *satmana*, *kamsa*, *pada*, *masaka* and *kakanika*. The emergence of monetary economy does not mean that barter system disappeared completely. It possibly continued to be in practice at small level transactions. Some 3,000 cowry shells are found from the NPPW levels at Mason, which suggests their use for economic transactions besides coins in early India.

Several new professions and occupations now began to emerge. The king also became the biggest employer, and under him were employed various specialists or non-specialists, e.g., foot soldiers, archers, cavalry members, elephant crops, charioteers, several ministers, governors, estate managers, royal chamberlain, elephant trainers, policemen (*raja-bhattas*), jailors, slaves, and wage earners. Besides urban professionals like physician (*vejja*, *bhisakka*), surgeon, and scribe, there were present actor (*nata*), dancer (*nataka*), magician, acrobat, drummer, courtesan (*ganika*) and ordinary prostitute (*vesi*) in cities. Among artisans, vehicle maker, ivory worker (*dantakara*), metal smith, goldsmith (*suvannakara*), silk weaver, carpenter, needle maker, reed maker, garland maker, potter (*kumbhakara*), weavers, jeweller (*manikara*), washer-man (*rajaka*) and barber were some of the important artisanal craftsmen. Many of the craftsmen were organized in guilds or professional groups (*shreni*,

also known as *gana*, *puga*, and *sangha*) whose members belonged to same profession/craft. Such groups had their own rules and regulations. The *Gautama Dharmasutra* connects agriculture, trade, animal husbandry, and usury with the vaishyas. It also informs that the farmers, traders, money-lenders, herdsman and artisans could lay down norms for their own professions. Even king is advised to take into account these norms before taking any decision in matters relating to these professional groups.

One pottery type that has been identified as a hallmark of the second urbanization is known as the Northern Black Polish Ware (NBPW; dated circa 600-100 BCE), which was fully wheel thrown pottery with a lustre shining surface, far better than the PGW in terms of quality as well as pottery making technique. According to George Erdosy, there was not much difference between PGW and NBPW. Rather, the NBPW is simply a 'variation of the same ceramic type, with an NBP alkaline substance' for shining. Therefore, instead of considering NBPW as a distinct cultural and ethnic denominator, it 'merely represents an innovation in ceramic technology' achieved by the same people who used PGW and Red Wares. About 450 NBPW sites have been identified so far with a greater concentration in middle Ganga valley. The NBPW is also found spreading in a vast region from Taxila, in north-west to Amravati, Ter, Nasik and Nevasa in Deccan. It was in 1946 for the first time the NBPW was brought into scholarly attention by Krishana Deva and R. E. M. Wheeler. Due to its distinctive style and shine it has been designated as a deluxe-table ware by Wheeler as well as several other scholars after him. And it was mainly used by the aristocrats or members of rich families as appears from the riveted potteries from the excavations at Rupar, Bairat, Sonapur and Kumrahar. Buddhist monks, traders, princess and kings had been responsible for the spread of this ware as it is found mostly from the Buddhist sites. As mostly NBP bowls and dishes are found but not jars and *handis* it has been suggested that this ware could not be used for day-to-day life (e.g., cooking, storing etc). Particularly the requirements of the common people could not be fulfilled by this ware alone. Therefore, the other wares like Red Ware were used in addition to NBPW which played an immense role in the day-to-day life.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q.1. Comment on Setthi-Gahapatis.

Q. 2. Write a note on *gramika*.

Q. 3. Comment on Buddha's view on merchants.

Q. 4. Write a note on NBPW.

12.5. LET US SUM UP

Our above discussion shows that the emergence of Mahajanapada polities coincided with the expansion of agriculture and second urbanization in the Ganga valley. As the rulers consolidated their position as a paramount authority, they forced peasantry to produce surplus and this surplus then allowed rulers to maintain permanent armies and bureaucracy. Early cities emerged as the centre of political powers, and they became the centre of diverse types of administrative works. As the demand of these primary cities increased, several more cities as centre of trade, manufacturing, and industries came into existence to address the demands of the urban elites. Both literary and archaeological evidence throw valuable light on the nature and geographical spread of these early cities, and a pottery type, which is known as the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), appears to have been closely associated with the second urbanization. Trans-regional trade routes (Uttarapatha and Dakshinapatha) connected these cities to each others, and several urban professionals including traders, artisans, artists, scribes, and so forth lived in these cities.

12.6 GLOSSARY

Uttarapatha – Northern Trans-Regional Route

Dakshinapatha – Southern Trans-Regional Route

Gahapatis – Rich Land-Owners

12.7. EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Discuss the geographical spread of early historical cities.
- Q. 2. Discuss the factors responsible for the second urbanization.
- Q. 3. Highlight the main features of early historic cities.
- Q. 4. Write an essay on the urban professionals.

12.8. LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Explain the term, 'Putā-Bhedana'.
- Q. 2. Explain the term, 'Karshapana'.
- Q. 3. Write a note on 'shreni'.
- Q. 4. Explain the term, Gahapati.
- Q. 5. Explain the term, *sarthavaha*.

12.9 ANSWER KEYS

CYPI

- Q. 1. See Section, 12.2
- Q. 2. See Section, 12.2.
- Q. 3. See Section, 12.2.
- Q. 4. See Section, 12.2.

CYP II

- Q. 1. See Section 12.3.
- Q. 2. See Section 12.4.
- Q. 3. See Section 12.4.
- Q. 4. See Section 12.4.

12.10. SUGGESTED READINGS

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MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL FORMATION (C. 600 BC)

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-III

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 13

STATE FORMATION: MONARCHIES AND GANA SANGHAS

STRUCTURE

13.0. Learning Objectives and Outcomes

13.1. Introduction

13.2. Monarchies and Gana Sanghas

13.3. Sixteen Mahajanapadas

13.4. Rise of Magadha

13.5. Reasons for the Rise of Magadha

13.6. Let us sum up

13.7. Glossary

13.8. Examination Oriented Questions

13.9. Lesson End Exercises

13.10. Answer Key

13.11. Suggested Readings

13.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine the factors responsible for the emergence of Mahajanapadas
- discuss the key features of monarchies and Gana-Sanghas
- explain the reasons for the rise of Magadha as a major political power in the Ganga valley

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the differences between monarchies and Gana Sanghas
- the emergence of the Sixteen Mahajanapadas
- the nature of Magadhan polity

13.1. INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the term Janapada began to be employed for territorial polities with fixed territorial boundaries by the middle of the first millennium BCE, and it literally meant a place, where people/tribe/clan (*jana*) had placed their feet (*pada*) for the first time. A Janapada referred to a well-defined and populated territorial polity. Janapada also figures as one of the seven limbs of the territorial polity in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. When a certain Janapada became gradually powerful and annexed the territories of other Janapadas, then a larger territorial polity came into existence and it was called Mahajanapada. A Mahajanapada usually comprised several villages (*grama*) and cities, where much of its population resided. A village-head or chief was known as *gramika* or *grama-gramani* in early India. On the other hand, urban settlements were known as Nigama, Nagara, Rajadhani, Pura, Mahanagara, Pattana, and Puta-Bhedana. The Nigama either referred to a market place or to a small town of predominantly commercial character. The expression Nagara was in use for both, a fortified city and a city without fortification. Mahanagara means a great or big city, and in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* early Indian cities like Champa, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saketa (Ayodhya), Koshambi, and Varanasi are mentioned as Mahanagaras. The capital city was called a Rajadhani, and Pura referred to a fortified settlement. Whereas the term Pura meant a fortified area of city, another term, Nagara referred to an area comprising the Pura as well as an area outside it. Pattana was a port-town and Puta-Bhedana was a transportation settlement, which was located at the bend or confluence of a river and here lids of the boxes or packages of merchandise were opened. Pataliputra was one of the early Indian cities that was known as a Puta-Bhedana. There were two types of Mahajanapadas, one monarchy (*rajya*) and another, oligarchy or non-monarchical state (*gana-sangha*), and the salient features of both, monarchies and *gana-sanghas* are discussed in detail in the following section.

13.2. MONARCHIES AND GANA-SANGHAS

The Sixteen Mahajanapadas emerged in the Ganga valley in the sixth century BCE, and several of them were monarchies and some were Gana-Rajyas. The expansion of agriculture facilitated the rise of monarchies by providing enough resources to rulers for the maintenance of standing army and bureaucracy, both of which had been an integral part of a territorial polity. In monarchies, a clear distinction between a ruler and ruled/subject people (*praja*) was maintained. People were made to pay taxes (*bali, bhaga*) in return of the protection to their life, family and property that a king provided from internal and external threats. The boundaries of state, became more fixed by now, that were to be guarded by the king. A king now enjoyed all the decision-making powers, which enabled an efficient organization of administration and army, management of trade and markets, and

mobilization of resources in a territorial polity. Several new titles as *nrpati*, *naresvara*, *narendra*, *naradhipa*, etc, came into use for a king to emphasise his authority over all people (*nara*) of his kingdom. In the *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini, a king is called a '*bhupati*,' which literally means the Lord of the Land/Earth, and it reinforces the position of a king/monarch as a supreme authority over a well-defined territory of his kingdom. Now kingship became hereditary; and the Vedic rituals like *Rajasuya*, *Vajapeya* and *Asvamedha* became a tool to legitimize the political authority of a king. Under monarchies the four-fold *varna* based social stratification became increasingly prominent. Ranabir Chakravarti points out that the primary task of a 'monarchical state is to maintain law and order not by obliterating the social inequalities, but by establishing an ordered society in spite of the differentiated social groups.'

The emergence of monarchy was accompanied by the development of new theories to legitimize them. The Sanskrit texts proposed a theory of divine origin of kingship. According to it the Vedic sages after killing the tyrannous Vena, they created Nishada, who was expelled as he was not fit to rule. Then they created Prithu and installed him as a king who introduced agriculture and farming. In this way kingship was proposed as a gift of brahmana sages. Likewise, the Pali texts (the *Agganna Sutta* in the *Digha Nikaya*) also formulated a theory to legitimize kingly authority in terms of a 'social contract' between the king and his *praja*. According to it in order to avoid theft in paddy fields, people together decided to 'elect' a 'king'. The elected king was to protect the people and their paddy fields. In return of protection the king was to be paid in the form of a share of paddy. These theories in this way were formulated to legitimize the new form of 'despotic' state as well as king's right to collect taxes.

The Gana-Sanghas were different from monarchies, and they are identified as non-monarchical states that had primarily been tribal oligarchies. Several of these Gana-Sanghas had been located in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountain Range along the eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and the presence of Gana-Sanghas in the Indus Basin, Punjab and Rajasthan is also evident from the numismatic evidence. Some of the important Ganga-Sanghas that were located in the Himalayan foothills were Shakyas of Kapilvastu, Lichachhavis of Vaishali, Mallas of Kusinagara and Pava, Bulis of Alakappa, Kalamas of Kesaputta, Moriyas of Pippalivana, and Bhaggas (Bhargas) of Sumsumara hill, which flourished in the mid-centuries of the first millennium BCE. From their geographical location it appears that Ganga-Sanghas had mainly been located in areas that were less fertile and away from the Ganga plains. Contrary to these, the major monarchical kingdoms like Magadha, Vatsa, and Koshala had occupied the fertile alluvial plains of the Ganga Valley.

Position of a ruler in the Gana-Sangha was different from a monarch of a territorial kingdom, and here a ruler was considered one among the equals. His position depended upon the support of other members of the tribe/clan. According to Upinder Singh, 'Power was vested in the hands of an aristocracy comprising the heads of leading Kshatriya families' in the Gana-Sanghas, which are identified as a form of a proto-state by Romila Thapar. Romila Thapar says: 'The compound term *gana-sangha* or *gana-rajya* has the connotation of *gana*, referring to those who claim to be of equal status, and *sangha*, meaning an assembly, or *rajya*, referring to governance.' Collectively the *rajas* or heads of leading Kshatriya families formed the main assembly, which looked after the diverse activities of the Gana-Sangha. For example, a *raja* (king), *uparaja* (vice-king), *senapati* (military

commander), and *bhandagarika* (treasurer) were an integral part of the administration of the Shakyas and Lichchhavis, in which the decision-making power rested with the main assembly. Unlike a monarchy, in which a king alone enjoyed the right to maintain an army, each *raja* in the Gana-Sangha could keep a smaller army, a storehouse and a bureaucratic set-up. All the resources and revenue belonged to a king in monarchical system. But all the resources were usually shared by the Kshatriya clans in Gana-Sanghas. Whereas the four-fold *varna* system had prevailed in monarchies, in the Gana-Sanghas kshatriya clans alone enjoyed control over land and its produce, and *Dasa-Karamkaras* (slaves-hired labourers) tilled their land and provided varieties of services. Neither brahmanas nor their *varna* system appear to have had much influence in the society of the Gana-Sanghas.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. Mention the names of six Mahanagaras that are mentioned in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*.

Q. 2. Who is called 'Bhupati' in the *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini?

Q. 3. Mention the names of any four Gana Sanghas.

Q. 4. What is the meaning of *bhandagarika*?

Q. 5. Who authored the ancient text, the *Arthashastra*?

13.3. SIXTEEN MAHAJANAPADAS

We learn about the sixteen Mahajanapadas from the *Anguttara Nikaya* (a Buddhist text), and these Mahajanapadas enjoyed control over considerable natural and human resources in the sixth century BCE. These sixteen Mahajanapadas are as follows:

1. Kashi- It was situated in south-eastern Uttar Pradesh with its capital Varanasi (Benares).
2. Koshala- It largely comprised modern eastern Uttar Pradesh and had Shravasti (Saheth-Maheth) and Kushavati as its two capitals.
3. Anga- The modern Bhagalpur-Monghyr region of Bihar has been identified with the Anga *Mahajanapada*. It was separated from the Magadha by the river Champa after which was named the capital city of Anga.
4. Magadha- It has been identified roughly with present south Bihar. The Ganga, Son and Champa rivers were situated on the north, west and east respectively, and the Vindhya in the south of the Magadha. It had two capitals. The first capital was Girivraja/Rajagaha (Rajgir) but later it was shifted to Pataliputra (modern Patna).
5. Vajji/ Vriji- It was situated in the north Bihar and had been a confederacy of eight/nine clans (*ganas*), for example, Jnatrikas, Lichchavis, Videhans (Videha), and Vajjis.
6. Malla- It was situated in north-eastern Uttar Pradesh, and like Vajji was a confederacy of about nine clans. It had two capitals: Kusavati/Kusinara (modern Kashia) and Pavapuri (Padaraona village). It was a monarchy earlier, which by sixth century BCE transformed into an oligarchy.
7. Chetiya or Chedi- It has been identified with modern Bundelkhand. Its capital was Suktimati or Sukti-sahvaya also known as *Sotthivatinagara*.
8. Vamsa or Vatsa- It was situated in the region south of river Ganga with its capital Kaushambi (modern Kosam village near Allahabad) and several trade routes connected it to Deccan, different parts of the Ganga Valley, and the North-West India.
9. Kuru- With its capital Indraprastha (modern Delhi), it has been identified with western Uttar Pradesh and

Haryana including Delhi. It was a monarchy up to the period of Buddha but subsequently it was transformed into a *sangha* (oligarchy).

10. Panchala- It was situated in western Uttar Pradesh and roughly corresponded to present day Rohilkhand area and a part of the central *doab*. It was divided by Ganga River into two parts: northern Panchala with Ahichchhatra (present day Ramnagar in Bareilly district) and southern Panchala with Kampilya (Kampil in Farukhabad district) as capital cities. It seems like several others Panchala also transformed into an oligarchy by the post Vedic period.
11. Matsya- It was located in modern Jaipur area in eastern Rajasthan with Viratanagara or Bairat as a capital city. It probably also comprised the parts of Alwar and Bharatpur.
12. Surasena- In the Greek sources it is mentioned as '*Soursenoi*' along with a capital city *Methora* (Mathura) situated on the Yamuna River.
13. Assaka or Ashmaka/Ashvaka- It was present on the bank of river Godavari in Deccan and the city of Potana or Potali (modern Patan in Maharashtra) was its capital.
14. Avanti- It comprised major parts of Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. The Avanti *Maajanapada* was divided by the Vindhya into two parts: Northern Avanti with Ujjaini and southern Avanti with Mahishmati (modern Maheshwar) as capital cities.
15. Gandhara- It comprised parts of northern Pakistan (modern Peshawar and Rawalpindi districts) and the Kashmir valley in India. Takshila was its capital which was also a famous centre for trade and learning. Archaeological excavations have brought into light three major settlements here at Bhir Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh, and out of these three settlements, the remains at Bhir Mound are identified with the oldest city of Takshila dated to *circa* 600/500 BCE to 200 CE.
16. Kamboja- It has been identified with a region located in Hazara district of Pakistan. Being a monarchy in the sixth century BCE, Kamboja is called in the *Arthashastra* as a *Gana-Sangha*.

13.4. RISE OF MAGADHA

These sixteen *Mahajanapadas* were constantly at war with each-others to establish their authority over the Ganga Valley. But in this constant warfare not all were fortunate enough to survive for long, and at last four *Mahajanapadas*, e.g., Magadha, Koshala, Vatsa and Avanti emerged victorious by subjugating the rest. Kashi perhaps was first to fall and was subjugated by the Koshalas. The Magadha had a marriage alliance with Koshala, and the daughter of Koshala king Mahakosala was married to the king of Magadha, namely Bimbisara who had received Kashi village in dowry. Bimbisara was also known as Srenika, who provided a strong foundation to the Magadhan kingdom. Under him Rajagaha or Rajagriha was the capital city. He was an expert diplomat and through matrimonial relations maintained close relations with several of contemporary political powers. Besides Koshala, he also contracted matrimonial relations with Videhans and Madras. He received an embassy from Gandhara king, and sent his chief physician Jivaka when king Pradyota of Avanti was suffering from Jaundice. He

is also credited with the annexation of Anga after defeating its ruler, Brahmadatta. Bimbisara of Haryanka dynasty reorganized the village administration and facilitated the safe roads for the traders as well as ordinary peoples. The *Majjhima Nikaya* informs us that Ajatasatru, son of Bimbisara had fortified his capital city Rajagriha. Ajatasatru usurped the throne after killing his father Bimbisara. And soon after this, died the queen Kosaladevi, wife of Bimbisara. It made Prasenajit to take back Kashi from Ajatasatru; and there began a long-lasting struggle between the two. Finally, the struggle was resolved with the marriage of Vajira, daughter of Prasenajit with Ajatasatru. Kashi was given to him in dowry. Ajatasatru is also credited with the conquest over the Lichchavis of Vaishali by creating a dissension among their ranks, with the help of his minister Vassakara. It is mentioned that he used two unique weapons- *mahasilakantaga* (catapult to throw big stones) and *rahamusala* (chariot with an attached mace) in a war against Vaishali.

Ajatasatru was succeeded by Udayin or Udayibhadda. Udayin, the successor of Ajatasatru shifted the capital from Rajagriha to Pataliputra (also known as Kusumapura), situated at the confluence of Ganga, Son and Ghaghra rivers. A direct struggle between Avanti and Magadha for the mastery over the Ganga Valley continued for a long period and it could only reach to its final conclusion in the time of Shishunaga dynasty. According to legends, the people of Magadha Mahajanapada ousted the ruling dynasty from power, and they established an *Amtya* (a high-rank official) Shishunaga as the new ruler of Magadha. Shishunagas in this way replaced the Haryanka dynasty. It was also followed by a complete annexation of Avanti, which probably brought Vatsa kingdom under the Shishunagas. May be Kosala was also annexed by him. King Shishunaga relocated the capital of Magadha from Pataliputra to Vaishali. He was succeeded by his son Kalasoka or Kakavarna (literally meaning the black Asoka or the crow coloured). Two most important events under him took place. First was the holding of second Buddhist council at Vaishali, and second was the relocation of the capital city to Pataliputra. The Shishunagas were followed by Nanda dynasty. The first Nanda ruler was Mahapadma according to Puranas and he is mentioned as Ugrasena in the *Mahabodhivamsa*. The Puranas whereas identify him as a son of a Shudra woman, the Jain text *Parisishtaparvan* refers to him as a son of a barber. The Greek sources also provide similar information. According to Curitus, his father was a barber who with the help of chief queen killed the reigning monarch and usurped the throne. The Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela informs us about the conquest of Kalinga by a Nanda ruler. The inscription records that a king named Nanda took away a Jina statue and heirlooms of Kalinga kings to Magadha.

Dhana Nanda was ruling over Magadha, at a time when Alexander had invaded North-west India. He is mentioned in Greek sources as *Agrammes* or *Xandrames*, which probably is a corrupt form of Sanskrit patronymic Augrasainya (son of Ugrasena). He is mentioned as an important king, who ruled over the people of east *prassi* (i.e., *prachya* meaning the eastern people) and the *gangaridae* (i.e., the people of the Ganga valley) with its capital Pataliputra (*palibothra*). The Greek writers like Curitus, Diodourus and Plutarch have highlighted a large number of his army comprising infantry, cavalry, chariots and war-elephants, and in this way, they highlight the fabulous wealth and resources that the Nanda rulers had possessed. The military might of the Nanda kings, besides other reasons, is believed to have had discouraged the Macedonian soldiers, and they as a result refused to move further into the Indian subcontinent.

13.5. REASONS FOR THE RISE OF MAGADHA

Under the Nanda rulers Magadha emerged as a powerful kingdom comprising almost whole of the Ganga-Yamuna *doab*, Ganga Valley, Central India and Deccan. The Nandas built their kingdom on the firm foundations provided by the erstwhile dynasties of Haryanka and Shaishunagas. Like strong rulers, it also enjoyed geographical and social advantages which played an important role in its rise from a smaller polity to a mighty kingdom. The Magadha was ruled by most efficient and powerful rulers. Bimbisara of Haryanka dynasty reorganized the village administration and facilitated the safe roads for the traders as well as ordinary peoples. Through marriage with the princess of Koshala, Vaishali and Madra he managed to consolidate his position. He annexed Anga *Mahajanapada*. Next Magadha king Ajatasatru annexed Koshala as well as Vaishali. Udayin, the successor of Ajatasatru, shifted the capital from Rajagriha to Pataliputra, situated at the confluence of Ganga, Son and Ghaghra rivers. Sisunaga dynasty replaced the Haryanka dynasty and completed the annexation of Avanti. They were followed by Nanda rulers, who brought Kalinga under Magadha suzerainty.

Marxist historians, D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma, have drawn our attention to Magadha's access to iron ores of Chhota Nagpur area of Jharkhand in eastern India. Due to the availability of quality iron ores, Magadha could produce best types of weapons for its army. Another advantage that Magadha enjoyed was its *Natural Defence System*. The two capitals of Magadha were located at strategic locations providing natural protection to them. The old capital city, Rajagriha was surrounded by five hills which provided natural defensive walls to it. Similarly, Pataliputra was situated at the confluence of Ganga, Son and Ghaghra rivers providing natural defence system to it. These natural defensive systems enjoyed by Magadhans were not available for its enemies. The same rivers providing protection to Pataliputra also facilitated easy river transportation. This riverine transportation was economically advantageous for both traders as well as armies. Magadha also had control over diverse types of *Natural Resources*. The east of Allahabad region had fertile alluvial soil suitable for paddy cultivation. The easy irrigation facilities from heavy rainfall and perennial rivers further made possible the expansion of agriculture and high production. The Magadha also had access to timber and elephants available in eastern India. The elephants were an important component of Magadhan army. Furthermore, the society of Magadha was less rigid and open to new ideas. The *varna* system and social stratification was not present here. Therefore, the heterodox sects, like Jainism and Buddhism, could receive great support from people. In against of Vedic *varna* rules, Magadha was ruled by many non-kshatriya rulers who were able and efficient. It suggests that the ability and power of the ruler was one of the main criterions for succession rather than the birth.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. Fill in the blanks:

- Suktimati was the capital of _____ Mahajanapada.
- The king _____ of Kalinga issued the Hathigumpha inscription.
- The capital of Surasena Mahajanapada was _____

d) King Ajatashatru belonged to _____ dynasty.

13.6. LET US SUM UP

Two distinct but competing political systems, monarchy and Gana-Sangha, emerged by the sixth century BCE in northern India with a major concentration in the Ganga valley. The Sixteen Mahajanapadas comprised both monarchies (Magadha, Vatsa, Kosala, Avanti, Anga, etc) and Gana-Sanghas (Vajjis, Mallas, Moriyas, Licchavis, etc). Despite being territorial polities, monarchy and Gana-Sanghas had different political set-ups. In a monarchy whereas the king was the paramount authority, it was a central assembly constituted by leaders of different member clans/tribes of the Gana-Sangha that looked after the administration, defence and resources. Gana-Sanghas were oligarchies, in which there was no one power centre, and different was the case of monarchies, in which all the power resided in the hands of a king. Usually, kings ruled their kingdoms with the support of ministers, but they alone had the final authority in administrative matters. Our above discussion shows that Magadha had emerged as the most powerful authority in the Ganga valley and in its rise efficient rulers had played a key role.

13.7. GLOSSARY

Gramika /Grama-Gramani – Village head or Chief

Gana-Sangha – Oligarchy (non-monarchical states)

Nrpati/ Naresvara/ Narendra/ Naradhipa – literally, Lord of the People, i.e., a king

Bhupati – literally, Lord of the Land, i.e., a king

Amtya - a high-rank official

13.8. EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Write an essay on the rulers of Magadha Mahajanapada.
- Q. 2. Highlight the differences between monarchies and Gana Sanghas.
- Q. 3. Write an essay on the Sixteen Mahajanapadas.
- Q. 4. Discuss the rise of Magadha as a major political power.

13.9. LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Write a note on Gandhara Mahajanapada.
- Q. 2. Comment on the capital cities of Avanti Mahajanapada.
- Q. 3. Write a note on Haryanka dynasty.
- Q. 4. Which Magadha king was also known as Srenika?

Q. 5. Mention the name of the Magadha king, who had shifted the capital from Rajagriha to Pataliputra?

13.10. ANSWER KEY

CYPI

- Q. 1. See Section, 13.1.
Q.2. See Section, 13.2.
Q. 3. See Section, 13.2.
Q. 4. See Section, 13.2.
Q. 5. See Section, 13.1.

CYP II

Fill in the blanks:

- a) Chedi Mahajanapada
b) King Kharavela
c) Mathura
d) Haryanka dynasty

13.11. SUGGESTED READINGS

- K.M. Shrimali, *A People's History of India-4: The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution, c. 700-c. 350 BC*. Aligarh Historians Society and Tulika Books, 2011 reprint.
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MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL FORMATION (C. 600 BC)

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-III

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 14

RISE OF HETERODOX SECTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JAINISM

STRUCTURE

14.0. Learning Objectives and Outcomes

14.1. Introduction

14.2. Heterodox Sects

14.3. Early Jainism

14.4. Jain Philosophy

14.5. Jainism and Early Indian Society

14.6. Let us sum up

14.7. Glossary

14.8. Examination Oriented Questions

14.9. Lesson End Exercises

14.10. Answer Key

14.11. Suggested Readings

14.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to -

- examine the factors responsible for the emergence of heterodox sects
- discuss the key features of early Jainism
- explain the nature of social patronage to Jainism

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about -

- the origin of Jainism and its philosophy
- the social background of early Jain monastic community
- the impact of Jainism on early Indian society

14.1. INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the *varna-jati* system gained wider popularity by the sixth century BCE, when society of Mahajanapadas was increasingly stratified and greater emphasis was laid upon the Vedic sacrifices and rituals involving the destruction of both livestock and agricultural produces. The rise of the sixteen Mahajanapadas was accompanied by the appearance of several urban centres in early India with a concentration in the Ganga valley. Transregional trade routes connected these urban centres, and they were known as Uttarapatha (northern trans-regional route) and Dakshinapatha (southern trans-regional route). Cattle were needed for the expansion of agriculture and also for facilitating ox-drawn transportation in early India. Both peasants and merchants recognized the importance of cattle wealth for their professions, and therefore, they extended their support to heterodox sects (Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikas) for advocating the practice of non-violence (Ahimsa). Unlike the Vedic-Brahmanical social order in which they had been assigned a lower status, the heterodox sects not only provided the merchants, artisans and cultivators (particularly, landowners) a higher social status but also endorsed their professional activities. In this lesson, you will learn about the salient characteristics of Jainism, its philosophy and the patterns of patronage that it received in early India.

14.2. HETERODOX SECTS

The expression, 'heterodox sects' refers to non-conformist religious traditions of early India that had emerged against the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition in the middle of the first millennium BCE. Among the prominent heterodox sects of early India are included Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikas. The Jains strongly criticised the Vedic sacrifices and the authority of brahmanas. Like Buddhism and Ajivikas, Jainism too popularised the concept of non-violence and the Jain monks denounced the destruction of cattle wealth in the lavish Vedic rituals. Jainism is a monastery-based religion and it promoted renunciation and asceticism. Jain monks lived a life of wanderer, and they survived upon the food offered as alms by kind householders. Besides Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivikas had been popular among people and these are usually identified as heterodox sects due to their philosophical differences with the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition. As they rejected the Vedas and challenged the authority of Brahmanas, the heterodox sects (Jainism, Buddhism and the Ajivikas) are called *nastika* in the Brahmanical literature. Several expressions, such as *parivrajaka* (wanderer), *shramana* (the one striving to realize the truth), and *bhikshu* (the one living upon alms), are used for ascetics including Jains, Buddhists and Ajivikas. The renunciation in Jainism did not mean a complete separation of the monk or nun from the material world. Rather it meant their joining a new order or world (with distinct rules and regulations) which continued to maintain a link with the material world for

patronage as well as for new recruits. The founder of the Ajivika sect, Makkhali Ghosala was contemporary of Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. We learn from the Jain tradition about the father of Ghosala, who is called *mankha* (a person, who earned his living by exhibiting religious paintings), and apparently, Makkhali Ghosala was named after his father. He was named Ghosala because of his birth in a cowshed in Saravana village. Besides him, Purana Kassapa, and Pakudha Kachchayana were two other prominent leaders of Ajivika sect.

For a short period, Makkhali Ghosala and Mahavira had stayed together but later parted away due to some ideological differences. Ajivikas believed that everything had been pre-determined (*niyati*) and nothing could be changed with human efforts (*karma*). Time was considered illusory because incidents which would take place in future had already been determined. Hence the whole future was believed by the Ajivikas to have been pre-determined. It means future exists in present and both exist in past. In this way Ghosala denied both action as well as result. The ‘motion’, ‘change’ and ‘time’ in this way becomes illusory. The Ajivikas preached severe asceticism and complete nudity. They did not accept food, a) especially prepared for them, b) from those who were still eating, c) collected in time of famine, d) which was near to dog or flies, and, e) comprising fish, meat or intoxicants. They practiced *ahimsa* but not as strictly as Jains. They did not believe in *varna-jati* hierarchy and denounced the *Vedas*. They enjoyed royal patronage. King Prasenajit of the Kosala Mahajanapada is believed to have had provided patronage to Ajivikas, and we know from the inscriptions found at the Barabar hills about the Mauryan king Ashoka’s (c. 268-232 BCE) donation of rock-cut caves to Ajivika ascetics. In a same way, Ashoka’s successor, Dasharatha gifted three caves to Ajivikas, about which learn from the inscriptions found at Nagarjuni hills. The Ajivikas also enjoyed support of laity comprising merchants, artisans etc. Both Jains and Buddhist despised Ajivikas which indicates to a bitter rivalry among them. You will read more about Buddhism in another lesson, and therefore, we will now discuss mainly about Jainism in the following sections of this lesson.

14.3. EARLY JAINISM

The Jain literature provides a list of 24 *tirthankaras*, out of which Mahavira was the twenty-fourth, and the first *tirthankara* was the Rishbhanatha, who is also known as Adinatha. According to Jain traditions parents of Mahavira were the follower of Parshvanatha who was the 23 *tirthankara*, born in the house of king Asvasena of Banaras/Benaras. The name Mahavira literally means ‘Great Hero’. Because of this it is believed that Parshvanatha was also the teacher of Mahavira. The name of Vardhamana Mahavira’s father was Siddhartha, who had been the chief of Jnatrika clan and his mother was named Trishala, who belonged to Lichchhavi clan of Vaishali and had been a sister of Chetaka (chief of the Lichchhavis). The Jain traditions believe that before the birth of Mahavira from the womb of Trishala, a brahmana woman named Devananda had conceived him. But due to divine intervention the embryo was transferred by Indra (Shakra) in the womb of Trishala. The Jain traditions considered Brahmanas socially low compared to kshatriyas, and the story of a brahmana woman Devananda reinforces this view by projecting a woman of non-kshatriya background as unfit for giving birth to a *tirthankara*.

Kundagrama (identified with modern Basarh) near Vaishali is believed to have been the place, where Mahavira was born in circa 599 BCE, and he lived for 72 years before his death at a place called Pavapuri (located near

Rajagir) in circa 527 BCE. Yasoda was the name of his wife, who bore a daughter named Priyadarsana or Anuja. Unlike *Svetambaras*, the *Digambaras* believed that Mahavira had remained celibate all his life and did not marry at all. According to one Jain tradition, Mahavira renounced the material world after the demise of his parents at the age of 30 years, and he joined a group of mendicants called *nirgranthas* (free from books or bonds), with whom Mahavira is believed to have wandered for several years in search of true knowledge. After 12 long years penance, Mahavira gained enlightenment in a field near Jrimbhika-grama on the bank of Rijupalika river, and he was called conqueror (*jina*), ford-maker (*tirthankara*) and worthy (*arhat*). Though he was not the founder of Jainism but he indeed popularized it among the masses. Both, the Svetambara and the Digambara traditions agree that Mahavira and his followers practiced nudity and had moved around completely naked. Contrary to the Svetambaras, the Digambara monks followed the tradition of nudity strictly, and they considered the renunciation of all possessions including cloths and begging bowl necessary for the attainment of salvation. As they did not carry a bowl, Digambara monks used to receive alms in their cupped hands. A Digambara monk was allowed to carry only a broom for removing insects away before sitting or walking on ground, and they could carry a water gourd for toilet hygiene. On the other hand, the Svetambara wore white robe, and did not practice nudity.

We learn from the Digambara traditions about a schism that had taken place in the Jain *sangha* during reign of Chandragupta Maurya (circa 324-297 BCE). A famine affected the population of Magadha for twelve years, and it is believed that a section of Jain monks under Bhadrabahu migrated to southern India due to this famine. Those Jain monks, who had decided to stay back in Magadha under Sthalabahu, began to cover their body with a piece of white cloth and they also codified the canon. When Bhadrabahu and his followers returned to Magadha from the south, they condemned Sthalabahu and his followers for transgressing the norms by wearing a piece of cloth. As a result, Jain community was divided into Svetambaras (white-clad) and Digambaras (sky-clad). The Digambaras rejected the canon compiled by Sthalabahu and his followers, who came to be identified by Digambaras as false Jainas. The Svetambaras do not agree with the story of Digambaras, and they traced the beginning of the Digambara sect to a self-initiated Jain ascetic called Shivabhuti. Although the old practice of nudity had died out after the death of Mahavira, Shivabhuti was blamed for reviving it and for establishing the Digambara sect. Scholars believe that the stories of the Digambaras and the Svetambaras about the schism in Jainism are of late origin and of dubious historical value. Yet the possibility of a migration of Jain monks to southern India possibly in the 4th century BCE cannot be entirely rejected. In fact, all the early Jain images from Mathura are naked and one of the earliest images showing Rishabha with a lower garment is dated to the fifth century CE. Chandragupta Maurya is believed to have had adopted Jainism in old age and migrated along with several Jain monks to southern India. He died there by practicing *Sallekhana* (a Jain ritual referring to a fast unto death).

Like men, women could renounce the world and join the *sangha* or monastery of the Jains; but they were subordinated to the authority of monks within the monastery. Generally, women were perceived as a threat to celibacy and Jain monks were directed to avoid friendship and company of women. The 19th *tirthankara* Malli or Mallinatha was identified by *Svetambaras* as a woman; but *Digambaras* had a different view and they argued that Malli was a man. While Svetambara monks believed that nuns too could attain salvation, Digambaras

considered birth in a male body necessary for attaining salvation. Digambaras preached as well as practiced complete nudity, which was considered by them necessary for attaining complete detachment from the material world. Clothes were association with passions, sexual desires and shame, and therefore, according to Digambaras, women could never attain salvation due to their inability to practice nudity. Owing to the limitation of her body (e.g., menstruation), a woman was considered inferior. Although the sectarian differences had arose quite early among the Jains, but scholars believe that the bifurcation of Jain community into the Svetambaras and the Digambaras had firmly crystalized in the Council of Valabhi in the mid-fifth century CE. This council was exclusively attended by the Svetambaras and no Digambara monk participated in it. Eventually, the western India came to be inhabited by the Svetambaras, and the Digambaras gained prominence in the southern India.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. Fill in the blanks:

- a) The heterodox sects, namely, _____, Buddhism and Ajivikas, are called *nastika* in the Brahmanical literature.
- b) The founder of the Ajivika sect, _____ was contemporary of Vardhamana Mahavira.
- c) The Ajivikas received the rock-cut caves in donation from the Mauryan king _____ and his successor, _____ at the Barabar and the Nagarjuni hills.
- d) The first Tirthankara of the Jain was _____, who is also known as Adinatha.
- e) Contrary to the Svetambaras, the _____ monks followed the tradition of nudity strictly.
- f) The Mauryan king _____ is believed to have had adopted Jainism and migrated to south with the Jain monks.

14.4. JAIN PHILOSOPHY

The Jains rejected the authority of Brahmanas and their scriptures including the Vedas, and they emphasised on renunciation and encouraged people (both men and women) to renounce the material world to attain salvation. For them, the purpose of a human life was liberation from the cycle of life and death (moksha, nirvana). Like their Buddhist counterparts, the Jains accepted the rebirth and the role of karma in shaping human life as two primary facts of human experience. The sincere observance of the principle of non-violence (ahimsa) was considered necessary for living a moral life and therefore, non-violence was made an integral part of the Jain worldview. Out of the five principal vows which are considered as the central pillars of Jainism, Parshvanath is credited to form the first four, namely, *satya* (do not to lie), *asteya* (do not steal), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *aparigraha* (do not hoard). And Mahavira is believed to have had added another fifth (i.e., *brahmcharya*) vow to the list of four vows. It was believed that the observance of these vows brought inner purification. Likewise, the Jain community

considered the *Tri-ratna* or three Jewels (namely, right knowledge/*samyag-jnana*; right action/*samyag-charitra*; and right faith/*samyag-darshan*) essential for attaining salvation. Ideally, every human action was expected to be followed by the notion of right conduct based on five principle vows to avoid the impacts of four darts, i.e., anger, pride, deceit and greed. Mahavira, who practised complete nudity, advocated severe asceticism for Jain monks. A complete detachment from the material world was considered necessary by the Jains for the attainment of salvation, and therefore, the expression 'shramana' ('striver') was used for Mahavira and other ascetics, who had renounced the life of a householder and embraced the life of a wandering mendicant in search of true knowledge. The aim of a renouncer was to minimise outer actions and simultaneously gain control over inner activity.

Since the Jains considered even a smallest particle on earth as having life, they greatly emphasised upon the practice of non-violence. The life forms are categorized as divinities (*deva*), humans, hell beings, and animals as well as plants in the Jain traditions. Neither hunting nor animal husbandry was considered a good profession for the Jain laity, who were expected to follow any of the following six occupations – state administration, writing, agriculture (*krishi*), the arts (*vidyas*), and trade (*vanija*) - for living. Out of these six, even cultivation was considered inferior due to the possibility of killing tiny insects in the act of ploughing and digging. As the possibility of causing injury to other living beings was minimal in trade and commerce, therefore, they were upheld as ideal occupations for Jain laity. Jains in this way promoted the practice of a severe form of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and vegetarianism was strictly observed by them. They believed in the transmigration of soul (*jiva*) and connected good actions (*karmas*) with the birth of an individual in higher *varna* and bad actions with the birth in lower *varna*. According to Jain philosophy every act performed with passions, desires and hatred by a human being attracts similar *karma* particles floating in the space. Good acts done with good intention therefore, bring good results and bad acts done with hatred bring bad results. The right knowledge makes a human being to act without passions, desires and hatred. Such act without any intention attracts no bad/good *karma* particle. As a result, human being ultimately attains salvation (*moksha*). The Jain ideologues had also analysed the multi-dimensional character of reality, which they explained by developing the doctrine of *anekantavada* (theory of multiple forms of reality) and *syadvada* (theory of may be). The theory of *anekantavada* and *syadvada* emphasise upon the multi-dimensional character of reality, and it makes it impossible for an ordinary human being to grasp reality in its entirety. However, contrary to ordinary humans, a *tirthankara* because of his enlightened status can grasp reality in its entirety, and he alone can understand the complexity of reality. Jains believed in Gods but placed them at a lower position than the *tirthankaras*.

14.5. JAINISM AND EARLY INDIAN SOCIETY

Mahavira played a key role in the spread of Jainism in Bihar and parts of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. In the centuries following the death of Mahavira, Jainism gained popularity along the caravan route that connected Ganga valley to Delhi and Mathura on the one hand and to Gujarat on the other hand. In a same way, the caravan route along the seacoast that connected Ganga valley to Odisha (Kalinga) and various parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, witnessed the spread of Jainism. Noticeable here is the discovery of a nude male torso of the Mauryan Age (circa 324 -187 BCE) from Lohanipur (in present day Bihar). If the identification of this torso as an image

of a Jain *tirthankara* is right, then it would become the earliest evidence of the image worship among the Jains in early India. Epigraphic and archaeological evidence show the presence of a Jain Stupa at the Kankali Tila in Mathura in the late centuries BCE. The major reason for the immense support received from mercantile class by Jainism was their ideological support to their occupation. Jainism supported usury, and long-distance trade which was despised in the Shastras of the brahmanas. The teachings of Mahavira, which supported preservation of cattle wealth, had a wider impact and it particularly benefitted peasantry particularly the big land-owning groups like *gahapatis*, who had required a large number of oxen to cultivate their vast estates.

K. M. Shrimali suggests that possibly the doctrine of *ahimsa* also helped the ‘...peasant communities, wishing to expand into the domain of the forest tribes, which mainly lived by hunting and killing animals. The latter occupation was naturally held blameworthy in the eyes of *ahimsa* preachers, and this could, in turn, justify the subjugation of the forest tribes at the hands of the higher elements of rural society’. A closer study of Jain literature shows that though the Jains criticized *Vedas* and *varna-jati* hierarchy, brahmanas and kshatriyas continued to be seen as higher social categories. They placed kshatriyas before brahmanas in social hierarchy and shudras remained at the bottom of it. In the *Adi Purana* of the Jains, the creation of the kshatriya, vaishya and shudra varnas is credited to the first Tirthankara Rishabha, who ruled the people as a king before attaining the status of a Tirthankara. On the other hand, the brahmana varna was created by Rishabha’s son and successor king Bharata, who was the first universal (Chakravarti) monarch. Jains used the word brahmana in two senses: a) a brahmana *varna* and b) as a higher social-intellectual status. In fact, Jainism had larger number of monks from brahmana and kshatriya *varnas*, and all the chief disciples as well as teachers (*acharyas*) of Mahavira had been from brahmana background. The major section of Jain laity comprised mainly the wealthy merchant/agriculturalist class (*setthis*, *gahapatis*), but even their presence in Jain *sangha* was not high. Likewise, though ideologically shudra’s entry into *sangha* was not barred their presence was negligible only.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q. 1. Mention the five principal vows of the Jains.

Q. 2. Define the *Tri-ratnas* (three Jewels) of the Jains.

Q. 3. Which profession is considered the best in the Jain scriptures?

Q. 4. Where in Bihar is found a nude male torso of the Mauryan Age?

Q. 5. Who is mentioned as the creator of Brahmana varna in the *Adi Purana*?

14.6. LET US SUM UP

In this lesson, we discussed the material context of the heterodox sects with a focus on early Jainism, and you learnt from this lesson about the main features of Jain philosophy. Jainism challenged the Vedic-Brahmanical traditions and popularised the idea of asceticism in early Indian society. Jain teachers advocated the preservation of cattle wealth by making non-violence (ahimsa) as an integral part of their philosophy and they considered trade as the best profession for lay-followers. While they preached *ahimsa*-based lifestyle for the laity, Jain monks and nuns were expected to renounce the material world and dedicate their all energies to attain salvation. Release from the cycle of life and death (moksha, nirvana) was considered the main aim of Jain monks and nuns, who could achieve it by following the path shown by 24 Tirthankaras. Due to sectarian differences the Jain community was divided into Svetambara and Digambara sects, and this division is still present in modern times.

14.7. GLOSSARY

Ahimsa - Non-violence

Parivrajaka - wanderer

Shramana - the one striving to realize the truth

Bhikshu - the one living upon alms

Nirgranthas - free from books or bonds

Jina - conqueror

Tirthankara - ford-maker

Arhat – worthy

Acharya - teacher

14.8. EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. Discuss the factors responsible for the emergence of heterodox sects.
- Q. 2. Analyse the role of Tirthankaras in the emergence and growth of Jainism.
- Q. 3. Write an essay on the life and teachings of Vardhamana Mahavira.
- Q. 4. Discuss main features of Jain philosophy.
- Q. 5. Discuss the nature of social patronage to early Jainism.

14.9. LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q. 1. Explain the term, Tirthankara.
- Q. 2. Write a note on the principal vows of the Jains.
- Q. 3. Mention the name of the 19th Jain Tirthankara.
- Q. 4. Why merchants patronized the Jain *sangha*?
- Q. 5. Write a note on the position of women in early Jainism.

14.10. ANSWER KEYS

CYPI

Fill in the blanks:

- a) Jainism
- b) Makkhali Ghosala
- c) Ashoka; Dasharatha
- d) Rishabha

- e) Digambaras
- f) Chandragupta Maurya

CYP II

- Q. 1. See Section 14.4.
- Q. 2. See Section 14.4.
- Q. 3. See Section 14.4.
- Q. 4. See Section 14.5.
- Q. 5. See Section 14.5.

14.11. SUGGESTED READINGS

- K.M. Shrimali, *A People's History of India-4: The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution, c. 700-c. 350 BC*. Aligarh Historians Society and Tulika Books, 2011 reprint.
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MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL FORMATION (C.600 B.C)

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-III

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 15

RISE OF HETERODOX SECTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BUDDHISM

STRUCTURE

15.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

15.1 Introduction

15.2 The life and times of Gautama/Siddhartha

15.2.1 Birth and early life

15.2.2 His Renunciation

15.2.3 His Enlightenment

15.2.4 His Missionary activity and death

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15.3.3 Other teachings of Buddha

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15.5 Buddhist Councils

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15.6 The main Buddhist Sects

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15.8 Let us sum up

15.9 Glossary

15.10 Examination Oriented Questions

15.11 Lesson end Exercises

15.12 Answer Key

15.13 Suggested Reading

15.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to-

- discuss the factors responsible for the growth of heterodox sects.
- explain the early life, renunciation and enlightenment of Gautam Buddha.
- discuss the teachings of Buddha.
- explain the setting up of the Buddhist **Sangha**.
- discuss the development in Buddhism after Buddha viz. the four Buddhist Councils and compilation of literature.
- discuss the schism in Buddhism and the rise of the different sects.

Learning Outcomes

After going through this lesson, you will have a clear understanding about-

- the causes behind the rise of heterodox sects
- the life of Buddha including his renunciation and enlightenment.
- the teachings of Buddha.
- the establishment of the Buddhist **Sangha**.
- the development in Buddhism after Buddha, viz. the four Buddhist Councils and the compilation of literature.
- the schism in Buddhism and the rise of the different sects.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the sixth century BCE is considered very important since many upheavals were taking place in different parts of the ancient world w.r.t the religious reforms. And this included India as well. We discern that during this time period, many new religious- philosophical movements like Buddhism, Jainism, Charvakas, Ajivikas, Ajnanas, Lokayatas etc emerged in the eastern part of the country. These are collectively called the Heterodox sects since they challenged the dominance of the Vedas and the Brahmanical social order. The rigid **Varna** system, the predominance of elaborate and expensive rituals and sacrifices in the Brahmanical religion, the priestly dominance and the lack of spiritual depth alienated many people. Unlike the followers of the Brahmanism, they believed in non-injury of living beings. Such people were searching for a more personal, ethical and rational religion. They found their answer in the rise of heterodox sects, including Buddhism. The charismatic personality of Buddha and the simple doctrines of Buddhism engaged their attention. Thus Buddhism emerged as a reformist, rational and egalitarian alternative to the orthodox Vedic religion.

15.2 THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GAUTAMA/SIDDHARTHA

Gautama/Siddhartha, who is also referred to Tathagata or the Enlightened One was an important historical personality of the period under review. Although there is no contemporary life story of the Master we have gleanings from later sources which enable us to find about the early life as well as the important events in his life.

15.2.1 Birth and early life

Siddhartha was the son of Suddhodana, a chief of the Sakya republican clan of Kapilavastu and of Mahamaya, his chief queen, who was a princess of the clan of the Koliyas, was born in 566 BCE at the Lumbini grove. This grove is located close to Kapilavastu. At His birth place stands a stone pillar which was built there by the Maurya ruler Ashoka, about 250 years after the passing away of Buddha. The inscription installed had this engraved on it, **“here was born the Buddha Sakyamuni.”** This was installed by Ashoka to commemorate his visit to this spot. Now known as Rummindei, it is in the Bithri District of Nepal.

Siddhartha was barely seven days old when his mother, Mahamaya passed away. The infant prince was then looked after by the sister of his mother, his foster mother, Mahaprajapati Gautami. Suddhodana provided him with all the comforts of life but the luxuries around did not engage his attention. He received the best education befitting his royal status. Although he was provided with the best in life, he continued to be quiet, thoughtful and pensive. This alarmed his father and as he was anxious to see his son leading a life of a normal prince and in order to keep him attached to the worldly attractions, he got him married to a beautiful princess, Yashodhara. They lived happily for about a decade but the reserved nature and the pensive, sober outlook of his life did not change. He was blessed with a son, Rahula.

15.2.2 His Renunciation

The Buddhist texts inform us that his indifference towards worldly life and his melancholic nature was further intensified by the four incidents which occurred when he was accompanied by his attendant Channa on one of his

rare visits outside the palace. The Buddhist call it the “Four Great Signs.” These were the sights of an aged man, a sick person, a dead body being carried in a funeral procession by his wailing relatives and an ascetic. The fourth sight, that of an ascetic who had renounced the world and had a calm and serene expression on his face affected him most. He developed a dislike for the worldly pleasures as they were transitory. Even the birth of his son did not make him happy. Rather, he regarded this as a shackle, an obstacle in his path of searching for the ultimate truth of life. So, one dark night, when he was 29 of age, he walked out of his palace, leaving his wife and son asleep, never to return to the worldly life. He had renounced the world. He turned into a wandering ascetic in search of truth. This renunciation of Siddhartha Gautama is known as **Maha Parityaga**.

15.2.3 His Enlightenment

His firm resolve to overcome suffering and realize the ultimate truth of life lead him to search for learned Brahmanas and ascetics to acquire knowledge of the scriptures and to learn meditation. He first met Alara Kalama and later Udraka Ramaputra. He learnt how to meditate and also learnt the tenets of the Upanishads from them. He continued with the study and penance for six years. At this time, Siddhartha was in touch with Panchavaggiya bhikku-”five setter alms men”- Anna Kondanna, Assaji, Vappa, Mahanama and Bhaddiya. The penance continued but it could not bring him near the Truth of life.

Siddhartha, now thirty five years of age was seated under a pipal tree on the outskirts of Gaya. He was emaciated. Penance was not leading him anywhere. Then, he accepted a bowl of porridge from a young girl, Sujata. After partaking little of this, he bathed and again sat beneath the pipal tree, with a firm resolve not to get up till he solved the reasons of suffering. He meditated for forty nine days. His associates left him in disgust. Siddhartha continued to meditate and on the forty ninth day, enlightenment dawned on him. He had realised the secret of sorrow and also understood as to why there is so much despair and suffering of all kinds and what he must do to overcome them. He had now become the Buddha, the Enlightened One. After spending about seven weeks under the Pipal tree, he travelled to the Deer Park at Sarnath near Banaras/ Varanasi.

15.2.4 His Missionary Activity and death

After attaining Enlightenment, Gautam Buddha wanted to share his supreme spiritual knowledge with the ignorant and suffering humanity. So, he journeyed to the Deer Park at Sarnath near Varanasi. His five former disciples were there. They bowed down before him. Buddha gave his first lecture to them and this is called “**Dhamma Chakka Pavattana**” or “**Dharma Chakra Pravartana**” or “Turning of the Wheel of law”. He thus laid the foundation of the Buddhist **Sangha** with only five monks. Thereafter, he undertook several long journeys and travelled far and wide with a missionary zeal for about forty five years. From Sarnath, he went to Rajgriha where king Bimbisara became his disciple. From there, he went to Sravasti, the capital of Kosala. There, king Prasenjit became his disciple. From there, he went to Kapilavastu where many people embraced Buddhism. This included his parents, wife and son. Some other places which he visited in order to preach include Kaushambhi, Champa, Nalanda, Kashi, Vajji, Avanti, Pava etc. A point worthy to note is that Buddha always taught in the local, easily understood language and through parables so that people could easily understand and imbibe his teachings. He had sincere and devoted disciples like Sariputta, Maudgalayana, Ananda and Upali who dedicated

themselves completely to the spread of Buddhism. Few rich merchants of Kosala and Utkala also became his followers. They too contributed a lot in the growth and spread of Buddhism. This way, the missionary activities continued unabated for forty five years. No discrimination was made between rich and poor, high and low man or woman. Buddhism thus spread far and wide.

After preaching the doctrines of his faith for forty five years, Buddha and his disciple Ananda reached Kusinara/ Kusinagar in the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. There he breathed his last at the age of 80 years. That was the full moon day of the month of Vaishakha in 486 BCE. This is called the **Mahaparinirvana** of the Buddha.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:-

Q1. The sixth century BCE is regarded as an age of far reaching religious reforming activity in India. Substantiate.

Q2. What do you know regarding the birth and early life of Siddhartha?

Q3. Throw light on the missionary activity of Gautama Buddha.

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a) Siddhartha was the son of _____ and _____.
- b) The renunciation of Siddhartha Gautama is called the _____.

- c) Buddha's first sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath near Varanasi is called as _____.
- d) Buddha breathed his last in _____.
- e) Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana at _____.

15.3 BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

Learners, as mentioned earlier in the lesson, Buddha had given his first sermon known as **Dharma Chakra Pravartana** after attaining enlightenment. This sermon, given to the five disciples at the Deer Park at Sarnath near Varanasi set the wheel of religious living in motion. This contained the fundamentals of his teachings. He also spoke about the Four Arya Satyas and the Eight fold path.

15.3.1 The Four Arya Satyas

The belief in the inevitability of suffering made him explain his gospel of the Four Noble Truths. They are:-

- (i) A person's life is full of **dukha** or sufferings.
- (ii) The reason of sufferings (**dukha samudaya**) is desires.
- (iii) The cessation of sufferings (**dukha nirodha**) lies in the extinction or killing of the desires.
- (iv) These desires (**trishna**) can be killed by following the right path and this is the 'noble Eight fold path'.

Thus, Buddha recommended following the Eight fold path in order to eradicate the desires in life.

15.3.2 Eight Fold Path (Ashtangikamarga)

The Eight fold path or the **Ashtangikamarga** is also known as the Middle Path as it avoids the extremes of both the sides. It consisted of –

- (i) **Right View**- to realize the truth of life and viewing reality as it is and not as it appears.
- (ii) **Right Aspiration/Thought**- we are what we think. Clear and benign thoughts build good and noble characters.
- (iii) **Right Speech**- when we speak good and kind words, we are respected and trusted by everyone.
- (iv) **Right Conduct**- Our conduct speaks volumes about us. No matter what we say, we are known to people by the way we conduct ourselves. So keep the conduct good at all times.
- (v) **Right livelihood**- Buddha believed and preached that- choose that work/job that does not hurt or harm others. It should not make them unhappy.
- (vi) **Right effort**- one should keep only good thoughts in mind and avoid evil thoughts. Do your best and cultivate good will for others.
- (vii) **Right Mindfulness**- This means being aware of one's thoughts, words and deeds. Think good, speak good and do good.

- (viii) **Right Concentration/ Meditation-** Concentrate on one thought at a time. This will result in the attainment of calm composure.

15.3.3 *Other beliefs of Buddha*

The beliefs of Buddha were simple and dealt with the everyday life of the common people. Apart from the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path mentioned above, he also held the following beliefs and spoke about them in his discourses-

- Gautama Buddha had firm belief in the theory of **karma**. What a person gets in this life is the result of his **karma** of his previous birth. And his deeds in the present birth will determine the quality of his life in the forthcoming birth. No one can escape the effects of his good or bad **karmas**'. He attributed the inequality in society due to the **karma** of the people. While some people are well off, others are poor and miserable. It is all the doing of one's **karmas**'. He believed in the transmigration of the soul.
- He believed in the theory of re-birth. A person is born again and again to reap the fruits of his deeds. If you sin, you die and when you die, you take birth again and the cycle continues. Only if you sin no more, you are born no more and thus will attain final Bliss.
- He said, we must all aim to acquire salvation in life. It implies the shedding of/ renunciation of all desires. When this is done, the suffering ends and a person attains **Nirvana**.
- Buddha does not mention God. This means that he neither accepted nor rejected the presence of various gods and goddesses.
- Buddha emphasised the principle of **Ahimsa** or non-violence. He denounced the **Yajnas** and sacrifices and stressed on non- injury to all living beings.
- Buddha rejected the Vedas and performance of rituals. Rather, he emphasised on good moral life which will bring an end to all kinds of sufferings.
- Buddha condemned the caste system. Not birth but the **karmas**' of a person determines whether the person is good or evil, high or low. He advocated shedding all kinds of caste distinctions. As a result of this thought, people of the low caste flocked around him in large numbers.
- Buddha was of the belief that one was one's own savior and master without reference to any outside power. Cultivate good moral values and practice truthfulness, love, benevolence, compassion, obedience to one's parents and the elderly, practice charity, kindness towards living creatures, have pure thoughts, pure speech and good actions. Buddha always preached that one must avoid the two extremes, of indulgence in worldly pleasure and the practice of strict abstinence and asceticism. The beliefs of Buddha influenced a vast number of people and they became his ardent followers.

15.4 BUDDHIST SANGHA

Other than the Buddha and to the doctrines of Buddhism or the **Dhamma**, the third factor of equal importance

was the **Sangha**. These three factors when taken together form the Buddhist 'holy trinity' - the Buddha, the **Dhamma** and the **Sangha**. These are the part of the prayers of every devout Buddhist. The Buddha had himself organized the **Sangha** in a systematic way. He also laid down rules and code of conduct to be followed by every member of the **Sangha**. He had a number of **bhikshus**' around him. This **bhikshus**' or monks were persons who had renounced the world and were committed to devote themselves completely to raise the moral and spiritual standards of the people. They led a simple life and depended on alms obtained from the community. The membership of the Buddhist **Sangha** was open to all those individuals who were above the age of fifteen. Their caste and status did not matter. However, they must have sound physical and moral qualities. He could join the **Sangha** after seeking and acquiring due permission from his parents and approval from the Council of Bhikshus'. Once this was granted, he had to lead a life of devotion and chastity. In the beginning Buddha did not favour the entry of women in the **Sangha** but later on he relented. The women who gave up the world and lived a life of asceticism were known as **bhikshunis**' or the nuns. The Buddhist **Sangha** continued to perform an important role in spreading the Buddhist doctrines and philosophy.

15.5 BUDDHIST COUNCILS

The Buddhist Councils were convened after the **mahaparinirvana** of Buddha. The purpose was the compilation of the teachings of the Buddha as well as the settlement of several important religious issues relating to the **Sangha**.

In all four such Buddhist Councils were held at different times.

15.5.1 The 1st Buddhist Council-

The 1st Buddhist Council was convened few days after the **Mahaparinirvana** of Buddha at Rajgriha in 483 B.C.E. It was held under the patronage of the ruler of Magadha, king Ajatshatru. It was presided over by Mahakassapa and was attended by 500 monks. Few prominent disciples of Buddha such as Upali, Ananda etc also attended the proceedings. The main purpose of this council was to maintain the purity of the teachings of Buddha and to preserve the sayings of the Buddha (**Suttas**) as well as the monastic discipline or rules (**Vinaya**).

In this council, while the **Suttas** were recited by Ananda, the **Vinaya** was recited by Upali. Thereupon, two texts were compiled- **Sutta Pitaka** and **Vinaya Pitaka**. While the **Sutta Pitaka** contains the teachings of the Buddha, the **Vinaya Pitaka** deals with the monastic code to be followed by the monks.

15.5.2 The 2nd Buddhist Council

The 2nd Buddhist Council was convened a hundred years after the **Mahaparinirvana** of Buddha, i.e. in 383 B.C.E at Vaishali. It was held under the patronage of King Kalashoka of Magadha. It was presided over by Sabaakami. It was attended by over seven hundred **bhikshus**' from all over the country. The council was called to settle a problem created by the monks of Vaishali who had adopted certain practices which were contrary to the rules codified in the **Vinaya Pitaka**. These pertained to issues such as acceptance of gifts, mid-day meals etc. Deliberations took place. However, the council could not change the views of the monks of Vaishali who continued to stick to their new principles. This ultimately led to the first schism in the Buddhist Church. Those

monks who were orthodox and upheld the old rules of the **Vinaya Pitaka** were known as **Sthaviravadins** or **Theravadins**. And the monks who had become unorthodox and had changed their life style were known as the **Mahasanghikas**.

15.5.3 The 3rd Buddhist Council

The 3rd Buddhist Council was convened in about 250 BCE at Pataliuputra during the time period of Emperor Ashoka. It was presided over by a learned Buddhist monk- Bhikkhu Moggaliputta Tissa. By this time, the Buddhists had developed many serious differences among themselves. This caused unhappiness to Ashoka. Therefore, he convened the council in order to bring about unity within the order and to set out the canonical texts with definiteness and authenticity.

The outcome of the council was that canonical texts were reclassified. The differences among the monks were eliminated. A third text, the **Abhidhamma Pitaka** was added to the existing two **Pitakas**. This **Pitaka** contained the philosophical interpretations of the existing two **Pitakas**. Ashoka sent missionaries far and wide such as Sri Lanka, Burma, South East Asia, Tibet, Kashmir etc. to preach the tenets of the Buddha.

15.5.4 The 4th Buddhist Council

The 4th Buddhist Council was convened at Kundalavana Vihara in Kashmir in the 1st century CE during the time period of the Kushana ruler Kanishka. This council was presided over by Vasumitra while the learned Ashvaghosha acted as its Vice President. Over a period of time, serious differences had developed between the monks of Sarvastivada of Kashmir and of Gandhara. This council was called wherein efforts were made to bring about an understanding between them. However, the differences between them could not be removed. Thus, the Buddhists could not remain united and it spilt into two sects- Hinayana and the Mahayana.

One great achievement of this Council was the preparation of the commentaries on the **Tripitakas**, called the **Vibhashas**. These were got engraved on copper plates and then kept in a stone coffer for their preservation.

15.6 THE MAIN BUDDHIST SECTS

The main Buddhist sects were the Hinayana, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. There were lesser important sects besides these three.

15.6.1 The Hinayana sect

In the Hinayana sect, come those disciples/adherents of Buddhism who had faith in the original teachings of Buddha. They did not want to change them or bring any relaxation in them. They were first called Sthaviravadins. Later on, this sect was known as Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle.

- The adherents of the Hinayana sect did not consider Buddha as an **avatara** of God. To them, he was an ordinary mortal who took several births for acquiring enlightenment.
- The Hinayanists felt that salvation could be attained only through practice of good deeds. And attaining it for oneself was the highest ideal.

- The adherents of Hinayana regarded **Nirvana** as a state of permanent peace or Bliss, free from the cycle of birth and re-birth for an individual.
- They believed that the world is full of sorrow.
- To them, the Bodhisattvas are the previous births of Buddha.
- The texts of the Hinayana sect were written in the Pali language.

Besides the above points of difference, there were certain basic differences between the two sects with regard to the metaphysical conceptions, the final goal of religious life, the true nature of Buddha etc.

15.6.2 The Mahayana sect

The Mahayana sect emerged as a new sect of Buddhism in the 4th Buddhist Council. The adherents of this sect called themselves Mahayanists or followers of the Greater Vehicle. They differed from the Hinayanists in several ways.

- As per the Mahayana school, the Buddha was an **avatara** of God. He is said to have taken birth several times but not to attain salvation for himself but to help others in its attainment. This according to them was the highest ideal - to help others in the attainment of enlightenment or **Nirvana**.
- the Mahayanists regarded **Nirvana** as a union of an individual with Adi Buddha. This resembles the union of man with Brahman, of Jivatman with Paramatman, as enunciated in the Upanishads.
- the followers of this school regard Buddha as God, made his idols in various forms and shapes and worshipped it. They also believed in his different incarnations, who were free from the cyclical chain of birth, death and rebirth. Buddha's different incarnations as Bodhisattvas were given different names by them such as Avalokiteshwara or Padmapani, Manjusri, Vajrapani, Maitreya etc.
- They regard the universe as an abode of misery and sorrow. Yet, they have an optimistic attitude towards life.
- They place immense faith in the various Buddhas in order to acquire **Nirvana**.
- They used the Sanskrit language to compose their texts such as the **Lalit vistar**, the **Sukhavali-Viyuh**, **Madyamik Karika** etc.

Besides the above, they had certain fundamental differences of opinion vis-à-vis' Hinayanism. This made it a distinct sect. The Mahayanism as we have seen above, remained closer to the concepts of Hinduism with regard to **Nirvana**, Brahman and incarnations of God. Over a period of time, this sect of Buddhism became more popular and spread beyond the frontiers of India.

15.6.3 The Vajrayana sect

The Vajrayana sect or the Thunderbolt Vehicle was another important sect of Buddhism. It emerged in the 8th century C.E. in the eastern part of India under the Pala rulers of Bengal. The adherents of this sect firmly believed

that the **tantrik** knowledge could help a person in order to acquire **Nirvana**. For this, they had to use the **mantras** and the **tantras**. They believed that by pronouncing the right **mantra** in the correct manner and by drawing the correct **yantra** or magical symbol, they can compel the gods to bestow magical power on the devout and lead him to the attainment of **nirvana**. The chief divinities of the Vajrayana sect were the Taras, the spouses of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. The followers of this sect, after attaining a degree of spiritualism adopted practices such as consumption of meat, alcohol etc.

15.7 BUDDHIST LITERATURE

The Buddha gave sermons to people throughout his life. He preached in the common language of the people. His disciples remembered what he said and recited them on regular basis. Gradually, this took the shape of books.

The Buddhist literature comprises canonical scriptures, philosophical treatises, commentaries, narrative literature and tantric texts that preserve as well as interpret the teachings of Gautam Buddha and later Buddhist traditions. These texts/ literature was composed in several languages like Pali, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tibetan, Chinese etc.

- **Hinayana sect**- The literature pertaining to the Hinayana sect was composed in the Pali language in the centuries following Buddha. It mainly consists of three **pitakas** or baskets, viz.
- **Sutta Pitaka**- this is the most important **pitaka** and it contains the teachings of Buddha. It has five sections namely **Digha nikaya**, **Majjhima nikaya**, **Samyutta nikaya**, **Anguttara nikaya** and **Khuddaka nikaya**.
- **Vinaya Pitaka**- this contains the rules and regulations for the monks and nuns.
- **Abhidhamma Pitaka**- it gives a detailed exposition of the Buddhist doctrines in a scholastic fashion. This was not based on the words of Buddha. Rather, it was compiled later on by those people who were eye witnesses of all the events which happened in the life of the Enlightened One.

Apart from the Tripitakas', there exists a vast non canonical Buddhist literature in Pali such as the **Milinda Panho**, which is in the form of a dialogue between the Greek king Menander and the Buddhist scholar Nagasena. We also have several commentaries written in Pali such as the **Buddhaghosha**, **Dipavamsa** and **Mahavamsa**.

- **Mahayana sect**- The canonical (religious) literature pertaining to the Mahayana sect was composed in the Sanskrit language. Its texts are known as Vaipulya Sutras and this contains nine divisions. Other significant works of the Mahayana sect include **Saddharmapundarika**, **Prajnaparamita**, **Divyavadana**, **Avadanasataka**, **Mahavastu** etc. Eminent scholars of the Mahayana sect who produced notable works include Buddhacharita by Ashvaghosha, Saundarananda Kavya, Sutralankara and others.

Literature pertaining to Vajrayana was also composed.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:-

Q1. What are the Four Noble Truths as per Buddha?

Q2. Write a brief note on the Buddhist **Sangha**.

Q3. When and where was the first Buddhist Council held? What were its achievements?

Q4. Write three main features of the Mahayana sect.

II. Fill in the blanks:

a) The Eight fold Path is also called the _____

b) Gautam Buddha had firm belief in the doctrine of _____.

c) The Third Buddhist Council was held in _____ at _____ during the reign of _____

- d) The _____ sect believed in the original teachings of Buddha.
- e) The _____ sect emerged in the _____ in the eastern part of India.
- f) The _____ contains rules and regulations for the monks and the nuns.

15.8 LET US SUM UP

The sixth century B.C.E saw the rise of several heterodox sects, including Buddhism. After undergoing several hardships and after being on the verge of despair, Siddhartha Gautama finally attained Enlightenment at Gaya. He then began to preach the doctrines to the elites as well as to the commoners. He founded the **Sangha**. His teachings include the Four Arya Satyas and the Eight fold Path besides his firm belief in the theory of **Karma** and in the theory of re-birth. It does not focus on worshipping a creator God. Instead, it encourages personal insight, self-discipline and inner peace. The aim in life is to attain **Nirvana**. Several developments took place in Buddhism after Buddha. In all, four Buddhist Councils were called at different times, at different places and under the patronage of different rulers. The Buddhist literature was compiled. In due course of time, due to difference in opinion, belief and practice, there occurred a schism in Buddhism. We witness the rise of the Hinayana, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana sect. The followers of these sects are to be found both within the country and outside it.

15.9 GLOSSARY

Bodhisattvas- one who is destined to become Buddha, Buddha in the making.

canonical- included in the list of sacred books officially accepted as genuine.

egalitarian- believing in the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities.

heterodox sects- These are non-conformist religious traditions that rejected the authority of the Vedas, Brahmanical rituals as well as the caste system. e.g. Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivikas. Their prime focus was on ethical conduct, **ahimsa** and liberation. It gained popularity among the trading community and the commoners.

nirvana- realization of the Ultimate Truth of life.

parables- a simple story used to illustrate a moral lesson

pitaka- basket

sangha- the Buddhist monastic order

trishna- desire

15.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. What do you know regarding the life, renunciation and enlightenment of Gautam Buddha?
- Q2. Discuss the teachings of Gautam Buddha in detail.

Q3. Discuss the developments that took place in Buddhism after Buddha.

15.11 LESSON END EXERCISES

Q1. Discuss the Buddhist Councils and the significant outcomes of these councils.

Q2. In which council did the schism in Buddhism take place? Elaborate.

Q3. What are the points of difference between the Hinayana and the Mahayana sect of Buddhism?

15.12 ANSWER KEY

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

Q1. See Section 15.1

Q2. See sub section 15.2.1

Q3. See sub section 15.2.4

II Fill in the blanks

a) Suddhodana, Mahamaya

b) Mahaparityaga

c) Dharma Chakra Pravartana

d) 486 B.C.E

e) Kusinagara

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

Q1. See sub section 15.3.1

Q2. See Section 15.4

Q3. See sub section 15.5.1

Q4. See sub section 15.6.2

II Fill in the blanks

a) Ashtangikamarga

b) karma

c) 250 BCE, Pataliputra, Emperor Ashoka

d) Hinayana

e) Vajrayana, 8th century CE

f) **Vinaya Pitaka**

15.13 SUGGESTED READING

- D.N Jha, Ancient India in Historical Outline Third enlarged edition, Manohar Publishers Distributors, New Delhi, 2015.
- Upinder Singh, **A History of Ancient and early medieval India**. From the stone age to the 12th century Pearson, First impression 2009.
- S.C. Raychoudhary, **History of Ancient India**, earliest times to 1000 A.D, Surjeet Publications, Delhi, First Edition, 1990.
- Ranabir Chakravarti, **Exploring Early India, Upto c. A.D 1300**, Macmillan Publishers India Ltd. , Delhi, 2010.

THE MAURYAS

SEMESTER-I
COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-IV
LESSON 16

SOURCES AND THE ORIGIN OF THE MAURYAS

STRUCTURE

16.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

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16.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to:

- explain the different categories of sources which tell us about the Mauryan age.
- discuss the various literary and archaeological evidences and see as to how it helps us to reconstruct history of the Mauryas.
- explain the origin of the Mauryas on the basis of sources.
- discuss the contemporary polity, society etc. based on the evidences of the history of that age.

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about

- the content of the various indigenous and foreign literary sources of the Mauryan period.
- the content of the diverse archaeological evidences which help us understand the Mauryan age.
- the origin of the Mauryas.
- the contemporary society, polity etc. of the Mauryan age.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, significant changes took place in the greater part of Northern India from the sixth century BCE to the late fourth century BCE. In the arena of politics, this change was the rising power of Magadha. When Alexander invaded India, Magadha was the most formidable power under the Nandas. The Nanda dynasty was overthrown by the Mauryas who then came into prominence. In about 325-324 BCE, Chandragupta Maurya established the mighty Maurya Empire that continued for nearly one hundred and forty years. The rise and the consolidation of the mighty pan India empire was the work of the first three rulers of this dynasty, viz Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara and his son Ashoka. The first of these is known for extending the frontiers of the empire, we

know about the Mauryan Empire through a large variety of sources which include literary and archaeological, which include inscriptions, numismatics, sculptural and architectural remains and Northern Black Polished Ware.

16.2 SOURCES OF THE MAURYAS -

We are fortunate to have a vast number as well as more diverse types of primary sources of the Mauryan age. It is also significant that many of these sources are contemporary to the period under review. This makes it more reliable and trust worthy. Discovery of new source materials or fresh assessments of the existing sources have added to our knowledge, enabling us to know the Mauryas better. A large variety of evidences which exist include the literary sources which comprise both indigenous and foreign sources, epigraphical sources, numismatic evidences, pottery, art pieces, remains of monuments etc. A student of history utilises all these diverse sources in order to reconstruct the history of the period under review.

Broadly speaking, we can characterize these sources into literary and archaeological which may be further sub divided for a better understanding.

16.2.1 Literary Sources - — The sources which are in a written form are called literary sources. These literary sources or evidences can be further sub divided into indigenous and foreign. Here, by indigenous, we mean those sources which belong to and were composed by people of one's own country. The indigenous sources include both the secular and religious works. The '**Arthashastra**' of Kautilya is an indigenous and secular source which is of great importance. The Puranas, the Jatakas, the Buddhist and Jain texts are indigenous and religious sources. On the other hand, the works composed by foreigners who visited India for one or the other purpose are called foreign sources. The texts composed by Megasthenese, called Indica is a classic example of a foreign literary source.

The details of literary sources are given below:-

16.2.1.1 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya — The '**Arthashastra**' of Kautilya is regarded as the most important text which informs us of the Mauryan era. In 1905 CE, R. Shamasastri discovered this important Sanskrit text in a manuscript in the Mysore Government Oriental Library. Here **Artha** means, success in the world in terms of power and wealth. **Shastra** means a rule, treatise or a branch of knowledge. The '**Arthashastra**' is a prose work in the **sutra** form. The traditional view is that the '**Arthashastra**' is a work of the 4th century BCE and is composed by Kautilya or Chanakya, also known to us as Vishnugupta. He was the mentor and the chief minister of Chandragupta Maurya who had helped him overthrow the Nandas. Arthashastra is the branch of learning that deals with the means of the acquisition and protection of the earth which is the source of people's livelihood. A work on the science of statecraft, Arthashastra consists of fifteen books. While the first five deal with internal administration, the next eight deal with interstate relations and the last two with many other topics.

The '**Arthashastra**' deals with the actual administration and not with the political postulations. It provides an explanation of the origin of state or kingship. To Kautilya, the king is human. He receives one sixth of the grain and one-tenth of the merchandise from his people as his charges for their protection and goods and also for the services that he renders to them. Welfare of the people was the top most priority. Other things of importance

were the maintenance of law and order, the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the peace loving citizen. ‘**Arthashastra**’ gives utmost importance to an able, energetic and good monarch. He exhorts the king to place the happiness of the people over and above his own comfort. The impression one gets from this text is that of a paternal government tempered by respect for religion and custom and limited by the privileges of guilds and corporations.

This text deals with many topics such as punishment of offenders, enforcement of law, espionage system etc. Eighteen departments of administration such as revenue, stores, armoury, agriculture, mint, forests, shipping, commerce, intelligence are dealt with. Mention is also made of slaves, divorce, women’s property, immodest wives, gambling etc. In a nutshell, it is an exhaustive treatise on the science of state craft. In it **Artha**, i.e. material well-being is said to be superior to **dharma** or spirituality and **kama** or sensual pleasure because the latter rely on **artha** for its well-being.

16.2.1.2 Indica/Indika of Megasthenes — The **Indica** is the text of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador of Seleucus Nikator to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. His account in the work is based on his impressions about India, especially the northern parts of the sub-continent when he visited the land during the time period of Chandragupta. Unfortunately, the book is now lost and all that we know from it is through the excerpts or summaries of the later classical writers like Diodorus, Strabo, Arrian and Pliny.

Megasthenes’s book **Indica** deals with his travels and his experiences in India. As it is the first foreign account of Indian way of life and its institutions, its importance is immense. He tells us about ‘Sandrocottus (Chandragupta) and Amitrochates (Amritraghata i.e. Bindusara) and their capital Palimbothra (Pataliputra).’ He further informs us that the capital was administered by officers called Astynomoi and the rural areas were administered by Agronomoi.

The **Indika** mentions several things about the Emperor, his magnificence and grandeur. He was well guarded by women guards. He was at the call of his subjects at all times and received petitions from them even in his personal chamber. The public appearance of the Emperor was a grand ceremonial. He made short journeys on horseback and mounted the elephant for long ones. About the people, Megasthenes informs us about seven classes or castes which flourished in the contemporary society. Of the seven, the first were the philosophers — the Brahmanas and the ascetics. They were honoured the most. The second class comprised the husband men and the cultivators. The third class was of hunters and herdsmen. The fourth class included the artisans, traders and boatmen. The fifth class was the military and of the Kshatriyas. The sixth class was of the overseers, the secret servicemen. And the last class, the seventh class was of the councillors and assessors. Here, it must be said that Megasthenes probably could not comprehend the Indian society and could not distinguish between **Jati**, **Varna** and the occupation.

We are further told about the civil administration of Pataliputra. It was conducted by a committee of thirty members. The members of the committee were divided into six Boards of five members each and each Board had a specific responsibility.

The military administration was headed by the war office. It comprised of 30 members divided in six Boards of five members each. Each Board looked after the Admiralty, Commissariat, Infantry, Cavalry, Chariots and the War Elephants respectively. The details given by Megasthenes in the book *Indica* which is available in the form of excerpts of the classical writers is important. Yet, we must read it with caution as it has its limitations. Romila Thapar is of the view that Megasthenes's understanding and perception of the Seleucid realm in West Asia affected his impressions of the sub-continent. His observations, such as these — famines never occur in India, Indians never resorted to lying or that there was no slavery in India and that thefts were rare, are inaccurate. We must keep in mind that for many classical writers, the sub-continent was an area of little interest. Their prime aim was to focus on the history of the Seleucids and by extension to Bactria. Nevertheless, despite the limitations, the **Indica** is an important foreign literary source of the Mauryan period.

16.2.1.3 Mudrarakshasa of Vishakhadutta — This political drama written by Vishakhadatta in Sanskrit is of the post Mauryan age. It mentions Chandragupta as being of low social origin. Usage of terms like the *Vrishala* and *Kulahina* for Chandragupta indicates that he was a person of humble origin. The work further gives details like the revolution by which Chandragupta overthrew the last Nanda ruler and thereafter occupied the throne. The manoeuvres of Kautilya against the enemies of Chandragupta also find mention in the text.

16.2.1.4 The Buddhist texts — There are several Buddhist texts which are sources of the history of the Mauryan age. The '**Mahavamsa**' and the '**Dipavamsa**' are the Ceylonese chronicles written in the Pali language which mention Chandragupta Maurya as a descendant of the Kshatriya clan of the Moriyas branch of the Sakyas who lived in Pippalivana, in the eastern Uttar Pradesh. These texts tell us about the early life of Chandragupta Maurya as well as the conversion of Ashoka to Buddhism. Further the reference of Piyadasi in the inscription of Ashoka is corroborated from these Buddhist works. It helps us to establish that Emperor Ashoka is the only Maurya monarch who is referred to as Devanampiya Piyadasi in the inscriptions. These works inform us much about Ashoka, his ancestors and their family. How Ashoka spread Buddhism in Sri Lanka is mentioned.

Besides these works, there is **Mahabodhivansa** written by Uptisra, the **Atha-katha** which are the commentaries on Tripitakas', the **Milinda Panha**, composed by Emperor Milinda, the **Thupvansa** written by Vachissaka, the **Sadamma-Sangraha** of Dhamma-Kitta Mahasani, the **Manjusri-Mulkalpa** are also important sources as regards the history and culture of the Mauryan age.

The **Jataka** texts, although deal with the tales of the previous births of Gautama Buddha gives us a sound picture of the prevalent society, economic conditions and popular traditions of the Buddhist period, which continued till the Mauryan Age.

Another important text is the **Mahaparinibbanasutta**. This is regarded as one of the authentic and ancient canonical texts of the Buddhists. It regards the Moriyas as the ruling clan of Pippalivana. As per the details mentioned in the text, the Mauryas were Kshatriyas. This is concluded from the reference which mentions that, the Moriyas, the ruling clan of Pippalivana sent a messenger to the Mallas, asking them for their justified claim of a portion of the relics of the Buddha. They did so as both of them were of Kshatriya origin, just like the Blessed Buddha.

The **Ashokavadana** and the **Divyavadana** are important texts as they contain details about Emperor Ashoka. These are largely preserved outside India i.e. mainly in Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist sources. Ashoka is regarded as a great Buddhist Emperor whose main purpose was to work for the spread of Buddhism. Some information on Chandragupta also finds mention in the '**Milindapanha**' and '**Mahabhashya**.'

16.2.1.5 The Jain texts — Several Jaina texts inform us about the Mauryas. The **Parishishtaparvan** of Hemachandra provides us with useful information as regards the origin of Chandragupta and his conversion to Jainism towards the close of his life. The relationship between Ashoka and Kunala is also known to us through the Jain sources. Among other Jaina texts, mention may be made of the **Kalpasutra** of Bhadrabhabhu, the **Bhadrabhabhu-Charita** of Ratnanandi, the **Vividh-Tirtha-Kalpa** written by Prabhasura, the **Vichar Sreni** of Merutung, the **Kathakosh** of Srichandra, the **Aradhana Satkatha Prabhand** of Prabhachandra, the **Punyasravaka Katha** written by Ramachandra, the **Aradhana Katha-Kosh** of Nemidatta, the **Brhat-Katha Kosh** of Harisen etc. The text **Vividh-Tirtha-Kalpa** informs us about the destruction of the Nandas by Chanakya and the times of Chandragupta, Bindusara, Ashoka, Kunala etc.

16.2.1.6 The 'Puranas' — The 'Puranas' such as **Vishnu Purana**, **Matsya Purana** and **Vayu Purana** and their commentaries throw useful light on the political, social and cultural life of the Mauryan age. However, the information obtained from these texts must be corroborated with other sources as well.

16.2.1.7 Secular literature composed at a later date — Apart from the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya there are few other texts such as the **Mudrarakshasa** of Visakhadutta, mentioned earlier in this lesson which was composed at a later date but is still an important source of history of the Mauryas. Then there is the **Kathasaritasagara** of Somadeva Bhatta, the **Brhatkatha-Manjari** of Kshemendra which inform us about the history and culture of the Mauryas.

The Sanskrit drama, **Malvikagnimitra** composed by Kalidasa and the **Mahabhasya** of Patanjali tell us regarding the downfall of the Mauryas.

Another later work, the **Harsha Charita** of Banabhatta also sheds light on the causes of the downfall of the Mauryas. The History of the Kings of Kashmir, the **Rajatarangini** composed by Pandit Kalhana gives us information regarding King Ashoka and his successors.

Thus these works, composed at a later date also helps us in understanding the age of the Mauryas.

16.2.1.8 Foreign sources — Apart from the **Indica** of Megasthenes mentioned earlier, there are other Greek sources which refer to the different aspects of the Mauryan period in their writings.

Strabo wrote a book entitled **Geography**. He incidentally mentions that two men were sent as ambassadors to Palimbothra (Pataliputra) the capital of the Mauryas. Of these Megasthenes was sent to the court of Sandrocottus or Chandragupta Maurya and Deimachus was sent to the Court of his son, Amitrochades or Bindusara. Strabo also informs us about the capital city Palimbothra or Palimbothra, which spread for about ten miles along the right bank of the Ganga. It is of the shape of a parallelogram and is surrounded by a wooden wall which is pierced and has holes, used for the shooting of arrows. It has a ditch in front which is useful in defence and also for receiving

the sewage of the city. Strabo quotes Megasthenes and mentions that the population of India is divided into seven castes. Diodoros also mentions about the seven castes. It also figures in **Indika** of Arrian. Strabo mentions that care of the body of the king is entrusted to women bodyguards.

Pliny composed **Natural History**. This book is divided into thirty seven books, the sixth of which contains the geography of India and is based mainly on the **Indika** of Megasthenes.

Justin refers to Chandragupta Maurya as Sandrocottus in his writings. He mentions his role in conquering the north western part of India and thereby establishing a great empire. The account of Justin is important since it attests the political achievements of the Mauryan monarch.

John W. Mc Crindle compiled the greek and latin sources in his books such as

- ‘**Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian.**’
- ‘**Ancient India as described by Ptolemy.**’
- ‘**Ancient India as described by Ktesias the Knidian.**’
- ‘**Ancient India as described in Classical literature.**’

The study of these greek and latin sources add to our knowledge as regards the age of the Mauryas.

Check your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words :

Q.1 What does ‘**Arthashastra**’ of Kautilya deal with?

Q.2 Evaluate **Indica** of Megasthenes as a source of Mauryan history.

Q.3 The Jain texts are an important source of the history of the Mauryas. Name at least three of them.

II. Fill in the blanks :

- a) The sources which are in a written form are called _____ sources.
- b) _____ discovered the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya in the Mysore Government Oriental Library.
- c) Megasthenes was the Greek ambassador of _____ to the court of Chandragupta Maurya.
- d) The Buddhist text _____ regards the Moriyas as the ruling clan of Pippalivana.
- e) Justin refers to Chandragupta Maurya as _____ in his writings.

16.2.2 Archaeological Sources — Apart from the indigenous religious and secular literary sources as also the foreign literary sources, we possess numerous archaeological evidences which help us to know the age of the Mauryas' better. These evidences of ancient Indian history not only add to our knowledge about our distant past but have also enabled us to lay our hands on the materials which we would not have obtained otherwise. With the aid of epigraphy, i.e. the study of inscriptions, numismatics or the study of coins, remains of monuments, archaeological evidences etc. we have got a grasp over the history of our ancient past. Another advantage that archaeological evidences have is that they are more accurate than the literary ones and hence more reliable. Some of the archaeological evidences of the period are mentioned below:

16.2.2.1 Inscriptions — Among the various archaeological sources belonging to the Mauryan period, the most significant are undoubtedly the inscriptions of Ashoka. These inscriptions indicate the beginning of Indian epigraphy. Inscriptions are regarded as trustworthy and reliable sources because it is a contemporary document. It is not possible to add or to edit in an inscription which is engraved on a solid surface. So interpolations cannot be done on such an inscription. The inscriptions of Ashoka are called edicts and are thereby differentiated from ordinary inscriptions. These were proclamations issued by Ashoka at different times and were got engraved on rocks, minor rock, pillars and caves. There are fourteen major rock edicts, seven pillar edicts, minor rock edicts, minor pillar edicts and also the cave inscriptions. They are issued in the first person for we see that Ashoka is directly addressing his subjects. These edicts provide reliable information about the contemporary polity, administration and social conditions. They are composed in four scripts, for the benefit of the people. These are the Brahmi script, in the larger part of the subcontinent, the Kharoshti script, in the north western part of the subcontinent, in two non-Indian scripts and languages, namely the Aramaic, a West Asiatic language and script and the Greek.

A detailed description of the edicts of Ashoka is given in the forthcoming lesson.

16.2.2.2 Numismatic evidences — It is worthy to note that a great number of coins, mostly of silver, have been ascribed to the Maurya period. These are known as Karshapana coins. But they do not contain any legend

referring to the issuing authority. Few symbols such as the crescent-on-arches, tree-in-railings and peacock-on-arches have been associated with the Maurya kings. There are different interpretations regarding this such as the tree-in-railing symbol represents the Buddha's enlightenment and the symbol consisting of a number of arches represent a stupa. The use of a symbol on coins issued by the state would surely have endowed it with a political significance. Here, we may note that the '**Arthashastra**' of Kautilya refers to different denominations of silver coins called **panas** and copper coins called **mashakas**.

16.2.2.3 Archaeological remains — The perusal of archaeological material is very important for understanding the Mauryan period. Valuable field archaeological material, urban in nature, are available from excavated sites like Kumrahar and Bulandibagh near Patna (the ancient Patliputra), Besnagar, near Bhopal, in Madhya Pradesh and Taxila. Excavations at Kumrahar have brought forth a Maurya palace with a pillared hall which owed its design to the Hall of Hundred Columns built by Darius. The dominant view in this regard is that the main inspiration of Maurya art was Persian imperial art. Then, in the sphere of cave architecture, Mauryas have made worthy contribution. The excavated halls of the Barabar and Nagarjuni caves belong to the time period of Ashoka and his successor Dasharatha. Compared to earlier levels, the Maurya levels display a far greater diversity of artefacts with urban features.

Thus it may be said that the remains of the Mauryan age are an important source for socio-political and cultural history of the period. A large number of ring wells that may have been used to supply water for household purposes have also been reported. We note that during this period, burnt bricks and ring wells were used extensively.

16.2.2.4 Pottery- 'Northern Black Polished Ware' — During the Mauryan period, the 'Northern Black Polished Ware' was extensively used and has been found from different parts of the empire. The making of NBPW was a specific and a specialized kind of pottery making craft and it is not found outside the Ganges valley. These wares were made from finely levigated clay. It had a distinct glossy and polished surface.

16.2.2.5 Sculpture and Architecture — As per Upinder Singh, the origins of the huge stone sculpture and architecture in the Indian sub-continent goes back to the Indus Valley Civilizations. However, after the fall of the civilization and a long time gap thereafter, it is only in the Mauryan period that we note big sized stone sculpture and architecture. Many of the surviving remnants of art and architecture were whole heartedly patronized by the Mauryan rulers, particularly Ashoka. They fall within the category of 'court art'. However, several other examples of stone sculptures and terracotta figures represent 'popular art' as well.

Emperor Ashoka whole heartedly patronized the sculpting of beautiful and exquisite pieces of visual art. The significant examples in this regard are to be seen in the capitals of Ashokan pillars. Not only are the statues of the animals at the top important even the ones shown in relief in the abacus are equally good. The animals that are modeled in three dimensions in the capital include Lion (Single) at Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampurwa, Kolhua and Bansi, Lion (set of four) at Sanchi and Sarnath, of Bull at Rampurwa, Elephant at Sankisia etc. The animals in relief on the abacus rings include the lion, elephant, Bactrian camel, horse, bull and the wild geese. Apart from the animals, floral motifs are also seen.

It is worthy to note that not a single human form is modelled on any Ashokan sculpture. The exquisite 'Yakshi' or semi divine guardian from Didarganj, Patna, with its Mauryan polish and display of Greek proportions of the torso and which is datable to the first century BCE probably illustrates what Mauryan art could have achieved had not convention prevented it from sculpturing the human form.

A large number of figurines in terracotta have been reported from Mauryan sites. These are products of a widespread folk art. Both, professional potters as well as womenfolk made female deities, animals as well as toys. While many figurines were undoubtedly manually shaped, others were cast from terracotta matrixes as is illustrated from the several copies of a plaque bearing the figures of a man and a woman standing side by side, found along with the matrix in the Mauryan levels, at the Bhir mound, Taxila.

At Dhauri in Bhubaneswar District, Orissa, there is a rock sculpture of the front part of an elephant. His heavy trunk is seen curling inwards. While his right front leg is slightly tilted, the left one is slightly bent. This suggests a forward movement. The whole effect is very powerful and it appears as if the elephant is walking out of the rock.

We notice the beginning of the rock cut architecture during the Mauryan period. Example for this are the caves in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills to the north of Bodhi Gaya. While the caves are simple in plan, their interiors are highly polished.

Emperor Ashoka is said to have decorated the country with structures and monuments of different types. His great innovation was the substitution of stone for wood and brick. He built palaces, stupas, viharas, monolithic pillars and rock cut caves. The pillars exhibit to the best, the perfection in the art of dressing, chiseling and shaping stone. The capitals of the columns were crowned with figures of bulls and lions. These are regarded as masterpieces of both style and technique. Critics of art have greatly appreciated the beauty of the columns of Ashoka. Their monolithic character, their size and weight, their polish and engraved figures of animals have all been regarded as most magnificent. Thus, we see that the art of architecture and sculpture made remarkable progress during the period under discussion.

16.3 ORIGIN OF THE MAURYAS

The Maurya dynasty was founded by Chandragupta Maurya. However, there is a difference of viewpoints among historians as regards the origin of the Mauryas. While some point to his Sudra origin, others say that he belonged to the Kshatriya clan.

Were the Mauryas of Sudra Origin?

As we have discussed in the preceding pages, the **Puranas** are one of the sources of Mauryan history. As per the **Puranas**, it is clearly mentioned that after this the country will be ruled by the Sudras. But evidently this has been mentioned with reference to the destruction of the Shishunaga dynasty and the establishment of the Nanda dynasty. The given statement seems to refer to the Nanda kings only for it is well known that there were many Brahmin dynasties which rose in India after the destruction of the Shishunaga dynasty. Therefore, we may say that the Mauryas were not of Sudra origin.

The Sanskrit drama '**Mudrarakshas**' composed by Vishakhadutta contains two words — **Vrishala** and **Kulahina**, for Chandragupta Maurya. While one opinion interprets '**Vrishala**' to denote Sudra, another points out that it indicates one whose social status is inferior and who condemns the caste system. From this, it appears that Vishakhadutta used the word **Vrishala** for Chandragupta Maurya to indicate his inferior status in society. Further, Vishakhadutta also uses the word '**Kulahina**' for Chandragupta Maurya. But, as per R.K. Mookerjee '**Kulahina**' does not denote Sudra but is rather used to convey a sense of inferiority. So it emerges from this that Chandragupta Maurya was a man of humble and inferior status in the contemporary society.

The Greek writer Justin refers to the low origin of Chandragupta. Here, he meant that he was not a Sudra but of the Kshatriya caste lowered down to a humble status.

Others point out that he was the son of a Sudra woman Mura and a Nanda prince. From her name has been derived the surname. Maurya. However, this is not correct. The derivative from Mura would be Mureya and not Maurya.

Kautilya's '**Arthashastra**' does not make any direct reference about the origin of Chandragupta. However, it contains a passage that "the **Arthashastra** has been compiled by one who forcibly and quickly achieved the liberation of the mother country of its culture and learning, its military power from the grip of the Sudra king." Here, it may be said that it is well known that Kautilya was a staunch Brahman who believed in the **Varnashrama dharma** system. He had crowned Chandragupta the ruler after uprooting the Nanda dynasty. R.K. Mookerji feels that Kautilya could not have made Chandragupta the king (had he not been a Kshatriya) in place of the Nanda ruler (who was a Sudra).

Hence, it may be said with confidence that the Mauryas were not of Sudra origin.

If not the Sudras, were the Mauryas of Kshatriya origin? Let us examine this.

Several books which are part of the Buddhist literature refer to the Mauryas as Kshatriyas. The **Mahavamsa** mentions that Chandragupta was a scion of the Kshatriya clan called Moriya. Tradition indicates that this clan had been reduced to difficult times in the 4th century BCE under Magadhan rule and young Chandragupta had grown up amongst peacock tamers, herdsmen and hunters. **Divyavadana** calls Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, an anointed Kshatriya and in the same work, Ashoka, the son of Bindusara is also referred to as a Kshatriya.

The **Mahaparinibbhasutta** of Dighanikaya represents him as the ruling Kshatriya class of Pippalivana republic. This ruling Kshatriya class of the Mauryas sent a message to the Mallas of Kusinara, that the Blessed one, Buddha, was of warrior caste and so are we. Hence, we too are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the great Buddha. We will erect a stupa over the relics and also hold a festival in his honour. This clearly conveys their Kshatriya origin. Hence, it is more than clear that the Mauryas were Kshatriyas.

The Jain literature also points towards the Kshatriya origin of the Mauryas.

Hem Chandra mentions in his work, '**Parishishtaparvan**' that Chandragupta Maurya was born in the family of the chief of a village community which reared royal peacocks. The '**Haribhadra Tikay**' also mentions a similar

reference. Further, the '**Punyashrava Katha Kosh**' clearly mentions that Chandragupta Maurya was a Kshatriya. From the above, we can easily infer that the Jain literature connects the Mauryas with Maurya or the peacock.

The third evidence with us is the archaeological evidence. This carries forward the opinion of the Jain literature. An emblem of peacock has been found at the pillar of Ashoka at Nandan Garh, The figure is also available in several sculptures on the stupa at Sanchi. According to Sir John Marshall, these finds convey that the Mauryas belonged to a Kshatriya dynasty and the peacock was their dynastic symbol.

The evidences furnished by the above mentioned literary and archeological sources indicate clearly that the Mauryas did not have a Sudra origin. They were definitely of the Kshatriya origin.

Check your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words :

Q.1 Write a brief note on archaeological sources.

Q.2 In which scripts are the edicts of Ashoka composed?

Q.3 Who were the Mauryas, as per the **Mahaparinibbanasutta**?

II. Fill in the blanks :

- a) The inscriptions of Ashoka are called _____.
- b) Numismatics is the study of _____.
- c) During the Mauryan period, the silver coins were called _____ and those of copper were called _____.
- d) The exquisite Yakshi figure is datable to _____.

- e) The Jain literature points towards the _____ origin of the Mauryas.

16.4 LET US SUM UP

In order to sum up, it may be said that the study of all the sources of a given time period are very important in order to understand the historical events of the contemporary time period. In this case, both the literary and the archaeological sources need to be taken into consideration in order to understand the different aspects like society, economy, polity and culture of the age of the Mauryas. Study of different literary evidences also indicate that the Mauryas were of Kshatriya origin.

16.5 GLOSSARY

inscriptions — An inscription is a piece of writing that is engraved, carved or impressed onto a durable surface such as stone, metal, pottery, birch bark etc.

literary — concerning the writing or content of literature, especially which is valued for its quality.

Varnashrama dharma system — it is a foundational concept in Hinduism that defines the ethical and spiritual duties of an individual based on their **Varna** (social class) and **ashrama** (life stage).

16.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Discuss the sources of history which tell us about the Mauryas.
- Q.2 What do you know regarding the literary sources which inform us about the Mauryas?
- Q.3 Throw light on the origin and the sources of history of the Mauryas.
- Q.4 Discuss the literary sources in detail regarding the sources of Mauryan history with special reference to the **Arthashastra** of Kautilya.

16.7 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q.1 Evaluate **Arthashastra** of Kautilya as a source of history of the Mauryas.
- Q.2 Discuss the importance of Megasthenes' **Indica** as a source of history of the Mauryas.
- Q.3 Write a note on the archaeological sources which tell us about the history of the Mauryas.
- Q.4 What do you know regarding the origin of the Mauryas?

16.8 ANSWER KEY

CYPI

- Q.1 See sub section 16.2.1.1
- Q.2 See sub section 16.2.1.2

Q.3 See sub section 16.2.1.5

Fill in the blanks

- a) literary
- b) R.Shamasastry
- c) Seleucus Nikator
- d) Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa**
- e) Sandrocottus

CYP II

Q.1 See sub section 16.2.2

Q.2 See sub section 16.2.2.1

Q.3 See Section 16.3

Fill in the blanks

- a) edicts
- b) coins
- c) panas, mashakas**
- d) first century BCE
- e) Kshatriya

16.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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THE MAURYAS

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-IV

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 17

ASHOKAN EDICTS

STRUCTURE

- 17.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes**
- 17.1 Introduction**
- 17.2 Early life of Ashoka**
- 17.3 Discovery of Ashokan Edicts**
- 17.4 The language and script of the Edicts**
- 17.5 Location and Categories of the Inscriptions**
 - 17.5.1 Fourteen Major Rock Edicts**
 - 17.5.2 Seven Pillar Edicts**
 - 17.5.3 The Minor Rock Edicts**
 - 17.5.4 The Minor Pillar Inscriptions**
 - 17.5.5 Cave Inscriptions**
- 17.6 Let us sum up**
- 17.7 Glossary**
- 17.8 Examination Oriented Questions**
- 17.9 Lesson End Exercises**
- 17.10 Answer Key**
- 17.11 Suggested Readings**

17.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to:

- explain the meaning and importance of the edicts of Ashoka as a source of history of his reign period.
- discuss the classification of the edicts.
- identify the location of his various inscriptions.
- discuss the content of his different edicts

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about

- the importance/significance of Ashokan Edicts.
- the discovery, language and script of his edicts.
- the classification/categorization of his edicts.
- the content of his various inscriptions
- the reign period of king Ashoka through the study of his edicts.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the history of the Mauryas enters its most important stage during the reign period of Emperor Ashoka. Ashoka was the son of Bindusara and grandson of Chandragupta Maurya. He ruled from 273-232 BCE which are very important years in Indian history. He is regarded as the great king not merely because of the extent of his vast empire but due to his character as a man, the principles for which he stood and by which he governed. He made one addition to his large empire which extended from Persia to south India and that was his conquest of Kalinga. Emperor Ashoka himself informs us about himself, his empire and his ideals through his inscriptions, which are indeed unique monuments. The information that is made available by Ashoka in the form of inscriptions is engraved on natural rocks as well as monolithic pillars and these are regarded as remarkable monuments of Indian architecture as well as engineering skill. Ashoka happens to be the first Indian king to issue edicts in order to proclaim his ideals and record his exploits. He also mentions the important principles of Buddhism as well as the State policy, in accordance with which he wished the administration to be carried on for the welfare of his people.

17.2 EARLY LIFE OF ASHOKA

We have to dwell upon the early life of Ashoka in order to imbibe the context and the content of his edicts better. But unfortunately, the inscriptions do not inform us about his early life. For this, we have to rely upon the Buddhist texts such as the **Divyāvadana** and the Sinhalese chronicles. In the Buddhist texts, Ashoka is initially

depicted as a cruel tyrant who seized the royal throne after the death of his father and after resorting to a fratricidal war in which he killed his ninety nine brothers. However, as per R.K.Mookerji, there is no truth in this as this was most probably intended to glorify Buddhism. A contrast has been made in Ashoka's character before and after he embraced Buddhism. The chronicles further inform us that Asoka's formal coronation was held four years after his accession. This is important information. As the inscriptions of Asoka date the events of his reign with reference to his coronation, many historians have accepted this statement as historical. This is corroborated by the inscription of Dasharatha, the grandson of Ashoka who also gives us the date with reference to his coronation. It is apparent that there was a gap between his accession and coronation. But, it is difficult to believe that Ashoka killed all his brothers. There may have been a contest, in all likelihood. Moreover, the Rock Edicts IV and V condemn rude behavior to relatives and refers to his brothers, sisters and other relatives with loving care. This implies that his siblings and other relatives were alive.

17.3 DISCOVERY OF ASHOKAN EDICTS

The discovery of the first Edict of Ashoka was made by a Christian missionary, Padre Tieffenthaler on a stone pillar which stood at a deserted place close to Meerut in the year 1750 CE. Few years later, in 1785, J.H. Harington discovered similar inscriptions in the Barabar and Nagarjuni Hill caves. This was followed by the discovery of the Girnar Rock Inscription of Ashoka by Tod in 1822. Then, a French officer of Maharaja Ranjit Singh learnt about the Shahbazgarhi inscription in north western India. Thereafter, the well known Sarnath Pillar inscription was discovered by Oertel in 1905. Several Ashokan inscriptions have since been found in the Southern Peninsula, Western India and in the parts of north western India, Kabul, Kandahar right up to the Pamir Ranges and the Hindukush mountains. Of all of these, thirty edicts of Ashoka are of immense historical value.

17.4 THE LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT OF THE EDICTS

An inscription or an edict is an order issued by the Competent Sovereign Authority which in our case is Emperor Ashoka.

The edicts of Ashoka which have been discovered from the main land of India were engraved in the Pali language, which was the commonly spoken language of the masses. It was composed in the Bramhi script which is written from left to right.

Apart from these, few edicts of Ashoka have also been found from the north-western part of the country, such as those of Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra. These were engraved in the Kharoshthi script and was written from right to left. This was just like Urdu, Persian and Arabic. Two Ashokan inscriptions have been discovered in the region of Kandahar, one of which is in Greek and the other in Aramaic script.

One inscription of Ashoka reported from the ruins of the ancient Kandahar, called the Shahr-i-Quna, is in the bilingual Greek-Aramaic characters.

It is worthy to mention that just as the discovery and identification of the inscriptions of king Ashoka was difficult, so was deciphering and interpreting them. The earliest version of Ashoka's inscriptions, discovered by then, was

published in the Asiatic Researches in 1801. In 1837, James Prinsep succeeded in reading Ashoka's edicts composed in the Brahmi script. But when he did so, it was not clear as to which king they were referring to. And this was so because most of them refer to Ashoka by two titles — Devanampiya, which means beloved of the gods and Piyadasi which means, he who looks on auspiciousness. It was only when the Buddhist texts **Dipavamsa** and **Mahavamsa** (which also used these titles for Ashoka) provided the clues, that the mystery was solved.

In the year 1840, Norris deciphered the Kharoshthi script of the Shahbazgarhi Rock Edict of Ashoka. Thereafter in the year 1879, the first volume of Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum was published by General Cunningham. At this point we may say that we have the most authentic versions of all the inscriptions of Ashoka, duly edited and interpreted by a host of learned scholars like V.A. Smith, R.G. Bhandarkar, R.K. Mookerji and others.

17.5 LOCATION AND CATEGORIES OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

The spread of the Maurya Empire as established by Chandragupta Maurya is known to us more precisely and definitely with the help of Ashoka's inscriptions. Their find spots really help in this regard. As the Edicts of Ashoka contained the proclamations and message of the Emperor for his subjects, they were located at places which were frequented by the people in various provinces. Some of these are found at their borders in various directions.

The Ashokan inscriptions are divided into various categories. The main categories are:-

- 14 major rock edicts
- 7 pillar edicts
- minor rock edicts, minor pillar edicts and cave inscriptions.

The minor rock edicts are considered among the earliest inscriptions, the major rock edicts later than them and the pillar edict still later. It is pertinent to mention that some inscriptions refer to events with reference to the number of years that had passed since Ashoka's consecration ceremony. The Ashokan edicts are regarded as unique because unlike royal inscriptions of later times which follow a conventional set pattern, the inscriptions of Ashoka reveal the ideas and voice of the king himself. They give us an insight into his inner most feelings and ideals and transmit these across to the audience in the very words of the great Emperor. They are quite like his autobiography and the most valuable source of information of his reign, his religious beliefs, the extent of his empire as well as his relations with the neighbouring states. They are also important from the of art point of view. The polish given to the pillars is exemplary. His edicts give us an insight into his character, kingship, administration and religion.

- The extant major rock edicts- These are mostly located along the borders of the empire.
- The major pillar edicts- These are located in north India.
- The minor rock edicts-These are found in the Andhra-Karnataka area.

We notice that the inscriptions were generally located along ancient trade and pilgrimage routes. To quote an example, the inscription at Sanchi was located at the important Buddhist monastic sites.

17.5.1 Fourteen Major Rock Edicts — The details pertaining to the location of the fourteen major Rock Edicts are as follows :-

- i. Kandahar, in Kandahar district, South Afghanistan
- ii. Shahbazgarhi, Peshawar district in NWFP, Pakistan
- iii. Mansehra, Hazara district, NWFP, Pakistan
- iv. Kalsi, Dehradun District, Uttarakhand
- v. Girnar, Junagadh district, Gujarat
- vi. Bombay — Sopara, Maharashtra
- vii. Dhuli, Puri District, Orissa
- viii. Jaugada, Ganjam District, Orissa
- ix. Erragudi, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh
- x. Sannati, Gulbarga, Karnataka
- xi. Rock Edicts 11 to 13 are found at Orissa
- xii. Portions of Rock Edicts 12 and 13 found at Kandahar
- xiii. Portions of Rock Edicts 12 and 14 found at Karnataka.

Content of Fourteen Major Rock Edicts

- (i) **Major Rock Edict I** — This Edict was got engraved by the King Piyadassi i.e king Ashoka and it is on **Dhamma** or Law of Piety. Here no animal shall be killed or sacrificed. The holding of festivals is also not permitted.
- (ii) **Major Rock Edict II** — This rock edict mentions about two kinds of medical services which have been made available in the empire of Ashoka. And these pertain to the medical care of both men and animals. Further, it mentions that the medicinal herbs, used to treat the sick have also been planted and are being utilized in the treatment.
- (iii) **Major Rock Edict III** — The King Piyadassi wanted his officers, viz. the **yuktas**, **rajukas** and **pradesikas** to go on a tour after every five years in order to propagate **Dhamma**. One must be obedient to one's parents, friends and relatives and also to the Brahmanas and Shramanas. Do not kill living beings, spend little and also own minimum property.
- (iv) **Major Rock Edict IV** — In this edict, the King observes that as the practice of **Dhamma** has increased and the summons to fight wars have vanished, the people must continue to tread on the path of **Dhamma**.

- (v) **Major Rock Edict V** — In this edict, the function of **Dhamma Mahamatras** (officials appointed to promote **Dhamma** far and wide) are described in detail. They have been appointed to establish **Dhamma** in all sects and to attend to the happiness of those who follow it.
- (vi) **Major Rock Edict VI** — conveys to the reader that there is no higher duty than to serve your people, in fact serve humanity. This was his pious duty and his foremost thought.
- (vii) **Major Rock Edict VII** — mentions that the King Piyadassi wishes that people of all the sects must live together in harmony and in peace.
- (viii) **Major Rock Edict VIII** — mentions that while in the past Kings went on pleasure tours, he advocates going on **Dhammayatras** instead.
- (ix) **Major Rock Edict IX** — Instead of performing petty ceremonies, like on marriages, birth of children, when going on a journey etc., ceremony of **Dhamma** must be performed. These may include respect to teachers, regard for servants, donation to Shramanas and brahmanas etc. These are our moral and social duties.
- (x) **Major Rock Edict X** — This denounces the ordinary glory and fame and rather places great importance to the glory which can be attained by performing the **Dhamma**.
- (xi) **Major Rock Edict XI** — In this Edict, the king Piyadassi praises the merits of observance of **Dhamma**. No gift is superior to its observance. One's good behavior towards servants, obedience to parents, generosity towards friends and others, renouncing killing living beings is above everything. If this is observed, one gains merit in this world as well as in the world beyond.
- (xii) **Major Rock Edict XII** — This edict implores people to be tolerant towards other sects, towards ascetics and also laymen and honour them with gifts. In fact, more than the gifts, the advancement of the essential doctrine is more important. In doing so, one's own religion is exalted and so is of the other person's. For this, the **Dhamma Mahamatras**, the manager of state farms and other class of officers are employed.
- (xiii) **Major Rock Edict XIII** — The major Rock Edict XIII is a moving document. King Ashoka had attacked and conquered Kalinga eight years after his concertation. This edict gives us a vivid description of the War of Kalinga. It was a horrible and devastating battle in which a hundred thousand people were killed and countless deported and shattered. Even after gaining victory, Ashoka was overcome with a feeling of remorse and regret. He could not bear to be the reason for so many deaths and so much destruction. It was equally painful to see that all good people, of different sects without any fault of theirs, suffered violence and separation from their near and dear ones. All this weighed heavily on the mind of the King Piyadassi.

King Ashoka, it is mentioned, considers victory by **Dhamma** as the foremost victory. The purpose of engraving this edict finds mention too. He says that the inscription of **Dhamma** has been got engraved so

that his successors do not think of gaining new conquests. They must consider that only conquest by **Dhamma** is true conquest. According to Buddhist tradition, Ashoka embraced Buddhism with the blessings of the respected monk Upagupta shortly after the Kalinga war.

The two Kalinga Edicts have been found at Dhauli and Jaugada in modern Orissa. These have been engraved as special supplements along with the other rock edicts of Ashoka at these places.

- (xiv) **Major Rock Edict XIV** — This edict of Dhamma was engraved at the orders of King Piyadassi, i.e. King Ashoka. It exists in abridged, medium-length and extended versions.

17.5.2 Seven Pillar Edicts — The location details pertaining to the Seven Pillar Edicts are as follows :-

- (i) Kandahar, Afghanistan
- (ii) Delhi. The Delhi — Topra pillar originally stood in Topra, Ambala district, Haryana,.
- (iii) Delhi. The Delhi — Meerut pillar originally stood in Meerut, UP.
- (iv) Allahabad. The Allahabad — Kosam pillar was originally located in Kosam, i.e. Kaushambi, UP
- (v) Lauriya — Araraj, Champaran, Bihar
- (vi) Lauriya Nandangarh, Champaran, Bihar
- (vii) Rampurva, Champaran, Bihar

Content of seven Pillar Edicts —

- (i) **Pillar Edicts I** — This edict came into being when twenty six years had passed since the consecration of Ashoka. The extreme happiness obtained by a person who follows **Dhamma** in entirety is mentioned. The King Piyadassi not only follows it himself but it is also observed by his subordinates and his officials.
- (ii) **Pillar Edicts II** — The King Piyadassi defines **Dhamma** like this — “It is having few faults and many good deeds, mercy, charity, truthfulness and purity.” Killing of animals and birds has been given up by the King.
- (iii) **Pillar Edicts III** — King Ashoka reflects that although we are conscious of our good deeds but not our wicked deeds. Here, we must pause and contemplate that cruelty, anger, pride and envy are all productive of sin. Let us be wary of this.
- (iv) **Pillar Edicts IV** — This edict was engraved after twenty six years of his consecration. Here, he speaks about the rural officers, the **rajukas**. He has shown his confidence on these officers and has given them independent authority in judgement and punishment. They work for the welfare of the people. He recommends uniformity in judicial procedure and punishment. The King further mentions that three days respite should be given to those sentenced to death or imprisoned. The convicts must make donations or undertake a fast so that they get a better re-birth.

- (v) **Pillar Edicts V** — This edict gives a long list with names of animals and birds whose killing was forbidden. This included parrots, mainas, swans, pigeons, fish etc. Non-violence must be practised as far as possible. Specific days which are holy in a month must be marked and animals must not be killed on these days as well.
- (vi) **Pillar Edicts VI** — **Dhamma** must be practised for the welfare of the people in this world. All sects must be revered and personal visits to them must be made.
- (vii) **Pillar Edicts VII** — In order to increase the interest of the people in Dhamma, they will be made to hear proclamations of **Dhamma**. Knowledge about **Dhamma** will be given to them. This work was entrusted to the Rajukas. Pillars of **Dhamma** also serve the same end.

Charity on behalf of the King, his queens and princes was distributed in various forms. The king speaks of the good deeds that he has done and which are followed by the people. He feels that the propagation of **Dhamma** among people has been through two means, legislation and persuasion. And of these, persuasion is more effective.

17.5.3 The Minor Rock Edicts — The details pertaining to the location of the minor rock edicts are given below:-

- (i) Bahapur/Srinivaspuri, New Delhi
- (ii) Bairat, Jaipur, Rajasthan
- (iii) Ahraura, Mirzapur, UP
- (iv) Sahasram, Rohtas, Bihar
- (v) Gujjara, Datia, MP
- (vi) Rupnath, Jabalpur, MP
- (vii) Panguraria, Sehore, MP
- (viii) Maski, Raichur, Karnataka
- (ix) Gavimath, Raichur, Karnataka
- (x) Palkigundu, Raichur, Karnataka
- (xi) Nittur, Bellary, Karnataka
- (xii) Udegolam, Bellary, Karnataka
- (xiii) Rajula — Mandagiri, Kurnool, AP
- (xiv) Eragudi, Kurnool, AP
- (xv) Brahmagiri, Chitradurga, Karnataka

(xvi) Siddapura, Chitradurga, Karnataka

(xvii) Jatinga — Rameshvara, Chitradurga, Karnataka

Among the earliest inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka are his minor rock edicts. They are located far and wide in his empire. We notice that several of these edicts located in the Andhra-Karnataka area. And to enable large number of people to read them, they were on purpose located along the ancient trade and pilgrimage routes. Frequent use of these routes enables wide dissemination of the thoughts and beliefs of Emperor Ashoka.

17.5.4 The Minor Pillar Inscriptions — Among the Minor Pillar inscriptions, versions of the schism edict have been found at Sanchi, Sarnath and Kaushambi.

Commemorative inscriptions occur at Nigali Sagar and Rummindei, in Bhairwa district of Nepal. A fragmentary inscription, which may be Ashokan, has been found at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh.

17.5.5 Cave Inscriptions — Three Cave inscriptions of the time of Emperor Ashoka have been reported. They have been found in the Caves in the Barabar hills in the Gaya district of Bihar.

Inscription I — After twelve years of consecration, the King Piyadassi gave the Banyan Cave to the Ajivikas.

Inscription II — After twelve years of consecration, the King Piyadassi gave this cave on the Khalatika mountain to the Ajivikas.

Inscription III — The King Piyadassi, consecrated since nineteen years - - - - -

The extent of the vast empire of Emperor Ashoka can well be understood if we carefully study the location and distribution of his edicts/inscriptions. We gather that in the north west, his empire extended upto Kandahar in Afghanistan. The kingdom of Antiochus II of Syria lay to its west. In the east, it extended to Orissa. It encompassed almost the entire sub-continent, except the southernmost parts. It is mentioned in the Rock Edict XIII that these were inhabited by the Cholas and Pandyas. Rock Edict II calls the inhabitants Keralaputras and Satyaputras. The name and fame of Emperor Ashoka rests on his association with Buddhism as well as his non-violent disposition. This, as we have seen, is proclaimed time and again in his own inscriptions.

Check your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words :

Q.1 What do you know regarding the early life of Ashoka?

Q.2 Write a brief note on the discovery of Ashokan edicts.

Q.3 In how many languages and scripts have the Ashokan edicts been composed?

I. Fill in the blanks :

- a) The _____ rock Edicts are considered among the earliest inscriptions.
- b) The Ashokan edicts are unique because they reveal the ideas and voice of the _____.
- c) The King 'Piyadassi' (Beloved of the gods) in the edicts refer to _____.
- d) The _____ is a moving document as it mentions the horrors of the Kalinga war and Ashoka's remorse to be a witness to so much bloodshed.
- e) In _____ the King Piyadassi defines **Dhamma** —" it is having few faults and many good deeds — mercy, charity, truthfulness and purity."

17.6 LET US SUM UP

The various Ashokan Edicts explain in his own words the work done by him in order to propagate **Dhamma**. He has explained the **dhamma**, he has talked about his efforts to spread it in the language of the people and he also assesses his success in doing so in his edicts. His edicts reflect his policies of **Dhamma** or righteous living, moral conduct, religious tolerance and welfare of people. Some of the edicts reflect his deep devotion to the teachings of the Buddha as well as his close association with the Sangha. How Ashoka regarded himself as the king is also reflected. At the same time, the socio-economic aspects, the administration of the Mauryas is also reflected, at times.

Ashokan edicts are truly an important source of the history of the reign period of Ashoka. They determine his important place in the human civilization as one of the greatest monarch of his times.

17.7 GLOSSARY

Dhamma Mahamatras — Officials appointed by Ashoka, whose work was to spread/propagate **Dhamma** far and wide.

Edicts — The inscriptions of Ashoka are called edicts as they are in the form of the King's order, given in first person.

fratricidal — connected with or characterized by the killing of a brother, sister or a fellow member of one's own family, group, tribe or nation.

17.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q.1 What do you know about Ashoka's edicts? Discuss in detail.
- Q.2 Mention the classification of the edicts of Ashoka and write about their content.
- Q.3 What do you know regarding the discovery of Ashoka's edicts? Also mention the language and script of the edicts.

17.9 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q.1 How many major Rock Edicts are there? Mention the location and content of any three such edicts.
- Q.2 How many Pillar Edicts are there? Mention the location of these edicts.
- Q.3 Write a Note on Ashokan Edicts as a reliable source of history.

17.10 ANSWER KEY

Check your Progress I

- Q.1 See Section 17.2
- Q.2 See Section 17.3
- Q.3 See Section 17.4

Fill in the blanks

- a) minor
- b) King
- c) King Ashoka
- d) Major Rock Edict XIII
- e) Pillar Edict II.

17.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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THE MAURYAS

SEMESTER-I

UNIT-IV

COURSE NO. HIST101

LESSON 18

DHAMMA OF ASHOKA

STRUCTURE

- 18.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Conquest of Kalinga
- 18.3 Dhamma Vijay of Ashoka
- 18.4 Dhamma or Law of Piety
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- 18.6 The spread of Dhamma
- 18.7 Let us sum up
- 18.8 Glossary
- 18.9 Examination Oriented Questions
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- 18.11 Answer Key
- 18.12 Suggested Reading

18.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to

- explain the significance of the War of Kalinga in the life of King Ashoka.
- discuss the reason for renouncing the policy of Dig Vijay in favour of **Dhamma Vijay** by Ashoka.
- explain the meaning of **Dhamma**.

- discuss the principles of **Dhamma**.
- discuss the various means adopted by Ashoka in the propagation of **Dhamma**.

Learning Outcomes

After going through this lesson, you will have a clear understanding about

- the significance of the War of Kalinga which was a turning point in the life of King Ashoka.
- the reasons which lead Ashoka to renounce **Dig Vijay** and embrace **Dhamma Vijay**.
- the meaning of the term **Dhamma**.
- the various principles of **Dhamma**.
- the various methods adopted by Ashoka in order to propagate **Dhamma**.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, King Ashoka was the third ruler of the Mauryan Dynasty. Son of Bindusara and grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, his reign period, 273-232 BCE is very significant in Indian History. Before assuming the charge of the sovereign, he served as the Viceroy of Ujjain and Taxila respectively. He assumed sovereignty at Magadha after the death of his father in 273 BCE. But his formal coronation took place four years later, in 269 BCE. The four decades long reign of Ashoka was witness to only one military campaign, conquest and victory and that was over Kalinga. Kalinga was defeated and conquered after eight years of his coronation. Thus it means that the conquest took place in his thirteenth regnal year, i.e. 261 BCE. The Rock Edict XIII gives us detailed information regarding Ashoka's victory over Kalinga.

18.2 CONQUEST OF KALINGA

The **Dhamma** of Ashoka can be better understood if we understand the background to the change in heart of King Ashoka. And for this, we must discuss his conquest of Kalinga. Kalinga was then a state situated between the rivers Mahanadi and Godavari and on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. It was an independent and powerful kingdom at that time and Ashoka felt it was important to subjugate it for political and trade reasons. The strategic location of Kalinga had greatly enhanced its importance. It was seafaring area. If this became a part of the Mauryan Empire, it would be very beneficial from the economic perspective. The battle that was fought in 261 BCE was fierce, brutal and devastating. Kalinga resisted with all its might but was ultimately defeated by the army of Ashoka. Ashoka himself informs us in the Rock Edict XIII that a terrible blood bath took place. The war was won but at a very heavy loss of life on both sides. Kalinga was ruined. About 100,000 persons were killed and over 1,50,000 were taken prisoners. While many times more that number died of injuries, disease and starvation. The massacre that was unleashed in the battlefield left a deep impact on the mind of King Ashoka. Despite being victorious, his heart was full of sorrow, remorse and regret. So perturbed was he when he witnessed the horrors of the war and the miseries it caused to innocent civilians that he decided to embrace Buddhism. This was soon followed by his promulgation of the Law of Piety or **Dhamma**. The policy of **Dig Vijaya** (conquest of the world)

was discarded in favour of **Dharma/Dhamma Vijay** (conquest of **Dhamma**). The sound of the war drum or **bherighosha** was replaced with the sound of **Dhamma or Dhammaghosha**.

18.3 DHAMMA VIJAY OF ASHOKA

Dhamma is a Prakrit term and is the same as Sanskrit 'Dharma' which is popularly, although not accurately translated as religion. Ashoka's **Dhamma** is commonly viewed as his personal religious leaning. After the bloody and brutal Kalinga war, Ashoka out of deep regret and remorse embraced Buddhism. We may define the term '**Dhamma**' as law of piety, implying a moral and spiritual life. We may also take into consideration Ashoka's own interpretation of it in his various edicts.

In the Ashokan Edicts, the **Dhamma** is explained as not a separate religion or a religious order but as the essence of all religions. It is a 'moral law', 'a common code of conduct and an ethical order'. In the second Pillar Edict, the king Piyadassi says-**Dhamma** is good. And what is **Dhamma**? It is having few faults and many good deeds such as mercy, charity, truthfulness and purity. He talks about saving lives of living beings, including animals, birds, fish etc. One who conforms to **Dhamma** will do well.

Ashoka stresses upon doing of deeds such as kindness, liberalism, truthfulness etc. He further says, evils such as anger, jealousy, cruelty, harshness, pride and envy must be avoided. Ashoka emphasized upon the basics of good conduct and social ethics and dealt with these in his several edicts.

The following basic principles were included in Ashoka's **Dhamma**:

- (i) **Satya** or truthfulness
- (ii) **Ahimsa** or non-violence
- (iii) **Samyam** or mastery of senses
- (iv) **Bhava Shuddhi** or purity of thought
- (v) **Kritajnata** or gratitude
- (vi) **Daya** or compassion
- (vii) **Dana** or charity
- (viii) **Sushrusa** or service
- (ix) **Sampriti patti** or support
- (x) **Apichiti** or reverence
- (xi) **Anarambho Prananam** or vegetarianism

The perusal of these principles as given by Ashoka as constituting **Dhamma** make it absolutely clear that these are the virtues / good morals common to all religions. Hence, **Dhamma** was clearly not a separate religious order. It is infact all that what religiousness should be to persons living in a society.

18.4 DHAMMA OR LAW OF PIETY

Ashoka passionately spoke about the tenets of **Dhamma** to his people living in the different corners of his empire through his various edicts. He tirelessly worked for the moral uplift of his people by preaching through his Edicts, the various basic principles of **Dhamma**. These are discussed as follows:

- (i) Ashoka insisted on the family as the basis of morality. One should have loving and respectful relations with father and mother, elders, teachers and seniors in status or age. One must be obedient to them all. One should give good treatment to persons such as ascetics, Brahmanas, Sramanas, friends, acquaintances, relatives, servants, dependents and the poor and the afflicted. Character, conduct and behavior matters more than rituals and ceremonies. Ashoka did not approve of the numerous ceremonies which were performed by women at the time of birth of a baby, at the time of marriage, when someone was taken ill or when they had to proceed on a journey. There was no need to perform these rituals. Instead, he emphasised the practice of good, moral conduct as these were important.
- (ii) Ashoka next dwells upon the toleration of all religious sects and developing a sense of reverence for them. There must be harmony among different creeds in a society. He urged people to try and appreciate the **dhamma** of other people.
- (iii) Ashoka stood for the creed of **Ahimsa** or non-violence, non-injury, abstention from the killing of all living beings. This, he preaches in many of his Edicts. And as far as the practice of **Ahimsa** is concerned, he set an example himself. The unrestricted slaughter of animals in the royal kitchen, was initially limited to one deer and two peacocks, but was later totally abolished. Ashoka was so zealous about non-violence that he extended this principle to the sphere of politics and international relations as well. He proclaimed that war is an absolute evil. Hence, he decided to give up extension of territory by conquest and force. He adopted instead, the extension of **Dharma** among people by love. He replaced officially the war drum or **bheri-ghosha** by a call to the moral life or **dhamma-ghosha**.
- (iv) The king wanted to ensure the happiness of all his subjects. Several benign sentiments are mentioned in the major Rock Edict II as well as the Pillar Edict VII. For instance, it is mentioned that the **Dhamma** of the king includes digging of wells so that the thirst of the people is quenched. Planting of useful herbs, roots and fruits is also recommended. Further, the medical treatment of the sick-whether humans or animals should also be got done.
- (v) The careful study of the Ashokan Edicts give us an idea that the king tried his best to live up to the ideals mentioned in the **dhamma** not only through his ideas but also actions. He behaved like the father of his subjects. His words, deeds and actions were like that of the patriarch of the empire. He envisaged himself as the teacher of the **dhamma**.
- (vi) If we go by the understanding of **dhamma** in Ashoka's own ideas as well as in his capacity of a king, we may say that he believed in completely giving up bloody warfare and rather re-defining conquest through righteousness. In this way, he promoted the Buddhist idea of **dhammavijay**. To carry forward this ideal,

he appointed the **Dhamma Mahamatras** for the first time in order to spread the ideas of the **dhamma**.

Check your Progress (CYP) I

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. Write a note on the War of Kalinga. What was the result of the war?

Q2. Define **Dhamma** Vijay of Ashoka.

Q3. Mention at least three basic principles that were included in Ashoka's **Dhamma**

Q4. Ashoka insisted on the family as the basis of morality. Elaborate.

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a) King Ashoka was the _____ ruler of the Mauryan dynasty.
- b) The War of Kalinga was fought in _____ .

- c) After the War of Kalinga, Ashoka replaced the **Bheri-ghosha** by _____ .
- d) In the _____ Pillar Edict, the king Piyadassi gave us the definition of **Dhamma**.
- e) Ashoka appointed the _____ for the spread of the ideas of **Dhamma**.

18.5 DHAMMA IN GREEK AND ARAMAIC INSCRIPTIONS

It is worthy to mention that the Greek version of the bilingual edict from Shar-i- Kuna informs us that King Ashoka, Piodasses, i.e. Priyadarshi promulgated Eusebia, Piety, which is the Greek equivalent of the Prakrit term **Dhamma**. The Aramaic inscriptions use the word **qsyt** (truth) and **data** (law). Both the Greek and the Aramaic inscriptions are not the exact translations of the edicts of Ashoka. As per B.N. Mukherjee, although there is a similarity in the elements of **dhamma**, like non injury towards living beings, restraint, truthfulness, liberality, compassion, respect towards parents etc., both the Greek and the Aramaic inscriptions show some differences. For example, the Kandahar Greek inscriptions refer to the devotion of the subjects to the king's interest as being an important part of **dhamma**. Another difference is that none of the Greek or Aramaic inscriptions mention that the attainment of heaven is the goal of following **dhamma**. This in fact, is something that the Prakrit inscriptions mention repeatedly.

18.6 THE SPREAD OF DHAMMA

The **Dhamma**, as per Thapar was the invention of Ashoka himself. In his reckoning, it was a suggestion to the people to imbibe and follow a way of life which was moral, practical as well as convenient. **Dhamma** was very dear to king Ashoka. He did his utmost in order to spread it far and wide and this included the countries beyond one's own. His good nature, his benign disposition, his toleration and religious accommodation affected all those who came into his contact. Ashoka is said to have taken a number of steps to spread **dhamma**:

- (i) The numerous principles of **Dhamma** were engraved on rocks, pillars and caves so that the people could read it and follow it in their lives. The principles were also read out on important days to those who could not read, for a wider outreach to the people of his empire. Appropriate language and script was used for a better understanding. The principles of **Dhamma** were got engraved on fourteen major rock edicts, seven pillars edicts, on the numerous minor rock edicts, minor pillar inscriptions and the cave inscriptions.
- (ii) After the War of Kalinga, Ashoka decide to renounce **Dig Vijay** and replace it with **Dhamma Vijay**. **Bheri ghosha** was done away with and was replaced by **Dhamma ghosha**. He also abandoned going on pleasure tours- the **Vihara yatras**. Instead, he started going on the **Dharmayatras**. **Dhamayatras** were occasions when he toured the country for promotion of **Dhamma**. Ashoka informs us that the purpose of these tours were manifold viz. visiting sramanas and brahmanas and giving gifts, visiting people in the country and giving instructions to them in high morals etc. This way Ashoka came into contact with his subjects much more than before. This also facilitated the spread of **dhamma**.
- (iii) Ashoka made use of the **Sangha** in order to propagate the tenets of the **Dhamma**. A large number of

monasteries were raised and endowed well. Young monks were given education and training for the monastic work. These young Bhikshus travelled far and wide in order to spread the message of the **Dhamma** in the different parts of the country.

- (iv) In order to propagate the tenets of the **Dhamma**, Ashoka sent special missions to various parts of the country. Majjhantika was sent to Kashmir and Gandhara, Majjhima to the Himalaya country, Dharmarakshita to Aparantaka, Mahadharmrakshita to Maharashtra, Mahadeva to Mahishamandala etc.
- (v) Ashoka is said to have started a special cadre of **Dhamma Mahamatas** (Dharma Mahamatras) thirteen years after his consecration. It was their duty to propagate **Dhamma** within the kingdom and among the people living in the borders such as Yonas, Kambojas, Gandharas, Rishtikas and Pitinikas. They had to move around among members of different sects and promote the welfare and happiness of masters, servants, traders, farmers, Brahmanas, the prisoners, the aged, destitute etc. There were besides, other officers like the Yuktas, Rajukas, Purushas and Pradeshikas who were required to preach the Law of Piety apart from performing their other official duties.
- (vi) In order to spread **Dhamma** outside India, Ashoka sent missions to several neighbouring countries as well. He sent Maharakshita to Yavana country. Mahendra was sent to Sri Lanka and Sona and Uttara to Suvarnabhumi (far East or Burma).
- (vii) Ashoka was a kind hearted king. He not only dedicated himself but also utilized the official machinery for spreading the principles of the **Dhamma** as also for humanitarian work. Arrangements were made to provide medical care to men as well as to animals. For the benefit of travelers, trees were planted along the roads so that men and beasts, both could rest in its shade. Wells were dug to facilitate supply of water.

It would be worthy to mention the opinion of Romila Thapar at this point. She speaks about the political rationale behind the propagation of **Dhamma**. For Thapar, it was not the Buddhist element in **Dhamma** which mattered. On the contrary, she feels that there need not be any relation between the personal beliefs of a statesman and his public proclamations. In her understanding, **Dhamma** was an ideological tool which was utilized by king Ashoka since his prime aim was to keep together his vast and far flung empire. And for this, he sought and obtained the cooperation of the people. He could well see the practical advantage of adopting as well as spreading the tenets of **Dhamma** since the latter was a benign ethical concept, acceptable and easily understood by people of the contemporary society.

Thus we see that, by adopting and promoting **Dhamma**, Ashoka tried to bring about some measure of unity within the empire in the midst of much diversity. The fundamental principles of **Dhamma** were such that could be easily imbibed by the people at large and this would then result in the creation of well-adjusted individuals in a society.

Check your Progress (CYP) II

I. On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. Which is the Greek equivalent of the Prakrit term, **Dhamma**?

Q2. Mention the terms used by the Aramaic inscriptions for **Dhamma**?

Q3. Mention any three ways utilized by Ashoka in order to spread the tenets of **Dhamma**.

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a) Piyadassi/ Priyadarshi is used in Ashokan Edicts for _____.
- b) Ashoka decided to give up **Digvijay** and replace it with _____ after the Kalinga War.
- c) Ashoka discontinued the practice of going on **Vihara Yatras** and instead started going on _____.
- d) Ashoka utilized the _____ in order to propagate **dhamma**.
- e) Ashoka created a cadre of officials called _____ in order to spread **dhamma** far and wide.

18.7 LET US SUM UP

The conquest of Kalinga in 261 BCE was an important event in the life of Ashoka. The Kalingans were defeated decisively but the loss of life, destruction and misery it caused to the people had a profound impact on the mind

of Ashoka. He was overcome with sorrow and regret. Then, he embraced Buddhism. The official policy of **Dig Vijay** was replaced with **Dhamma Vijay**. Thereafter, Ashoka devoted himself and also the official machinery in the promotion and propagation of **Dhamma**. His edicts, especially the Rock Edict XIII is a touching document which could have been adopted by a person as humane and magnanimous as Ashoka. Through his **Dhamma**, Ashoka tried to bind together his vast empire and strengthen social cohesion in the contemporary society.

18.8 GLOSSARY

Abstention - restraint

Bherighosha - sound of the war drum

Dhamma ghosha - sound of the **Dhamma**

Dhamma - Piety, as in Ashokan Edicts

Dhamma Mahamatras - a cadre of officials created by Ashoka for the purpose of propagation of **Dhamma**

Patriarch - Male head of the family

18.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. What was the reason behind the adoption of the policy of **Dhamma Vijay** by Ashoka?
- Q2. Define **Dhamma**, the Law of Piety.
- Q3. Discuss the fundamental principles of **Dhamma**.

18.10 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. What do you understand by the Policy of **Dhamma Vijay** of Ashoka?
- Q2. Discuss the methods utilized by Ashoka in the propagation of **Dhamma**.
- Q3. What do you know regarding the basic principles of the policy of **Dhamma** of King Ashoka?

18.11 Answer Key

Check your Progress(CYP) I

- Q1. See Section 18.2
- Q2. See Section 18.3
- Q3. See Section 18.3
- Q4. See Section 18.4

II Fill in the blanks

- a) third
- b) 261 B.C.E
- c) **dhamma ghosha**
- d) pillar edict
- e) **dhamma mahamatras**

Check your Progress (CYP) II

- Q1. See Section 18.5
- Q2. See Section 18.5
- Q3. See Section 18.6

Fill in the Blanks

- a) King Ashoka
- b) **dhamma vijay**
- c) **dhamma yatras**
- d) **sangha**
- e) **dhamma mahamatras**

18.12 SUGGESTED READING

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THE MAURYAS

SEMESTER-I

COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-IV

LESSON 19

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

STRUCTURE

19.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

19.1 Introduction

19.2 The Mauryan Administration

19.2.1 The Central Administration

19.2.2 The Provincial Administration

19.2.3 The District Administration

19.2.4 The Village Administration

19.3 Let us sum up

19.4 Glossary

19.5 Examination Oriented Questions

19.6 Lesson End Exercises

19.7 Answer Key

19.8 Suggested Reading

19.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to:

- explain the administrative structure of the Mauryas. The king was the sovereign and supreme authority
- discuss the various components of the Central Administration such as the **mantriparishad**, army, secret service, justice etc.

- discuss the administration of the Mauryas at the Central, Provincial, District and the Village level.

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about

- the administrative structure of the Mauryas.
- the important and powerful position of the King in the Administration.
- the various components of the administrative structure at the different levels such as at the Provincial, District and at the Village level.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, the establishment of the Maurya Empire (324-187 BCE) is a very significant event in the ancient history of India. The Mauryas founded an empire that spread over to the entire sub-continent and even beyond it. The foundation was laid by Chandragupta Maurya. Among his successors were his son, Bindusara and the son of Bindusara, Emperor Ashoka. The Maurya rulers are famous for not only carving out a vast empire by military conquests and the annexation of conquered areas but also for keeping such a vast empire under the political control of a paramount power for at least a century. This feat was possible only due to the prevalence of an efficient administrative system which kept the Maurya empire integrated. To understand the administrative structures, we can take the help of literary sources such as the 'Arthashastra' of Kautilya, the account of Megasthenes and the inscriptions of king Ashoka.

19.2 THE MAURYAN ADMINISTRATION

The Mauryas laid down the first formidable and effective structure of administration in the country. Chandragupta Maurya was not only an outstanding conqueror but also a great administrative genius. The Mauryan Empire is regarded as a centralized one, with the King as the head of the state. The Provincial, District and Village administration formed an integral part of regional or local administration, but these were under the supervision of the Mauryan Emperor. The Mauryan administration took care of a wide range of activities such as military, espionage system, revenue collection, justice etc.

19.2.1 The Central Administration

The **Arthashastra** of Kautilya is the first Indian text which has defined a state. In it, it mentions the concept of the **Saptanga rajya**. The state consisted of seven inter related constituent links (**angas or prakriti**).

These links are:

- i) **Svami** (the king)
- ii) **Amatya** (ministers)
- iii) **Janapada** (the territory and the people)

iv) **Durga** (the fortified capital)

v) **Kosha** (the treasury)

vi) **Danda** (justice or force)

vii) **Mitra** (ally)

Civil Administration

i) The King –

The Maurya state was a monarchy and the king had supreme power as head of the government and administration. Chandragupta Maurya was all powerful and enjoyed supreme power in matters of the military and civil administration. Great care must be taken to protect him at all times and at all places. He should have a personal guard of female archers and should be surrounded by trustworthy persons. He should be guarded against poison, fire and snakes. The services of efficient spies must be taken. Kautilya emphasizes that as the danger of assassination is always there, care must be taken in this regard. The **Arthashastra** also elaborates the king's duties and obligations. These duties include protecting the person and property of his subjects and ensuring their welfare. He was assisted in the administration by a Council of Ministers. Ashoka's ideals of kingship partially match the ones given in the **Arthashastra**. His own ideas are also mentioned alongside. His paternalistic ideal is reflected in his rock edicts. He wanted to ensure the welfare of all beings and his subjects in this world and the next.

ii) The Council of Ministers-

The King was aided/advised by the **Mantri parishad** or the Council of Ministers in the discharge of his day to day duties. It was headed by the **Mantriparishadadhyaksha**. The members of this **parishad** were appointed by the King and they were also responsible to him. The **Arthashastra** has referred to eighteen high officials of the state. Kautilya stresses upon three qualities of a minister, viz. birth, integrity and intelligence. A number of high ranking officers in charge of important portfolios are mentioned. These include **samahartri** (chief collector of revenue), **samnidhatri** (treasurer), **dauvarika** (chief of the palace attendants), the **antarvamshika** (chief of the palace guard). **Purohita** (royal priest) was an important minister. Kautilya advises the king to follow the **purohita** as a pupil does his teacher . The **Yuvaraja** and the **Senapati** were equally important. The inscriptions of Ashoka mention many kind of **mahamatas** such as **anta mahamatas** (mahamatas in charge of the frontier areas and **itthijhakka mahamatas** (mahamatas in charge of women's welfare). The **dhamma mahamatas** were a new cadre of officials created by Ashoka when he had been consecrated thirteen years. These **Mahamatas**, along with the **Adhyakshas** and **Amatyas** were second grade of officials. The pay scales, service rules and method of payment of these officials were clearly laid down. Three other classes of civil servants are mentioned in Rock Edict III, viz the **Pradesikas** (responsible for revenue collection and police duty), the **Rajukas** (responsible for the revenue and judicial functions) and the **Yuktas** (related with the revenue collection). The power of the Council of Ministers might have varied from time to time, yet its primary and basic role remained that of an advisory body.

iii) Army-

The extension of the empire under Chandragupta meant that the army had to be given priority in many matters, so that it might be constantly ready for major campaigns. The Mauryan army was often led by the King himself. For instance, Chandragupta Maurya led his army in his war against Seleucus Nikator and Ashoka led his army against the ruler of Kalinga. The army was large, well disciplined and well organized. Kautilya refers to the **Chaturanga Bala**, the four wings of the army viz. the infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots. Each wing was under a commander. The troops are further classified into the hereditary ones, the hired ones, troops supplied by forest tribes and those furnished by the allies. Of these, the first kind was of greater importance and was a part of the standing army of the king. Kautilya further informs us regarding the salaries of the different ranks of the military commanders. For instance, the Senapati received a salary of 48,000 **panas** per annum. Details regarding the training of the soldiers, their duties, salary etc. also finds mention. The Mauryan king himself supervised all the activities of the defence forces. The **Senapati** was appointed by him so that he supervises and keeps a check on the entire army with the help of different officials.

There is a difference of opinion regarding Mauryan army in the account of Megasthenes. He informs us that the Mauryan army consisted of the infantry, cavalry, elephants, chariots, transport and admiral of fleet. Pliny says that the army of Chandragupta included 6,00,000 foot soldiers, 30,000 cavalry and 9,000 elephants besides numerous chariots.

iv) Espionage or Secret Service-

The Espionage department under the Mauryas, was closely associated with the organization of the army. The Secret Services under the Mauryas was efficient and well organized. It was manned by the **gudhapurushas** (secret agents) under the control of the **Mahamatyapasarpa**. There were two types of secret agents- the stationary or **samstha** and the roving or **sanchara**. These secret agents are further divided into nine sub types. Kautilya also mentions the utilization of a spy on the simultaneous pay roll of two kings, possibly a king and his enemy. This comes close to what we know as a double agent. Kautilya speaks about an elaborate network of espionage in which the information gathered by the roving agents should be routed through the stationary spies to the head of the Secret Service. It implies verification of information gathered by the spies. It is important to note that the messengers (**pativedakas**) in the Ashokan edicts carried out the same function. Different types of agents, from ascetics, students, snake charmers, women, merchants to householders were employed. They correspond to the overseers, inspectors and spies of the classical texts and are regarded as the most reliable persons in the realm.

v) Administration of Pataliputra-

Details pertaining to the city administration at Pataliputra are furnished by Megasthenes and other later Greek writers. Pataliputra was a premier urban centre. Officers in charge of the city administration are known as *astynomoi*. They were divided into six boards of five members each.

- a) The first board looked after the industrial arts. It insisted upon the use of proper material in the manufacture of goods and also enforced the laid out regulations. It took care of the interests of the artisans.
- b) The second board was entrusted with the information on the births and deaths occurring in the city. This information helped the administration to assess the amount of taxes to be levied from the people of the city.
- c) The third board took care of the foreigners, travellers and pilgrims visiting the Maurya capital.
- d) The fourth board regulated the sale of commodities and checked the use of false weight and measures. Trade and commerce was regulated by the committee.
- e) The fifth board supervised the manufactures. It checked and punished the persons responsible for the adulteration of goods.
- f) The sixth board was given the work of collecting one-tenth of the sale proceeds. Failure to pay this levy was punished with death sentence. As per Chakravarti, there is not much corroborative evidence in support of the classical accounts, on municipal administration.

The **Arthashastra** assigns the administration of the urban area to the **samahartta**, who was a revenue collector. Kautilya mentions that there were strict rules to maintain cleanliness, health and hygiene in the urban area. The **Arthashastra** further mentions the collection of detailed data on the size of the household, the number of male, female and children in each family and the general trends in income and expenditure and also the ingress and egress of people from their house in both villages and cities. All this was done in order to form a thorough assessment of the revenue to be collected.

vi) Administration of Justice-

The **Arthashastra** deals with the administration of justice in detail. The king was the fountain head of justice but the law was superior to him. The Mauryas had a well-organized legal system. The justice was administered in accordance with well-established laws. There were separate civil and criminal courts.

- i) **Dharmasthiya** Courts- These were civil courts.
- ii) **Kantakshodhana** Courts- These were criminal courts.

Each court consisted of three judges and three commissioners. The cases were decided in accordance with the Hindu law as embodied in the **Shastras**. People could appeal to these courts. The Emperor heard these as he was the fountain head of justice.

Besides these courts, there were special courts in the cities and villages which were presided over by the **pradesika**, **mahamatras** and **rajukas**.

The **Arthashastra** mentions four sources of law, viz. **dharma** (sacred law), **vyavahara** (usage), **charitam** (customs and precedents) and **rajasasana** (royal proclamations).

We are informed that severe punishments, ranging from fines to mutilation of limbs to even death were given. And many times, the **varna** of the offender and plaintiff, the nature, gravity and circumstances of the crime decided the nature of punishment. In most cases, persons of higher **varnas** were given lighter punishment than the persons of lower **varnas**.

The Judges were called **dharmasthas** and the officers responsible for the suppression of criminals were called **pradeshtris**.

The inscriptions of Ashoka do not mention the **dharmasthas**. However, the judicial functions of the city **mahamatas** are mentioned in the rock edict I. They are urged to be not only impartial but also sympathetic and also to make sure that no one is imprisoned or tortured without sufficient ground. The Pillar Edict IV contains Ashoka's claim that he had introduced **samata** in the judicial procedure. This has been interpreted as uniformity all over the empire. A three day respite was given to those condemned to death.

vii) Revenue Administration- The Revenue Administration is another vital feature of the Mauryan administrative structure. The **Arthashastra** of Kautilya repeatedly stresses on the significance of a strong treasury (**kosha**). The collection of revenue was entrusted to a high ranking officer, the **Samahartta**. The **Samahartta** was required to supervise the collection of revenue from the following seven heads:

- a) Fortified urban area (**durg**)
- b) The countryside (**rashtra**)
- c) Mines (**khani**)
- d) Irrigation projects (**setu**)
- e) Forests (**vana**)
- f) Pasture grounds (**vraja**)
- g) Trade route (**vanikapatha**)

Evidently, the most significant source of revenue was agriculture. Generally, the king collected 1/6th to 1/2 of the produce as land tax. The officials were instructed to show leniency while assessing the taxes but collect them strictly. In addition, the king received income from the crown lands which were considered his personal property. Apart from this, the state had monopoly over mines and metals as well as forest and forest products like wood or timber. Tax was levied on the sale and purchase of goods imported and exported through toll houses at the gates of the city, share of income from gambling houses and liquor shops, on manufactured goods etc.

A large part of the revenue thus collected by the state was utilized to meet the expenditure on administration, army, upkeep of the king, the royal palace, the royal household etc. Works of public welfare were also carried out by using this revenue.

viii) Public Welfare- The Mauryan rulers, especially king Ashoka undertook a number of measures for the welfare of their subjects. They felt duty bound to strive for the material, moral and spiritual progress of its people.

Ashoka advocated the paternal theory of government and regarded his subjects as his children. He felt responsible for giving them a good life, in this world and the next.

- a) **Construction of national highways and roads-** Chandragupta Maurya paid special attention to the highways and roads which facilitated the swift movement of his army. Old highways were broadened and new ones were constructed. Milestones were set up along the highways and military posts were established at the strategic points. Shady trees were got planted on both the sides. Rest houses and water wells were provided at regular intervals. The **Arthashastra** mentions a Royal Road that led from Pataliputra to Taxila and beyond to the borders of the Mauryan Empire. Another important highway connected the capital with the seaports of Gujarat and Kathiawar. Another road connected Pataliputra to Tamralipti or Tamluk, a seaport near the mouth of the Ganga in Bengal.
- b) **Irrigation-** The Mauryan government gave special attention to irrigation as it was essential for the advancement of agriculture. And for this, a special department of irrigation had been created which built dams and constructed canals for irrigation purposes, particularly in the drought hit areas. The Sudarshana Lake constructed at Girnar in Kathiawar by the Mauryan governor Pushyamitra was one of the most famous irrigation works. Water rate was charged for the supply of water from the irrigation canals and tanks. The land revenue was foregone and liberal loans were given to the farmers in times of drought.
- c) **Health and sanitation-** Under the Mauryas, health of both men and animals was taken care of. Separate hospitals were built for them. Service of efficient physicians was made available. Adequate arrangements were made to check the outbreak of epidemics. Sanitary regulations were made to keep the towns neat, clean and healthy. Medicinal herbs were cultivated under government supervision.

People living along the river banks were moved to safer places once the danger of flood was found to be imminent. The government had stocks of food, to meet the eventualities of this nature. The farmers who suffered due to flood conditions were provided the seeds for the coming sowing season and also other aids.

The Maurya king Ashoka was most devoted to Public Welfare. He gives details regarding his welfare measures in the Pillar Edict VII. Mangroves and shady trees were planted. Ponds were dug and shelters erected at every eight kos. Wells were dug for quenching the thirst of men and beasts.

- d) **Care of the destitute-** The state recognized its responsibility towards the less fortunate people of the state, like the orphans, elderly ill people, old destitute women and ascetics. Shelters were provided to them along with monetary aid.

We do not know the extent to which the above mentioned measures were undertaken. Yet, that these were envisioned as a duty of the state is an important fact. In the Pillar Edict VII, Ashoka mentions that earlier rulers too had undertaken similar works for the 'happiness' of their subjects. So what he was doing for their welfare was not something original. He continues that his efforts in this direction was to draw the people towards **dhamma**.

Check your Progress (CYP) I

I On the basis of your understanding of the previous section, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. What do you understand by the **Saptanga Rajya**?

Q2. What are the three qualities of a minister?

Q3. Write a brief note on the administration of Pataliputra.

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a) The head of the secret service in the **Arthashastra** is the _____
- b) The _____ courts were the civil courts while the _____ courts were the criminal courts under the Mauryas.
- c) The Judges were called the _____
- d) _____ advocated the paternal theory of government and regarded his subjects as his children.
- e) In the _____, Ashoka mentions that the earlier rulers too had undertaken works of public welfare.

19.2.2 The Provincial Administration

Since the Mauryas had a huge empire, it was divided into a number of provinces. During the reign period of king

Ashoka, four provinces were there. Their names and capitals are mentioned below:

- (i) Uttarapatha or the Northern Province, capital- Taxila
- (ii) Avantipatha or the Western Province, capital-Ujjain
- (iii) Prachyapatha or the Eastern Province, centre- Tosali
- (iv) Dakshinapatha or the Southern Province, capital- Suvarnagiri

Apart from these, Ashoka added the fifth province of Kalinga. These provinces were put under the control of a prince or a member of the royal family called **Kumara** and **Aryaputra**.

Pataliputra, the capital of the Central Province was the headquarters of the empire.

It is worthy to mention that Ashoka was posted as the Governor of Ujjayini during the tenure of his father, king Bindusara. Among the responsibilities of the provincial governments were included-maintenance of law and order, keeping the feudatories under check, collection of taxes, co-ordinating the works of the different departments etc. It is further given that each **Kumara Mahamatra** commanded over a number of **mahamatras**.

The Central Government kept a check on the working of the Provincial governments through the supervisory staff from time to time. Not only this, the working of the administration and the condition of people living in the provinces was also reported to the Emperor by the **Pativedakas** or the secret emissaries. So, a sound system was established w.r.t the Provincial Administration.

19.2.3 The District Administration

The Provinces under the Mauryas were divided into districts. The source of information in this regard are the Ashokan inscriptions. Accordingly, we learn that there were three important officials at the district level. And these were-

- The **Pradeshika**- He was the overall incharge of the administration of a district.
- The **Rajuka**- He was in charge of measurement of land so that revenue assessment was calculated.
- The **Yuktas**- These were subordinate officers and took care of secretarial work as well as accounting.

We also learn from The Rock Edict III that in every five years time, these officers went on tour of the kingdom. They got in touch with the people and gave instructions to them regarding **dhamma**.

19.2.4 The Village Administration

The details pertaining to the administration at the village level are known to us from the '**Arthashastra**'. Accordingly we learn that the village, i.e **grama** was the smallest unit of administration and it enjoyed autonomy to a large extent. We further learn that the **Gramika** or the village Headman was the person incharge of the Village Administration. The elderly people of the village or the **grama- vridddhas** helped him in his works.

Two officers-The **Gopa** and The **Sthanika** were the intermediaries between the district and village level administrative units.

- **Gopa-** Among the duties of the **Gopas** were to work as an accountant, setting up of village boundaries, maintaining record of the census of the population of each village as per their tax paying capability, maintaining record of livestock of each village etc.
- **Sthanika-** The Sthanika worked directly under the **Pradeshika** and was in charge of collection of taxes.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

I. Based on the understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. How many provinces of the empire were there during the time of Ashoka? Name them.

Q2. What were the important functions of a provincial government?

Q3. Who were the important officials at the district level?

II. Fill in the blanks:

- The southern province had its capital at _____.
- The governor of the provinces are also referred to as _____.
- The _____ was in charge of the overall administration of a district.
- The _____ was in charge of the Village administration.

- e) The _____ and the _____ were officers who were intermediaries between the district and village administration.

19.3 LET US SUM UP

The Mauryas had a well-organized administrative structure at the different levels of government. This includes the Central, the Provincial, the District and at the Village level. Chandragupta Maurya was the head of the government and administration. He was head of the civil administration and also the commander of his armed forces. He was the supreme authority in the administration of justice in his empire. Although he was so powerful, he was not an autocrat. He had the good of his subjects at his heart. **Amantri parishad** or council of ministers assisted him in the administration. He performed a number of duties for the welfare of his subjects. His grandson Ashoka is known for the paternal theory of government. The Mauryas had a well-organized military, an efficient secret service, a good municipal organization, a good judicial system as well as revenue system. The administrative structure of the Mauryas was so good and efficient that it continued to prevail even during the reign periods of the later Maurya rulers with minor changes.

19.4 GLOSSARY

Egress- the action of going out or leaving a place.

Guddapurushas- secret agents

Ingress- the action of going in or entering

Monopoly- the exclusive possession or control of the supply of or trade in a commodity

Paternal- relating to a father

Samata- uniformity

19.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Write a note on the administrative structure of the Mauryas.
- Q2. What do you know regarding the Central Administration of the Mauryas?
- Q3. Discuss the Military administration of the Mauryas.
- Q4. What do you know regarding the Provincial administration of the Mauryas?

19.6 LESSON END EXERCISES

- Q1. Discuss the administrative structure under the Mauryas.
- Q2. Elaborate upon the Central Administration under the Mauryas.
- Q3. Discuss the District and the Village administration under the Mauryas.
- Q4. Discuss the Central Administration of the Mauryas with special reference to the works of public welfare.

19.7 ANSWER KEY

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

- I Q1. See Sub Section 19.2.1
 Q2. See Sub Section 19.2.1
 Q3. See Sub Section 19.2.1
- II. a) **Mahamatyapasarpa**
 b) **Dharmasthiya, Kantakashodhana**
 c) **Dharamasthas**
 d) **Ashoka**
 e) **Pillar Edict VII**

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

- I. Q1. See Sub Section 19.2.2
 Q2. See Sub Section 19.2.2
 Q3. See Sub Section 19.2.3
- II. a) **Suvarmagiri**
 b) **Kumara or Aryaputra**
 c) **Pradeshika**
 d) **Gramika**
 e) **Gopa, Sthanika**

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THE MAURYAS

SEMESTER-I
COURSE NO. HIST101

UNIT-IV
LESSON 20

DECLINE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

STRUCTURE

20.0 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

20.1 Introduction

20.2 Causes of the decline/downfall of the Mauryas

20.2.1 Division of the Empire

20.2.2 Succession of weak Kings

20.2.3 Extremely large empire

20.2.4 Internal revolts and factions

20.2.5 Ashoka's Pacifist policies

20.2.6 Centralized Administration

20.2.7 Weakening of imperial finances

20.2.8 Ashoka's Dhamma and reaction of the Brahmanas

20.2.9 Invasions of foreigners

20.2.10 Emergence of local kingdoms

20.3 Let us sum up

20.4 Glossary

20.5 Examination Oriented Questions

20.6 Lesson End Exercises

20.7 Answer Key

20.8 Suggested Reading

20.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to enable you to

- explain the multiplicity of factors responsible for the decline of the Mauryas.
- discuss as to what extent the division of the empire and succession of weak kings after Ashoka led to the decline of the empire.
- discuss as to how the pacifist policy followed by Ashoka and the centralized nature of administration were responsible for the disintegration of the Mauryan empire.
- explain how weakening of the imperial finances contributed in the decline.
- explain as to how the decline made way for the rise of local kingdoms.

Learning Outcomes

After going through the lesson, you will have a clear understanding about

- the different causes which were responsible for the decline of the Mauryas.
- the extent to which the division of empire and succession of weak kings after Ashoka were responsible for the decline.
- the extent to which the pacifist policy followed by Ashoka and the centralized nature of administration pushed the Mauryas to their decline.
- the role played by weak finances in the decline.
- the reasons which led to the rise of local kingdoms.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, as mentioned in the earlier lessons, the Mauryan Empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya was the first sub-continental empire. It spread over a large part of the Indian sub-continent and also included Kandahar in modern Afghanistan. It reached the peak of its glory in the reign of Emperor Ashoka. However, this mighty Maurya empire collapsed in less than half a century after the death of Ashoka in 232 BCE. The last Maurya ruler, Brihadratha was overthrown and assassinated by his own **senapati** (military commander) Pushyamitra Shunga,

who laid the foundation of the succeeding Sunga dynasty. Study reveals that the disintegration and the decline of the Maurya empire was not the fall out of a single factor but a multiplicity of factors. We notice that some of the factors were more important than the others. These have to be taken together in order to understand the reasons responsible for the decline of the mighty Mauryas.

20.2 CAUSES OF THE DECLINE/ DOWNFALL OF THE MAURYAS

Chandragupta Maurya founded and expanded the Maurya empire. He was succeeded by his son Bindusara who was successful in keeping the empire intact. He was in turn followed by his illustrious son, Ashoka. He ruled for nearly forty years. During this time period, the Mauryas reached the zenith of its glory. Barring the long reigns of the first three rulers, the other Maurya rulers who succeeded them were weak and had short reigns. Out of them, only King Dasharatha is known to have issued inscriptions. The others are known only from Puranic, Buddhist and Jaina accounts. An invasion by the Bactrian Greeks further weakened the empire. The mighty Maurya empire collapsed in less than half a century after the death of Ashoka in 232 BCE. The **Puranas** indicate that around 187 BCE, the Maurya empire crumbled when the last ruler of the dynasty, King Brihadratha was overthrown and assassinated by his military commander, Pushyamitra Sunga. He later founded the Sunga dynasty.

A number of factors were responsible for the decline and fall of the Maurya empire. Different scholars have given different viewpoints. Some scholars even regard Ashoka responsible for the decline. Let us examine the viewpoint of different scholars regarding the disintegration and the decline of the Mauryas.

20.2.1 Division of the Empire

One of the major reason of the decline of the Mauryas was the division of the empire into two- the eastern part and the western part. While the eastern part was under Dasharatha the western part was under Kunala. If this division had not taken place, the Greek invasions of the north west could have been held back for a while. The time so gained could have given the Mauryas a chance to re-establish some degree of their previous power. Further, we may say that the division of the empire also disrupted various services. The first three Maurya rulers were strong and had controlled the political and administrative organization from the centre. But the division of the empire changed several things. The eastern part was at an advantage vis' a vis' the western part. The organization of Pataliputra continued much as before although on a smaller scale. But, the western part had to rapidly expand the provincial government of Taxila and the north west province into a near imperial organization. And in this process of change, it could not give due attention to the attack of the Greeks. Hence, it suffered.

20.2.2 Succession of weak Kings

One of the major reasons of the decline of the Mauryas was the succession of weak kings after the passing away of Emperor Ashoka. After Ashoka's death in 232 BCE his empire was divided among his sons and grandsons. His successors include Kunala, Dasharatha, Samprati, Salishuka, Devavarman and others. However, they were weak and imbecile and could not bear the political and administrative responsibilities like their illustrious ancestors. As a result, the empire got fragmented and there was quick succession of rulers. The imperial control over administration was thus weakened. None of his successors showed the political ability and the leadership quality

needed for the high office. In the words of R.K.Mookerji, they were all 'pigmies whose shoulders were not fit to bear the weight of his mighty monarchy.' As these rulers could not exercise proper control over the central administration, some of the provincial rulers declared their independence and refused to acknowledge the power of the later Maurya kings. Thus, the disruptionist tendencies also could not be kept under check. They had short reigns and could rule for about fifty years, altogether. The last Maurya ruler, Brihadratha was overthrown and killed by his own military commander, Pushyamitra Sunga.

20.2.3 Extremely large Empire

The extremely large dimensions of the empire itself became a cause for the decline of the Mauryan empire. The empire was so huge that in those days of slow means of transport, it was impossible for the central government to exercise an effective and efficient control over its outlying provinces. This fact encouraged the provincial governors and the viceroys, even though related to the ruling monarch to raise their standards of revolt. Earlier, the strong monarchs like Chandragupta and Ashoka were able to control the vast empire due to an efficient espionage system. But this declined during the reign of the later Mauryas.

20.2.4 Internal revolts and factions

The internal revolts of the feudal chieftains was a regular feature of the Indian polity. Such occurrences also took place during the reigns of the weak successors of Ashoka. And as the later Mauryas were weak and imbecile they could not handle such disruptions and divisive tendencies among the ambitious subordinate chiefs and government officers. This weakened the empire. There are also references to the hatching of conspiracies at the Mauryan court which proved very harmful for the Mauryan empire. The **Malavikagnimitra** of Kalidasa mentions two rival parties at the court of Brihadratha. While one party was led by the Commander in Chief, the other was led by the Prime Minister. The Commander in Chief Pushyamitra Sunga assassinated King Brihadratha and thus brought the Mauryan dynasty to a close.

20.2.5 Ashoka's Pacifist Policies

The Pacifist policies pursued by Ashoka has also been regarded as responsible for the disintegration of the Maurya empire. Ashoka followed a non-violent policy. His policy reversed the age old policy of blood and iron which was pursued by his predecessors and which largely contributed to the military and political success of Magadha. By doing away with the war drums and replacing it with the reverberation of **Dhamma**, Ashoka virtually signaled the disbanding of the Maurya army. This was bound to put the later Maurya rulers in trouble. But this judgement on Ashokan policy is not what the edicts of Ashoka convey. It has to be mentioned that there is no hint in the entire range of Ashokan edicts that the Mauryan army was disbanded after the Kalinga war. He was far more pragmatic. He neither disbanded the army and nor abolished the capital punishment. He warned the forest dwellers to mend their ways. Moreover, he also stated in one of his edicts that he would pardon only up to the limit that was pardonable. This reflects that he was certainly not a weak ruler but a pragmatic and strong one. However, a long reign in which there was only one military campaign in the early years may have adversely affected the military preparedness of the army. And this, most probably may have been a factor responsible for the success of the Greek invasion.

Thus, we may say that non-violent policy pursued by Ashoka is not to be blamed for the disintegration of the Empire. Rather, it only contributed a little in the ultimate downfall.

Check Your Progress (CYP) I

On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. How was the division of the empire one of the causes of the decline of the Mauryan empire?

Q2. When did Ashoka die? Name at least three of his successors.

Q3. How did vastness of the empire become one of the reason for the decline of the Mauryan empire?

Q4. Write a note on Ashoka's Pacifist policies.

Fill in the blanks:

- a) The last Maurya ruler, Brihadratha was killed by his military commander _____.
- b) The eastern part of the Mauryan empire was under _____.

- c) The _____ of the empire led the provincial governors to revolt against the king.
- d) The _____ of Kalidasa mentions two rival parties at the court of Brihadratha.
- e) King Ashoka gave up **digvijay** and followed a policy of _____.

20.2.6 Centralized Administration

The organization of administration and the conception of the state or the nation and the feeling of nationalism were matters of great importance in the causes of the decline of the Mauryas. However, as per Upinder Singh, we must not generally expect to find absence of nationalism in ancient states. The administration of the Mauryas was of an extremely centralized character. All the important functions were under the direct control of the king. This fact necessitated a ruler of considerable personal ability. Things remained under control during the reigns of the first three rulers. An efficient secret service kept the ruler informed regarding his officials. But things did not remain the same after the death of Ashoka. The later Maurya rulers were weak and could not hold the empire together due to their personal weaknesses. And weakening of the central control lead automatically to a weakening of the administration. The empire had been divided. The breaking away of the provinces was at this point almost inevitable. It was seen that the officials of the administration owed their loyalty to the king and not to the state. Under the circumstances, a change of king could result in a change of officials, at least the important ones. And if this was the case, it was highly detrimental in Mauryan India as there was a rapid succession of kings soon after the death of Ashoka. Further, the social basis of the Mauryan bureaucracy was under stress and strain. This resulted in an inefficient administration which was unable to maintain social order in general. As the centralized monarchy became weak, the administrative machine deteriorated. The later Maurya rulers could not handle the centralized administration and this became one of the reasons of the disintegration of the Mauryas.

20.2.7 Weakening of imperial finances

According to the opinion of few scholars, dwindling imperial finances was one of the causes for the decline of the Mauryas. The Mauryas had a well-organized and large army. After the conquest of Kalinga, Ashoka did not embark on any conquest. So although money was spent on the maintenance of the army, no gain was made. Ashoka further expanded the bureaucracy, thereby adding to the state expenditure. The expansion in cultivation, increased use of forest wood and deforestation must have led to flood and famine situation. This further added to the expenditure of the state. Under such circumstances, Ashoka carried out numerous works of public welfare and donated lavishly to the Buddhist church and in the construction of Buddhist viharas. The expansion of habitation in newly cleared areas also caused a good deal of drain on the treasury. Further, the weakening of state control and lenient policy towards the farming communities, traders and artisans resulted in a shortfall in the collection of revenue. In this situation of an economic crisis, taxes were increased on a variety of things. It is seen that the punch marked coins of this time period show debasement of currency. In light of the above, it is said that the decline of the Mauryan empire was due to the economic consequences of the policies followed by Ashoka. However, the foreign accounts and the material remains of the period give a picture of an expanding economy.

20.2.8 Ashoka's Dhamma and reaction of the Brahmanas

After the bloody and devastating war of Kalinga, Ashoka felt deep remorse and regret. He decided to give up digvijay and replaced it with **Dhammavyay**. The adoption of this new policy changed the attitude of the king towards life, his subjects and the basis of his government. He preached **Dhamma** which was an ethical code aimed at building up an attitude of social responsibility among the people. He stressed on practice of non-violence and having tolerance and compassion for all. His policy of **dhamma** sought for the recognition of the dignity of man, it was a plea for the inculcation of virtuous behaviour transcending all social, religious and cultural barriers. Ashoka's **dhamma** was conditioned by the huge expanse of the empire, whose unity would be better preserved if tensions generated by the existence of divergent social, cultural and religious elements were overcome. It did not have anything to do with Buddhism, as such. After the demise of Ashoka, however, **dhamma** was not implemented the way it was envisaged by Ashoka.

Few scholars feel that Ashoka's **Dhamma** was equivalent to Buddhism. And by following the principles of **Dhamma**, Ashoka downgraded the position of the Brahmanas. His promotion of non-violence, disregard for rituals and sacrifice antagonized them. His appointment of the **Dhamma Mahamatras** was regarded as a direct attack on the rights and privileges of the Brahmanas. The discontent of the Brahmana community resulted in the military coup d'état by Pushyamitra Sunga, his **senapati**, who was a Brahmana by birth.

The aforementioned belief that Ashoka's policy of **Dhamma** had harmed the interests of the Brahmanas and this ultimately resulted in the assassination of last Maurya ruler, Brihadratha at the hands of his military commander is not accurate. Had this been the case, Pushyamitra would not have been the **senapati** in the Maurya realm. Clearly, Brahmanas were not discriminated against. They could rise to high positions in politico – administrative circles. And if such a thing as assassination happened, it should have happened soon after Ashoka's death. At best, the assassination can be explained as an act of a military coup, carried out at an opportune time, when the king was weak and did not enjoy mass support. It was surely not an example of anti Brahmanical policy pursued by Ashoka and his successors. Pushyamitra was an opportunistic and strong military commander and he utilized his position in order to fulfill his ambition of becoming the king.

Hence the opinion that the downfall of the Mauryas was due to the adoption of **Dhamma** and anti-Brahmanical policies by the Mauryas, does not hold ground.

20.2.9 Invasions of foreigners

As long as there were strong rulers ruling the Maurya state, all things were under control. But after the demise of Ashoka, circumstances changed drastically. The foreign invaders took advantage of the internal chaos and political instability. Then invasions on the north west borders of India considerably weakened the Maurya empire under the later Mauryas. The Indo Bactrians and Indo Parthians made repeated attacks which eventually brought ruin and devastation to the Maurya empire.

20.2.10 Emergence of local kingdoms

The rise of several independent local kingdoms in different regions following Ashoka's death was a major reason for the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire. This fragmentation was the outcome of several factors. Ambitious governors and provincial administrators began asserting their independence as the central authority weakened. Regions like the North West, the Deccan and the Eastern parts of the empire declared themselves sovereign.

In the Gangetic Valley, the last Mauryan ruler, Brihadratha was killed by his own military commander, Pushyamitra Shunga, who established the Shunga dynasty around 185 BCE.

In the Deccan and the Andhra regions, the Satavahanas became a prominent independent power. Kalinga declared independence under king Kharavela of the Chedi dynasty.

In the extreme south, the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandyas continued to be prominent from the Mauryan period itself in the regions like the Kaveri valley, Malabar area and the area around the tip of the Peninsula.

In the North West, the weakening of the Maurya power allowed various foreign invaders, such as the Indo-Greeks, Sakas and Kushanas to establish their own kingdoms.

Check Your Progress (CYP) II

On the basis of your understanding of the previous sections, answer the following questions in your own words:

Q1. How did centralized administration become a reason for the downfall of the Mauryas?

Q2. Weakening of imperial finances also caused the disintegration of the Mauryas. Substantiate.

Q3. Evaluate **Dhamma** of Ashoka and the reaction of the Brahmanas as a cause which led to the downfall of the Mauryas.

Q4. Was the rise of local kingdoms a reason for the disintegration of the Mauryas? How?

II Fill in the blanks:

- a) The administration of the Mauryas was of an extremely _____ character.
- b) The punch marked coins under the later Maurya rulers show _____ of currency.
- c) After the war of Kalinga, Ashoka gave up _____ and replaced it with _____ .
- d) With the emergence of local kingdoms, the central authority _____
- e) Kalinga declared independence under _____ .

20.3 LET US SUM UP

To conclude, we may say that there was not one but a number of complex causes which were responsible for the decline of the mighty Mauryan empire. The division of the empire after the demise of Ashoka and a rapid succession of rulers one after the other greatly weakened the basis of the empire. The vastness of the empire made it difficult for the Central government to exercise control over the outlying provinces. And this was the case, when the rulers were not strong enough. There existed a highly centralized bureaucracy whose loyalty was towards the king and not to the state. The pacifist policy may also have contributed partly to the decline. The weakening of the imperial finances is also regarded as a cause although we have foreign accounts and material remains which give a picture of an expanding economy. The policy of **Dhamma** and Brahmanical reaction are also cited as reasons of decline. But, this is not convincing enough in the light of evidences. Invasions of foreigners and emergence of local kingdoms also played a role in the disintegration of the empire. Thus, we see that the downfall of the Mauryas was caused by several complex and interlinked and inter related causes. Together they made the situation difficult and dismal for the Mauryan empire and it starting falling apart.

20.4 GLOSSARY

bureaucracy- a system of government in which most of the important decisions are taken by state officials.

coup d'état- a sudden, violent and unlawful seizure of power from a government.

detrimental- tending to cause harm

divisive- tending to cause disagreement or hostility between people.

imbecile- a person having very low intelligence or an intellectual disability.

pacifist- a person who believes that war and violence are not justifiable.

reverberation: prolongation of a sound, resonance

zenith: the time at which something is most powerful and successful.

20.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Succession of weak kings was one of the major reasons for the decline of the Mauryas. Justify.
- Q2. How did the pacifist policy followed by Ashoka become one of the reason for the decline of the Mauryas?
- Q3. Discuss the cause which were responsible for the decline of the Mauryas in detail.

20.6 Lesson End Exercises

- Q1. The Centralized administration of the Mauryas was one of the reason which led to the decline of the Mauryas. Elaborate.
- Q2. How far was the weakening of the imperial finances a reason for the decline of the Mauryas? Evaluate.
- Q3. List the causes that led to the decline of the Mauryas with special reference to Dhamma and the Brahmanical reaction as one of the cause.

20.7 ANSWER KEY

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- I. Q1. See sub section 20.2.1
- Q2. See sub section 20.2.2
- Q3. See sub section 20.2.3
- Q4. See sub section 20.2.5

II. Fill in the blanks:

- a) Pushyamitra Shunga
- b) Dasharatha
- c) Vastness
- d) **Malvikagnimitra**
- e) **Dhamma vijay**

CYP II

- I. Q1. See sub section 20.2.6
 Q2. See sub section 20.2.7
 Q3. See sub section 20.2.8
 Q4. See sub section 20.2.10

II. Fill in the blanks

- a) centralized
b) debasement
c) **Digvijay, Dhammavijay**
d) weakened
e) King Kharavela

20.8 SUGGESTED READING

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