EXPLORING EARLY INDIA up to c.AD 1300

THIRD EDITION

This third edition of ***Exploring Early India up to c.AD 1300*** offers a broad overview and connected narrative of early Indian history, taking into consideration major historical developments from the earliest times to c.AD 1300. Salient features of political, socio-economic and cultural history have been discussed elaborately, and regional diversities in early Indian history have been commented upon, keeping in sight the commonalties at the subcontinental level. Rich in empirical details and containing relevant illustrations and maps, the book delves into the historiographical thrusts and shifts in the study of early India and is marked by attempts to demonstrate elements of change in early Indian history beyond dynastic shifts. It also offers critical readings of diverse primary sources from the fields of archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics and art-history, and the various congruent, and contesting, images of the past which they generate. This book also includes two new appendices respectively on the Kushana political history and the seafaring to the island of Socotra in the light of recently discovered epigraphic data.

Ranabir Chakravarti, Professor of Ancient History, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (India) specializes in social and economic history of early India with a particular interest in the Indian Ocean maritime history. A regular contributor to refereed journals published in India and abroad, Chakravarti has authored/edited several books, including *A Sourcebook of Indian Civilization* (2000); *Trade in Early India* (2005, paperback); *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society* (2007); *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-first Century: A View from the Margin* (2007) and *Exploring Early India* (2012). He has recently annotated the fourteenth century Latin Crusade text, *How to Defeat the Saracens* (English translation by Giles Constable, 2012). Besides these works in English, he has authored/edited three books in Bangla: *Prachin Bharater Arthanaitik Itihaser Sandhane* (on economic history of early India, 2002); *Samaj Sanskriti, Itihas: Adhyapak Ashin Das Gupta Smarak Grantha* (essays in Memory of Professor Ashin Das Gupta, 2001) and *Bharat-Itihaser Adiparva* (History of Ancient India up to AD 600, 2007; translated in Hindi as *Bharat-Itihaska Adi Kal*, 2012).

Chakravarti was elected the Sectional President (Ancient India) of the Indian History Congress (72nd session, Patiala) in 2011. He also presided over the Ancient India section of Punjab History Congress (2011, Punjabi University, Patiala). He was invited to deliver the Anniversary Commemorative Lecture (*India and the Indian Ocean: Issues in Trade and Politics up to c.1500 CE*) by the Maritime History Society, Mumbai in May 2014.

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To the cherished memory
of
my uncle
UMA PRASAD CHAKRAVARTI
(1923–1996)

Contents

Transliteration Table

अ	a	ड	ḍa
आ	ā	ढ़	ḍha
इ	i	ण	ṇa
ई	ī	त	ta
उ	u	थ	tha
ऊ	ū	द	da
ऋ	ṛi	ध	dha
ए	e	न	na
ऐ	ai	प	pa
ओ	o	फ	Pha
औ	au	ब	ba
		भ	bha
क	ka	म	ma
ख	kha	य	ya
ग	ga	र	ra
घ	gha	ल	la
ङ	ṅa	व	va
च	cha	ह	ha
छ	chha	श	śa
ज	ja	ष	sha
झ	jha	स	sa
×k	ña	क्ष	ksha
ट	ṭa	ज्ञ	jna
ठ	ṭha		

Preface to the Third Edition

This third edition has been through press not only with a view to updating the bibliography in line with contemporary debates, but also to augment the understanding of my readers by contextualizing the period discussed in Chapter V. I decided to add two appendices in order to bring to the attention of my readers some interesting developments in the history of the period from *c.*200 BC.to AD 300. Appendix I is prepared with a view to situating the recent developments in Kushana studies in terms of political history (but not dynastic history). The main intention is to take a close look at the political processes that led to the transformation of the Kushanas from a nomadic Central Asian tribe to a very formidable settled polity. The new perspectives of the persistent debates on the possible date of Kanishka has also been taken into consideration. Appendix II deals with the remarkable inscriptions, mostly—but not exclusively—Indic, discovered from the island of Socotra near the Horn of Africa in the western Indian Ocean. The inscriptions have been deciphered and meticulously studied by Ingo Strauch and his colleagues. Dated to the first five centuries of the Christian era these inscriptions highlight the seafaring activities of the people of the subcontinent. The inscriptions have not only had very significant bearing on the early maritime history of the subcontinent, but raise important issues on social and cultural practices (including the myth of incurring pollution by undertaking voyages across the sea) and the epigraphic culture. Both the appendices address several technical issues, especially pertaining to primary sources. That is why the appendices are presented with footnotes which are otherwise avoided in the rest of the book. However, keeping in view the format and purpose of the book, the two appendices present broad overviews of the topics under discussion without getting into intricate details associated with both the topics. The Bibliography has been updated also keeping in the light of the important publications that came out in the last five years. As the manuscript of the third edition was being prepared the excellent overview of south India, entitled *A Concise History of South India*, edited by Noboru Karashima reached me. I wished very much to incorporate some of the salient aspects of this book into my text, but that

would have delayed the production of this book by several months more. I had to reluctantly refrain from using Karashima's book, especially the sections therein on early medieval south India.

The Index to the third edition has been kindly prepared by Ms. Preeti Gulati and Mr Abhimanyu, both currently pursuing M.Phil. degree in the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. My most sincere thanks go to them for their help and cooperation.

I have tried my best to keep the book as error free as possible. In case of any inaccuracy cropping up in the book, I would ask for the indulgence of the readers. I shall feel rewarded if this book is able to arouse curiosities and interests in the history of Early India which can be enriched by fresh exploration of the field.

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RANABIR CHAKRAVARTI

Preface to the First Edition

It is a matter of relief for the author that this broad overview of early Indian history is about to see the light of the day. I would like to record my sincere thanks to Macmillan Publishers India Ltd. for approaching me to take up this project, but more for their interminable and exemplary patience with a recalcitrant author like the present one, who missed many deadlines. The proposal came from Macmillan Publishers India Ltd. in 2004–5; it took a much longer time than what was originally estimated to complete the book. I must own up the entire blame for the delay in bringing out this book.

A special note of thanks goes to the cartographer, who had taken considerable pains to prepare the maps for this book. A large number of photographs were made available to me by the kind permission of the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi; I would like to acknowledge here my sincere thanks to the ASI. The photographs of the coins in this book are published with the kind permission of the National Museum, New Delhi, to whom also I am sincerely thankful. I must record here my sincere appreciation to the anonymous reader(s)/referee(s) of the manuscript; the suggestions and comments from the reader(s)/referee(s) were indeed valuable. I have tried to incorporate these suggestions to the best of my ability and made modifications to the original manuscript wherever necessary. It is with immense pleasure that I would like to record here my thanks and appreciation to Digvijay Kumar Singh and Asish Kumar—both pursuing M.Phil. programmes in the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU for ably preparing the index. I received sustained cooperation from the staff of the Central Library, JNU and also from the staff of the library of the Centre for Advanced Study of the Centre for Historical Study, JNU; I acknowledge with gratitude their help in the production of this book.

I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my beloved uncle, Uma Prasad Chakravarti. His passing away in 1996 left a void in my life that is impossible to fill up. That he breathed his last with my name on his lips, while I was away from home, is an inestimable grief which I am unable to overcome. Though terminally ill, he firmly instructed me not to hurry back home, but to attend first to my academic assignments in 1996. By dedicating

this book to his memory, I do the minimum to say that I miss him so very much every day ever since he departed.

Two persons are present in every word written in this book: they are Tutul, my wife and Majaru, my son. Upright, straightforward, focussed and resolute, especially when the chips are down, they have set for me a very high standard that I try to emulate, but which are also elusive milestones for a person of my calibre. Mere words cannot illuminate their contributions to the making of this book.

New Delhi

RANABIR CHAKRAVARTI

Author's Note to the Second Edition

The author would like to offer his sincere thanks to Mr Amitabh Nagpal, Chairman and Managing Director, Macmillan India and Mr Naval Shukla, Senior Vice President and Business Head, Higher Education Division, Macmillan India for their valuable support to publish this revised second edition of the book. I would also like to record my appreciation of the unstinted and sustained cooperation I received from Ms Keerthi Sudevan, Jr. Commissioning Editor, Higher Education Division, Macmillan India. Mr Digvijay Kumar Singh and Mr Ashish Kumar, both doctoral students under my supervision at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, helped me enormously in making the manuscript of the second edition as error-free as possible. To them go my very sincere thanks. My apologies to readers for the errors and misprints which remained in the first edition of the book.

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RANABIR CHAKRAVARTI

Abbreviations

IESHR	*Indian Economic and Social History Review*
IHQ	*Indian Historical Quarterly*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
MHJ	*Medieval History Journal*
SH	*Studies in History*

Introduction

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

— T.S. ELIOT, 'Burnt Norton', *The Four Quartets*.

The Introduction of a book gives its author both opportunity and space to spell out the aims, objectives and plan of the book. The present work attempts to provide a broad sweep of the early history of the subcontinent, beginning from the period of the emergence of human beings in the subcontinent to *c.*AD 1300. Recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in early Indian history as a curricular subject at undergraduate/postgraduate level, as a subject attracting informed general public and as a specialized field of in-depth research. The increasing awareness of the subcontinent's remotest past encourages a historian to delve deep into the subject and present an overview of various facets of early Indian history by drawing upon the works of a host of historians of both older and recent generations. Needless to explain that this book has to attempt at synthesization of the existing knowledge about the subject. Taking into account the vast body of published scholarly works on multiple aspects of early Indian history was indeed a major learning experience for the present author, who in this process was able to improve upon his own readings of early Indian history to overcome many of his lacunae of understanding and to develop a clearer perspective of early Indian history. It also gives the author an opportunity to comment upon the production of knowledge of early India in recent decades.

At the risk of stating the obvious, it should, however, be emphatically stated here that the historical space treated in this book is not equivalent to the present nation state of India, but it deals with what is most conveniently expressed as the Indian subcontinent. On many occasions, areas now included in the modern nation states of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, prominently figure in our discussions. By this, we never intend to project an image of what, in a particular political perception, is promoted as 'akhand Bharat' (unified India). This is a problem and contradiction of historical methodology. While the most common practice of selecting a

spatial unit for historical studies is a modern nation state or part(s) thereof, the chronological span of a historical enquiry may take the historian to pre-modern times when there was no nation state. In our present case, the aspiration for and the emergence of the nation state of India goes back to the late nineteenth and twentieth century; but the history of this land takes us several millennia ago. To treat the past of these millennia in the parameters of a modern nation state it will not only be inaccurate and anachronistic, but also methodologically wrong because the emergent historical image will appear as a frozen one. The essential feature of historical studies is to identify and explain significant changes in a given people's history and also to suggest its impacts on subsequent times. Thus the spatial unit India here stands for the subcontinent. This may be a reason of convenience. But there is also a logic of historical geography.

While it is impossible to treat the area of the Indian subcontinent as a unified, undifferentiated area of a pre-modern state, it is also clear that as a landmass, this region has a remarkable historical entity. The two well-known ancient geographical epithets of this country—Bhāratavarsha and Jambudvīpa—generally signified the vast area of the subcontinent, bounded by the Himalayas on the north and the sea on its other three sides. Bhāratavarsha is so named in the Puranic accounts after Bharata, the name of a Rigvedic tribe. The earliest known definite use of the term, as shown in Chapter 5, figures in a first century BC inscription. But at that time it denoted not the subcontinent, but a portion of the Ganga valley lying possibly between Magadha in south Bihar and Mathura in the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The term Jambudvīpa, first appearing in an inscription of Aśoka in the third century BC, is likely to refer both to a country and the Mauryan realm, in the latter sense, therefore, recognizing a geo-political entity. In the Puranic cosmographical and geographical concepts, the earth consisted of seven islands (*saptadvīpā vasumatī*), separated by seven seas that resembled concentric circles. Jambudvīpa was one of the seven islands; it was further divided into various quarters or *varshas*. One such *varsha* was Bhāratavarsha. It is also true that in Puranic ideas, the names Jambudvīpa and Bhāratavarsha covered an area, in which were occasionally included places that are now situated in mainland or maritime South-East Asia. This cannot be seen as a justification of what was once termed as 'Greater India'. The intimate and sustained contacts of South Asia with mainland and maritime South-East Asia paved the way for this Puranic practice of including these extra-Indian areas into Jambudvīpa/Bhāratavarsha.

Significantly enough, three non-Indian appellations of the subcontinent, India, Shen-du and Hindustan, in their initial phases denoted a relatively small area, the lower Indus valley and the Indus delta. But the three names subsequently stood for the vast South Asian subcontinent. When Herodotus in the sixth century BC first used the word India, he denoted by it the lower Indus valley. By the time of Megasthenes in the late fourth century BC the

term stood for an area having the mount Imaos (Himlayas) in the north and stretching up to the Pandion (near modern Madurai) in the south. Greek geographers like Diodorus, Strabo, and Ptolemy, albeit not free from errors and inaccuracies, used the term India as a vast territory. Similarly, the Chinese term Shen-du originally denoted the lower Indus valley, obviously so named after the river Sindhu or the Indus. That the name or its variants subsequently embraced vast areas of the subcontinent is best evident from the seventh century AD travel accounts of Xuan Zang. He included in the country In-du the north-west frontier area, Kamarupa (in the Brahmaputra valley), Saurashtra in western India and Kanchi in Tamil Nadu. Contrary to the popular notion, the name Hindustan was not coined by Arab and Persian authors in medieval times. The earliest use of the term goes back to AD 262, figuring in the Naqsh-i-Rustam inscription of Sasanid ruler Shahpur I, who denoted by the term Hindustan the lower Indus valley. The term indeed gained greater currency in the Arabic and Persian accounts of subsequent times. Thus, the famous geographical work, *Hudud al-'Alam* (c.AD 982) considered the river Mirhan (Indus) as the north/north-western marker of Hindustan and included in it Kamarun (Kamarupa) and Kanza (Kanchipuram). The same image is also available from the celebrated accounts of Hind left behind by Al Biruni in the eleventh century AD. There is, therefore, a long historical tradition of recognizing the vast subcontinent as a distinct historical area that undoubtedly contained in it immense varieties of languages, cultural and social practices, economic pursuits, ethnic groups and political experiences. It must be kept in mind that there were few fixed frontiers, which even if they existed, must have been porous. That the subcontinent had a number of regions within it was clearly recognized by the traditional idea of its fivefold or sevenfold divisions, seen in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina texts. The distinctiveness of such divisions were often signalled by natural landmarks like mountains, forests and rivers.

A brief discussion on the chronological label early India may be in order at this juncture. The previous notion of treating the entire period from the Palaeolithic culture to AD 1200 as 'ancient' is largely given up of late. Recent historiography strongly impresses upon us that the many significant changes occurring in Indian history till AD 1300 cannot satisfactorily be appreciated by treating it as an undifferentiated ancient phase. Periodization in Indian history has been a controversial issue. The ill-used periodic divisions of Hindu, Muslim and British have been given up. The most common alternative periodization is to think of ancient, medieval and modern. Recent decades have witnessed scholarly doubts over the nearly uniform use of this tripartite division of time over any given area. This system of periodization first appeared in European historiography and then came to be mechanically applied to any other area, especially to non-European societies. It has been recently argued that this flat tripartite division of historical time in any given culture is in fact an indication of the impact of colonial

Europe over non-European societies. Alternative scheme of periodization for specific historical cultures, including the history of the subcontinent, has been proposed, though not unanimously approved of. From 1960s, greater awareness of the possibilities of changes in Indian history paved way for the termination of the ancient period of Indian history around AD 600, since there were significant mutations in political, socio-economic and cultural life after AD 600. The phase from AD 600 to AD 1300 is variously called post-Gupta, late ancient and early medieval period in Indian history. The last expression—early medieval—has gained considerable currency in historiography and scholarly circles. This chronological label occurs in the present text too. The ancient and the early medieval periods in Indian history cover up to AD 1300, which is generally taken to mark the end of Early India, an expression that is considered more useful and comprehensive than ancient India. The present author has used this chronological label in this sense. A chronological subdivision within Early India is early historical phase, an expression that has received wide acceptance. The early historical phase in Indian history is generally located between the 'pre/proto-historic' period and what is often termed as the 'Classical' phase. The early historic is, thus, a period of nearly nine centuries from *c.* sixth century BC to AD 300. The markers of the early historic phase are the emergence of territorial states, urban centres and the consolidation of stratified societies: these changes are often studied from the point of the emergence of the state society. The early historic material culture is often associated with the proliferation and specialization of crafts, especially the growing use of iron technology, and the beginning of coinage. These typical features of the early historic phase are best evident in the Ganga valley, more precisely in the middle Ganga plains. There is little doubt that these changes were of immense significance and, therefore, justified the designation of this chronological label. However, in recent years, some historians and archaeologists have drawn our attention to the problem of using this expression as a generic label. The historical experiences typically associated with the early historic in and around sixth/fifth centuries BC are more relevant to the formation in the Ganga valley. The peninsular experience of the early historic came much later, not earlier than the second century BC. If the early historic in north India often coincides with the increasing utilization of iron technology, iron age and early historical phase are distinct chronological/developmental phases in south Indian context. The use of such chronological labels is, therefore, not without regional variations.

Interestingly enough, in some other recent works on early Indian history, one may note the conscious efforts to avoid the use of expressions like early historic, classical, ancient and early medieval. The cases in point are Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History* (1995) and Romila Thapar, *Early India from the Origins to c.*AD *1300* (2002). In the first work, there are chapters like 'North India during the First Millennium BC', 'Trade and Contacts', ' State and Economy AD 400–1200' (for both north India and south India). The first two chapters relate to the periodic label early historical, while the period 400–1200 corresponds to early medieval. In her magisterial survey of early Indian history, Romila Thapar designates the period from AD 300 to AD 600 as 'Threshold Times' , avoiding the use of problematic terms like Classical or Golden Age or the Gupta period. The method here is to indicate a chronological bracket as a valid temporal unit of historical study, since during that phase demonstrable historical changes and processes are possible to locate.

The present work has an apparent thrust on references to primary source materials. This has been done for two purposes. First, the author feels that citation of relevant evidence is crucial to substantiate the historian's observations on the past. Second, it helps the reader to understand how historians construct the past on the basis of sources. It is also important to place before readers how different approaches to sources could generate contesting views of the past and leads to historiographical debates. For instance, the same Aśokan edicts have been read by some historians to perceive a highly centralized, unitary, pan-Indian character of the Maurya empire and by some others to consider that the Mauryan realm was far from being unitary, and at the most experiencing limited political integration in the Ganga valley. The juxtaposition of prescriptive/normative textual sources (e.g., the Brahmanical sastras) and descriptive literary accounts (creative texts, accounts of non-indigenous writers) in many cases offer images of deviations from seemingly inflexible social and cultural norms. Attempts have been made to integrate field archaeological materials with textual/written sources; and field archaeological sources are not seen as merely confirmatory to the textual sources. The work also tries to dispel the notion that field archaeology is useful only for the study of the pre-literate phase of Indian history. We have tried to highlight the importance of field archaeological research in understanding settlement patterns, especially the formation of urban centres, when textual and written sources abounded.

The book has seven chapters, each chapter catering to the historical scenario of a particular phase of early Indian history. Each chapter begins by situating that particular period in terms of historical developments. The preliminary section of a chapter often discusses the relevant sources for the study and also gives an overview of the principal historiographical issues. Barring the first two chapters, other chapters have an extensive discussion on political condition and polity. This is usually followed by sections on different aspects of economic, social and cultural life. Discussions on political, socio-economic and cultural life have incorporated multiple experiences in different regions. The treatment of political, economic, social and cultural history in different sections does not imply that these are seen as watertight compartments. That these aspects of history interact with one another has been a focal point in our discussions. A case in point

in this context is the well-known acts of patronage to Budhhist and Jaina establishments by a wide variety of non-royal donors during the period 200 BC to AD 300. A substantial number of such cases of patronage are located in and around urban centres, which proliferated in an unprecedented manner during this period. Urban spurt was closely linked with the spread of state society, especially 'secondary' urban formation in peninsular India. The period also witnessed a remarkable growth in diverse manufacturing crafts and a rapid expansion of long-distance commerce. Craftsmen and merchants were among prominent donors to Buddhist and Jaina establishments. As a result of this sustained patronage, there emerged celebrated cultural centres, including centres of architectural and sculptural productions. The donors by their acts of patronage seem to have been able, at least on some occasions, to improve their actual status in the society, although their ritual status, according to the normative treatises, may not have matched their actual status. Without combining these diverse aspects, it will not be possible to appreciate the importance of the changes visible during the period 200 BC-AD 300.

The author has tried to pay due attention to regional features and differences in dealing with a particular period. It needs to be emphasized here that the study of social and economic life of early India has not been presented merely in the light of normative literature. The gleanings from 'descriptive' category of sources—e.g., inscriptions, accounts of non-indigenous writers and creative literary texts—on social and economic life have been given due consideration. In cases where practices differed from precepts, these are not seen as aberrations/deviations from a strict code of conduct. At the end of each chapter is given a select reading list. This list contains only the name of the author and the title of the publication. The complete reference to the readings used in the book will be available in the Bibliography at the end of two appendices.

This overview does not certainly claim any final historical truth regarding early India. Engagements with the study of the past may bring out some hitherto unknown facet(s) of past life, thereby requiring modifications of the current understanding of a particular aspect of the past. History is a tool to explain the past; and there are and can be multiple explanations of the past. Certain new possibilities may emerge from time to time to our ways of looking and understanding the past. That is why the study of history is inseparably associated with debates and issues among historians who keep the subject alive. If readers of this book offer fresh insights into the understanding of early Indian history and contemplate new problematics of the subject, the author of this book will feel rewarded.

CHAPTER 1

From the Beginning of Human Presence to the First Civilization

(up to *c.*1500 BC)

The subject matter of History is the past, remote as well as recent. History offers explanatory tools for understanding the past. The study of History not only makes the past knowable, albeit imperfectly and in a fragmented manner, but also looks for changes in the past and identifies the possible causes and effects of those changes. In other words, the understanding of the past is intimately connected to comprehending the present—even the contemporary situation. The constant dialogue between the past and present is an integral aspect of History, as E.H. Carr demonstrated. The study of the past, however, is directed to the activities of human beings in relation to their given surroundings.

History does not have to address the issues of the 'past' of anything and everything; for example, the creation of the universe is not a subject matter of History. It can be postulated by philosophers, theologists, cosmologists, astronomers, physicists and mathematicians. The account of the making of the earth, the habitat of human beings belongs to the realm of Geology and not History. History is intimately connected with and draws from the natural and earth sciences and from philosophical speculations; but its outstanding feature is the enquiry into human activities. However, History does not and cannot deal with a single, isolated, individual person; when an individual is judged by History, it is done so in relation to that individual's society and times. For Marc Bloch, History was science of men in time (the term 'men' is obviously used here as a synonym for human beings and certainly not gender-specific). Commenting on the futility of attempting the history of a lone individual (or more precisely, of a loner), Ashin Das Gupta once wrote that one could attempt a history of religion, but not the history of God. What we now understand as History is a subject that tries to study human activities by situating these in specific temporal and spatial contexts. Although the term *Itihāsa*, known in India since the days of the *Atharvaveda*, is now a current synonym of History in the New Indo-Aryan

languages, *Itihāsa* and History are not the same. The term *Itihāsa* is derived from *iti ha āsa* (so it verily happened in the past). Romila Thapar's sustained studies have clearly underlined the distinctiveness of *Itihāsa* (or *Itihāsa-Purāṇa*) tradition from History.

The human beings of the past and their activities—the subject matter of History—are never fully knowable, except that tiny fragments of the proof of their existence and life (called evidence) are available to those who study the past at present. Put differently, the production and accumulation of the knowledge of the past is a very recent endeavour of the historian. Needless to explain, the degree of difficulty of recovering the past enhances as one probes into the very remote past, when only a handful number of artifacts and no written documents are available. There is little doubt that written words and documents of the past are invaluable for the construction and assessment for the historian. In fact, there is a strong tendency to locate the beginning of history with the advent of writing and/or the availability of the written documents. The period preceding the advent of written evidence is often labelled as 'pre-historic'. Some scholars are not comfortable with the term 'pre-history', since anything belonging to the past should become a subject matter of History, which is only imperfectly understood in terms of written words. The antiquity of writing in the world cannot be pushed back before the Bronze Age, which in terms of the long history of human beings, is of a relatively recent origin. It is, therefore, impossible to limit the study of human beings only to the world and practice of written words long before which the human society had already gained some visibility. The alternative term to 'prehistory' is the 'preliterate' phase of human history, gaining increasing acceptance among anthropologists and archaeologists. There is little doubt that the preliterate phase that precedes the age of written records, vastly outnumbered the years of the experience of literacy in human society. For understanding the nature of preliterate human society and culture, archaeology offers the only window of knowledge; the importance of archaeology however, hardly diminishes even when literacy gains ground in a particular society at a given temporal situation. In Indian society, with a strong emphasis on oral culture, the advent of a literature or a literary style may not automatically point to literacy. The earliest of Indian literature, the *Rigveda*, is steeped in orality and is the product of a scriptless society as we shall find in a subsequent chapter. The study of the remotest past of India, like that in many other countries, is entirely based on archaeology.

Archaeology alone cannot offer many clues to the earliest human beings and their surroundings. Sustained cooperations among archaeologists, anthropologists, geologists, zoologists and botanists are absolutely essential for the understanding of human beings of the remotest possible times. Such a study attempts to trace the gradual evolution of the human species to what is called the Anatomically Modern Man (AMM), also known as the Homo Sapiens; in other words, the evolution of the physical features of the

species called human beings over tens of thousands of years is also a major aspect of the earliest human history. Such enquiry as this largely belongs to the realm of physical anthropology. The physical anthropologist looks for the evolution and traces of the typical physical features of a human being: bipedal (two-footed) movements, the evolution of the forelimbs into arms, a straight and vertical vertebral column, a large brain case with a substantial cranial capacity (measured in cubic centimetres or cc), stereoscopic eyes and opposable thumbs. Remains of human bones, skeletal remains, fragments of the skull, traces of the denture, etc., present vital but partial clues to the extremely long and slow evolution of the earliest human species to the 'modern' anatomical shape. This history of the making of the human being runs closely parallel to another singular human attribute—the ability of humans to make culture. Culture here does not stand merely for the popular notion of literary creations, fine and visual arts, dress and food. It denotes, especially in anthropological terms, all human activities that are beyond the primarily biological functions, like eating, breathing or sleeping. In other words, from the earliest and crudest stone implements to the most complex supercomputers—all human creativity comes under the purview of culture. Culture here stands for the adaptive ability of mankind in relation to the given environment and surrounding. Culture is unique to human beings. Thus the anthropologist's tracing of the remains of the earliest human beings involves both the search for the physical traits of the evolving mankind, as well as the changes and continuities in culture. Culture, therefore, is an expression of the human being's response to natural surroundings. One of the earliest cultural activities of mankind was the making of tools. A human being is not merely a tool-using animal but a tool-making animal. A tool is explained as an extra-corporeal agency by the archaeologist and the palaeoanthropologist. Human beings need tools to manage the deficiencies or shortcomings of their bodies or limbs. A human being, for example, fashions a long stick out of the branch of a tree to pick up some fruit from a considerable height where his hands cannot reach; the fruit may also be at such a height that it could prove difficult for its human procurer to climb the tree without danger. The stick in this case almost acts as an extension of a human arm. The stick of an intended length and suppleness to pluck the fruit from the ground is not available in its natural condition. It is to be fashioned by a peculiar combination of hand, eye and brain coordination. In other words, the shape, length and suppleness of the intended stick has already been perceived, conceived and planned in a mental process, much ahead of the actual fashioning of this tool from a raw material, which in this case, is a branch of a tree. This ability of making a tool is unique to human beings and is distinct from the process of using an ad hoc tool.

Anthropologists have informed us of the ability of apes to break off a branch or twig and use it as a weapon during a fight among themselves. Though the twig here turns into a weapon, it is not a fashioned or

manufactured tool, but an ad hoc one. In addition to the toolmaking ability, human beings are also endowed with another fascinating feature—their ability to communicate with speech. This has been instrumental to recount and pass on past experiences of mankind from earlier generation(s) to a more recent generation—once again a unique human attribute. Tracing the earliest human beings, therefore, takes two routes: the search for the remains of human body and/or the remains of cultural artifacts. The latter could be manufactured only by human beings and therefore is an indicator of human presence even when physical remains of human beings are not recoverable. Dating of the earliest physical remains of human beings and the artifacts created/manufactured by them is done by various methods. For example, to situate the evidence in geological and zoological ages, thermo-luminescence test, dendrochronology, pollen grain analysis and carbon 14 tests are being conducted. Of crucial importance is the general application of the geological law of superposition in archaeology/anthropology. In other words, it recognizes the fact that artifacts and human, animal and plant remains found in deposition at a lower depth in the soil are more ancient or primitive than those discovered from an upper level of the soil. Thus, the topmost layer of the soil, which is now being inhabited and settled, is also the most recent; the greater the depth of the soil that yields evidence for the archaeologist, the more ancient it is.

II

So far, the earliest known remains of human species have been discovered from East Africa, in Olduvai Gorge (Serengeti Plains, northern Tanzania), which is dated to 3.8 million years BP (Before Present, not to be confused with BC, the present being located in 1954), thanks to Louis Leakey and Richard Leakey. The earliest human beings belong to the Australopithecines species.

The remains clearly suggest that it was a biped specie, thereby establishing its true hominid character. From Ethiopia was discovered the fossil skeleton of a young girl, given the name 'Lucy', which had an impressive cranial capacity of 400cc (although the cranial capacity of an AMM is much larger, 1250–1450cc): the large cranial capacity was seen as a marker of her hominid character. The skeleton of 'Lucy' is dated to 3.2 million years BP. Other specimens of the Australopithecines with a slightly higher cranial capacity (500cc) are recovered from South Africa, dated to 2.3 million years BP. Somewhat junior to these specimens are the remains of the Homo Habilis, placed between 2.6 and 1.7 million years BP, with a larger cranial capacity (700cc), found from East and South Africa. The larger brain case of the Homo Habilis is indicative of its greater intelligence and the ability of making stone tools by striking one stone against another. One such tool is the pebble tool

with cutting edges around a core (also called core tool); along with that there is the debitage of stone chips that is technically known as the flake.

The Homo Habilis is also closely linked with the more or less contemporary Pithecanthropus Erectus (also known as the Java and the Peking/Chou ku tien Man), the latter so called, because of its erect posture and attendant bipedalism; the Pithecanthropus Erectus had a brain case of 1,000cc capacity. The evidence from China clearly suggests his/her ability to use and control fire—a major event in the evolution of mankind. The Pithecanthropus Erectus must have been able to roast meat rather than eating it raw. This brief survey underlines two points: first, the genesis of human beings took place in Africa, more precisely in East Africa, leading anthropologists to propound the 'out of Africa' theory. In other words, human being originated in East Africa and then gradually moved to other parts of the globe. Second, the chronology of human origin clearly establishes that human beings as a species, arrived much later in our planet than many other zoological species. It is also likely that the arrival of human beings in India took place in course of the movement/migration of our ancestors from Africa, though the process of this movement is not clear.

III

Unlike the African situation, fossil remains of the earliest humans are not easily and readily available in the Indian subcontinent, making it difficult for the archaeologist/historian to accurately date the first advent of human beings in the subcontinent. However, the presence of human beings in the subcontinent in a very, very remote past is visible through the remains of the tools used by our ancestors. The earliest known stone tools in the Indian subcontinent go back to 2 million years BP. These came from the Potwar plateau in Pakistan, in the Soan valley in Kashmir. Mostly chopper chopping pebble tools, these lithic implements were made and manufactured by the Homo Habilis and the Home Erectus in India. Closely following these in date are the chopper chopping tools recovered from the Siwalik hills in Himachal Pradesh, assigned to 1.8 million years BP. In the Soan valley the tools found are hand axes (Acheulian type) along with the chopper chopping tools, assigned to a period between 700,000 and 500,000 years BP. These are among the earliest known Palaeolithic tools found in India. The discovery of the Soan culture by de Terra and Patterson in 1939 also pointed out that the northernmost part of the subcontinent came within the scope of glaciations during the geological Pleistocene epoch.

However, the greater part of the subcontinent did not experience glaciations. Raymond Allchin and Bridget Allchin suggested that the subcontinent, like the greater parts of Africa, passed through pluvial and inter-pluvial ages, instead of glacial and inter-glacial phases, thereby

indicating the alteration of prolonged periods of profuse rainfall (pluvial), punctuated by phases of relative aridity and warm climate. That the Homo Erectus began to spread over wider areas of India, during the middle Pleistocene epoch (730,000–130,000 years BP), will be evident from the discovery of hand axes (Acheulian) from the peninsular parts of India; e.g. from Hungsi valley (Karnataka), Attirampakkam (near Chennai). Nevasa (Maharashtra) and Didwana (Rajasthan) have also yielded Palaeolithic tools datable to 350,000 and 390,000 years BP. An evolved skull of the Homo Erectus comes from Hathnora in the Narmada valley, dated to 130,000 years BP. One of the most telling evidences of human presence in central India is available in the Bhimbetka caves near Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), discovered by S. Wakankar. The Bhimbetka caves were occupied over successive periods, the traces of which are visible in the subsequent floors. The earliest floor has yielded Acheulian tools, thereby pushing the antiquity of the human presence to the Lower Palaeolithic phase. These caves also bring to light subsequent Middle Palaeolithic tools, consisting mostly of thinner and smaller flake blades. There is absolutely no doubt that mankind at this stage entirely depended on hunting and collecting fruits and roots for their survival and nourishment. Under such circumstances, there was no scope of creating regular settlements. Human beings lived mostly in the open. However, rock shelters like the Bhimbetka caves and the Sanghao caves (in north-western Pakistan), were the preferred areas for living. The Bhimbetka caves are particularly notable for rock-paintings of hoary antiquity. Though dating these paintings is controversial, these depict scenes of hunting, associated with a hunting-gathering society and not a pastoral or food-producing community. Scenes of hunting could have been painted inside the caves as part of rituals, ensuring success in hunting expeditions.

The principal marker of the shift from the lower to the middle and eventually to the Upper Palaeolithic lies in the increasing preference for and the use of flake tools, while the Lower Palaeolithic implements were largely core tools. The flake tools were lighter, sharper, finer and more advanced than those of the Lower Palaeolithic period. The most frequently found and typical tool was the blade. Flake blades, typical of the middle and Upper Palaeolithic phases, have been found from Nevasa in Maharashtra and Didwana in Rajasthan. The Middle Palaeolithic tools from Gujarat and Rajasthan are dated on the basis of Thermo-Luminescence tests to about 56,800 years BP. Archaeologists and anthropologists suggest that around 60,000 years BP, arrived the Anatomically Modern Man (AMM) in the subcontinent. Ian Tattersall has drawn our attention to anthropological findings about the prevalence and spread of the AMM or the Homo Sapien Sapiens with other existing human species, now extinct. There is a strong possibility that the present day existence of the AMM or the Homo Sapien Sapiens as the only one human species in the planet was the outcome of much slaughter of the other and pre-existing species by the AMM.

The AMM is characterized by the large forehead and a gradual elimination of the supra-orbital ridge; by the slow disappearance of the heavy jaw and the appearance of a sharper vertical line of the face and chin; by increasing gracility (thinning of the bones) that contrasted the more robust species of the preceding times. One of the earliest known human skeletal fossils from South Asia has been found from the Fahien cave in Sri Lanka. This human skeletal fossil is dated to 34,000 years BP. The Upper Palaeoltihic sites in India are widely distributed and vary in date. This suggests that the transition from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Upper Palaeolithic was not uniform or unilinear, but varied in different parts of the subcontinent. Thus Upper Palaeolithic sites at Renigunta (Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh), in Shorapur doab (Karnataka) and at Baghor (middle Son valley) belong to the period from 25,500 to 10,500 years BP; in the Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh, similar sites are dated during the period 18,000-16,000 BP. On the other hand, Upper Palaeolithic artifacts made of fossil wood from Tripura and the eastern part of Bangladesh belong to a relatively more recent period: 11,000-4,500 years BP.

IV

Geologists locate the advent of the 'recent' geological phase (Holocene) around 10,000 years BP, which mark the end of the protracted Ice Ages of the Pleistocene epoch and the beginning of the relatively warmer phase that continues in our times too. Archaeologically speaking, South Asia at this juncture enters its phase of microliths that marks the abundance of and preference for miniature stone tools. These are tiny implements, none bigger than 5 cm. and hence termed as microliths. The microlith tools largely consist of blade, burin, points, scrapers, crescents, blades and bladelets. These appear to have evolved out of and/or a continuation of the blade industry of the Upper Palaeolithic stone technology into the Holocene epoch. There is an appreciable change of raw materials for making the new implements: from the pebble stones to stones like quertz, chert, agate, chalcedony, etc. The latter was easier to flake, and the use of flakes was essential for the fashioning of microliths. It is quite clear that such tiny weapons could not be used on their own for hunting; they had to be attached to or hafted on other tools. In this way, the microliths were mostly composite tools that speak of considerable complexity and development in technology from the blade technology of the Upper Palaeolithic period. As the microliths stand between, as it were, the Upper Palaeolithic tools and the implements of the Neolithic phase (in the Levant around 9000 BC), these mark the Mesolithic phase in South Asian archaeology. As the very term Mesolithic (meso=middle; lith=stone) suggests, it is considered a transition from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic phases. The Mesolithic period in South Asia is important not merely for the advancement of stone technology, but for a major social

transformation. This is the phase, which for the first time, yields evidence of domestication of animals. Hunting and gathering were never given up, but from this period, hunting of animals began to be supplemented by pastoral pursuits. In fact, by the beginning of the Mesolithic phase, human beings in South Asia began to show greater reliance on animal rearing than on hunting-gathering activities.

Before one embarks upon the study of the Mesolithic culture in the subcontinent and of the domestication of animals—leading eventually to pastoralism—a few general observations may be in order. The domestication of animals involves the processes of capturing, taming and breeding wild animals in captivity. As Sandor Bokonyi points out, wild animals meant for domestication are to be separated from their natural habitats and provided with food and shelter. The process certainly involves intimate knowledge about various animal species—anatomy, biology, physiology and behaviour of wild animals—which must have been accumulated over a very long period of hunting activities. The choice of animals fit for domestication arises out of the following conditions:

1. provision of food for these species easily available through human beings
2. domesticated species of some use—e.g. availability of meat, milk, wool or any other purpose
3. animals not too aggressive
4. the pack of domesticated animals, kept in captivity and/or under tamed condition, capable of easily moving from place to place

But the principal urge for domesticating animals must have been to ensure the reserve supply of food, in case hunting operations failed or proved inadequate. It would also naturally and logically follow that the advent of domestication of animals and pastoralism was not only an extremely slow process, but it did not bring about a sudden break from the hunting-gathering activities; in fact, it was the hunter-gatherer's minute observation of the animal species over generations that enabled the accumulation of knowledge about the choice of animals to be domesticated. In the long history of domestication of animals, the earliest animal to be domesticated was, according to Wenke, the dog (12000 BC), followed by the sheep (8500 BC), the goat (7500 BC) and the pig (7000 BC). While these animals were domesticated first in West and South-West Asia, the water buffalo was domesticated first time in about the fifth millennium BC by the people of Mehrgarh (now in Pakistan). The horse was not domesticated before 3000 BC; one of the last animals to be domesticated was the reindeer (1000 BC).

Khazanov presented five broad and important characteristic features defining the economic essence of pastoral nomadism (generalizing on the archaeological data mostly from Central and West Asia): (1) Pastoralism was the predominant form of economic activity; in other words, pastoral

groups depended less on hunting-gathering for subsistence; (2) The herd was maintained all the year round on a system of free-range grazing without stables; (3) Periodic mobility is observed among pastoral groups in accordance with the demands of the pastoral economy within the boundaries of specific grazing territories; thus their periodic mobility is distinct from migration; (4) All members or the majority of the pastoral group would participate in pastoral mobility; and (5) The resource generated in a pastoral society is to meet the requirements of subsistence; put differently, the capitalist ranch or dairy farming of today cannot be considered a pastoral activity.

We can now look specifically at the situation during the Mesolithic times in the subcontinent. The Mesolithic cultures in the subcontinent are marked by the growing use of microliths. The earliest known microliths from South Asia have come from the Fahien cave in Sri Lanka, yielding Mesolithic tools going back to 34,000 years BP. The geometric microliths from Batadomba Lena in Sri Lanka closely follow in date: 28,000 years BP. Another Sri Lankan site, Beli Lena, shows the evidence of charred grains, which are dated in between 12,000 and 9,000 years BP. This however, does not speak of the beginning of regular agriculture in South Asia at so early an age, as these belong to wild, and not cultivated variety of grains. It may indicate the consumption of wild grains, collected but not grown, in the dietary practice of the island in a remote antiquity. One of the earliest Mesolithic sites in India is Sarai Nahar Rai in the central parts of Uttar Pradesh. Dated on the basis of C14 tests to 10,000 years BP, Sarai Nahr Rai has yielded human skeletal remains (recovered from burials), bones of animals and microliths. These microliths are tools, principally based on parallel-sided blades; no less significant is the availability of arrowheads of bone and flint. The latter strongly indicates the use of bone tools in addition to stone tools. Moreover, the arrowheads cannot but speak of the use of bows and arrows as hunting implements. The burials at Sarai Nahr Rai demonstrate the existence of strongly built, robust human beings with large bones. The mean height of adult male skeletons there is 180 cm., while the mean adult height of female skeletons is 170 cm. and above. Bones of animals recovered from the site demonstrate the faunal resources available to the hunting group: zebus (Indian humped ox), buffalo, sheep, goat, stag, pig, rhinoceros, elephant, tortoise, turtle and different birds. The people knew the art of roasting meat in fire. But there is no evidence of either domestication of animals or agriculture.

The other site, Mahadaha, from the same region has also yielded skeletons in burial. A study of the skeletons shows that the average life expectancy of human beings was rather short: the average age of death of thirteen deceased persons was between 19 and 28; only one specimen shows signs of living above 40 years, but none beyond 50 years. The practice of burial at Sarai Nahar Rai and at Mahadaha are clear indicators of the belief in and practice of rituals, especially in the belief of the supernatural. At Mahadaha are seen bone ornaments and bones of slaughtered animals interred in the grave.

This possibly has something to do with the belief in life after death. One of the Mesolithic sites demonstrating an early evidence of domestication of animals is Adamgarh, Hoshangabad district, Maharashtra (8000 years BP) in the Narmada valley. Along with blades, parallel sided blades, burins and awls of noticeable variety, bones of domesticated dog, zebu, buffalo, sheep and pig have been discovered from here. But the people of Mesolithic Adamgarh continued with their hunting practices as will be evident from the bones of wild deer and porcupine. That hunting continued to be the mainstay of livelihood will be apparent from the rock paintings of hunting at the Bhimbetka caves, the earliest painting from here being dated about 6000 BC.

Attention may be focussed to two Mesolithic sites—Bagor (Bhilwara district, Rajasthan) and the cluster of sites at Koldihwa, Chopdani and Mahagara (in the Belan valley, Uttar Pradesh). The sites are significant for showing the transition from hunting-gathering to pastoral pursuits. Bagor is the largest Mesolithic habitation site known in India and the most securely dated of all Mesolithic sites based on the C14 tests. The total thickness of the habitation deposit in trenches is about 1.150 m., which possibly indicates occupation of the site for nearly 4,000 years. The earliest period at Bagor ranges in date from 5000 to 2500 BC, yielding profuse number of microliths and animal bones, remnants of huts with stone-paved floors and burials (with the dead-bodies usually heading to the east, that is according to a distinct orientation). V.N. Misra's meticulous recording of the bones (total 226 in number) shows that 72.29 per cent came from phase I, 19.06 per cent from phase II (2500–1000 BC) of period 1 and the rest 2.65 per cent from period 2. According to Misra, 60 per cent to 80 per cent of these bones belonged to the domesticated variety of sheep and goats. What cannot escape our attention is the large number of bones of domesticated animals and the gradual shrinking of the number of wild animal bones as the people of Bagor took more and more to pastoralism. The greater the dependence on animal rearing, the lesser was the incidence of hunting—in other words, graduating to domestication of animals. The reliance on animal breeding at Bagor could have led to a relatively more settled life—though not having a permanent habitat—than that of the hunting-gathering groups. This explains the remains of stone-paved floors of huts at Bagor.

Now to the other interesting sites of Mahagara, and almost opposite to it—the site of Koldihwa—both located in the Belan valley in the Allahabad district of Uttar Pradesh. The site of Mahagara has an irregular oval shape measuring over 8,000 sq.m. Within this area, particularly notable is a section measuring 1,622 sq.m., from where remains of 20 huts have been recovered. Though the superstructure of these huts do not exist any longer because of perishable materials, the floors and post-holes speak of the existence of huts. At the eastern fringe of the site have been found 20 post-holes of varying diameters (ranging from 10 to 15 cm.), distributed over a rectangular area (12.5 m. × 7.5 m.). The entire area looks like an enclosure; this assumption

gains firm ground as the area has yielded clear hoof-marks of animals. In other words, the area enclosed by 20 post-holes was a cattle-pen. The cattle-pen was located in a stretch of land, which was closest to the approach of the river. This further indicates that the choice of the site of the cattle-pen was a deliberate one, as it was conducive to the grazing of the cattle close to a source of water. It is quite clear that the cattle-keeping pursuits of the people of Mahagara endowed them with a greater security of livelihood. The huts at the site undoubtedly speak of a quasi-permanent habitat of the cattle-keepers. The site of Koldihwa has yielded, along with microliths, handmade and cord-impressed pottery. The use of pottery certainly points to the requirement of the storage of food, the supply and procurement of which must have been facilitated by domestication of animals. According to G.R. Sharma—the excavator at Koldihwa—the pottery contains husk of rice. Archaeobotanical examination of the husk points that the rice was not wild but of the cultivated variety. Sharma and his colleagues have dated the specimens of these cultivated variety of paddy on the basis of C14 tests to seventh or sixth millennium BC. The excavators claim that this is the earliest known evidence of the cultivation of rice, not only in the subcontinent, but in the entire world. Though the findings have been approvingly used by Irfan Habib in his Presidential Address to Indian History Congress (1982), he himself now doubts the antiquity of the specimen of rice from Koldihwa excavations, as several archaeologists consider this to be too high an overdating. Even if the claim for the earliest evidence of paddy cultivation from Koldihwa is disputed, it is quite clear that the Mesolithic period saw significant changes—the introduction of pastoralism gave a greater security to material life and facilitated quasi-permanent settlements; the period also witnessed technological advancements in the form of microliths. Better livelihood probably paved the way for decorating the burials of the deceased with grave-goods, including bone ornaments.

V

The stage is now set for a general survey of the Neolithic cultures in the subcontinent. The term Neolithic period literally denotes the new stone age, distinct from the old (palaeo) and middle (meso) stone ages. The period under review was initially considered distinct, as it brought about further advancement in stone tool technology, leading to the use of sharper, smoother and finer stone tools than those of the previous times. It was V. Gordon Childe, who saw with the coming of the Neolithic period, vast and sweeping social changes, the most important being the beginning of farming in Syria and Palestine, variously called 'the most Ancient East' and 'the Fertile Crescent'. The beginning of domestication of plants and regular agriculture is traceable in the archeological records from sites like Tell Mureybit (in the middle Euphrates valley in Syria), Abu Hureyra (Syria), Beidha and Jericho

(Jordan), Karimshahar, Shanidar and Tepe Asiab (in Iran), Halaf, Hassuna Samara and Ubaid (in Iraq). The foundation of agriculture as the mainstay of life brought unprecedented security and steadiness to material life to those groups which practised it. Human societies began to transform from hunting-gathering to food-collecting and finally, to food-producing stages, though not in a uniform and unilinear manner, but with considerable diversity. In many cases, the domestication of animals and plants are mutually related and not opposed to each other. A sound understanding of the available wild plants and animals is a precondition for the beginning of agriculture. It has been argued by experts that density of population and ecological changes since the beginning of the Holocene compelled human societies to tap the subsistence potentials inherent in plants and animals so that these would become useful for human beings in a sustainable manner. Once certain cereal-yielding plants, especially wheat and barley were domesticated, then, over several centuries, the improvements of agrarian techniques further facilitated the generation of excess agrarian products. This excess agrarian production could then be used to sustain the non-agrarian and non food-producing social groups, like the specialist craftsman, the merchant, the ruler and the administrator and the professional soldier. The advent and development of agriculture holds crucial clue to the emergence and consolidation of complex and stratified society. As land assumes the most important social wealth in an agricultural society, the possession and control over land ultimately decided upon social and political pre-eminence, particularly since the Bronze Age. The advent of agriculture is instrumental in the long run in breaking up the relatively simpler and less sharply differentiated societies of the pastoral and hunting-gathering groups. This is the reason why Gordon Childe considered the Neolithic period as a 'revolution', thereby highlighting the enormity of changes triggered by the new developments. It should be pointed here that Childe's overemphasis on diffusion to explain changes in human cultures and societies has met with sharp criticism from many recent archaeologists and anthropologists.

In the Indian subcontinent too, the Neolithic phase brought in extremely significant changes since the seventh millennium BC. While the term Neolithic generally connotes an age unacquainted with metal technology, the greater part of the subcontinent began to experience copper and bronze technologies along with the stone tools. The simultaneous use of stone and metal (non-iron) tools in the context of the subcontinent renders the history of this period a distinctiveness. The phase therefore was termed as Neolithic-chalcolithic by Bridget Allchin and Raymond Allchin, the term chalcolithic denoting a culture acquainted with the use of both stone and copper/bronze tools. It is true that while Neolithic-chalcolithic sites were pretty common over greater parts of the subcontinent, some areas—notably the western part of Pakistan, Kashmir valley and some parts of south India showed the existence of what may be called 'pure' Neolithic cultures, as sites in these

areas did not yield any evidence of the use of copper/ bronze technology. The discovery of new sites and the re-examination of the available archaeological data have naturally resulted in changing the perspectives of the Neolithic-chalcolithic period in Indian history. Considerable regional variations in the Neolithic-chalcolithic cultures have attracted the attention of archaeologists. The following brief survey starts with the oldest Neolithic site in the subcontinent, namely Mehrgarh in Pakistan, followed by the flowering of farming communities in the Indus basin. This sets the stage for the study of the Harappan civilization, the largest of the Bronze Age civilizations, which saw the first urban development in the subcontinent. The contemporary Neolithic and Neolithic-chalcolithic cultures of Kashmir, the Ganga valley and eastern India and the peninsular India will also be taken up in this survey. We shall begin with the site of Mehrgarh and then examine the succeeding cultures in the Indus basin. This will be followed by a discussion of the mature Harappan civilization, and finally, the survey of the Neolithic-chalcolithic cultures in the Ganga valley, eastern India and peninsular India.

Mehrgarh

The discovery of Mehrgarh in Kachi district of Baluchistan province in Pakistan by French archaeologists, especially Jarrige (1977) has been an event of momentous significance for the understanding of the subcontinent's history. A Neolithic deposit of 10 m. was found out at Mehrgarh, immediately showing a very long occupation of the site since the seventh millennium BC, if not as early as 7000 BC. The very prolonged occupation at the site cannot but point to the sedentary nature of the settlers, the bulk of whom therefore, must have been farmers. Otherwise, the protracted occuaption at Mehrgarh cannot be explained. The site has yielded indisputable evidence of crop production.

The earliest occupation at Mehrgarh goes back to the phase 7000–5000 BC. From this phase come remains and impressions of the two-row hulled barley (Hordeum distichum), six-rowed barley (Hordeum vulgare and H. vulgare var. nudum), einkorn wheat (Triticum monococcum), emmer wheat (Triticum dicoccum) and bread wheat (Triticum durum/aestivum). These securely dated data on grains leave little room for doubt that the Mehrgarh people were not only agriculturists, but capable of generating diversified and developed cereals. Moreover, querns, mortars and grinding stones attest to the availability of crops grown at Mehrgarh. An integral part of the farming lifestyle at Mehrgarh was certainly the domestication of animals. This will be evident from the bones of humped oxen, goat and sheep. Some bones of wild animals with cut marks suggest that the earliest settlers at Mehrgarh continued to practise some hunting, though it dwindled with the consolidation of a farming economy. Another firm indicator of the sedentary life at Mehrgarh is evident from the remains of dwelling houses.

These residential structures were made of sun-dried bricks of a regular size and consisted of small rooms with assigned places for fire. Neolithic tools like chipped stone blades and bone tools speak of the principal crafts at Mehrgarh. This phase at Mehrgarh is aceramic, i.e., without pottery. Ornament-making had already entered the lifestyle there even at the initial stage of settlement; ornaments like beads of steatite and bangle of conch-shells appear on skeletons in burials. Two points emerge from this. First, the conch-shell was not a local product. The use of this non-local material for ornament-making may speak of some exchange-related activities in exotic objects, possibly of ritual significance. The custom of burying the dead with grave-goods not only hints at the belief in life after death, but is a marker of the relative prosperity of some persons in the society. A farming community is generally more complex with social differentiations than a pastoral and hunting-gathering group. Such social differentiations are often manifested in burial practices and rituals.

Mehrgarh's further advancements in material culture are writ large in the finds from the subsequent phase II, ascribed to 5000–4000 BC. Considerable developments took place in agriculture. This will be borne out by impressions of varieties of wheat and barley recovered from this phase. But more significant is the discovery of a large structure from where clear impressions of large number of grains of barley and wheat were found. One particular compartment in that structure also contained two sickles in excellent condition; the sickles had three bladelets hafted in a slanted manner in bitumen. These sickles or sickle blades are the earliest known harvesting tools in the subcontinent, an undoubted commentary on the improved agrarian technology at Mehrgarh II. The structure is certainly larger than an ordinary residential one and therefore has been identified as a granary. This is also the earliest known structure for storing grains—a forerunner of a granary—in the subcontinent. The construction of the granary speaks of a system of storage of grains, which were produced much in excess of the immediately required quantity. It is also a marker of a complex socio-political organization, which oversaw the collection and storage in and possibly the distribution of the stored grains from a non-residential (and therefore a 'public') structure. The construction of impressive structures may also suggest the availability of a labouring force. Outside the granary building lies a fireplace, containing several hundred charred grains. Among these were found remains of cotton seeds (Gossypium species), datable to 4000 BC. The people of Mehrgarh were perhaps the earliest to have cultivated cotton for its oil or for its fibrous properties or both. The earlier notion that the Harappans in the third millennium BC were the earliest growers of cotton, therefore, needs to be corrected in the light of this evidence of cotton cultivation from the fifth-fourth millennium Mehrgarh. The farmers of Mehrgarh must be credited for growing both cereals and non-edible crops. There are also significant developments in the crafts scenario. For the first

time at Mehrgarh pottery appeared: Mehrgarh II onwards, the site enters its ceramic phase. The first pots were indeed crude and handmade, with basket marks. These were made by putting a lump of clay one upon another in a basket smeared with asphalt or bitumen, the basket obviously being used as some sort of mould. At the very end of Mehrgarh II (4000 BC) emerged the first wheel-turned pottery, the technology probably having arrived from West Asia, where the wheel technology had appeared about 5000 BC. This phase has also brought to light what is termed as a craftsman's grave. A man was buried with a sophisticated Neolithic axe, three core tools of flint, nine geometric flint microliths and 16 chipped blades. The ornament-making craft continued unabated: beads of turquoise, lapis lazuli, carnelian and shells were manufactured and used as grave-goods. Most of these raw materials, especially lapis lazuli are non-local; it is likely that these were procured as exotic and precious items through some exchange network. Mehrgarh, though essentially a sedentary agricultural society, was gradually becoming more complex than a rural settlement.

Growing complexities are visible in the social and cultural life at Mehrgarh III (4300–3800 BC). Mehrgarh grew during this phase four varieties of wheat, barley and oat. The most important craft was indeed that of the potter. The Mehrgarh III ceramic tradition is fully wheel-thrown in monochrome and bichrome styles. Pottery of this phase is found strewn over an area of 75 hectares: this surely speaks of a remarkable expansion of the site. The pottery appears to have been mass produced. This is the phase when Mehrgarh experienced regular metal technology. Though copper slag had already been noticed in its phase II, copper smelting became common in period III. However, the extraction of copper from the copper ore is a difficult process, although it certainly speaks of advancement in smelting technology. As only a small quantity of copper is available from a relatively large quantity of copper ore, the continuity in the use of stone tools at Mehrgarh III is only natural. The sustained making of beads (of lapis lazuli, carnelian and turquoise) cannot escape our notice, especially in the light of the debitage of raw materials at what may be called local factory sites. Period IV at Mehrgarh (around 3500 BC) is marked by dwelling houses with small, low doors and open spaces. This period for the first time yields elegant polychrome pottery with geometric designs in red, white and black, surely an evidence of the considerable development in pottery-making. One also cannot miss the proliferation of terracotta female figurines, which were likely to have been mother goddess images, related to fertility cult. Mehrgarh IV is also noted for the advent of seals made of terracotta and bone. This is another marker of change—a seal is generally an administrative mechanism, associated with the function of authenticating or approving some acts. Seen from this light, the seals from Mehrgarh IV may indicate the presence of some kind of administrative authority. Though the nature of the authority cannot be ascertained, it shows that Mehrgarh was becoming increasingly complex

from an erstwhile farming settlement. Periods V and VI at Mehrgarh point to its interactions with areas in the Indo-Iranian borderland. It continued as a mass production centre of potteries and terracotta figurines. Just before 2500 BC, Mehrgarh became integrated to what Rafiq Mughal considers the 'Early Harappan' culture and then the site was abandoned. The antiquity of Neolithic culture in the subcontinent has been pushed back to the seventh millennium BC by the startling discovery of Mehrgarh. The remarkable site of Mehrgarh thus demonstrates continuous habitation and presents the evidence of the changing contours of the settlement. Mehrgarh clearly shows how the ground was getting ready for the emergence and efflorescence of the mature Harappan civilization from 2600 BC.

Early Harappan

Mehrgarh, though the pre-eminent Neolithic site of the north-western part of the subcontinent, is however not an isolated instance of the emergence of a Neolithic farming community. There are several other Neolithic-chalcolithic sites in the region, albeit none is comparable to Mehrgarh in terms of complexity and extent of the settlement. A case in point is Kili Gul Mohammed in the Quetta area in Pakistan, the antiquity of the site going back to the fourth millennium BC. Originally a Neolithic settlement, the site soon became acquainted with copper technology and subsistence farming. Similar sites flourished at Damb Sadat, Damb Buthi, Kot Diji, Kulli, Mehi, Amri, Nal and Nundara (all in Pakistan). These sites have yielded their distinct pottery traditions, but all share the commonalty of an initially crude, handmade pottery graduating to a wheel-thrown ceramic tradition. In spite of their distinctive decorative designs on the pottery, these Neolithic-chalcolithic potteries show a preference for stylized representational motifs (including leaves, birds and animals) on the outer surface of the wares; these potteries were also decorated with excellent geometric motifs (straight, curved, parallel, diagonal and circular lines), showing the capability of the craftsmen to delineate abstract ornamental designs. The use of copper began to spread in course of time at most of these sites; this will be evident from the manufacturing of copper weapons, copper fish-hooks and copper mirror, the last item certainly intended for extra-utilitarian purposes. The copper mirror is likely to have been used by the more affluent members of the society. Towards the close of the third millennium BC, these sites also experienced a considerable proliferation of terracotta figurines, mostly female forms. These were probably associated with the cult of the mother goddess whose importance in farming communities can hardly be overemphasized. Like Mehrgarh, these sites too yielded terracotta seals, which speak of the presence of some administrative mechanism and organization. A large number of Neolithic-chalcolithic sites have now become known in the

Cholistan desert, the Bahawalpur district and Jalilpur in Pakistan, largely due to the efforts of Rafiq Mughal.

The chief significance of the discovery of these sites lies in the better understanding of the process of the emergence and consolidation of a complex urban society and culture in the Indus plains in the third millennium BC. These Neolithic-chalcolithic settlements were precursors to the mature Harappan civilization.

The landmark development of the Bronze Age is of course the first urban civilization in Indian subcontinent, variously called as the Indus Valley Civilization, the Indus Civilization and the Harappan Civilization. The Neolithic-chalcolithic cultures of north-western India were earlier branded as pre-Harappan. Following Rafiq Mughal, Kenoyer, Meadow and Iqbal, the preferred labelling of these cultures now is early Harappan. The new terminology speaks of the changing perspectives of archaeologists. In recent decades, South Asian archaeologists attach less importance to the concept of diffusion for the explanation of the rise of urban civilization in India in the third millennium BC. A diffusionist position, often taking the cue from Gordon Childe, recognizes that the idea of civilization diffuses from one particular centre or region to faraway places, thereby often overlooking the possibilities of indigenous factors behind significant historical changes in a given area. Of late, greater reliance is placed on the processual model, current among anthropologists in North America who often stress on local formations, and not diffusions, as holding crucial clues to the understanding of complex, urban and state societies of pre-modern times. By preferring the label 'early Harappan' to 'pre-Harappan', many leading archaeologists imply that the 'mature' Harappan civilization grew out of the local situations in north-western part of the subcontinent as a continuous process. The point is driven home especially with the recent excavations by Kenoyer and Meadow at Harappa itself (situated on the banks of a now dried up channel of the river Ravi) where clear evidence of an increasingly complex society prior to the advent of the mature Harappan civilization has been unearthed.

In this context, the site of Kot Diji, about 50 km. to the east of Mohenjodaro, demands our attention. Kot Diji is marked by a massive defensive wall made of mud brick (upper course) and limestone rubble (lower course). The defence system was possibly necessary to ward off the calamity of a flood or an incursion from elsewhere or for both the purposes. Within the walled area, excavators discovered an occupation deposit as thick as 5 m., surely indicative of a prolonged occupation of the site. This, in its turn, further suggests the regular presence of farmers at Kot Diji. Stone blade industry is quite prominent, some blades bearing a sickle like gloss; the latter therefore clearly speaks of agricultural practices. The prevalence of agriculture among the Kot Diji settlers will further be evident from stone querns and pestles. Wheel-thrown pottery, decorated with plain bands of dark or brownish

paint, has been reported. Bichrome pottery with cream slip and red/sepia/black painted design is another characteristic ware from Kot Diji. Some of the decorative designs on the pottery have some affinity with the more evolved ones on the mature Harappan wares of the subsequent times. Kot Diji bears tell-tale marks of two massive conflagarations (dated respectively around 2750 BC and 2520 BC) after which the excavators noted the onset of Harappan culture. According to the Allchins, one cannot rule out the 'suggestion of violent overthrow and conquest' during the transformation from early to mature Harappan culture.

Recent excavations at Harappa by Kenoyer and Meadow, taking the cue from Mughal's fundamental researches on 'incipient urbanism', show two distinct phases of developments at the site of Harappa in the fourth millennium BC. In 1996, excavations revealed what are known as the Ravi and Kot Diji phases of occupation at Harappa. The two phases are datable respectively to 3300–2800 BC and 2800–2600 BC. The settlement at Harappa during the Ravi phase marks Period 1. The settlement covered the northern edge of the present mound AB and north-west corner of the mound E. The earliest habitational structures at this site consisted of huts, which had wooden posts and walls of plastered reeds. The huts were constructed with both north-south and east-west orientations. The Ravi phase at Harappa has not yet yielded a complete mud-brick structure. Earliest potteries from this phase are entirely handmade with a variety of decorations. Towards the very end of the Ravi phase (Period 1b) appeared for the first time wheel-turned pottery, which certainly points to the introduction of the potter's wheel—a marker of significant changes.

Noticeable changes of far-reaching consequences occurred at the succeeding Kot Diji phase at Harappa. Already known since the 1996 excavations, the Kot Diji phase settlement at Harappa is now better understood after the horizontal excavations were undertaken there during 1998–2000. The growth of the settlement is unmistakable: it measures 25 hectares; this cannot but suggest increasing population at the site. Appreciable diversities in crafts productions have been recorded. Not only wheel-turned pottery tradition is fully established during the Kot Diji phase, but these are given a red slip and decorated with black painted designs. Ceramic decorations range from horizontal bands to geometric and floral motifs; peepal leaf and fish motifs also appear on potteries. Such motifs as these would become common and regular on potteries of the mature Harappan civilization. This phase also marks the use of copper and gold, the latter obviously for non-utilitarian purposes. Bead-making was a major aspect of the crafts economy; beads of glazed steatite particularly speak of the advancement and specialization in bead manufacturing technology. Large number of bangles have also been discovered, including those made of shells, a non-local item. Marine shells were possibly procured from littoral areas, which lay at a distance of 860 km. from Harappa. In other

words, one notes the presence of exotic items that were likely to have been required by the better-off residents of the site. The possibility of growing exchange network looms large in the light of the appearance of inscribed seals and standardized weights in the Kot Diji phase at Harappa. Inscribed seals and standardized weights were among the hallmarks of the mature Harappan urban milieu since 2600 BC. Harappa in its Kot Diji phase, had therefore, experienced these features two centuries ahead of the mature Harappan culture. Excavations reveal early attempts at a planned layout of the settlement: first traces of streets with both north-south and east-west orientations are visible at this phase. For the first time, the settlement had a perimeter wall of mud bricks; large mud-brick platforms also appeared in the Kot Diji phase. Harappa as a settlement assumes a greater complexity than a mere rural area; it is indeed marked by incipient features of urbanism during the early Harappan stage. Excavators have noted that mud-bricks at Harappa during the Kot Diji phase were manufactured, following a distinct ratio of the breadth, width and length of the brick (1 : 2 : 4). Such a ratio as this would become standardized in the mature Harappan civilization. There is little doubt that Harappa during its crucial two centuries of the Kot Diji phase (2800–2600 BC) signalled the advent of a complex social and political organization, though the exact nature of the polity cannot be ascertained. The elaboration of a social hierarchy will be evident from the diverse types and sizes of buildings constructed during the early Harappan phase. The incipient urban society not only comprised specialist craftsmen and merchants, but also accommodated agriculturists, pastoralists, hunters and fisherfolk. Thus, Harappa during the Kot Diji phase seems to have emerged as a regional centre that integrated its immediate hinterland with distant resource-gathering zones.

VI

Mature Harappan Civilization (2600–1800 BC)

The study of this civilization, since its discovery in 1922, has become so large and complex that it may be considered to have developed into a distinct discipline within the rubric of South Asian studies. It is well-known that the discovery of Mohenjodaro (in modern Pakistan) by Rakhaldas Banerji led to a major change in the study of South Asia's past. Not only the remains of a third millennium BC culture were discovered, thereby pushing the antiquity of Indic culture beyond the Vedic age, but the possibilities of urbanity in South Asian cultural ethos were recognized, which has been invariably associated with a seemingly changeless ruralism. The earliest known urban society in the subcontinent is one of the three great Bronze Age civilizations, the others being the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian civilizations. With the discovery of many new sites, especially since the 1960s, the historiography

Map 1.1: The Harappan Civilization Zone

of this civilization rarely remains static, and new insights are constantly being added to the existing information. The changing nomenclatures of this civilization are one indicator of the changing perspectives of historians/archaeologists.

As the two best and earliest known sites, Mohenjodaro and Harappa are located in the Indus valley (now in Pakistan), the civilization was first named as the Indus Valley Civilization by Marshall, a nomenclature though dated, still continues in many text books and books for general readers. The discovery of several sites sharing the typical features of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, but not confined to the Indus valley, led to a slight but significant shift in the nomenclature: the Indus Civilization, coined by Wheeler. In such labelling one may discern a recognition that the earliest

Indian civilization was, like its Egyptian and the Mesopotamian counterparts, also a riverine civilization. Many more sites have been unearthed since 1950 in both India and Pakistan, covering a very large area. There is a marked preference among recent scholars for the label, Harappan Civilization, to other previous nomenclatures. The reasons for this are that the extent of the civilization spreads far beyond the Indus valley, and that it should better be named after the first type site Harappa. Harappa in fact was visited in the second half of the nineteenth century by Sir Alexander Cunningham. He was aware of the seals found from the site, but did not pay adequate attention to these, as his primary interests and priority lay with Buddhist monuments. Harappa was also the first site to be excavated (by Dayaram Sahni), at the time when Rakhaldas Banerji found out the ruins of Mohenjodaro. In spite of the wide acceptability and currency of the label Harappan civilization, another nomenclature was coined in the late 1980s. The label is Sarasvatī-Sindhu civilization. The name Sarasvatī figures in the *Rigveda* as a sacred and a seagoing river. Whether it was really a mighty sea-going river has been contested by several historians, who consider the Sarasvatī nothing more than a seasonal river within the Indus basin. The remains of the once-mighty Sarasvatī are suggested to have been found in the dried up channels of the Hakra or the eastern Nara rivers. It is true that many settlements of the Harappan times have been discovered in the vicinity of the dried-up channels of the Hakra, Ghaggar and Chautang.

Suraj Bhan, on the other hand, doubted whether the proliferation of sites in the Ghaggar-Hakra valley implied that it was the core region of the civilization. Romila Thapar argues that the crucial point in using a nomenclature for a particular culture should not be merely the number of sites in an area, but the nature of sites. The sites in the north-western part of the subcontinent, especially in the Bolan area, strongly bear out the gradual changes from the pre-urban to the urban phase and offer more widespread and sustained evidence of the evolution of an urban culture than the cluster of sites in the Ghaggar-Hakra valley. In the coinage of the nomenclature Sarasvatī-Sindhu civilization, many historians and archaeologists further suspect an attempt at imposing a 'Vedic complexion' on the pre-Vedic Harappan civilization. At the present state of our knowledge, the label Harappan civilization remains the most acceptable, satisfactory and effective description of the mature Harappan civilization that will now be taken up for a discussion.

The geographical extent of the Harappan civilization covers a huge area. The northernmost site is Manda in Jammu, though the northernmost outpost of the civilization is situated at Shortughai in the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan. The civilization never penetrated beyond the sub-Himalayan foothills. Its westernmost limits are marked by the Makran coast in Baluchistan, where stand two sites, Suktagen Dor and Sotka Koh. The easternmost site is Alamgirpur, lying to the east of Delhi. Several Harappan sites have been located in the present Haryana, but not in the Ganga valley.

In the south, Rangpur in Gujarat, or even Daimabad in Maharashtra (230 km north of Mumbai), has been considered as the southernmost extent of the Harappan civilization. In the 1960s and 1980s, new lights were thrown after the discovery of sites in Gujarat, including the Kutch area (especially Dholavira). The area thus covered is nearly 700,000 sq. km. or half a million square miles. The Harappan civilization was undoubtedly the largest in extent among the Bronze Age civilizations. Most of the sites are urban in nature, consisting very large cities and smaller towns. From the configuration of cities, an estimate of population has been suggested, ranging between one million to five million. Of this, the total urban population is suggested to have been 250,000 of which the residents at Mohenjodaro and Harappa—two premier centres—counted together approximately 150,000. Habib cites that during the nineteenth century de-urbanization in India, the rural population was nine times higher than the urban one. On this count, he estimates that in the third millennium BC, the rural population would have been more than fifteen times and, therefore, estimates the total population of the Harappan civilization at 4,000,000. According to him, the density of population was likely to have been six persons per square km.

Harappan Economic and Social Life

There is little dispute that the economic and social life of an urban culture would be much more complex than that in the rural areas. Though the city is usually populated by craftsmen, professionals, merchants, administrators and religious personalities, the city must have had a secure supply of food, since the bulk of the population in the city did not grow food. But for a strong agricultural economy, the Harappan towns and cities could not have existed. The Harappans grew a wide variety of crops: wheat, barley, pulses, lentils, linseed, mustard, bajra, ragi, jowar, sesame and cotton. Remains of rice have been found only from Rangpur and Lothal, both in Gujarat. It is not clear whether paddy cultivation in Harappan Gujarat was a regular feature or it emerged only during the late Harappan times (after 1800 BC). The diversity of crops is truly impressive: it covered both kharif (seeds sown in monsoon and reaped in autumn—e.g. rice, bajra, cotton and sesame) and rabi (seeds sown in winter, harvesting in spring/ early summer: wheat, pulses, barley mustard, etc) crops. It is likely that cultivation was facilitated by the possibility of higher rainfall during the Harappan times than the current rainfall. This is indicated by the evidence of a long wet phase (5510-2230 BC) on the basis of Gurdeep Singh's pollen grain analysis from the Rajasthan lakes. The Harappan civilization has a distinctive feature in the widespread use of wells, which helped access water from underground. Flood water in the Indus basin seems to have been utilized by what is known as inundation irrigation. Scholars generally agree that the traditional system of bunding water in the stream by blocking it with large boulders

(*gabarband*) in lower Indus valley and Baluchistan was also prevalent during the Harappan times. The familiarity of the Harappans with plough cultivation is conclusively proved by the discovery of terracotta models of plough from Banawali (Haryana) and Jawaiwala (Bahawalpur). That plough had arrived at Kalibangan in Rajasthan even before the mature Harappan phase, is demonstrated by a ploughed field from a 'pre-Harappan' level. This agricultural field bears clear furrow marks, both vertically and horizontally. The system of simultaneous vertical and horizontal ploughing across the plot is still practised in Rajasthan to grow peas, sesame and mustard in the same field. It is possible that the same practice was prevalent to grow more than one crop in the third millennium BC.

That the Harappan civilization was capable of generating sufficient crops for its rural and urban population as well, is proved by the granaries at Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Both the granaries were located in the upper town or citadel of the two cities and were impressive brick-built structures. The structure at Harappa measures 9000 square feet, more or less of the same size as the one at Mohenjodaro. The granary at Harappa has two rows of platforms, each row having six platforms (50'×20'); in other words, there were twelve such platforms. The two rows of platforms are separated by a passage, 23' wide. Air ducts were provided with a view to keeping the grains dry and free from moisture. This granary was located close to the dried up channel of the river Ravi. It is likely that crops meant for storage was brought to the granary by the river.

To the south of the granary at Harappa stood a large platform with circular pits (diameter from 10' 9" to 10' 11"). Wheeler reported the discovery of hay, husk, wheat and barley grains from within these circular pits, which he interpreted as pits for threshing grains; the platform was therefore identified as a grain-pounding platform. To the immediate south of the pounding platform can be seen two rows of tenements. These are one-room or two-room dwellings, meant for the residence of people who are poorer than the residents of larger structures in the city. Wheeler identified these houses as coolie barracks, earmarked for workers employed for pounding grains close to the granary. According to Wheeler, there existed a granary complex rather than isolated and disjointed structures. Bridget Allchin and Raymond Allchin also consider that the granaries probably functioned as central banks where grains were collected as tributes or taxes. Recently, however, Kenoyer has contested the identification of the structure at Harappa as a granary as he doubts the existence of grains in the pounding platform. There is little room for doubt that the Harappan civilization was capable of generating profuse amount of crops, much in excess of the immediate need of the cultivators, to sustain the large urban population.

Intimately linked with the agrarian economy was animal breeding. Bones of cattle and oxen, both humped and humpless varieties have been found. The humped bull also figures regularly and prominently on Harappan seals.

The water buffalo appears on the seal, but no bones of the water buffalo has been discovered. Bones of sheep and goat point to their domestication. There has been some controversy whether the horse was known to and used by the Harappans. Some bones from Surkotada were identified with those of horses; this has been contradicted and these bones are of the wild ass (onager). In the late 1990s, N. Rajaram claimed to find a representation of the figure of a horse on a Harappan seal. Michael Witzel and Steve Fanner exposed that Rajaram's claim was a deplorable act of downright forgery on the figure of a unicorn on a Harappan seal, long ago published by Mackay, which was deliberately doctored in a computer to produce the image of a horse. There is little, if any, possibility of the prevalence of the horse during the Harappan times; it is difficult to find any concrete evidence of the horse prior to the emergence of the speakers of Indo-Aryan in the subcontinent. What is beyond any controversy is the existence of a large number of pastoralists who were active beyond the settled society of city dwellers and villagers.

Needless to elaborate, the hallmarks of the urban material milieu lie in the crafts production and commerce. The Harappan civilization belonged to the Bronze Age and also sustained the chalcolithic tradition, the onset of which have already been discussed in the context of the early Harappan farming communities. The Harappan craftsmen continued with the stone blade industry. Rorhi and Sukkur in the lower Indus valley seem to have been the principal source of the raw material, the grey flint or chert stone. Bridget and Raymond Allchin inform us of a possible working site of stone blades near Sukkur. The factory site is determined by the Allchins on the basis of the remains of the raw material, carefully prepared cores of excellent quality and finished, semi-finished and unfinished blades. Further, they also demonstrated in the factory site a cleared area where possibly the craftsman sat cross-legged amidst his raw materials, tools of production, prepared tools and debitage. No less significant are the locations of most of stone-blade 'factories' close to the Indus; the choice of sites close to the river seems to have facilitated the transportation of finished products by riverine crafts to Mohenjodaro and other places.

Major advancements in metallurgy are evident from the proliferation of bronze tools. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. Bronze was mostly used for making better knives, axes and chisels, though bronze utensils were also in vogue. The bronze mirror was certainly a luxury product. The use of copper tools also marks an appreciable increase from the previous times. Copper implements include weapons, tools of production and house-hold goods: razors, knives, chisels, fish-hooks, saws, chisels, axes (unsocketed) and sickles. It is reasonable to assume that those who used bronze and copper utensils besides fragile earthenwares, were affluent persons in cities. A clear testimony to the excellence of the brazier is borne out by the famous figure of the nude female dancer from Mohenjodaro. To this must be added

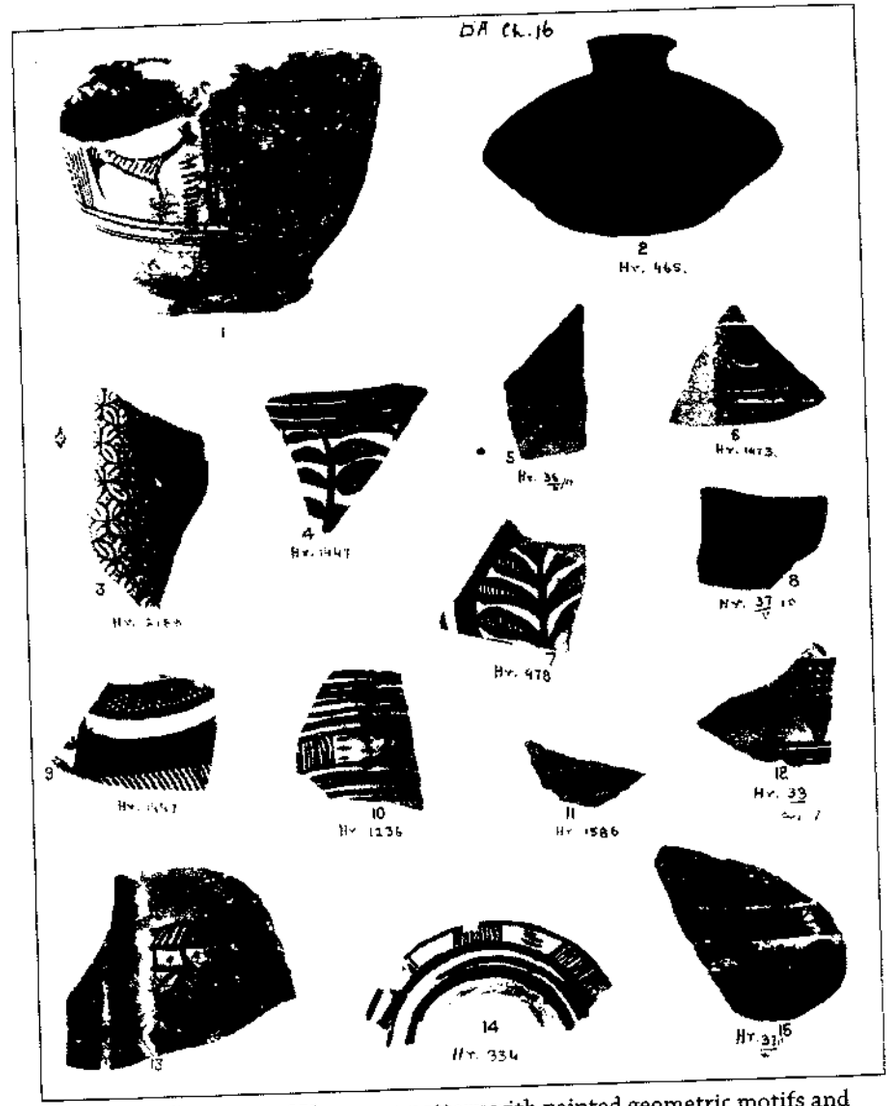


Fig. 1.1: Specimen of Harappan pottery with painted geometric motifs and figures of leaves and animals

the four bronze animal figures from Daimabad, assigned to 1760 BC by Sali: (1) a pair of yoked oxen pulling a chariot-like carriage, (2) an elephant, (3) a rhinoceros and (4) a buffalo. Superbly crafted, these bronze pieces are too heavy to be toys. It is difficult to ascertain what purpose these bronze images served.

A typical urban craft was that of the brick manufacturer. The manifold increase in the use of bricks, both mud and fired bricks, fits in well with the

image of burgeoning urbanism in the mature Harappan phase. Kilns for firing bricks are also known. This undoubtedly speaks of major advancement in brick-making technology. Fired bricks were specifically used for impressive public buildings, drains and residential structures of the rich, while the mud-brick was more prevalent for building common dwelling houses. What is striking is the maintenance of a distinct ratio of the breadth, width and length of the fired brick (7cm × 15cm × 28 cm, i.e. 1 : 2 : 4) over a vast area and for nearly seven centuries.

The cultivation of cotton plant was conducive to the textile industry during the mature Harappan times. The discovery of spindle whorls certainly speaks of textile production. Mohenjodaro has yielded minute fragments of dyed woven cloth; these are the earliest known evidence of the manufacture of cotton cloth in the world. The impressive trefoil motifs on the wrapper covering the image of the famous male figurine (usually labelled as the 'priest-king') point to the presence of embroiderers, who most likely had worked in close linkages with the textile workers.

One of the salient features of the mature Harappan crafts was bead-making, a craft that had appeared as early as Mehrgarh. The Harappan beads were made of gold, copper, shell, lapis lazuli, steatite, faience, ivory and a variety of semi-precious stones (crypto crystalline silica) like agate, jasper, chalcedony and carnelian. Etched carnelian beads are a typical Harappan craft-item. Archaeologists have identified bead-makers' shops on the basis of assemblages of unfinished objects. One such workshop was found out by R.S. Bisht at Banawali. It was a fairly large structure that had a hearth and many tiny weights for minute objects. The structure yielded many beads in finished, semi-finished and unfinished conditions. Most beads are of carnelian, but some gold and lapis lazuli pieces have also been observed. Bisht cogently identified the structure with a bead-maker's workshop.

No discussion on Harappan craft can be complete without referring to its pottery, which is profuse in number and diverse in nature. Pots were invariably wheel-turned. Most pieces have a thick wall, well-baked to red. The majority of the pieces are for utilitarian purposes: e.g. storage jars, cooking vessels, dishes and bowls, dish-on-stand, containers, strainers. Some pots and cups were given a red slip and decorative designs in both representational and non-representational motifs were painted in black. Special potteries were manufactured for funerary purpose. Kilns for firing pottery have been discovered. Harappan pottery was mass-produced with little preference for new and innovative shapes and designs. An innate conservatism, according to many archaeologists, permeates the mature Harappan pottery tradition. This survey underlines the rich variety, considerable specialization and technical excellence of Harappan craftsmen. Gordon Childe rightly considered the Harappan crafts 'technically the peer of the rest' among products of the Bronze Age. Concentration of craftsmen can be seen in large cities. Thus, Nayanjyot Lahiri considers Harappa as a

major centre of crafts operations. Chanhudaro was another such centre of crafts production and maintained close linkages with Harappa. Kalibangan in northern Rajasthan was particularly noted for the making of bangles, and in fact, so named because of the large number of black bangles found from there.

The movements of crafts and agricultural products in the extensive zone of the Harappan civilization required a complex commercial system and organization. The diverse crafts of the Harappans also needed communications over long-distances to procure raw materials, some of which were not locally available. Shereen Ratnagar has suggested that the Harappan long-distance trade was considerably prompted by the urge to procure raw materials. Copper, for instance, could have come from the Khetri mines in Rajasthan, but also from the Oman peninsula. Agate, chalcedony and carnelian were procured from Saurashtra and western India. The source of lapis lazuli is certainly the Badakhshan region in Afghanistan where, significantly enough, was situated the Harapan outpost of Shortughai. Wherefrom tin, an essential ingredient for bronze manufacturing, was procured, is uncertain. The most renowned source of tin is Southeast Asia, with which Harappans had little known and direct contacts. The only known source of gold in India is the Kolar gold-field in Karnataka; the other possible supply zone for gold could have been Afghanistan. Shell and chank, regularly used for making bangles and other ornaments, must have been brought from coastal areas of western India.

The extensive trade contacts of the Harappan civilization with areas beyond the subcontinent are evident from archaeological artifacts. The most significant evidence comes from the Harappan seals that were administrative and trade mechanisms. As early as 1923, C.J. Gadd drew our attention to about two dozens Harappan seals, or a close copy of these, found from Ur in Mesopotamia. One can safely infer not only contacts between the Indus and the Tigris-Euphrates valleys, but also a possible 'settlement' of Harappan merchants in Ur. Although the Harappan script is yet to be deciphered, Mesopotamian tablets in cuneiform script have been read, the latter throwing significant light on Harappan trade. These cuneiform tablets often refer to the arrival of ships from Meluhha, Magan and Tilmun/Dilmun at the port of Agade under the Akkadian ruler Sargon. Scholars are sharply divided in their proposed identifications of these places. However, most scholars tend to locate Meluhha in the lower Indus region. Magan was previously sought to be identified with the Makran coast in Baluchistan. But following Shereen Ratnagar, it is better be located in the Oman peninsula. Magan appears in Mesopotamian document as a region rich in copper, which is locally available in Oman. Ratnagar has also pointed to the availability of Harappan artifacts in the Oman peninsula. Tilmun/Dilmun, according to most archaeologists, corresponds to Bahrain island in the Persian Gulf. Romila Thapar's attempts to locate Magan and Tilmun/Dilmun within India were criticized by Govinda

Kutty and During Caspers. It is evidently clear that the Harappan civilization participated in a maritime trading network in the Persian Gulf. This further gains ground if one accepts the identification of a dock at Lothal in Gujarat, following S.R. Rao, whose position has been contradicted by Leshnik.

However, the discovery of button seals, typical of the Persian Gulf at Lothal, cannot but speak of the contacts with the Persian Gulf region. Two Harappan outstations in the Makran coast—Sutkagen Dor and Sotka Koh, are also likely to have played a role in the sea-borne communications and commerce. The Harappan maritime network will be further illustrated by the representation of water-crafts on seals. The major destination of this trade from coastal western India was Mesopotamia. Tosi has recently discussed a cuneiform tablet, which depicts a seated person who apparently was a chief or an administrator. On his lap is seen another seated figure of a short person. Further, two other male figures seem to have been engaged in conversation with the chief/ administrator. The accompanying legend in the seal speaks of a person named Su-ili-ssu who is described as an interpreter of Meluhhan language. Tosi suggests that the short person on the lap of the administrator was none other than Su-ili-ssu. The very mention of an interpreter of Meluhhan language certainly speaks of intimate contacts of the Mesopotamian ruler with Meluhha or the Indus valley.

A reading of Shereen Ratnagar may impress upon the significance of maritime commerce in the Harappan economy. This is a point contested by Dilip Chakrabarti, who highlights the external overland contacts of the Harappans. Sarianidi has discovered Harappan artifacts from Bactria (north-east Afghanistan) through which Harappan commerce could further have reached Iran. This possibility gains ground with the finds of Harappan items from Tepe Yahya and Shahr-i-Sokhta in Iran. From Susa in Iran has been found mature Harappan seals. Altyn Tepe in Turkmenistan has yielded three typical Harappan ivory pieces.

The impressive and far-flung commerce of the Harappan civilization was ably sustained by a uniform weights and measures system. The basic unit (1) of weight corresponds to 13.63 g., which went upwards on a binary pattern: 1, 2, 4, 10, 20, 40, etc. The heaviest weight is of 10.9 kg. The astonishing standardization of the weight system facilitated commercial transactions; it is also an index of growing urbanism. Closely tied to commercial networks is the issue of transportation. Harappan overland carriages can be inferred on the basis of model carts unearthed from sites. For transportation of goods two-wheel carts with broad frame were largely used. A four-wheeled cart with a spoon-shaped wooden frame was probably also in vogue. The third variety is something akin to *ikka* type vehicles, carrying two to four passengers. There is little possibility of the use of spoked wheel in the Harappan civilization, as the model carts were fitted with solid wheels. Cart ruts found at the early Harappan level measure 1.07 m.; this suggests only modest size of carts. Harappan water crafts (river vessels) have been

represented on seals, but no miniature model has so far been found. These vessels were made of timber, lashed by ropes and fitted with a central cabin.

Harappan Urban Layout

Among the major distinctive features of Harappan urbanism two points need underlining. First, there is a pattern in the urban layout, though the pattern is neither invariant nor rigid. Nevertheless, a pattern of urban layout is discernible; shifts from this pattern in the cases of individual sites will be taken into account. Second, there is clear hierarchy of urban centres. The prime examples of Harappan urbanism and urban planning are indeed Mohenjodaro (200 hectares) and Harappa (150 hectares) which had an estimated population of 85,000 and 65,000.

Harappan cities and towns generally have two distinct sectors: the upper city or citadel, raised on a massive man-made mound, and the lower town. The chief distinction between the two sectors is that while the upper town/ citadel has impressive public buildings, the lower town abounds in residential structures. The citadel is generally located in the western side of the city, while the lower city occupies the eastern, south-eastern part of the city. The citadel was usually rectangular, noticeable not only in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, but at Lothal and Kalibangan too. Typical examples of impressive public buildings in the citadel area include the Great Bath in Mohenjodaro, the granaries at Harappa and Mohenjodaro and the large assembly hall at

Fig. 1.2: Mohenjo-daro—SD Area drain with curved corner

Mohenjodaro. Large public buildings were usually constructed of fired bricks. The Great Bath consists of a rectangular tank (12m. × 7m. × 2.4m.) which was made waterproof by a 3 cm-layer of bitumen. The tank could be approached by two flights of staircases from opposite sides. Around the tank, there was a gallery with brick-paved colonnade. Several rooms adjoining the Bath were also built. The Great Bath was certainly meant for very elite people among the urban dwellers. Close to the Great Bath stood the very large structure of the granary; its similarity with the one at Harappa has already been noted. In the southern part of the citadel in Mohenjodaro stood a large pillared hall. Twenty pillars, arranged in four rows of five each are seen. Covering an area of 750 sq.m., this structure was not meant for residential purposes and expectedly, was situated in the citadel. The pillared hall was possibly meant for an assembly of persons during some ceremonial occasions. The citadel in Harappa had two gateways, in the north and the west, though the west gateway was subsequently blocked. The gateways, like the fortification walls, are typical features of an ancient urban centre. The fortification wall at Mohenjodaro was repaired on several occasions. Fortifications are also visible in the upper town at Dholavira (total area 60 hectares). Departures from the usual urban layout are visible at Dholavira. The entire city is divided into three (instead of the usual two) sectors: the upper city, middle city and lower city. In no other Harappan city this tripartite division of the city lay out is repeated. Behind the northern gateway of the Dholavira citadel was excavated a large tank (12.80m. in width) which was connected with a channel (24m. long). The middle town, like the citadel, at Dholavira was fortified. Kalibangan (11.5 hectares) shared with other major Harappan cities the system of dividing the urban area into the citadel and the lower town. But only at Kalibangan one finds that the citadel itself was divided into two sectors, the northern and southern ones: this is once again, a unique feature. At Lothal, the citadel stands not to the west of the main town, but to the south-east of the lower city. If one considers Lothal as a port-town, then its unusual lay out may be appreciated.

The lower town, as we have already said, was the main residential area of the Harappan city. Some houses in the lower city were large. At Mohenjodaro, there was a residential building occupying an area of 300 sq.m., with a courtyard around which were as many as 27 rooms. It was indeed a palatial structure belonging probably to an affluent person. Another large house in Mohenjodaro with a stairway was surely more than one-storeyed.

R.S. Bisht unearthed a residential structure in the lower town at Banawali. It had a sitting room paved with mud brick. As it yielded several seals, a few weights and a large number of jars—embedded in the house floor—Bisht considered it to be the residence of a wealthy merchant. This house also had a toilet with a wash basin placed at some height in a corner near a drain, which carried off waste water. In general, most residential houses in lower towns invariably had a courtyard around which were constructed living

rooms. An outstanding feature of Harappan urbanism was the elaborate drainage system and the use of water for washing and purification. The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro is a prime example. But no less interesting is the fact that in the lower town in Mohenjodaro, there were as many as 700 wells for nearly 2,000 residences. At Harappa however, one comes across fewer wells, but every dwelling there was provided with a latrine, clearly demonstrating the excellent civic hygiene arrangement. The elaborate drainage system in the Harappan cities is unparalleled in the then-material culture elsewhere, whether in India or other Bronze Age civilisations. Main drains were covered and connected with individual drains from houses. It speaks of the great achievement in municipal organization and maintenance of high standard of public health and hygiene. The lower town at Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan and Chanhudaro (4.7 hectares) also demonstrate the existence of main streets—usually running north-south- and smaller roads, lanes and alleys, which were usually oriented east-west. The lower city therefore often assumed a grid-like appearance and was divided into blocks. It is expected that much more data on urban layout will be available as and when the large site of Ganeriwala (80 hectares) will be excavated.

The Harappan urban lay out astonishes archaeologists because of the maintenance of a distinct urban order and impressive cultural commonalty over a very protracted period. The seeming cultural uniformity was however, not bereft of local features, which were active beneath the overarching Harappan system. This could have been achieved by an efficient economic system managing land, labour and water resources by an authority of an impressive kind, though the nature of this authority eludes our understanding. While Harappan cities lack monumental architecture (like the pyramid in Egypt) or clear evidence of pompous ceremonial/mortuary rituals (like the cemetery at Ur), the construction of large public buildings in the citadel area would nevertheless require the employment of a large labour force deployed by an authority that was capable of organizing and controlling labour. This is particularly relevant to the quarying, dressing and transporting of stones for building. Recent excavations in Gujarat show a remarkable spread of Harappan urbanism and proliferation of cities. This is a clear case of the Harappan urban tradition reaching out to distant areas towards the south from its core areas in the Indus basin and the north-western part of the subcontinent. The urban formation and the attendant social changes in Gujarat took place with an almost dramatic suddenness, as archaeologists observe. There is an opinion that the geographical spread of urbanism and considerable cultural commonalty over a wide area could have been the result of conquests. The image of a military conquest is, however, not consistent with the availability of relatively few weapons. That Mohenjodaro and Harappa were twin capitals of a large Harappan empire has been suggested by several archaeologists (notably by Piggott and the Allchins), but such a perception has not found unanimous acceptance. The

Harappan cities were also not like the subsequent autonomous city-states of early historical times (since sixth century BC): the analogy does not stand in the light of the very clear differences in the planning and layout of cities belonging respectively to the first and second urbanizations in Indian history. But the complex nature of the political organization can hardly be doubted. It was indeed far removed from and more complex than chiefdoms, which could have been prevalent in the farming communities. Material life in the chiefdoms is marked by the family labour and clan labour employed for cultivation. In other words, the possibility of the presence of non-kin labour is minimal in chiefdoms and farming communities. On the other hand, the very large and complex urban society could not have flourished without having access to non-kin labour. There is little dispute that the Harappan society was a sharply differentiated one. At the top of the social ladder were probably the priests or priests-rulers, if the analogy from West Asian situation is a guide. The urban society is likely to have accorded considerable eminence to merchants. Next can be considered the large number and variety of artisans, craftsmen and professionals. Much poorer than the above groups were the workers and manual labourers, whose small dwelling areas sharply contrast the residences of the better-off urbane community. Outside the city area, but of crucial significance to the city life, were rural residents, mainly cultivators. Beyond the pale of the sedentary society, there were many nomadic and pastoralist groups who supplied livestock and beasts of burden for the settled people. Maintaining a balance among the urbane, rural and pastoral groups may hold crucial clues to the urban process during the mature Harappan times.

Harappan Cultural Life

The Harappan civilization, besides witnessing the first cities in the subcontinent, also marks the first use of script and the earliest known use of stone as a medium for the art of sculpting. These two features, along with the Harappan religious beliefs and practices, are salient features of the cultural life of the Harappans. The Harappan script has not yet been deciphered despite many attempts and numerous claims. Most of the writings appear on the rather circumscribed space of seals. The largest Harappan inscription comes from Dholavira. As it has large-sized letters, it has been considered as a signboard. Harappan script was prevalent during the period 2600 to 2000/1900 BC. It is indeed one of the four most ancient scripts in the wold. There are about 4,000 short inscriptions on seals with five characters on an average on each seal. Latest researches by Asko Parpola and Iravatham Mahadevan have established that the script was written from right to left.

The Harappan script therefore, has little connection with Brāhmī, the mother of most of the current Indian scripts and which for the first time, surfaced in the edicts of Aśoka in the third century BC. There is little to prove

that the Harappan script was the earliest form of Brāhmī and meant for writing Sanskrit language, in spite of some recent attempts to paint this culture with a Vedic hue. A logical surmise would be that the language of the Harappan script was non-Sanskritic. Though all opinions on this vexed subject are largely conjectural, it is not entirely impossible that the Harappan language belonged to the Dravidian group of languages. That Dravidian languages could have been spoken and used to the north of the Vindhya mountains in hoary antiquity may be indicated by the survival of Brahui (belonging to the Dravidian group of languages) speech pocket in Baluchistan. Epigraphic and palaeographic studies have also indicated that the Harappan script was not merely ideograms: it consisted of both pictographs and ideographs. Hence the Harappan script has of late been labelled as logo-syllabic. As the script appears mostly on Harappan seals, it is safe to assume that the language and script had an official character and was prevalent among administrators, priests and merchants. The uniformity of this script over the vast area of Harappan civilization must have contributed to the cultural commonalty in the Harappan civilization. One may also logically infer that with the system of writing, the Harappans also engaged in what Childe termed as the 'exact sciences' in the first civilization. Enlisted in the exact sciences are mathematics, especially geometry and astronomy. Though it is difficult to specify on Harappan ideas and practices of mathematics and astronomy because of the paucity of written evidence, the construction of large public buildings cannot but speak of the Harappans' proficiency in surveying and geometry. Similarly, the unquestioned success of the Harappans in cultivating both rabi and kharif crops is an indirect statement of their understanding of climates, varying seasons and also possibly some basic astronomy.

The Harappan civilization is marked by the first stone sculpture in the subcontinent. Along with stone, terracotta was widely used for sculpting. The tradition of metal sculpting (in bronze) also began during the Harappan times. Though there is no monumental sculpture, the Harappan artists' mastery over the modelling of both human and animal figures is startling. The powerful modelling of the nude male torso brings out the artist's skill in delineating muscularity. This red sandstone piece, though only 9.3 cm in height, imparts the sense of a robust chest, rounded shoulders, a smooth back, with a pleasantly contrasting soft belly and a deep-set navel. Sockets provided for the head and two arms clearly show that these would be attached separately with the main figure and enabled movements of the head and two arms. While there is no known precedence of stone sculpting in the subcontinent prior to the Harappan times, this time the sculptor achieved a remarkably mature degree of imparting both plasticity and roundness of forms along with imparting a flowing linear rhythm in the compositions. The ability of the Harappan artists to impart movements in a human figure is amply borne out by the modelling of the famous Dancing Girl figure, especially in the bend of her left knee and the right arm in akimbo. A sense of

linear rhythm seems to have been heightened here by elongating her limbs. The feeling for a powerful form is perhaps best expressed in the bronze figure of the buffalo, elephant and the rhinoceros from Daimabad of the late Harappan phase. The physical strength of these animals is wonderfully portrayed along with the graceful roundness of forms. These bronze figures of animals and the famous figure of the Dancing Girl are all sculptures in full round and not relief sculptures-a point that further underlines the achievements of the Harappan artists.

More numerous than stone sculptures are terracotta figurines of females (goddesses), birds and beasts of various types. The modelling of the goddess images shows a continuity from the early Harappan tradition, but now with a greater degree of ornamentation. If the terracotta figure of the humpless bull strikes the onlooker with the compactness and muscularity of the form, the elephant figure is delineated with the sense of massiveness and yet with the flowing rhythm of the trunk. This contrasts nicely with the lightness of form in the case of the figures of flying birds. The ability of the artist to endow the animal figure with a sense of humour is perhaps best demonstrated in the toy figure of the monkey. The portrayal of animal figures on a restricted and compact space of a seal is another eloquent testimony to the competence of the Harappan artists in modelling the desired forms. Particularly notable is, once again, the bull figure on seals. The strength and virility of the animal are plainly visible in the modelling of its fore and hind limbs. The details of the arrangement of the dewlap in several meticulous layers or folds and the simple flowing length of the tail are clear examples of the mastery of the sculptor. The soft and prominent hump and the sharp crescent-like pair of horns enhance the aesthetic appeal of the bull-figure. Similarly, the plasticity of the heavy frame of the elephant, along with its flowing trunk and a pair of crescent-shaped tusks, give an impression of roundness of form in relief.

A salient aspect of the cultural life of Harappans was certainly their religious beliefs and practices. The Harappan civilization is remarkable for

Fig. 1.3: Seals with figures of unicorn, Mohenjodaro

its conspicuous absence of a temple or a large-scale religious shrine. Large number of terracotta female figurines have been found. These are usually described as mother goddess figurines and/or linked to fertility rites in view of their pronounced breasts and prominent hips. These figures are almost routinely decorated with an elaborate headdress. Designs of diverse ornaments, especially several strings of necklaces and a girdle, adorn these female figurines. The widespread presence of these figures has led archaeologists to infer that she was a household deity. Much attention has been paid to a male figure, seated cross-legged, ithyphallic, his two arms touching the pair of knees. The figure has a prominent and trident-shaped head-gear and is shown with at least three faces. Several animals are shown surrounding him. The most frequent identification of this figure is with a proto-Śiva deity, a precursor of the Paśupati (lord of the beasts) aspect of Śiva of the later brahmanical pantheon. The identification with Śiva or a proto-Śiva cult rests largely on the assumption of the yogic seated posture of the figure. The assumed identity of the head-gear with the *triśūla*, an implement associated with the iconography of Śiva in later texts, is another factor in this identification. The third point is the presence of animals around him, attempting to link the male figure with Śiva Paśupati. In recent times, the worship of such a male figure has been cited by some scholars as an evidence of the Vedic character of the Harappan religion. Contrary to this well-entrenched view, the identification of the male deity with a proto-Śiva cult has not gone unchallenged. The cross-legged seated position, it has been pointed out, has little relevance to a yogic posture, since similar posture is visible in the depiction of the hooved bull-deity on proto-Elamite seals belonging to the period 3000-2750 BC. The Harappan motif could have been drawn from the proto-Elamite sources. The term *paśu* in Sanskrit stands for domesticated cattle, while the animals shown on the Harappan seal are the tiger, elephant and rhinoceros—in other words, wild animals. This casts a doubt on the straightforward identification of the male deity with a proto-Śiva cult.

What is beyond any doubt and controversy is the Harappan tradition of venerating various animals. Many such animals figure on Harappan seals. Some animals are mythical ones, the best known instance in this case being the unicorn. The unicorn resembles a humpless bull with a single horn shown coming out of its forehead. The unicorn figure is invariably represented in the seal with a three-tiered manger in front of the animal. According to Iravatham Mahadevan, the bull (but never the cow) figures in as many as 95 seals; this may suggest that the bull was venerated by the Harappans. The custom of propitiating a real animal along with a mythical one can be seen here. Some figures of composite animals have also been found: e.g., the sculpture of a ram-bull-elephant from Mohenjodaro and the figure of a bull-elephant-tiger on a seal from Mohenjodaro. Another seal depicts a horned tiger covered by a female horned spirit. The Harappan belief system

certainly includes the veneration for the pipal tree (the Indian fig tree) and the pipal leaf. Pipal-leaf designs were commonly applied on pottery too. One seal portrays a pipal tree with prominent leaves along with a pair of unicorn heads. An elaborately carved seal from Mohenjodaro presents a deity in a pipal tree with a fish sign and a large markhor goat. A kneeling human figure to the right of the deity probably represents the worshipper. At the bottom of the seal, seven women (suggested as seven priestesses) are shown standing in a queue. Some scenes on the seal may have some parallel to Mesopotamian mythology. Similarly, the male figure grappling with a pair of tigers reminds one of the Gilgamesh motif. A horned deity with the legs and the tail of a bull closely resembles Enkidu of the Gilgamesh epic. The *svastika*-like cross symbol mark as an auspicious symbol also figures in some seals.

The well-known alabaster male figure from Mohenjodaro shows the bust with one shoulder covered by a shawl-like wrapper, decorated with trefoil designs. The man is portrayed with a half-shaven face and a fillet around his head. That the figure belonged to an aristocrat is generally accepted. The half-closed eyes, suggesting that the person was meditating, are taken to mean that the person was a priest or a priest-king.

The existence of the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro, the profusion of wells in Harappan cities in general and the regular presence of baths in residential houses cannot but impress upon the importance of water for purification and ablution. The remains of a few oval structures containing ash were found at Kalibangan. These structures were made on a series of high brick platforms constructed in the citadel area. A well and bathing places also stood close by. The Allchins suggest that 'this complex must represent a civic ritual centre where animal sacrifice, ritual ablution and some sort of fire ritual featured'. However, this cannot establish that Harappans worshipped fire and there is little basis to indicate the prevalence of the cult of Agni (fire god) and the cult of sacrifices (*yajña*) of the *Rigveda* during the Harappan times, as has been erroneously claimed in recent times by some scholars.

The principal method of the disposal of the dead in the Harappan civilization was burial. Cemeteries have been found at Harappa (two cemeteries R37 and H), Lothal and Kalibangan. The general practice was the fully extended burial with the head to the north and the body lying on its back. Grave goods, consisting of potteries and sometimes of ornaments, were also deposited. At Harappa, traces of a coffin burial with reed shrouds have been reported. Sometimes graves took the shape of brick chambers or cists, as one would encounter such a practice at Kalibangan. Lothal has yielded the evidence of the queer practice of a burial and a double burial, the latter consisting of skeletons of a male and female in a single grave, side by side. Pit burials were also practised: this custom required deposition of bones of the deceased in special pits. A special type of pottery seems to have been associated with the burial rites at the cemetery H (late Harappan) at Harappa.

Decline and End of the Harappan Civilization

Radiocarbon data, presented by D.P. Agrawal, show that the mature Harappan civilization came to an end around 1750 BC after a protracted existence since 2600 BC. The possible explanations of the decline and end of the civilization have created major debates among experts. Pointing to the several repairs of the city wall at Mohenjodaro and finding traces of mud in the wall, Dales and Raikes suggested that the city was devastated by repeated flood of the Indus, on which the city stood. It is possible that the city of Mohenjodaro could have been threatened by floods. But the flood theory for the decay of the civilization has been criticized on the ground of insufficient data and flood(s) unlikely to have caused havoc for the entire civilization.

On the other hand, the role of major environment changes has been highlighted as a potent cause behind the disappearance of the flourishing civilization. Studies of the palaeo-climate suggest that the long-lasting wet phase in the Near-East and South Asia came to an end around 2200 BC. This brought about increasing aridity, which was hardly congenial to the agrarian milieu of the Harappan civilization. To this natural phenomenon can be added man-made situations further aggravating the problem. The regular use of burnt bricks for buildings in urban centres necessitated the availability of fuel, which was provided largely by the existing forest and vegetation cover. The steady tree-felling over several centuries could have ultimately paved the way for a drier and more arid climate and lessened the moisture-retention capacity of the soil. The possible desiccation could have threatened the agrarian foundation of the civilization. Long ago, Wheeler noted that even before its actual desertion, Mohenjodaro was gradually wearing out of its landscape. Scholars have also drawn our attention to the shrinkage of the thriving commerce between the Harappan civilization and Mesopotamia after 1900 BC. Trade was indeed a vital ingredient to the sustenance of the urban society of the Harappans. A slump in long-distance trade could not only have adverse effects on commerce, but also on the crafts economy. The desertion of Harappan cities may speak of the declining relevance of cities as centres of artisanal and commercial functions. Archaeologists have noted that Mohenjodaro, during its last phase, bore the tell-tale marks of a waning civic standard (e.g., use of old bricks for construction) and resembled a slum. In view of the decline in long-distance trade, the resources of urban centres could have been adversely affected. Wheeler inferred a period of troubles in the very last phase of Mohenjodaro and pointed to the possibility of a massacre of the city-people on the basis of skeletons left haphazard

in the streets of Mohenjodaro without proper burial. The skeletons also bore injury marks. Wheeler then proceeded to conjecture a major external incursion, which finally sealed the fate of Mohenjodaro.

By citing the Rigvedic hymns on the destruction of *purs* by Indra, he accused the 'Aryans' and Indra especially of destroying the last remnants of Mohenjodaro. His hypothesis of an Aryan invasion has been strongly critiqued and it is difficult to find sufficient evidence of the wrecking of the Harappan cities by the Indo-Europeans/ Indo-Aryans. The term *pur* in the *Rigveda* hardly refers to large fortified urban settlements. These problems have been discussed in greater details in the following chapter. The theory of a massacre at the last phase of Mohenjodaro has few takers nowadays in view of the paucity of data. A monocausal explanation of the collapse of the Harappan civilization is neither logical nor adequate. The fall, like the emergence and growth of the civilization, was the result of the combination of different factors active in different regions of the extensive Harappan cultural zone. What is beyond doubt is that urban centres faded out around 1800-1750 BC. Along with the cities, seals and script disappeared from the cultural scenario. Cities would reappear after nearly a millennium in the subcontinent, but largely in the context of the Ganga valley.

VII

Neolithic/Chalcolithic Cultures in Other Areas of the Subcontinent

The Harappan civilization, the most extensive of the Bronze Age civilizations, saw urban centres in the western and north-western part of the subcontinent. This does not mean that the greater parts of the subcontinent experienced urban society, economy and culture. Outside the zone of Harappan civilization, there were several Neolithic/Chalcolithic cultures, which were contemporary to the Harappan civilization and continued with their distinctive regional features during the heydays and after the end of Harappan urbanism as well. These cultures did not experience urban life. In other words, urban centres disappeared in India with the collapse of the Harappan civilization, but there was no major crisis in human societies in a pan-Indian context. A brief survey of these non-urban Neoltithic/chalcolthic cultures should be in order here.

At the site of Harappa, emerged a distinctly new culture, labelled as Cemetery H culture. It is so named after the burial culture at the site. The people associated with the Cemetery H culture built a settlement over the ruins of the former structures in the acropolis of Harappa. The structures are poor in comparison to the mature Harappan ones. The pottery tradition is clearly different from the Harappan one—the fabric of the Cemetery H pottery is thinner and finer than the erstwhile Harappan ware; the former is noted for its dark red tone. The burial custom also marks a departure

from the Harappan tradition; at the initial phase of the Cemetery H, the body orientation in the grave is different from the mature phase, and in the later phase, only fractional burials are seen. The change in the burial practice and the attendant change in the ceramic tradition may suggest shifts in the belief system during the post 1750 BC phase. As many as 50 sites with cultural features typical of the Cemetery H are reported from the Bahawalpur district, which had, during the mature Harappan phase, a total of 174 sites. This may indicate a contraction of settlements. Needless to add, the use of seals and writing is nowhere to be encountered in the Cemetery H culture. More or less, a similar cultural pattern is seen in Punjab and Haryana of India, known as the late Harappan culture. Hulas in Saharanpur district is an interesting site, yielding barley, gram, lentils, oat (rabi crops) and rice, jowar, ragi and cotton (kharif crops). But no baked brick structure, typical feature of an urbane settlement, is found there. At Bhagwanpur in

Map 1.2: Neolithic-Chalcolithic Cultures (4000–c.1500 BC) Major Sites

Haryana, one comes across burials within the habitation area of the site; this is a marked departure from the Harappan system of the disposal of the dead in the cemetery outside the residential area.

Kashmir experienced during this time what is known as the northern Neolithic culture. The two representative Kashmiri sites are Burzahom and Gufkral. The earlier Neolithic phase (2800-2500 BC) is aceramic. The later part of the Neolithic period witnessed the introduction of pottery. The earliest pottery was, as expected, hand-made, with impressions of mat and cord, which must have been used as some kind of mould. Subsequently, there emerged painted pottery. Ground stone tools are also seen. Domestication of cattle, sheep, goats, buffaloes, pigs and dogs is evident from the bones of these animals. But hunting was not given up and it continued side by side. A hunting scene depicts the killing of a stag by two men, one with a bow and arrow and the other with a spear. The use of these two hunting implements by the people of Burzahom is, therefore, confirmed by the pictorial depiction. It is only in the late Neolithic phase that agriculture made its first appearance. This is visible from the remains of rice and a harvesting knife. The Kashmir Neolithic is conspicuous by the absence of copper technology that was used in many other areas of the subcontinent. The other distinctive feature of this culture is the pit-dwelling tradition, in the place of constructed houses for habitation. The disposal of the dead was done by exposing the dead body; the left out bones were then gathered and buried with the application of red ochre. The application of the red ochre possibly suggests the belief in life after death. Burzahom has yielded skulls with holes made into them, not accidentally, but by design. This method is called trephining. It may indicate the first known attempt at brain surgery in India, though it is impossible to assess the effects of this curative process on the patient.

Taking a broad overview of the chalcolithic cultures between 2500 BC and 1500 BC, one discerns the cultivation of diverse crops in the subcontinent. Rice production is encountered at sites in western Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, western Uttar Pradesh, the plains in Punjab and Kacchi plains. Ragi or millet was grown in Gujarat, Maharashtra and South India. This coincided with the spread of copper technology over greater parts of the subcontinent. In the Ganga-Yamuna doab and upper Ganga valley (largely in western Uttar Pradesh) appeared a culture-marked by the use of Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) and copper tools. Copper use is also reported in the Banas culture of Rajasthan, where the locally available copper source (e.g. the copper deposit at Rajpur Dariba) must have been exploited (3000–2800 BC). From there, the use of copper technology probably spread to Kayatha culture (2400–1800 BC) in Madhya Pradesh. The copper appeared in Maharashtra in the Malwa culture (1800–1400 BC). It is likely that copper technology penetrated the peninsular parts of India through Maharashtra.

The most impressive finds of copper tools come from the 'copper hoards' in northeastern Rajasthan, western Uttar Pradesh, yielding various types

of weapons (swords, daggers) and ritual objects (e.g. the anthropomorphic figure). The copper hoard culture is closely associated with a new pottery tradition, which is termed as the Ochre Coloured Pottery or OCP. Typical representative sites of this culture are Jodhpura and Ganeshwar in Rajasthan and Atranjikhera (Uttar Pradesh) and Lal-Qila (in Delhi), datable to a period from 2800 in 1500 BC. At Sarpai and Atranjikhera, OCP occurs with the use of burnt bricks and mud-bricks as well. However, the use of burnt brick is a rarity in the copper hoard culture, which yielded very handful number of bronze items. Balathal in Rajasthan (3000–2000 BC) is a fortified enclosure of about 500 square m. The mud-wall here has an impressive width of nearly 5m. Residential structures and huts are of varied shapes and sizes. This may be indicative of the different status of the dweller in these structures; in other words, the difference in housing may be a marker of social differentiation. Rajasthan also witnessed the flowering of the Banas culture (3000–1300 BC) with two major sites, Ahar and Gilund. The typical pottery of this culture is the Black-and Red Ware (BRW) with white painted designs. While copper smelting and manufacturing of copper tools are seen in Ahar (possibly using copper in the Rajpur Dariba mines), Gilund has a flourishing stone industry. The adjacent region of western Madhya Pradesh is noted for the chalcolithic Kayastha culture (2400–2100 BC), which is associated with a distinctive pottery style. This takes us to what is known as Malwa culture, spreading as far east as Eran and Tripuri (near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh), and also distributed over Maharashtra in the Deccan. The distinctive ceramic tradition in the Malwa culture is a black-on-red ware with highly stylized paintings and geometric patterns decorating the pottery. One of the most characteristic wares is the channel spouted vessel, especially that recovered from Navdatoli.

A large number of excavated Neolithic sites are located in Karnataka, which probably had cultural linkages with the Neolithic-chalcolithic culture of Maharashtra. The representative sites are: Utnur, Kopgal, Kodekal, Pallavoy, Brahmagiri, Sanganakallu, Piklihal, Maski and Hallur. What is remarkable is the absence of any evidence of crop production in the southern Neolithic sites during the period from 3000 BC to 2100 BC. Charred grains of raggi and horse-gram appear during the phase 2100–1700 BC. This implies that the farming communities, which are closely connected with Neolithic culture, emerged rather late in the south. The southern Neolithic culture in the initial 1000 or 900 years, depended on domestication of animals, especially cattle-keeping. Raymond Allchin, therefore, aptly described them as the Neolithic cattle-keepers of south India. This is particularly demonstrated at Utnur, where the evidence of Neolithic cattle-pens and hoof-marks were discovered by Raymond Allchin. These cattle-keepers mostly herded the bos indicus. At Utnur, a huge accumulation of cow-dung was burnt that left clear evidence of a conflagaration. The cattle-pen and stockade at Utnur therefore had to be rebuilt. Why did the conflagaration take place—whether it was

by an accident or by design (to mark seasonal festivals?)—is difficult to ascertain. Tekkalakotta, Sanganakallu and Hallur have brought up remains of circular huts with hearths on the floor which was coated by mud. Large pots were buried in the ground up to its neck; these were used as storage jars. In the later phase of occupation at Tekkalakotta and Hallur can be seen horse gram and raggi. It is likely that agriculture was undertaken in tiny plots by terracing the hills. Among stone implements, mention may be made of stone blades in large number and ground stone axes. Small number of copper and bronze objects appear in the later phases of the southern Neolithic. What is significant is the availability of gold in Tekkalakotta; this provides us with an early evidence of gold mining. This is an area rich in mineral resources.

Large areas in eastern India also experienced Neolithic-chalcolithic settlements. That farming communities became well-entrenched in Bihar and West Bengal will be amply borne out by excavations at Chirand and Pandurajar Dhibi. From Chirand I (2100–1400 BC) charred grains of rice, wheat and barley have been found. Remains of huts made of wild reeds have been noticed. The presence of semi-precious stones suggests the prevalence of the craft of the bead-maker. The earliest potteries, as usual, are handmade; later wheel-turned wares became visible. Chirand in Bihar shares certain features with Pandurajar Dhibi in West Bengal. Prior to 2000 BC, the people at Pandurajar Dhibi (Period I) had already known rice cultivation and handmade pottery with cord impression. Paddy cultivation continued in Period II of Pandurajar Dhibi and the transformation from handmade to wheel-turned pottery also took place. The practice of rice cultivation in upper Assam is clearly borne out by the discovery of tools for pounding and grinding grains at Daojali Hading (north Kacchar Hills) and Sarutaru (Kamrup district). The Neolithic culture of Assam and farther North-east is likely to have had linkages with China, where rice was domesticated as early as 5000 BC. Thailand and Vietnam too experienced paddy cultivation and cord-impressed ware. The possibility that mainland South-east Asia could have influenced the culture of paddy cultivation in the north-eastern parts of the subcontinent cannot be ruled out.

The rapid survey and general overview that has been discussed, offer an outline of the salient features of human life from the earliest possible times to the middle of the second millennium BC. While north-western India and greater parts of the Ganga valley witnessed the emergence of a literate culture from 1500 BC, many features of the Neolithic-chalcolithic settlements continued in different parts of India till at least 500 BC. These changes are narrated in the chapters that follow.

Reading List

D.P. Agrawal, *The Archaeology of India*
Bridget and F.R. Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*
Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *India an Archaeological History*
———, *The External Trade of the Harappan Civilization*
———, *An Oxford Companion to Indian Archaeology*
V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself*
———, *What Happened in History*
———, *The Social Evolution*
A.H. Dani, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Pakistan*
Walter A. Fairservis, *The Roots of Ancient India*
A. Ghosh ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology* in two vols
S.P. Gupta and B.B. Lal eds., *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*
Irfan Habib, *Prehistory*
———, *The Indus Civilization*
J. F. Jarrige, 'Excavations at Mehrgarh: Their Significance for Understanding the Background of the Harappan Civilization', in G.L. Possehl ed., *Harappan Civilization, a Recent Perspective*
J.M. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Civilization*
B.B. Lal, *The Earliest Civilization of South Asia: Rise, Maturity and Decline*
Nayanjyot Lahiri ed., *The Decline and Fall of the Indus Civilization*
Richard Leaky, *The Origin of Mankind*
Iravatham Mahadevan, *The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables*
Asco Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script*
G.L. Possehl ed., *The Ancient Cities of the Indus*
———ed., *Harappan Civilization, a Recent Perspective*
Shereen Ratnagar, *Understanding Harappa*
———, *Trading encounters: from the Euphrates to the Indus in the Bronze Age*
H.D. Sankalia, *Pre and Protohistory of India and Pakistan*
B.K. Thapar, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in India*
B.K. Thapar and Rafiq Mughal, *'The Indus Valley', History of Humanity*, Vol. II
R.E.M. Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*
Website: www.harappa.com developed by J.M. Kenoyer, especially useful for superb slides and highly informative notes.

CHAPTER 2

India During the Days of the Vedic Corpus

(*c.*1500–600 BC)

Understanding the Vedic corpus—a vast and voluminous sacerdotal literature—is intimately linked up with the study of India's past in a remote antiquity for a variety of reasons. First, with the Vedic corpus, Indian society and culture enters its literary phase, a phenomenon of momentous significance. The Vedic corpus is the earliest literary tradition in Indian history, and the *Rigveda* is also the earliest literary creation in India, if not possibly the earliest in the entire range of Indo-European languages. The second reason for making a thorough acquaintance with the Vedic literature is that, the Vedic tradition is lauded to have contained in it the quintessential ethos of Indian social and cultural life. It has been claimed, especially during the last two decades, that the very roots of Indian civilization and culture are firmly embedded in the Vedic tradition—to the exclusion of all other elements—in an unbroken and homogenous continuum.

In other words, everything ranging from history, philosophy, mathematics to villages in India are seen to emanate from their Vedic sources which offer the images of the pristine situation that need to be emulated to retain and promote the Indian-ness. Such a view about the Vedic corpus and their bearing on the present scenario also implies the wish for perpetuity of the Vedic tradition and the advocacy of the immutability of Indian history and culture from remote antiquity. An assertion of this kind, increasingly becoming strident since the 1980s, therefore denies any possibility of change in Indian history. As history primarily records and explains changes in human society and culture, it naturally runs counter to this chauvinistic attitude to the Vedic literature, wherein a particular brand of scholars, linguists and historians wish to locate the epitome of all achievements and knowledge of the entire humanity. Put differently, understanding of the Vedic literature and its bearing on Indian history have generated in recent decades immense debates and controversy. The polemics relate to the

questions of the antiquity, authorship, spatial character of Vedic literature and the people figuring in it. No less contentious are the readings of the Vedic texts on social, economic, political and cultural condition in India. The debates have not been raging merely among scholarly circles, but have distinct political agenda. The present chapter attempts to introduce the Vedic corpus and its component elements; we would also like to offer an overview and the nature of the debates.

The *Rigveda*, the earliest of the Vedic texts, was composed in a language which was more archaic than the classical Sanskrit, the grammatical structure of the later Sanskrit language (*bhāshā*) being set by Pāṇini in his celebrated *Aṣṭhādhyāyī* (fifth-fourth centuries BC). The language of the *Rigveda*, therefore, carries the label of either Vedic Sanskrit or archaic Sanskrit. Here we are trying to understand a particular period in Indian history largely through language (field archaeological evidence is relatively less); language labels and linguistic issues are of special significance. Classical Sanskrit descended from its predecessor language encountered in the Vedic corpus.

As early as the late sixteenth century, an Italian merchant on his visit to Goa was struck by the similarity of Sanskrit and its derivatives with European languages like Greek, Latin and German. The first scholarly statement on the linguistic commonalty between Sanskrit and several European languages figured in the famous address of Sir William Jones at the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in 1784. Then followed the monumental study, editorial work and translations of the *Rigveda* and other Vedic texts in the hands of Friedrich Max Mueller and a large number of scholars later, many of whom were German, in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. These extremely valuable researches, especially in historical linguistics and comparative philology, not only made the Vedic corpus accessible to a wider world and readership beyond Sanskritists, but more importantly, established the commonalty among, and the ancestry of Sanskrit (and its derivatives), Iranian, Greek, Latin, German and Lithuanian. It was unmistakably discerned that the oldest Iranian text, the *Avesta* and the oldest Indian text, the *Rigveda*, had striking linguistic and cultural parallels. This led to the logical conclusion that there was a shared cultural heritage between the people in the *Avesta* and those in the *Rigveda*. The *Avesta* often refers to its known people as Airiia and the *Rigveda* uses an analogous label, Ārya. This is the basis from which the coined was widely used and much abused English/European word, the Aryan. On the basis of the demonstrated affinity among Sanskrit, Iranian, Latin, Greek, German and other European languages, linguists and comparative philologists have tried to reconstruct the original and common language family of hoary antiquity from which these languages of South Asia, South-West Asia, Eurasia and Europe descended. This is a purely reconstructed language, the currency of which cannot be evidenced by its being used and/or spoken. The reconstructed 'original' language is called

'Indo-European'; the language which must have been commonly shared by the ancestors of the Avestan and Rigvedic people is known as Indo-Iranian; the Vedic language, especially that in the *Ṛigveda*, carries the linguistic label, the Indo-Aryan.

There is little doubt that terms like Aryan, Indo-Aryan, Indo-Iranian and Indo-European are language labels and can never have any ethnic/racial connotation. Though this caveat exists right from the times of Max Mueller, the term 'Aryan' has been terribly abused to establish race superiority and cultural mastery of one imagined homogenous community over the perceived 'other' who are considered inferior and hence fit to be subordinated, if not wiped out. The 'Aryan' question which Romila Thapar rightly diagnoses as a nineteenth century concern, has continued to be used for gaining political mileage, for exercising cultural chauvinism and spreading the message of hatred and intolerance even in recent times. In short, looking for the 'Aryan(s)' is as much a linguistic and historical enquiry as much as it is a political programme.

II

Components of the Vedic Corpus

As our principal concern here is to present an overview of the subcontinent's situation in the days of the Vedic corpus, it will be logical to present here the principal components of Vedic literature. The unanimous and the uniformly held opinion is that the *Ṛigveda* is the earliest among the Vedic texts, as it shows a more archaic language than that in the rest of the corpus and also because many Rigvedic hymns are incorporated in other Vedic texts. The *Ṛigveda* is the earliest of the *Saṁhitās* (book of hymns); it, therefore, belongs to and is the only literary source of the early Vedic period. The rest of the Vedic corpus are all dated later than the *Ṛigveda* and hence labeled as the later Vedic texts, belonging to the later period. What we understand by the expression the Vedic age or the Vedic period has, therefore, two broad chronological segments: the early Vedic/Rigvedic and the later Vedic. The later Vedic texts include the three other Vedic *Saṁhitās*—the *Sām, Yajur* and *Atharva*. There are also a large number of *Brāhmaṇa* texts, related to explaining the Vedic *Saṁhitās* mainly for the performance of the rituals; the *Āraṇyaka* texts, which are replete with philosophical speculations of sages in forest tracts (*araṇya*) and finally the *Upanishads* or the philosophical tracts seeking to conceptualize and establish the unity and identity between the Self (*Ātman*) and the Ultimate Universal Being (*Brahman*).

The Vedic *Saṁhitās* are said to have been not created by human beings (*apaurusheya*), but were divine revelations, which were heard (*Śruti*) by seers and sages (*rishis*). As this was not a written textual rendering, it was essentially a oral literary tradition that was handed down from one

generation to another by a near perfect memorization of the hymns—almost syllable by syllable. The process of memorization of these 'Revealed' hymns is captured in the delightful frog hymn (*bhekastuti*) in the *Ṛigveda*. Students were to memorize the hymns by following the lead given by one, exactly in the manner as many frogs croak by imitating the first croaking frog during the monsoons. The actual reduction to writing of these Vedic *Saṁhitās* (especially the *Ṛigveda*) began much later. In early eleventh century, the celebrated Arab erudite al Biruni reported about the writing down of the Vedic texts. The most significant commentary on the *Ṛigveda* was composed by Sāyana as late as the fourteenth century in the Vijayanagara realm. But for Sāyanāchārya's commentaries, it would have been almost impossible for Max Muller to prepare the edited version of the *Ṛigveda* in the nineteenth century.

It is one of the most controversial issues to accurately date the Vedic corpus, especially the *Ṛigveda*. An absolute dating is almost out of the question and only relative chronology can be suggested. Max Muller's pioneering research suggested that the latest stratum of the Vedic corpus—the *Upanishads*—shared some philosophical traits with Buddhism, which is said to have originated around sixth to fifth centuries BC. This led him to believe that the latest stratum of the Vedic corpus was not far removed in date from the time of the origin of Buddhism in the sixth century BC. The *Upanishads* and the *Āraṇyakas* were thought to have been composed over at least two centuries and were therefore dated to a period from 800-600 BC. Allowing a similar span of two centuries for the three later *Saṁhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas* to grow, Max Muller assigned a date bracket of 1000-800 BC to these later Vedic texts. The earliest of the Vedic corpus, the *Ṛigveda*, was placed in the period from 1200 BC to 1000 BC. Max Muller's chronology of the Vedic corpus is sometimes considered to be too neat and schematic to have been a reality. We shall later come back to the problem of dating the Vedic corpus.

That the *Ṛigveda* is not a monolithic text and consists of several literary layers was demonstrated by Oldenberg, who has been followed by recent scholars like Michael Witzel. The *Ṛigveda* consists of 1028 hymns (*sūktas*) divided into ten books (*maṇḍalas*) of unequal sizes. The oldest section of the text is represented by *maṇḍalas* II-VII, which are generally called 'family books' after the name of the family or clan of poets who composed these hymns. Oldenberg found out that there was a distinct principle within the text for arranging the *maṇḍalas*. The *maṇḍalas* 'have been ordered according to the increasing number of hymns per book'. On the other hand, 'hymns within the book follows a descending order by arrangement, which relies on deities': first Agni, then Indra, then other gods. 'Within each collection the hymns are then arranged', Witzel remarks, 'according to the decreasing number of the stanzas per hymn'. This gave the contents of Books II-VII a clear homogeneity and a pristine character. Witzel aptly describes it as a

'clever system', effective in a 'scriptless society, ensuring that each hymn to be found immediately according to its author (family), deity and metre'. The next logical step would be to consider those hymns as additive and later compositions, which did not conform to the already established arrangement of the length of the hymns. Such hymns were likely to have been added to the *Rigveda* at a later date. Closely following the hymns in the Books II-VII are the hymns of *maṇḍalas* I (numbering 51–191, i.e. about 140 hymns), which were somewhat 'younger' than the former (i.e. Books II–VII). The next addition to the text took the form of Book VIII, where authors were more prominent than the metres for their arrangement: hymns numbering 1-66 are ascribed to Kāṇva and the rest to Angirasa. To this were added hymns of the *maṇḍala* I, numbering from 1 to 50. The entire *maṇḍala* IX was dedicated to Soma, the famous inebriating drink. The surest sign that it was a later addition will be evident from the fact that the entire *maṇḍala* was collected for the Samans, the priests of the *Sāmaveda* (later than the *Rigveda*) and therefore would have been quite irrelevant to the *Hotars* or the Rigvedic priests. The tenth *maṇḍala*, which has the largest number of hymns, clearly violates the arrangement noted by Oldenberg. Therefore it is universally regarded as an interpolation to the *Rigveda*. Witzel considers the *maṇḍala* X as 'the great appendix' of the *Rigveda*. F.B.J. Quiper perceives a period of five centuries of composition for the *Rigveda* to have assumed its present shape and appearance. Though hymns were added to the kernel (Books II-VII) of the *Rigveda*, the text was more or less retained intact and it remained relatively free from vast changes in spite of the fact that it was indeed oral literature. Witzel compares the recitation of the *Rigveda* with a tape recording of what was first composed and recited 3,000 years ago. On literary, linguistic and archaeological considerations, the *Rigveda's* composition is generally located in the second half of the second millennium BC. Thus, the *Rigveda* is dated by most modern scholars to 1500-1000 BC.

The *Sāmaveda* is certainly posterior to the *Rigveda* as the bulk of it consists of Rigvedic hymns put to tune. The *Sāmaveda* is in fact the earliest Indian text on music. The *Yajurveda* has two divisions, the White (*Śukla*) and the Black (*Kṛishṇa*). These are largely hymns, relating to the performance of rituals, particularly the sacrifices (*yajñas*). The *Atharvaveda* was not originally included within the four Vedic *Saṁhitās*. Even the *Arthaśāstra* recognized only three Vedic *Saṁhitās* (*Trayī*). The *Atharvaveda* was initially known as *Atharvāṅgirasa*, since it had two parts, the *Atharvan* and the *Āṅgirasa*. The possible reason for its initial exclusion from the list of Vedic *Saṁhitās* is that it was essentially a text on magic (both black magic and white magic), which as a belief system was not often compatible with the philosophy and religion of the three Vedic *Saṁhitās*. The *Atharvaveda* may contain many beliefs, which are pre-Vedic and 'primitive'. Its incorporation in the Vedic corpus, therefore, suggests that this text on magic was gradually given the sanctity

of a Vedic *Saṁhitā*. It may also suggest that the Vedic corpus gradually accommodated pre-Vedic rites and rituals.

The *Brāhmaṇas*, which are associated with the Vedic *Saṁhitās*, were compositions in prose. These were then created by human beings, unlike the Vedic *Saṁhitās* which was a Revealed literature. Further, the *Brāhmaṇas* were meant for offering explanations of the hymns of the *Saṁhitās*. Thus, the *Brāhmaṇa* texts must belong to a period later than that of the *Saṁhitās*. We have already pointed out that the *Upanishads* and possibly some of the *Āraṇyaka* texts belong to the latest stratum of the Vedic corpus (*Vedānta*). The *Vedangas*, literally limbs of Vedas, are generally ascribed to a period from fifth to the second century BC. Therefore, these should be placed to the post-Vedic phase, though such texts strongly upheld the Vedic tradition and heritage. The main purpose of the above account is to underline the fact that the Vedic corpus evolved over many centuries, almost for about a millennium. The literature therefore does not offer the image of an unchanging society and culture. Scholars have made us aware that there were identifiable changes in the polity, economy, society and cultural life of the Vedic people from the Rigvedic to the Later Vedic times. Though the Vedic literature essentially deals with religious life, rites, rituals and philosophical questions, the prayers offered to various divinities and the invocations to different gods often spoke of the mundane aspirations and wishes of contemporary human societies: e.g. victory in wars, long life, freedom from diseases, birth of a male child, availability of cattle, horses, food, etc. The Vedic corpus is indeed an invaluable and the most important source of information for the period under review (1500-500 BC).

III

Locating the Indo-European Speakers

The study of the Vedic literature and the language Indo-Aryan has been intertwined with the question of the ancestral or original homeland of the speakers of the Indo-Aryan and Indo-European languages. It is unfortunate that the accurate expressions like the 'speakers of the Indo-Aryan' and the 'speakers of the Indo-European' languages have often donned erroneous, but widely current, appellations—the Indo-Aryans and the Indo-Europeans. Such changes wrongly give the image that the terms Indo-European and Indo-Aryan stand for distinct ethnic or racial groups, while these are actually language labels and have nothing to do with ethnicity. As linguists have argued that there was a common and ancestral language (Indo-European, a reconstructed language) from which subsequently evolved Sanskrit, Iranian and several European languages, locating the earliest habitat of the speakers of Indo-European has been one of the most hotly debated issues among historians, linguists and archaeologists. This issue is also popularly known

as the 'Aryan problem', which is largely directed to locate the 'homeland' of the speakers of the Indo-European languages. This is not merely a scholarly debate. Closely connected with it are political issues and the claim for racial superiority and vain national glory. It is impossible to forget how the National Socialists under Hitler tried to implement the grotesque concept of the racial purity of the Aryans, the Aryans as the only founder of high-culture and the pure Nordic race in Germany as being the single community fit to rule the world. This was coupled with the inhuman Holocaust programme of Hitler. Even V. Gordon Childe, a great archaeologist and a famous Marxist thinker, wrote in his book *The Aryans* that the Aryans were 'fitted with exceptional mental endowments' and 'promoters of true progress'. It must however be stressed that he himself dismissed his own researches on the 'Aryan problem' as among the most childish things he wrote. Locating the homeland of the Indo-European speakers was, according to Romila Thapar, a concern of the nineteenth century historiography.

A Hungarian homeland of the speakers of Indo-European languages was proposed on the basis of the 'birch' theory, particularly highlighted in the chapter in *Cambridge History of India*, (vol. I) by Giles. The Proto-Indo-European word for birch tree is *bhergo*. It stands for the birch in Indic (*bhūrja*), Iranian (*barz*), Germanic (*birch*), Baltic (Latvian *berzs*) and Slavic (*bereza*). As the birch appears to have been commonly known to these later languages, it was believed that the speakers of the ancestral Indo-European inhabited an area, which abounded in birch trees. This led to the identification of the area in question with Hungarian plain. The birch theory was criticized and rejected by Brandenstein who pointed out that there were shifts in the meaning of the word *bhrego* which did not uniformly stand for the 'birch'. Thus, its meaning has been shifted in Italic where fraxinus refers to the ash. The word does not figure in Greek at all. Thus, the fundamental reason of locating the 'Aryan homeland' in a birch-growing area of Eastern Europe has been strongly critiqued. B.G. Tilak and Georg Biedenkapp proposed the Arctic homeland for the Indo-European speakers. This theory did not find many serious takers.

A few Indian scholars like Triveda, Kalla, Ganganath Jha and in more recent times, archaeologist B.B. Lal have argued for the homeland of the 'Aryans' in India, especially the north-western part of the subcontinent. The principal basis of this argument is that the *Rigveda* was the earliest literary creation in the entire family of Indo-European languages, and that the *Rigveda* was an Indian text. They have pointed to the linguistic commonalty between Rigvedic vocabulary on the one hand and Iranian and Latin, Greek and Germanic vocabularies on the other. It has been claimed that the Rigvedic Aryans spread from their original Indic homeland and reached Iran, from where they further spread to Central Asia and Europe. This theory was first expounded in the late nineteenth century, was strongly contested and then it has resurfaced in the late twentieth century. In the late nineteenth

century, the theory suggested that the Europeans (especially the British), the colonizers, and the Indians (the colonized) shared a homogenous and common ancestry. This suggestion found favour with the nationalist intellectuals who upheld the vision of a glorious past: the idea could have been used as a cultural defence in the days of the struggle against a colonial power. It also could have implied that the Indians, as the descendants of the 'Aryans', were also ethnically related to their European/ British political masters. There are a number of major difficulties in accepting this claim. First, in the *Rigveda* there are about 300 loan words of non-Indo-European origin, mostly from the Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic (Mundari) groups. The two language groups are not present beyond the Indian subcontinent. This suggests that there were other more ancient language groups in India prior to the emergence of Indo-Aryan. Most linguists, for instance S.K. Chatterjee, also hold that both Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian were older than Indo-European. Kuiper has drawn our attention to the fact that every language that entered the Indian subcontinent through the north-west, developed retroflex sounds (hard *ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, sh*). This is a feature typically associated with the Dravidian and the Austro-Asiatic languages. This feature is strongly present in the Vedic and Classical Sanskrit too, while retroflex sounds are not encountered in European languages like Latin, Greek. Had the Indo-European spread out north-westwards from an Indian homeland this feature should have been present in the present zone of Indo-European speech family. This is, however, not encountered any where else other than in India and in Indo-Aryan. There are also major chronological matters (to be taken up later), known from archeological sources, that render it almost impossible to consider India as the ancestral area of the speakers of Indo-European languages. One of the most recent and serious rebuttal of the 'out of India' theory of the autochthonist scholars has come from Michael Witzel.

Most of the specialists on Indo-European languages more or less agree that a broad division took place among the original speakers of Indo-European; this resulted in the emergence of Indo-Iranian in which can be seen many of the subsequent linguistic and cultural features associated with the Iranian *Avesta* and the Vedic corpus. A further division led to the separating of the Indo-Aryan in India from the Indo-Iranian. The firm archaeological evidence of the presence of this language comes from an inscription from Boghazkoi in Asia Minor; this cannot be dated prior to 1400 BC. Hugo Winckler's excavations at Bozhazkoi in 1906 unearthed a vast archive of 10,000 tablets. The inscription in question speaks of a treaty between the Mitanni king Mattiwaza and the Hittite ruler of West Asia who invoked a number of gods, including the four following names having remarkable affinity with Indic and Iranian divinities. These are: (1) In-da-ra (cf. Indra), (2) U-ru-wa-na or Wa-ru-na (cf. Varuna), (3) Na-sa-at-ti-ana (Nasatyas/Iranian Naonhaitya) and (4) Mithra (Iranian Mithra or the Sun god, often coupled in the *Rigveda* as Mitra-Varuna). The record is to be situated in the context of the rise of

the Mitannis over an extensive area from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Zagros mountain. This Mitanni expansion led to the conflicts with the Egyptian control of the Euphrates. The Boghazkoi archive has also yielded a tablet in Hittite language, dated to the fourteenth century BC, the purport of which is the training of chariot horses. Its author was Kikkuli, a Hurrian of the Mitanni kingdom. It refers to *navartanni wasnnasya*, meaning 'for nine turn of the course' (comparable with Sanskrit *navavartane vasanasya*). The document provides us with earliest known specimens of Indo-European numerals: *aika* (cf. Sanskrit *eka;* Ir. *aeva*) or one; *tera* (Sanskrit *Tri*) or three; *panza* (Sanskrit *pañcha*) or five; *satta* (Sanskrit *Sapta;* Ir. *Hapta*) or seven and *na* (Sanskrit *Nava*) or nine. The significant point to remember here is that the basic language of the Mitanni was non-Indo-European, but they were familiar with certain Indo-European vocabulary. Documents from Tell-el-Amarna in Egypt inform us of a ruler named Tusratta or Dusratta, which once again is comparable with Sanskrit Dasaratha. The Kassites of the Zagros region assumed control of the Babylonian region and they were familiar with a few deities whose names find comparisons with Indic names. These deities in the Kassite region were Shurias (Surya in Sanskrit) and Maruttas (Marut in Sanskrit).

In the cuneiform tablets and texts from Mesopotamia, no trace of Indic presence can be seen prior to eighteenth and seventeenth centuries BC. On the other hand, with the collapse of the Mitanni power in the thirteenth century BC, the presence of Indic vocabulary ends in South-western Asia. One cannot also miss that gods like Agni and Soma—among the foremost deities in the *Rigveda*—were conspicuous by their absence. The archaeological evidence presented above, negates the possibility of the west/ northwestwards spread of the Indic/Indo-Aryan language from a supposedly Indian homeland. The Kassites were not speakers of the Indo-European languages, although some names there had Indo-Aryan affinity. The Indo-Aryan element in West Asia appears to be more archaic than the Vedic/Rigvedic language and should therefore be considered as Proto-Indo-Aryan, distinguished from Vedic Sanskrit.

The presence of the Indic/Indo-European vocabulary in the non-Indo-European Mitanni area, on the other hand, suggests the arrival of a horse-riding people with a strongly nomadic orientation. William Brandenstein's pioneering researches pointed out that the earliest possible language of the Indo-European speakers (the Proto-Indo-European as it is nowadays called) was associated with a vast steppe land, away from the sea, where little sedentary agriculture was practised. Such an area was ideally located in the Ural/Kyrghizia area of Central Asia. The above archaeological evidence strongly speaks of a westward migration of the speakers of the Indo-European languages from the Central Asian steppe area. The obvious similarity between the *Rigveda* and the *Avesta* both in languages and also many contents cannot but point to the shared Indo-Iranian heritage. The

composition of the *Avesta* is generally placed in the middle of the second millennium BC. Apart from the linguistic commonalties between the *Avesta* and the *Rigveda*, the two texts also reveal that attributes of gods were reversed in the two texts. Thus, the *Devas* as divinities are venerated in the *Rigveda*, while they are strongly looked down upon as *Daeva* in the Avesta. Similarly, the *Asuras* are presented as demons in the *Rigveda* and as the enemies of the *Devas;* on the other hand, the highest God in the *Avesta* is *Ahura*. It will not be illogical to infer that at some point of their shared heritage and residence in West Asia, there was a dissension in the Indo-Iranian scenario. In view of the geographical proximity of Iran with the north-western borderland of Indian subcontinent, it is possible to suggest the migration of Indo-Aryan speakers into the subcontinent, following a dissension in Iran. This paved the way for the presence of the Rigvedic people in South Asia and the creation of the *Rigveda*, the antiquity of which is difficult to push beyond the middle of the second millennium BC. A crucial archaeological evidence in this context comes from the remains of horses. It needs to be repeated that the horse is inseparably associated with the Indo-European speakers and the speakers of Indo-Aryan; on the other hand, the mature Harappan civilization (2600–1750 BC) was unacquainted with this animal. The presence of the horse is revealed in Ghalighai IV (1800–1400 BC) in the Swat region of the North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan, and also in Pirak I (1600–1400 BC) and Pirak II (1300–800 BC) in the northern Baluchistan region of Pakistan. The dated evidence of the Boghazkoi tablet does not allow us to place the *Rigveda* anywhere earlier than 1400 BC. Even if one concedes that the Rigvedic language precedes the composition of the *Rigveda* it is difficult to claim an antiquity of that language much beyond the middle of the second millennium BC.

What has so far been presented and discussed does not find any concurrence with the recently asserted position that the authors of the *Rigveda* were the same as the Harappans. B.B. Lal, who has strongly upheld this view in some recent publications, shows that he has converted to this idea by controverting his own findings about the Harappan civilization in the 1960s and 70s. The data and analyses available in linguistics have been conveniently overlooked. But more surprising is the attempt to attribute the *Rigveda* to Harappan urbanism. The *Rigveda* shows little familiarity with urbanism. The term *pur* in the *Rigveda* cannot mean a fort or fortified area, as Wilhelm Rau has established; it stood for an enclosure of impermanent nature. It can never be equated with the fortified Harappan urban centres. The *Rigveda* also lacks data on the familiarity with a city-oriented lifestyle; large scale and complex exchange system; centres of large scale crafts production and writing system. To the Rigvedic people, terracotta figurines, ubiquitous in the Harappan civilization, are alien and there is little trace of the fertility cult, which once again is a hallmark of the belief system of the Harappan people.

It is therefore, not possible to uphold the view that the Indian subcontinent was the ancestral territory of the Indo-European speakers. The speakers of Indo-Aryan appear to have entered the subcontinent from Iran through the north-western borderland of the subcontinent sometime around or before the mid-second millennium BC. There are traceable myths in the *Avesta* alluding to migrations from Iran to the Indus area. The arrival of the Indo-Aryan speakers in the north-western part of the subcontinent seems to have taken place after the end of the Mature Harappan civilization. But this should not at all connote that there was an 'Aryan invasion' in India from Indo-Iranian borderlands, as was once supposed by Mortimer Wheeler. Combining the Rigvedic accounts of Indra as *purandara* (which he took in the sense of a destroyer of forts/ fortified urban centres) with what he presented as 'massacre' at the very last days of Mohenjodaro, Wheeler gave the famous verdict, 'on circumstantial evidence, Indra stands accused'. Wheeler's statement got wide publicity till the 1970s.

Sustained linguistic and archaeological researches of recent decades discard an 'Aryan invasion' hypothesis. Though urban settlements are not visible in the post-Harappan scenario (1500–600 BC), there is also no archaeological evidence of widespread disruptions of settlements and cultures in India with the advent of the Indo-Aryan speakers since 1500 BC. The appearance of the Indo-Aryan speakers, the people of the *Ṛigveda* in particular, took place more as a result of migration or a series of migrations. Scholars like B.B. Lal, who as a spearhead among the autochthonists favour the Indian homeland theory of the Indo-European/Indo-Aryan speakers, wrongly tends to equate two dissimilar processes, namely, migrations and invasions. As the *Ṛigveda* demonstrates, the material milieu of the Rigvedic times was rooted to cattle-keeping, and agriculture, though not unknown in the *Ṛigveda*, was secondary to pastoral pursuits. A close perusal of the *Ṛigveda*, the *Avesta* and some field archaeological evidence from the north-western extremes of the subcontinent indicates that the Indo-Aryan speakers migrated in search of pastures and some arable land, by following pre-existing pastoral circuits. One may once again look at the West Asian situation for a comparison. While in West Asia the military success of the Indo-European/Indo-Aryan speakers figure in the inscribed tablets, Indo-Aryan vocabularies had a precarious existence after a while. Romila Thapar rightly argues that conquest was not always the only mechanism for the spread of a language or what is called language change. Taking all contestant positions into account, it appears at the present state of our knowledge that the Indo-Aryan speakers of the *Ṛigveda* reached the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent in and around mid-second century BC, migrating from Iran, which they had reached previously from their ancestral area in the Central Asian steppes. This paved the way for the spread of the Indo-Aryan language first over greater parts of north India, and then subsequently to other parts of the subcontinent. It should be pointed out here that the earliest known written form of this language in India figures in the inscriptions of Maurya emperor Aśoka in the third century BC.

A perusal of the Vedic corpus to understand the nature of human life requires us to take into account the long range of chronology during which the Vedic literature took shape. While the *Ṛigveda* is dated to 1500–1000 BC, the later Vedic literature belongs to the period from 1000 BC to 600/500 BC. The Vedic corpus thus evolved almost over a millennium. No society can remain static during such a long span of time. The historical geography, polity, socio-economic condition and cultural life known from the Vedic corpus needs to be appreciated by thoroughly studying the changes that must have taken place from the Rigvedic (1500-1000 BC) to the later Vedic (1000–600/500 BC) times.

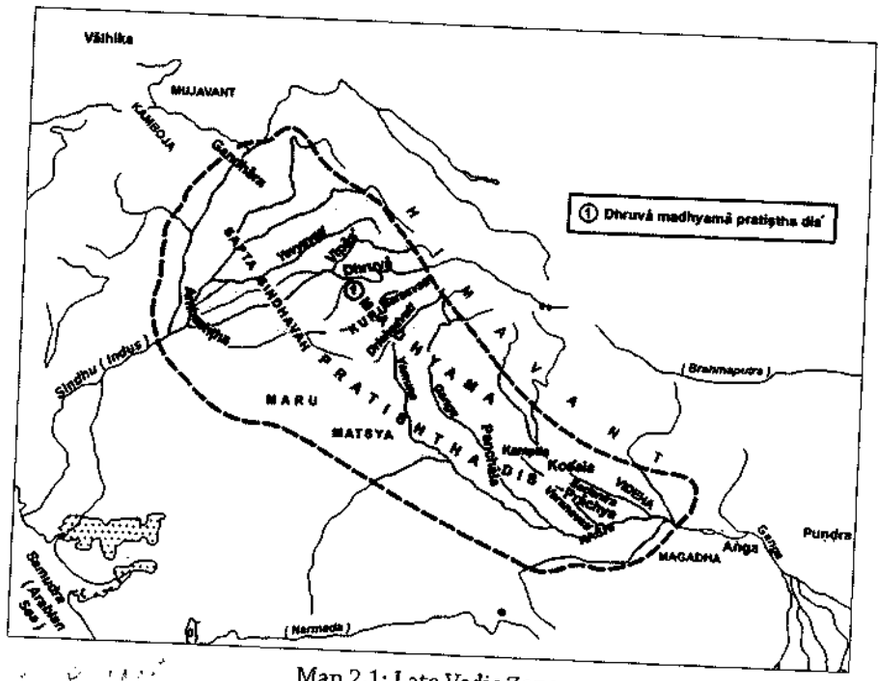
The scanty field archaeological information for this period, wherever available will be studied vis-à-vis the literary gleanings from the Vedic corpus; there is no written source information for this period.

IV

Historical Geography and Spread of Settlements

The beginning of our ancient knowledge of historical geography is traced from the *Ṛigveda*. The *Ṛigveda* offers excellent information about the rivers with which the Rigvedic poets were well-acquainted. The identification of these rivers on a modern map of the subcontinent helps understand the geographical zone of the Rigvedic people. The most important of these accounts is the famous hymn in praise of rivers (*Nadīstuti*), admittedly a late hymn (X.75). As it was composed at the last stage of the formation of the *Ṛigveda*, it is likely that the hymn offers a mature perception of the rivers and the areas they watered. The most celebrated river in the *Ṛigveda* was the Sindhu (modern Indus), hailed as the most excellent of all rivers (*ambitamā, naditamā*) since it reached the sea. While many western and eastern tributaries of the Indus figure in the *Ṛigveda*, there is no reference to the Oxus. Significantly enough, the Ganga and the Yamuna, the two premier streams in the heartland of north India, appear only once in the *Ṛigveda*, and that too in the *Nadīstuti*. This strongly suggests that the land watered by the rivers Ganga and the Yamuna was less known to the poets of the *Ṛigveda* than the Indus river system, about which the text shows a much more intimate familiarity.

Among the western tributaries of the river Indus were Harirud (Sarayu in Afghanistan), Sarasvati (Haraxvati in the *Avesta*, modern Arghandhab—Helmand rivers in Afghanistan), Rasa (Panjshir river?), Kubhā (Kabul), Krummu (Kurram), Suvāstu (Swat, the name implying that its banks were conducive to settlement) and Gomati (Gomal). Among the eastern tributaries of the Indus were the Vitastā (Jhelum), Asikni (Chenab—the



Map 2.1: Late Vedic Zone

Greek authors of the late centuries BC significantly called it Akesenis, which was clearly derived from the Rigvedic name Asiknī), Parushnī (Ravi, also known as the Irāvatī), Vipāś (Beas) and Śutudrī (Sutlej). The last mentioned one was certainly the easternmost tributary of the Indus. If the Sushoma and the Marudvṛidhā are identified respectively with the Soan and the Maruwardwan, then the *Ṛigveda* betrays familiarity with two rivers of ancient Kashmir too. A major controversy among scholars exists regarding the identification of the river Sarasvatī (different from the Haraxvati of the *Avesta*), which is said to have been an eastern tributary of the Indus to the east of the Sutlej. The Sarasvatī figures in the *Ṛigveda* as a mighty sea-going river. The Sarasvatī is now a lost river, which dried up long ago. It is possibly the same as the Sarsuti, which is however, not a mighty stream. The dry bed of the river seems to have connected those of the Ghaggar and the Hakra, the latter disappearing in the Bahawalpur desert. A literal acceptance of the Rigvedic account of the Sarasvatī has led many scholars to portray the Vedic Sarasvatī as a mighty river originating, like the Indus, in the Himalayas. It is also claimed that the Sarasvatī was simultaneously a tributary of the Indus and also a sea-going river. Some scholars consider that the Sarasvatī used to reach the Arabian Sea through the Rann of Kutch. This has been a topic of major contestations, especially from Irfan Habib, who points out on both hydrological and cartographical grounds that the modern Sarsuti, generally identified with the ancient Sarasvatī, is a rather small and insignificant river,

which originates not in the Himalayas but in the Siwalik mountains. Drawing on hydrographers' findings, Habib argues that a river amidst mountains, like the Sarsuti, hardly changes its courses. Judged from this angle, it is difficult to visualize the Sarasuti/Sarasvatī as a mighty sea-going river of the Rigvedic times. The *Ṛigveda* projects, according to Habib, a mythical river in the name of the Sarasvatī with which is inseparably associated the myth of the goddess of learning (Sarasvatī). If Rajesh Kochar is to be followed, then the Rigvedic Sarasvatī carried the memory of the Haraxvati in Afghanistan. At the present state of our knowledge, it will be difficult to view the principal settlement area of the *Ṛigveda* in what is claimed as the Indus-Sarasvatī system. What is beyond any doubt is that the Rigvedic geographical zone embraced considerable parts of Afghanistan, the NWFP of Pakistan, the Punjab of both India and Pakistan and the lower Indus valley.

The *Ṛigveda* speaks highly of Saptasindhava (cf. Haptahendu in the *Avesta*; Old Persian 'h' replacing the Vedic 'sa') or the land of the seven streams or rivers. This probably refers to the area watered by Indus river and its eastern tributaries. Thus, Saptasindhava, lauded as the divine land (*devanirmitadeśa*) in the *Ṛigveda*, appears to have denoted the Punjab.

In the later Vedic literature, a much greater familiarity with the Ganga plains, especially the Ganga-Yamuna doab, is unmistakable. The cradle of the Vedic culture was Brahmarshideśa or Brahmavartta, lying between the Sarasvati and the Drishadvatī (the Chautang). Brahmarshideśa thus closely corresponds to the present day Haryana in the Indo-Ganga divide. It is quite obvious that the most exalted habitat of the Rigvedic times had shifted eastwards from the Punjab to Haryana during the later Vedic times. The later Vedic texts offer less information about the western tributaries of the Indus, in conspicuous contrast to the Rigvedic account. The Mujavant mountains appear as a distant zone in the *Atharvaveda*. Aṅga (eastern Bihar), Magadha (southern Bihar) and Vaṅga (in the Ganga delta) have received scornful attitude from the later Vedic authors who viewed these areas as impure and far away from the heartland of the Vedic culture. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, one of the most important of the later Vedic texts, describes a journey by a brāhmaṇa named Māṭhava from the banks of the Sarasvatī to as far east as the Sadānīrā (literally a river with perennial water, identified with the Ghaghara); at the end of the journey he reached Videha (north Bihar). He is therefore known as Videgha Māṭhava. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* further narrates that Māṭhava carried with him the sacred fire god, Agni Vaisvanara. He stopped at the banks of the river Sadānīrā as the area to the east of the river was marshy and as yet untouched by Agni. The legend of Videgha Māṭhava's journey implies that the land as far east in northern Bihar was included within the later Vedic culture zone. The description that the *brāhmaṇa* carried Agni with him is interpreted by several scholars (notably Sharma and Thapar) as the indicator of the eastward expansion of the Vedic settlement by burning the thick forest cover in the Ganga valley.

The eastward spread of the Vedic culture from the Punjab has a direct relationship with the proliferation of sedentary agricultural settlements in the Ganga valley during the later Vedic times.

A reading of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* speaks of the widening of the geographical knowledge during the later Vedic period. For the first time, there emerged the concept of a five-fold division of India in that text: four divisions in the four cardinal directions (Udichīdiś, Dakshiṇādiś, Prāchīdiś and Pratichīdiś) and a central quarter (Dhruvāmadhyamāpratishṭhādiś). The central quarter was considered the land par excellence and designated as Śishṭadeśa (habitat of the noble people). H.C. Raychaudhuri located the zone, on the basis of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, stretching from Vinasana or Adarśana (near Kurukshetra in Haryana) to Kālakavana (near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh). This geographical designation later evolved into Madhyadeśa in the *Manusaṁhitā*. The later Vedic texts thus speak of the principal settlements of the Vedic people in the area now covered by the Indo-Ganga divide, the upper Ganga valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab (i.e. up to Allahabad in the east). More or less coeval with the later Vedic literature is the archaeological culture labeled as the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture (900–500 BC), so named after a particular Grey Ware, which is considered as the diagnostic pottery of the period.

R.S. Sharma has drawn our attention to the fact that out of the total number of 700 PGW (explored and excavated) sites, 287 are found in Haryana. The concentration of PGW sites in Haryana hardly escapes one's notice. This is also exactly the area of Brahmarshideśa/Brahmāvartta, hailed as the best of lands in the later Vedic texts. One has also to take note of the fewer number of PGW sites to the east of Allahabad. This once again corresponds to the impression of the later Vedic texts that the easternmost part of the central quarter (Dhruvāmadhyamāpratishṭhādiś) came up to Kālakavana close to present Allahabad.

V

Polity and Political Situation

Looking for data and/or impressions about political life in the Vedic corpus—and especially the *Ṛigveda*—an essentially religious and sacred literature, may appear futile and unrewarding. The Vedic texts are not, however, devoid of their political contents. The *Ṛigveda* is replete with prayers to deities who are expected to help humans to overcome their enemies; accounts of clashes also regularly figure in the *Ṛigveda*. The text in question retains the memory of a major battle, namely the battle of ten kings (*Dāśarajña*) against the Bharata chief Sudās. The battle of ten kings will be taken up for discussion subsequently. Though the Vedic literature does not offer any connected account of political events for nearly a millennium, the later Vedic texts

pay considerable attention to the performance of various rituals meant for aspirants' political control. The Vedic corpus was also aware of the role of popular assemblies. In short, images of polity and political situation are not entirely absent from the voluminous Vedic literature.

The *Ṛigveda* regularly acquaints us with terms like *gaṇa, jana* and *viś*, which all point to a group or collection of people. An even smaller or more primitive unit was *grāma*, which originally did not stand for its commonly accepted connotation of a village; *grāma* too denoted a combination, a group. R.S. Sharma's readings into the *Ṛigveda* indicates that the *grāma* denoted a band-like group, mainly of the semi-pastoralist group of unrelated families (*kulas*), the *kula* or family being the smallest unit. Above the *grāma* probably stood the *jana, gaṇa* and *viś*—generally taken to mean a clan or a tribe. Large number of references to *jana* and *viś* in the *Ṛigveda* convinced Sharma that the Rigvedic polity was largely oriented to clan or tribal organization. As many as 300 clans/tribes figure in the *Ṛigveda*, according to Witzel. Pre-eminent among them were a collection of five tribes, labelled in the *Ṛigveda* as *pañchajana* and *pañchakṛishṭi*. These were the Yadu, Turvaśa, Anu, Druhyu and Puru. Another clan or tribe, the Bharatas also steal the limelight in the *Ṛigveda* for their victories in war. Commonly associated with the accounts of clashes, skirmishes and battles are the narrations of the collections of war-booties, which consisted largely of cattle and horses. That the *Ṛigveda* used the term *gavishṭi* (literally, the search or desire for cattle or *go*) as a synonym for war fits in well with the predominantly cattle-keeping material culture of the Rigvedic times. References to frequent clashes and hostilities between the *Āryavarṇa* and the *Dāsa/Dasyuvarṇa* occur in the *Ṛigveda*, the latter always portrayed as enemies of the Rigvedic clans. The term *rājā*, which denotes a king in Classical Sanskrit, is known since the *Ṛigveda*. In the pioneering researches of the Vedic texts and the translations of the Vedic passages, the term *rājā* is almost always taken in the sense of the king. In other words, it was previously taken for granted that monarchical polity, headed by a king, existed in India right from the early Vedic times. This view has lately come under considerable criticism and revision. The term *rājā* is derived from root *rañj*, which denotes someone who leads, shines, and in later literature, as one who pleases. Given the predominance of the *jana* and the *viś* in the Rigvedic polity, it will be more cogent to consider the *rājā* as a leader or a chief of the clan or tribe. It is extremely difficult to equate the Rigvedic *rājā* with the head of a monarchical state, who would normally have a well-defined territory, a subject population and command a regular military. Sharma points to the conspicuous absence of royal epithets, typically associated with a later monarch in the *Ṛigveda*. The Rigvedic *rājā* was not known as *nṛipati* or *narapati* (lord of men), *bhūpati* (lord of the soil), *adhipati* (overlord) and *mahīpati* (lord of the earth). He bore the epithets, *gopati* (literally, lord of the cattle) and *viśpati* (lord/chief of the tribe/clan). These epithets need to be situated in the context of the preference for pastoral pursuits and of

the clan/tribal organization of the polity during the Rigvedic times. The agglomeration of the *kulas* or the families led to the formation of the *jana* or *viś* that was marked not by a fixed residence or territory, but by the kinship organization. Under such circumstances, the Rigvedic *rājā* was likely to have more resembled a chief or leader of the clan/tribe—with strong kinship bonds-than a full—fledged king at the helm of a monarchical polity. The principal qualities on which the *rājā's* position rested were his abilities to lead in wars and to ensure collection of booties, which were then distributed among the clan members.

R.S. Sharma has enlightened us with his study of the *vidatha*, a popular assembly in the *Ṛigveda*. The *vidatha* was attended by the members of the *viś/jana* and the *rājā* alike. It was the place for discussions on wars and other political matters; a place for social gathering and also for recreations. No less significant was its role as a place where the booties captured in wars were distributed among the members of the clan, with a possible special share for the *rājā* or the chief of the clan. The prominence of the *vidatha* in the Rigvedic polity once again negates the possibility of considering the *rājā* as a full-fledged king. The recent insights into the nature of polity in the *Ṛigveda* emerge out of the new readings of the text and the drawing from anthropological and ethnographic researches as well.

Among many references to clashes and battles, outstanding are the impressions of a major battle fought on one side by ten chiefs and on the other by Sudās—the chief of the Tṛitsu-Bharatas. Celebrated as the most significant political event of the Rigvedic times, the *Dāśarajña* took place on the banks of the river Parushṇī or the Ravi. Sudās is said to have defeated the Yadu, Turvaśa, Anu, Druhyu, Puru, Alina, Bhalāna, Pakhta and Vishānin tribes. Sudās belonged to the Tṛitsu-Bharatas or the Bharata clan. Sudās's ancestor Divodās also figures in the *Ṛigveda*. Witzel shows that the Bharata clan was given a place of considerable dominance in the Family Books (*maṇḍala* II-VII). If the Rigvedic accounts of Divodās, son of Pijavana, are believed, Divodās as the Bharata chief has the credit of leading his clan into South Asian mainland from the borderland of the subcontinent. The Bharatas once seems to have been attached to the Purus with whom they fought later on the banks of the Ravi. The impression of the growing power of the Bharatas is available from the genealogy of the clan and eulogies to its chiefs found in the Family Books of the *Ṛigveda*. Many of such accounts are attributed to Viśvāmitra, the priest of the Bharatas, who was later ousted in favour of Vaśiṣṭha; Viśvāmitra joined the rival Puru group. Vaśiṣṭha, the composer of much of Book VII, also eulogistically refers to the achievements of the Bharata chiefs, especially Divodās and Sudās. Divodās, for instance, is praised as a giver of wealth. Sudās's epithet *Paijavana* intends to underline his belonging to the line of Pijavana, an ancestor. Can one see here a very early attempt to present a genealogy, which often gives pedigree to a ruler and enhances his prestige? Two later chiefs of the post-Sudās days, namely, Devāśravas and

Devavāta, also figure in the *Ṛigveda*. Witzel draws our attention to Sriñjaya Daivavata, who was possibly the son of Devavāta; the name, according to him, is indicative of the 'link between Bharata and Sriñjaya'. The Bharata chief Sudās won a resounding victory over the ten chiefs; it is the central theme of the account of *Dāśarajña*. The account of the battle in Book VII, as Witzel demonstrates, is a 'snapshot of history', narrating the advance of the Bharatas across the Sindhu (Indus) into the present Punjab plains, the victory over the ten chiefs (including the Purus) by breaking a natural dyke on the river. Kosambi surmised that this was one of the earliest known instances of a war in Indian history for controlling rivers. The *Ṛigveda* eulogizes the Bharata chief as one who ousted all enemies in the north, west and east; in the south there was no enemy as there stood the Khāṇḍava forest. Remembering the famous burning down of Khāṇḍava forest in the *Mahābhārata*, it is likely that the victory in *Dāśarajña* helped the Bharatas to extend up to Kurukshetra (in modern Haryana), to the south of which was probably located Khāṇḍava forest. The Rigvedic accounts of the *Dāśarajña* probably offer a prototype of the great *Mahābhārata* battle at Kurukshetra. Long ago, U.N. Ghoshal discerned in the attempts of the Rigvedic poets to recount this momentous event the beginnings of Indian historiography; in other words, a forerunner of what Romila Thapar would call the *Itihāsa-Purāṇa* tradition.

The later Vedic texts present significant changes in polity, though political events (like the *Dāśarajña*) rarely figure in these texts. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* contains a legend of the fights between the gods (*devas*) and demons (*asuras*). The gods suffered defeat in the hands of the demons and realized that the absence of a leader (*arājanyatā*) was the chief factor for their defeat. They made Indra their chief as he was the most heroic, the ablest and the most beautiful; this was followed by the gods' victory over demons. Beni Prasad read in this legend the possible origin of kingship out of military necessity. What hardly escapes our notice is the growing power of the Vedic *rājā*. That the chiefs were of different status, is indicated in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. Thus, the *rājā* was inferior to *samrāṭ* or *ekarāṭ*. The Vedic *samrāṭ* or *ekarāṭ* should not be taken to mean 'emperor' following its meaning in Classical Sanskrit literature. In contrast to the *rājā*, the *samrāṭ* or *ekarāṭ* was more powerful as the latter was a greater conqueror than the former.

The later Vedic texts acquaint us for the first time with the term *janapada*, literally where the *jana* or people first set its feet (*pada*), meaning a settlement or more precisely a rural settlement. Combining the testimony of the *Yajurveda* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Ghoshal underlined the significance of the concepts like *rājya* (governance), *rāshṭra* (domain) and *kshatra* (ruling authority). He further pointed out that the three terms were often interchangeable in the later Vedic literature, implying thereby the ascending power of the ruler. The conspicuous urge in the later Vedic texts for increasing the power of the *rājā* is best seen in the elaborate prescriptions

for the performances of sacrifices (*yajñas*). The successful performance of the *rājasūya*, the *vājapeya*, the *aśvamedha yajñas* and the consecration ceremonies (*abhishekas*) like the *aindramahābhisheka* and *punarabhisheka* rendered great power and prestige on the sacrificer (*yajamana*), i.e. the ruler. During the sacrifice, the *rājā* is given epithets like the eater of the folk (*viśāmattā*), the lord of cultivators (*charshaṇīnām*), the exterminator of foes (*amitrāṇāṁ hantā*) and the overlord of the world and living beings (*viśvasyabhūtasya adhipati*). The sacrificing *rājā* was to tread upon a tiger skin; this was certainly an act of white magic, effective on the law of contagion, with the intention that the ruler would assume the prowess of a tiger when he came in touch with the tiger-skin. In the *vājapeya* sacrifice, the ruler was to participate in a chariot race in which he would be made a winner. The *rājā's* position indeed became more powerful than his Rigvedic counterpart: while the Rigvedic chief was the leader of the clan (*viśpati*), the later Vedic ruler was the devourer of the *viś* (*viśāmattā*). The later Vedic texts clearly viewed an opposition between the ruler and the *viś*, which was considerably subordinated. The mutually antagonistic position between the kshatriya and the viś also looms large in the statement that the ruler was the deer while the *viś* was likened to barley; once again the juxtaposition of the devoured and the devourer is unmistakable. The exalted position of the ruler is also evident from the notion that by performing the *yajñas*, the ruler became Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Soma. The later Vedic ruler was, therefore, endowed with 'occasional divinity', as Spellman suggests. This does not however mean that the later Vedic ruler was held as a divinity or having a divine descent. The maximum extent of such a claim in the later Vedic text was the epithet of Parikshit as a demi-god (*ardhadevatā: Atharvaveda*). Larger number of prominent clans came on to the political scene: the Kekayas, Madras, Kośalas, Kurus and suchlike, while the Pañchāla clan was an assemblage of several clans. The Kuru-Pañchāla combine in the Ganga-Yamuna doab area represents the formation of an even larger and more complex confederacy.

All these would certainly contribute to the growing power of the ruler. The later Vedic texts offer more elaborate genealogies of rulers than the *Rigveda*. This is a marker of greater prestige of the ruler whose descent from a lineage was underlined. In comparison to the Rigvedic polity, the polity of the later Vedic times gave greater stress on hereditary rulership, paving the way for dynastic succession as an integral feature of a monarchical polity of subsequent times. Romila Thapar draws our attention to elaborate gift-giving by the *rājā* to brāhmaṇa and other invitees during the sacrifices. On the analogy of gift-giving in pre-state chiefdoms, noted by anthropologists, Thapar argues that such gift-giving was accompanied by the wish to be reciprocated with similar, if not even more lavish gifts in return. This is likely to set in motion a spirit of competitiveness among chiefs by engaging in conspicuous consumption and even in excessive waste of resources, something comparable with the ceremony of potlatch among

the pre-colonial 'Indian' chiefs in North America. While such competitive attitude may later manifest in political mastery of one ruler over others, the element of gift-giving (*dāna/dakshiṇā*) during the *yajñas* would also result in distribution and redistribution of resources. This implies that the chiefdom may not have developed the political institutions that enabled and empowered the concentration of resources in the hands of the ruler. It is true that the later Vedic literature was familiar with terms like *bali*, *bhāga* and *śulka*, all of which in later Sanskrit texts and inscriptions denoted various type of imposts, levies and revenue demanded by the king. The term *bali* in the *Rigveda* stands for a voluntary offering given to the chief, while the later Vedic texts denoted by *bali*, an obligatory payment to the ruler. That is why the later Vedic ruler bore the epithet, the procurer of *bali* (*balihṛit*). This cannot but speak of the growth of the power and position of the ruler. But it is doubtful if *bali* in the later Vedic texts meant a regular tax. The rate of the *bali* is nowhere specified; this also may indicate that there was no proper and adequate assessment of revenue. Thapar therefore considers *bali* as a prestation, distinct from a genuine revenue demand. The absence of a regular revenue probably precluded the formation of a military organization as there would not be enough resources; the absence of the military—the most visible aspect of the coercive authority of the ruler—would, in its turn, render difficulties for the ruler to demand revenue. Despite the growth of the ruler's power the later Vedic period had not yet experienced a monarchical system; it was, to borrow an expression of Sharma, a proto-state, on the threshold of a state system.

The growing authority of the later Vedic rājā was checked by two popular assemblies, the *sabhā* and *the samiti*. Though the *sabhā* and the *samiti* had figured in the *Rigveda*, they appeared more prominently in the later Vedic literature. The *vidatha*, interestingly enough, disappeared from the later Vedic texts. It is not easy to fully grasp the distinctive feature of the two assemblies. In fact, once it was thought that there was only one single assembly, the *samiti*, while the place or seat of the assembly was known as *sabhā*. The clear description of the *sabhā* and the *samiti* as twin daughters of Prajāpati (the Divine Creator) leaves little room for doubt that these were indeed two separate assemblies. Many early scholars (especially K.P. Jayswal) in their enthusiasm to show that the Vedic polity anticipated some features of a modern democracy and a constitutional monarchy, tried to project these two assemblies as upper and lower houses in a bi-cameral legislative system, with a pronounced thrust on participatory political process. While such an assertion as the above one is far-fetched, it seems that to the *sabhā* often went the prosperous persons (*maghavan*). The *sabhā* was certainly a place for recreation as it was a place for the game of dice. The *samiti* was attended by the people in general and also by the ruler. Among the matters discussed in the *samiti* were wars, exile of a ruler and even bringing back an exiled ruler. Activities in the *samiti* were often marked by debates. A person going to the

samiti uttered prayers so that one came out as the best participant in the debate. There is little doubt about the lively deliberations at this public forum. There are also prayers that members of the assembly would be unanimous in their view: a sentiment that may not match the urge for lively debates. It is possible that debates and exchange of views were followed by decisions at the assembly, which were accepted by everyone through consensus. The popular assemblies appear to have checked the concentration of powers in the *rājā's* hands.

Another possible check to the rājā's power came from the *ratnins* (the bejeweled ones) as close associates of the ruler. Described as the bestower of the domain upon the ruler (*ete vai rāshṭrasya pradātāraḥ*), the *ratnins* included among them the *senānī* (a military commander), the *bhāgadugha* (one who apportioned the share) and *akshavāpa* (keeper of the dice). Some scholars hold that the *ratnins* were precursors of the ministers of the monarchical polity in subsequent times. There is also a distinct possibility that the brāhmaṇa priest who offered and officiated at sacrifices on behalf of the ruler could have thwarted the growth of the ruler's power. It was the brāhmaṇa who anointed the ruler with a besprinkling ceremony (*abhisheka*), when on certain occasions the ruler had to take a vow of ensuring just administration. The brāhmaṇa priest as a legitimizing authority, possibly acted as a check against the rise of a powerful king. There are, on the other hand, instances of the Vedic rājā dispensing one brāhmaṇa priest in favour of another: the classic example of this is the virtual sacking of Viśvāmitra in favour of Vasishtha as the family priest of the Tṛitsu-Bharata clan. Even if the brāhmaṇa priest exerted some control over the ruler, the Vedic corpus is not clear whether he did so in his individual capacity, or as the representative of the priestly community, or as the representative of the entire *viś*. The later Vedic texts offer several examples of some tension between the ruler and the priestly community, a point to which we shall come back later. As the power and authority of the king enormously increased in the subsequent monarchical set up, the *samiti* disappeared altogether and the *sabhā* survived, but only to denote primarily the royal court in classical Sanskrit.

VI

Economy and Society

It is an uphill task to glean information about the socio-economic life of the period from 1500 BC to 500 BC on the basis of the sacerdotal Vedic texts, because, describing society and economy was not the intent of these texts. Nevertheless, as we have said before, many prayers in the Vedic corpus, especially in the *Ṛigveda*, relate to mundane affairs and desires. The Vedic texts, particularly the later Vedic literature, pay considerable attention to ritual ranking in the society in terms of the four-fold *varṇa* order. Amidst

all these limitations, the Vedic corpus offer some glimpses of the socio-economic life.

The *Ṛigveda* repeatedly emphasizes the importance of cattle-wealth (*go*). The cattle (*go*) in the *Ṛigveda* is synonymous with wealth (*rayi*). A person rich in cattle (*gomān*) is considered wealthy (*maghavān*), fit to be a member of the *sabhā* (*sabhāsad*). R.S. Sharma has counted as many as 173 references to *go* and its derivatives in the *Ṛigveda*, while there are about 21 mention about agriculture therein. The *Ṛigveda*, therefore, considered the cattle as the principal form of social wealth; agriculture though known and practised, was secondary to cattle-keeping in the Rigvedic economy. It is no wonder that the *Ṛigveda* knew the chief of the clan (*viśpatī*) as *gopati* (literally lord of the cattle); wars were termed in the *Ṛigveda* as *gavīshṭi* (literally, search or desire for cattle). There are several hymns in *Maṇḍala* IX where Soma is praised and invoked for jointly bringing with Indra plentiful of kine, many of which were captured as booties during wars. The *go* was also the medium of exchange in the *Ṛigveda*. The term *gotra* literally stands for a cattle-pen; the human habitation adjacent to the cattle-pen subsequently assumed the character of a distinct social group. As a result of this, the term *gotra* in later times came to denote an exogamous unit within a *varṇa* or *a jāti*. No less coveted than the *go* was the horse (*aśva*), which is not encountered in India prior to the advent of the Indo-Aryan speaker. The horse regularly appears in the *Ṛigveda* as a coveted animal, which was often obtained as booty in a war. The Rigvedic people were not entirely nomadic but semi-pastoralists, who therefore did not experience a fully sedentary society. Meagre archaeological data are available to supplement the literary images. Field archaeological remains from Bhagwanpura (Kurukshetra district, Haryana), Dadheri (Ludhiana district, Punjab), Naggar (Jalandhar district, Punjab) and Manda (in Jammu)—all datable from 1500 BC to 1000 BC—do not demonstrate a regular and settled agriculture, nor the presence of iron tools. Bhagwanpura, significantly, has yielded profuse number of bones of cattle, goats and lambs. Archaeological data too tend to indicate a predominantly cattle-keeping society in north-western India during the second half of the second millennium BC.

Though fewer references (21) to agriculture appear in the *Ṛigveda* than to cattle-keeping, the data on agricultural practices are significant. An entire hymn (*kṛishisūkti*) is devoted to the praise of Kshetrapati or the deity presiding over agriculture (IV.57). The hymn graphically portrays ploughing the cultivated tract (*kshetra*) with the help of *sunāsīra*, denoting respectively the plough (*sunā*) and the ploughshare (*sīra*). The other synonym for the ploughshare is *phāla*. The word *sita* stands for the furrow marks left on the field as a result of the plough being drawn by oxen. That Parjanya or the rain-god moistened the field with rains for agriculture also figures in this hymn. The account of harvesting the ripe crop with the help of a sickle (*dātra/sṛiṇī*) also occurs in the text. Irfan Habib has recently presented a

striking archaeological confirmation of the prevalence of plough cultivation in the second half of the second millennium BC. A ploughed field, datable to twelfth–eleventh centuries BC, with clear furrow marks in parallel rows, has been found from Aligrāma in Swat (Pakistan). The crop in general was known as *sasya* (Avesta: *hahya*). One of the main cereals was barley (*yava*). Wheat is nowhere mentioned in the *Ṛigveda*, but the Sanskrit word for it, *godhuma* and its Iranian counterpart *gantuma*, cannot but suggest a common Indo-Iranian ancestor of the crop. It is therefore likely that wheat too was grown by the Rigvedic people. It is not certain if rice cultivation was in vogue in the *Ṛigveda*. The word *vrīhī*, which means rice in Sanskrit, is taken in the *Ṛigveda* to denote crop in general, and not specifically paddy. Paddy cultivation seems to have taken root in Vedic culture with the spread of the settlements in the Ganga valley in first millennium BC. Apparently impressed by the archaeological proof of the ploughed field from Swat, Habib critiques scholars who in his opinion, has over-emphasized the pastoral pursuits in the Rigvedic times. Even with this firm and visible evidence of agriculture in the North-Western Frontier zone, it will be difficult to miss the obvious recognition of cattle as the principal wealth in the *Ṛigveda*. It is possible that towards the end of the Rigvedic times, the importance of agriculture was being taken into account. A hymn in the Xth *Maṇḍala* (X.34.13)—certainly belonging to the very end of the Rigvedic phase—urges a person, excessively addicted to the game of dice, to give it up and instead, take to agriculture, which will yield to him many cows and wives. What is underlined here is that agriculture generated greater material security for the maintenance of a settled family life. Also unmistakable is the notion that successful agriculture helps the maintenance of cattle wealth, which continues to get the prime attention.

One does not expect to trace many references to crafts and professions in text that hails cattle as the principal social wealth. Only rudimentary crafts figure in the *Ṛigveda*. One of them was that of the carpenter (*takshaka*), who is different from the woodcutter (*vṛikshachhedaka*). The carpenter not only made furniture and wooden houses, he was inseparably associated with the making of chariot. Chariots, driven by powerful horses, hold a crucial clue to the successful spread of the Indo-Aryan speakers over the Ganga valley. The presence of the improved wheel with spokes is noted in Turkmenistan (north of Afghanistan), datable to 1700–1500 BC. There is negligible evidence of the use of spoked wheel in the subcontinent, except for a solitary terracotta piece (from Banawali, Haryana) representing on low relief such a wheel. The Rigvedic society was well-acquainted with the leather-worker (*charmamna*), something to be expected in a largely cattle-keeping society. Various type of dresses and garments are mentioned in the *Ṛigveda*, implying the prevalence of cloth-makers. But the *Ṛigveda* shows no acquaintance with cotton plants and cotton in general. The Rigvedic garments were likely to have been made of wool and/or skin, features that would associate these crafts with a cattle-

keeping society. Some mention of jewellery in the *Ṛigveda*, for instance, the *karṇaśobhana* and *hiraṇyakarṇa* (earring), *nyochanī* and *kurīra* (ornaments worn during wedding), will point to the existence of ornament-makers and the jeweller. *Hiraṇya* or gold was used for making ornaments. To what extent other metals were used for manufacturing purposes, it is difficult to ascertain. It is almost impossible to find any concrete evidence of the use of iron in the *Ṛigveda*. The term *ayas* has been wrongly understood by several scholars, including B.B. Lal, in the sense of iron. Iron was of course synonymous with the term *ayas* in Classical Sanskrit, but never in the *Ṛigveda*. The term *ayas* in the *Ṛigveda* may signify any metal in general. There is little, if any at all, archaeological evidence of the use of iron in India prior to 1000 BC.

Did the Rigvedic material life, oriented to cattle-keeping, and practising some agriculture and a few rudimentary crafts, experience regular trade? There are prayers in the *Ṛigveda* for ensuring safety on journey to distant places (1.56.2); for safety against robbers on a distant journey (I.42.2-3); and for gaining a hundred-fold wealth (*śatadhana*) as gain (II.18.3). It is difficult to ascertain whether such journeys invariably indicated commercial ventures to faraway lands. In the *Ṛigveda* appear the *paṇis*, noted for their wealth and for their travels; they received scornful attitude from the Rigvedic poets for their unintelligible speech and for being hostile to Rigvedic people. The association of the *paṇis* with wealth and distant journeys led D.D. Kosambi to infer that they were traders, possibly at the fringe of a predominantly pastoral society. He further sought to see in the *paṇis* the forerunner of the *vaṇik* or the merchant of the later times. There are some controversies if the sea (*samudra*) was known to the *Ṛigveda*. The suggestion that by the term *samudra*, the Rigvedic poet generally understood a vast body of water at the confluence of the Indus with the sea is open to question. The Rigvedic poet clearly distinguished between the Indus and the sea. This, however, does not at all imply that the Rigvedic people were regular seafarers for commercial purposes. The claim for seafaring in the Rigvedic times largely rests on the over-enthusiastic and literal reading of the account of the vessel, fitted with a hundred oars (*śatāritra nau:* I.116.3). If such large sea-going ships were really in operation in the Rigvedic times, what would have been the size of the dock or the port, where such a ship could be berthed? Do we come across any such ports or harbours of impressive size in the *Ṛigveda* or in archaeological remains in the Indus delta, datable to the second half of the second millennium BC? Even the dockyard of Lothal would not have been able to accommodate a vessel fitted with a hundred oars. Whatever little is offered by the *Ṛigveda* in terms of sea-borne journeys is the likely outcome of the imagination of the Rigvedic poets. The basic question remains that how, and to what extent regular trade (different from exchanges in the pastoral and nomadic circuits) was relevant to a predominantly cattle-keeping society.

The later Vedic times witnessed significant changes in the material life, along with the spread of Vedic culture from the Punjab to the east and the

south-east, i.e. into the, Ganga valley. The later Vedic literature presents clear evidence of the cultivation of three major cereals, barley, wheat and paddy. The most significant change was in the regular cultivation of rice, now denoted by the word *vrīhi*, referred to in the later Vedic texts. The PGW level from Hastinapura has yielded remains of rice, a visible proof of paddy cultivation in the doab area. There is little doubt that the spread of settlements in the fertile Ganga basin, more moist than the relatively arid Punjab and the farther north-west, proved conducive to agriculture. From the later Vedic times, the society certainly assumes the character of a fully sedentary society, primarily oriented to agriculture with cattle-keeping as an important adjunct to the agrarian life. Four important aspects or stages of agriculture figure prominently in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa:* ploughing the soil (the ploughshare ideally should be pointed–*pavīravat*), sowing seeds, harvesting of ripe crops and winnowing/threshing. A mature understanding of alterations of seasons and different crops is available in the *Taittrīya Saṁhitā:* the seeds of barley (*yava*) are sown in winter, the crop is harvested in summer; paddy is sown in the monsoons and harvested in autumn; *tila* (sesame) is sown in summer, harvested in winter. Manure largely consisted of cow dung: fresh cow-dung (*gomaya*) and dried cow-dung (*karīsha*). The operation of ploughing is described in many later Vedic texts. The ploughshare was made of wood from *khadira* or *udumbara* (fig) tree, while copper share was also known. There is little likelihood that iron ploughshares were regularly used. The solitary instance of an iron ploughshare has come from the excavations at Jakheda in western Uttar Pradesh. The term *sītā* continues to mean the furrow marks since the days of the *Rigveda*. The description of the cultivator (*kīnāśa*) driving the plough with the help of oxen has become commonplace in the later Vedic period. The *Athrvaveda*, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittiriya, Maitrāyaṇī, Kāṭhaka* and *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitās* describe that the land was ploughed with the help of six, eight, twelve and even two dozens oxen. Why so many oxen were required for ploughing is a point to ponder. The thick alluvial tract in the Ganga valley could have necessitated the employment of many oxen to till the heavy soil. It is also likely that the number of oxen employed for tilling is a pointer to the size of the plot: a field tilled with the help of twenty four oxen must have been more extensive than the plot requiring four oxen for ploughing. Seen from this angle, it may suggest unequal size of agricultural plots, implying unequal access to the most important means of production, land—a feature typical of a sedentary agrarian society.

The spread of agriculture in the Ganga valley must have followed the clearance of the dense forests there, possibly by burning the forest. The journey of Videgha Māṭhava with the sacred fire in his hand may symbolize such a process of forest clearing. Copper and iron implements, axes and adzes were used for cutting down the forest. There are some references to cutting down of forests in the later Vedic literature. Several archaeological

sites have yielded specimens of iron and copper axes and adzes. Many iron axes had a hole in the middle for accommodating a handle, possibly made of wood. The introduction of iron technology is a special feature of the later Vedic times. The later Vedic literature speaks of *śyāmāyas* and *krishnāyas* (the black *ayas*), which probably refer to iron. The most eloquent testimony to iron technology comes from archaeology: two major sites in western Uttar Pradesh, Atranjikhera and Noh, which have brought to light large number of iron tools and implements. Most of these implements are, however, weapons for offensive and defensive purposes. Iron arrowheads, shaped like barb and leaf as well, came in vogue; also in use was the iron spearhead. Some of these iron tools may go back to as early 1000–900 BC, but majority of the iron tools were manufactured in a period after 800 BC. The use of iron technology began to be regular and widespread after 750 BC. The spread of the later Vedic settlements was possibly instrumental in giving access to iron-ore deposits in the Ganga valley. But to what extent iron technology was employed for agricultural pursuits is open to doubt, especially because of the very few specimens of iron ploughshare and other agricultural implements. The available iron technology could well have been advantageous to the later Vedic chiefs, whose power, we have already discussed, was on the rise during this period.

One of the most significant developments in crafts-production was the manufacture of an improved type of pottery, labelled as the Painted Grey Ware (900–500 BC). The ware is so named after its greyish colour resulting out of a particular firing technique of the pots. Later, paintings were added to the exterior; hence, the nomenclature, PGW. It was first discovered at Ahichhatra near Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh) in 1946, but the importance of the ware was first established in the subsequent excavations at Ropar. The PGW was discovered at Ropar from a layer which lay between the Harappan deposits (2300–1700 BC) and the early historic deposits (600–200 BC). The PGW there has to be assigned to a period after the Harappan times, but before 600 BC, thus, more or less coeval with what is called the Vedic, especially the later Vedic period. There are about 700 PGW sites strewn over the Indo-Ganga divide, the upper Ganga valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab. Most of the PGW wares were dishes and bowls (shallow and deep) which speak of the admirable control of the craftsman for exposing the earthenware to high temperature in kilns. The exterior was painted with circular and spiral designs and dots. In many sites, PGW and iron tools coexist, clearly indicating that these were contemporary manufactures. Both iron implements and the PGW are clear pointers to the developments in crafts production in the later Vedic times.

The same impression is available from the *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā* (Ch. XXX), which enlists as many as 19 craftsmen and professionals in the context of the Purushamedha sacrifice: (1) *kaulāla* (potter), (2) *karmāra* (blacksmith), (3) *maṇikāra* (jeweller), (4) *iśhukāra* (arrow-maker), (5) *dhanukāra* (bow-maker),

(6) *jyākāra* (maker of the string of the bow), (7) *rajjusarja* (rope-maker), (8) *surākāra* (distiller), (9) *vāsaḥpalpulī* (washerman), (10) *rañjayitrī* (dyer), (11) *charmamna* (leather worker), (12) *hiraṇyakāra* (goldsmith), (13) *dhīvara* (fisherman), (14) *hastīpa* (elephant-keeper), (15) *aśvapa* (horse-keeper), (16) *gopālaka* (cattle-keeper), (17) *suta* (actor/bard), (18) *sailusha* (musician/singer) and (19) *mṛigāyumantaka* (hunter). Some elements of specialization of crafts cannot escape our notice. Such a diversity of crafts and professions was never encountered in the *Ṛigveda*.

More information on exchange-related activities is available in the later Vedic texts than that in the *Ṛigveda*. The *Yajurveda* speaks of *vaṇija* in the sense of the son of a *vanij;* it may suggest that transacting in goods could have emerged as a hereditary occupation. For the first time, the term *śreshṭhī* appears in textual sources, which stands for a rich merchant in Sanskrit literature. The descriptions of long-distance journeys also continue in the later Vedic texts. The later Vedic literature was also aware of the two seas on the east and west (*pūrva* and *paśchima samudra*) by which probably are denoted the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* refer to *kusīda* and *kusīdin* in the sense respectively of loan and usurer. Do these terms point to more regular exchanges and transactions than those in the *Ṛigveda*? It is difficult to find clear information on regular trade because of the absence of metallic medium of exchange (coins) and of formal regulations of marketplace trade, which are unlikely to have existed in a pre-state society.

VII

The Vedic literature is indeed our principal source for understanding contemporary social life. The primary unit of the social life was the family (*kula*). Right from the Rigvedic times the family is patriarchal; the head of the family usually being the father. This is perhaps the earliest known beginning of the patriarchal family life in India. The description of the family life in the *Ṛigveda* and the later Vedic texts speaks of the prevalence of the extended family system. Impressions of three generations—the father, his sons and daughters and grandchildren—living in the large family surroundings are commonly available. The presence of the mother-in-law of the head of the family is also occasionally seen. Hospitality to the guest (*atithi*) was an essential feature of the family life. The warmth of the family life is particularly felt in the accounts of the lively atmosphere of the children in the family.

The *Ṛigveda* offers the earliest known account of the origin of the four *varṇas*, the most distinctive feature of the structure of traditional society in India. The famous *Purushasūkta* in the *Ṛigveda* (X.90) narrates that the mouth, arms and the thighs of the Great Primaeval Being (*Purusha*) respectively became the brāhmaṇa, the rājanya and the vaiśya, while from

the feet were born the śūdra. The well-known division of the traditional Indian society into four *varṇas* or sharply hierarchized, unequal, endogamous groups is thus encountered first here. Some scholars have tried to find the emergence of a four-fold occupational divisions of the society into the priest, the warrior, the agriculturist and trader and finally, the servile community, in descending order. But it is unlikely that the Rigvedic society experienced a strict and complex *varṇa* classification. First, the *Purushasūkta* is clearly a late hymn, figuring in the interpolated section of the *Ṛigveda* and therefore the *Purushasūkta* evidence is difficult to relate to the situation prevailing in the Rigvedic times. Barring this late *Purushasūkta*, the *Ṛigveda* does not regularly refer to the four *varṇas*. In fact, the *Ṛigveda* more frequently speaks of only two *varṇas:* the *āryavarṇa* and the *dāsa* or *dasyu varṇa*, between whom a hostile relation is often said to have existed. The *dāsa/dasyu varṇa* is often described as of dark-skin (*krishnatvāch*), of an unintelligible speech (*mṛidhravāch*) and also without speech (*anāsa;* the previously accepted meaning of the term as someone snub-nosed has been questioned). The *Ṛigveda* seems to have been more acquainted with the two groups of Indo-Aryan speakers (*āryavarṇa*) and the non-Aryan speakers (*dāsa/dasyu varṇa*) than the four-varna division of the society. The typical features of a strict *varṇa* society, relating to hereditary occupation and taboos on intermarriage and inter-dining, are not seen in the *Ṛigveda*. The text in fact shows clearly that the father of a poet was a physician (*bhishak*) and the mother, a grinder of corn (*uplaprakshiṇī*). While the *Ṛigveda* did not approve of a marriage between an *āryavarṇa* and a *dāsa/dasyuvarṇa*, marriage between two unequal *varṇas* (in other words, emphasis on endogamy and taboo on connubium) did not find any opposition. Under such circumstances, it will be difficult to infer that inter-dining among members of unequal *varṇas* was frowned upon.

The *Ṛigveda*, on the other hand, shows much greater familiarity with terms like *jana, gaṇa, viś* than with *varṇa*. All these terms, as we have pointed out before, spoke of clan or tribe-like social groups, which point to the existence of a society simpler than the one strictly observing the complex *varṇa* regulations. R.S. Sharma has pointed to the numerous Rigvedic references to words derived from the root *bhāj*, which covers both the meanings of food and sharing. Sharma, therefore, concludes that the Rigvedic society, typical of a clan-based society, encouraged distribution of food among its members. The predominantly cattle-keeping society of the *Ṛigveda* would not be conducive to excessive accumulation of food in the hands of fewer, but more influential members of the society, something which is commonly encountered in an agrarian society. The lesser dependence on agriculture and the greater reliance on the capture of booty would encourage the consumption of what had been acquired and minimize the possibility of the inequalities of distribution of the resources. The distribution and the redistribution of resources through community ceremonies and *dāna-dakshi*

nā institutions are compatible with a relatively simpler society of the *Ṛigveda*. This does not however, imply that the Rigvedic society was an egalitarian society, as the *Ṛigveda* clearly refers to the *maghavan* or the prosperous persons, whose presence also indicates the existence of the unprivileged ones. The relatively less sharply differentiated society of the *Ṛigveda* will also be evident from the absence of references to the employment of non-kin labour. Romila Thapar argues that the large extended family of the Rigvedic times encouraged the elders in the family to exploit the younger members: this she considers as the lineage system. Several Marxist historians, especially Suvira Jaiswal have however, questioned her formulation in that they find traces of social division within the tribe 'along the lines of classes rather than lineage'.

The later Vedic texts, on the other hand, provide information about social change from a relatively simpler society to a more complex and sharply differentiated society. This change has to be situated in the context of the agrarian material milieu of the later Vedic period. The emergence and consolidation of an agrarian society generally accompany sharp social inequality as in such societies the equal access to land, the most important means of production, is impossible; this is also tied to the pronounced tendency to accumulate and hoard resources. The later Vedic texts strongly upholds the sharp differentiation in *varṇa* status. From this age onwards the term *varṇa* denoted the four unequal social groups. The first three *varṇas*, the brāhmaṇa, the kshatriya and the vaiśya were called *dvijas* or the twice born, as they were entitled to the sacred initiation ceremony; the śūdra was completely denied this status as his only duty in the Vedic tradition was to serve (*śuśrushā*) the three upper *varṇas*.

As the later Vedic literature is replete with prescriptions for performing *yajñas* under the strict guidance and supervision of the brāhmaṇa priest, it is natural that the texts emphatically assert the ritual supremacy of the brāhmaṇa over all other *varṇas*. As the brāhmaṇa was the only one entitled to offer sacrifices, they were considered the highest *varṇa*. The period in question also saw the emergence of the second *varṇa* of the kshatriya from the previous rank of the *rājanya* of the Rigvedic times. This is in keeping with the growing power of the Vedic chief that has already been discussed. The sharp differentiation among the *varṇas* will be evident by the fact that while the first two *varṇa* claimed considerable pre-eminence, the two latter *varṇas* of the vaiśyas and śūdras were looked down upon. The later Vedic texts also leave an impression that the brāhmaṇa and the kshatriya were engaged in contestations for social supremacy. Both the brāhmaṇas and kshatriya could study and teach the Vedas (*adhyayana* and *adhyāpana*) and thereby had a distinct claim to acquire the Vedic knowledge. While this apparently put the kshatriya at par with the brāhmaṇa, he had to depend on the brāhmaṇa for performing the elaborate and lavish *yajñas* in order to enhance his power and eminence. Though most of the Vedic texts recognize

the premier position of the brāhmaṇa in the four-*varṇa* order, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* takes a scornful attitude to the priest viś-a-viś the kshatriya. The brāhmaṇa is described therein as a drinker of *soma* (an inebriating ritual drink) and one who could be evicted at will. Some other texts, on the other hand, underline the mutual dependence between the two and strike a note of rapprochement instead of contestation. The vaiśya was to perform agriculture, cattle-keeping and trade. Though the vaiśya was included among the *dvija* group, he was denounced as the one who was to be lived on by another (*anyasya ādyo*), could be evicted at will (*yathākāma-utthāpya*) and oppressed at will (*yathākāmapreshya*). We have already indicated the growing tension and opposition between the ruling power and the vaiśya in the later Vedic texts, obviously to the detriment of the vaiśya's status. The worst hit of the system was undoubtedly the śūdra, who bore the epithet, one who could be oppressed at will (*yathākāmapreshya*), could be evicted at will (*yathākāma-utthāpya*) and even killed at will (*yathākāmavadhya*). There are some common epithets of derogation applied to the vaiśya and the śūdra alike; this points to the tendency to bracket the vaiśya and the śūdra together, to the advantage of the brāhmaṇa and the kshatriya. Sharma finds in the vaiśya the actual wealth-producing section in the Vedic society and the śūdra as the labouring group. He explains that in order to perpetuate the dominance over these two lower orders, the two higher varṇas desisted from contestation and preferred a course for rapprochements. From the vaiśya was extracted the *bali* and from the śūdra, labour. The brāhmaṇa and the kshatriya without actually participating in the production process were able to enjoy the fruits of production. That is why Sharma considers the brāhmaṇa and the kshtriya to be a combined managerial group in the varṇa-divided society, buttressed further by ritual superiority.

The growing rigours of the *varṇa* system are also clear from the restrictions on marriage. The ideal of *savarṇa* marriage (marriage within the same *varṇa*), in other words, the ideal of endogamy, is stressed in the later Vedic texts. This was, however, only a norm as the texts speak also of marriages outside one's own *varṇa*. The marriage between a higher *varṇa* male and a lower *varṇa* female, though certainly not the ideal, is accepted and approved as an *anuloma* marriage. But the reverse order, the union between the higher *varṇa* female and the lower *varṇa* male (*pratiloma* marriage) is severely reprobated, though not unknown. The gender discrimination in these regulations can hardly escape our notice.

The Vedic society was patriarchal. Such a society as this invariably placed women in a position secondary to the male members in the family. It is no wonder, therefore, that right from the *Ṛigveda* down to subsequent times, the birth of a son was much preferred to that of a daughter. As it was a patrilineal family system, descent was counted from the father to the offspring and only the male child was fit to continue the lineage. The *Ṛigveda* is replete with references to ardent prayers for the birth of sons. The *Ṛigveda*, however,

does not show that once born a daughter was neglected. This would take place subsequently in the later Vedic texts, which would view the birth of a daughter as a source of misery (*kṛichhraṁ tu duhitā*). There are indications enough in the *Ṛigveda* that women married at a grown up and mature age and no reference to marriage of a girl child at a pre-puberty stage is available. In fact, *the Ṛigveda* speaks of the meeting of unmarried young men and women at fairs (*samana*) to select their respective conjugal partners. There was also little restriction on the choice of spouse in terms of the *varṇa* considerations, except that a marriage between the *aryavarṇa* and the *dāsa/dasyu varṇa* was disapproved. The *Ṛigveda* offers few, if any at all, evidence of parental control and approval on the choice of spouse. On the basis of the Rigvedic terms, *jaratkumārī/vriddhakumārī* (an old maiden), Sukumārī Bhattacharji suggests that women could remain unmarried throughout their life and spend their life in their parental home. In other words, Bhattacharji underlines that marriage was not an obligation for women in the Rigvedic age, as it would be from the later Vedic period onwards. The *Ṛigveda* leaves little room for doubt that at least some women were literate and were composers of Vedic hymns: e.g. Apālā, Ghoṣhā, Viśvavārā, Sūryyā, etc. Heroic women participating in wars are also not unheard of in the *Ṛigveda*. There is a wonderful marriage hymn in the *Ṛigveda*, containing benedictions to a newly married wife about to go to her husband's home. It is hoped that she would be honoured like a queen (*samrājñī*) by her parents-in-law, her sister-in-law and her brother-in-law. The wife in the *Ṛigveda* is accorded a position of dignity; she actively participates in the rituals with her husband, and as a co-performer in rituals, she is rightly called the *sahadharmiṇī*. Illicit relation occasionally figures in the *Ṛigveda*. There is a lover's prayer in the *Ṛigveda* to ensure that when the man tried to reach his beloved in the night, the neighbours would remain in deep sleep and the dogs in the vicinity would not bark.

There is no mention of the custom of *satī* or the burning of the widow on the same funeral pyre with her dead husband. It is stated that the widow would perform a ritual lying beside her dead husband on the funeral pyre, but would then actually descend from there at the call of her brother-in-law. The *Ṛigveda* allows the cohabitation of a sonless widow with her younger brother-in-law till the birth of a male child; this is known as the custom of *niyoga*. First, it is not exactly widow remarriage, but is akin to levirate. Second, the ultimate end is to procure a male child and the arrangement is not primarily aimed at women's benefit.

The position of women seems to have taken a worsening turn from the later Vedic times. As we have already stated, the undesirability of the birth of a daughter became pronounced. The Later Vedic texts strongly favour the lowering of the age of marriage of girls to pre-puberty stage. There is also a clear disapproval of providing education and Vedic learning for women in the later Vedic times. In fact, it is said that an educated woman becomes devoid of her femininity and assumes more male-like features. Sukumārī Bhattacharji

argues that with the lowering of the age of marriage and the little prospect of education, women of the later Vedic period were trained primarily in domestic chores. The preference for marrying them off at a pre-puberty stage leaves little scope for women to voice their choice of spouses, which is then decided upon by the father. The later Vedic texts speak of polygamy (but little polyandry), which was a marker of opulence and prestige of the husband, but the existence of co-wives was hardly conducive to the dignity and honour of the wife. A later Vedic text describes how the daughter-in-law ran away from the father-in-law like a ghost that fled before the rising sun. The analogy of the daughter-in-law with the ghost is in conspicuous contrast to the Rigvedic epithet *samrājñī* given to the newly-wed wife among her in-laws. The principal duty of the wife in the later Vedic period was to follow and obey her husband. For women, marriage became as sacred as the learning of the Vedic texts. The dominance of the husband becomes explicit when the later Vedic wife is expected to submit to the physical desires of her husband whenever he demanded sexual satisfaction. This speaks of the loss of control of the wife even over her own body. The other principal expectation from the wife was her bearing male children. There is little doubt that the later Vedic text glorifies the position of the mother in the family. It is however not sure whether the projection of the mother of daughters is done in the similar vein. The role of the later Vedic wife is reduced to the bearer of male children, a producer of the producers. In fact, Āpastamba recommends that the wife who bore only daughters should be abandoned in the tenth year, who gave birth to still-born children in the twelfth year, but one who talked back to the husband must be discarded forthwith. With domesticity increasingly becoming the yardstick in the social and cultural life of women, the later Vedic texts, unlike the *Ṛigveda*, offer little or no reference to women's presence in the popular assemblies (*sabhā* and *samiti*). The ardent desire that a woman remains a non-widow during her life is a powerful commentary on the deteriorating condition of widows in the later Vedic times. Recent researches by Sukumārī Bhattacharji, Kumkum Roy and Uma Chakravarti (among many others) have exposed the limitation of the Altekarian paradigm of looking at the supposedly dignified position of early Indian women prior to the Delhi Sultanate, which is wrongly considered by many to have marked the beginning of the deterioration of women's status in India. They have effectively driven home the point that in the patriarchal social and family life of the Vedic times, women did not enjoy an honourable position in the society.

VII

Cultural Life

The Vedic literature being religious in nature, historians have regularly used the Vedic corpus for understanding the belief-systems and rites and rituals.

Unlike the Harappan times, the early Vedic period does not speak of fertility rites and image worship. The *dāsa/dasyuvarṇa* people were castigated in the *Rigveda* for being phallic worshippers (*śiśnadeva*). The centrality of Vedic religious life is given to the ritual of sacrifices of various kinds. That there was a long shared Indo-Iranian heritage of the ritual of sacrifices will be evident from the Vedic *yajña* and the Avestan *yasna*. This ritual involved the sacrifice of animal to appease gods; it was presided over by the *hotṛi/hotār* who has a close correspondence to Avestan *zaotar*. The Indo-Iranian cultural tradition was deeply attached to fire worship. The Rigvedic priest for fire worship, *atharvan* has a near parallel in Avestan *athravan*. The Indo-Iranian worshipping tradition is strongly aniconic, though the literary imagery of the divinities—both male and female—is certainly anthropomorphic. The contrast with the religious beliefs of the Harappans is quite obvious: the Harappans certainly had idols for worship, but their venerable divinities are zoomorphic and not anthropomorphic.

One of the most significant gods in the *Rigveda* was the fire god, Agni, who figures in about 200 hymns out of about 1000 hymns (that is, about one fifth of the hymns are devoted to Agni). Agni was the purifier and was the linkage between human being and gods. Agni was indeed the pivotal feature in the cult and ritual of sacrifices; it was into Agni that offerings to gods were placed and by Agni the sacrificed animal was roasted. It is significant that Agni has no counterpart in the *Avesta*. The most prominent deity in *the Rigveda* was indeed Indra to whom are addressed 250 hymns; he figures in another 50 hymns along with other gods. Indra as In-da-ra has already appeared in the well-known Boghazkoi inscription. He is a great hero, chief of the gods in their incessant war with demons (*asuras*), yields thunderbolt as his weapon and releases flood water by killing demon Vṛitra who dammed up the water. This aspect of Indra is particularly evident in his epithet *vṛitrahan*, which has a close correspondence to *Verethragna* in the *Avesta*. But it is important to note that in the *Avesta* Indra is reduced to a minor demon (*daeva*) there. Varuṇa, figuring in the Boghazkoi inscription as A-ru-na or Wu-ru-wa-na, was the upholder of the cosmic order (*rita*, Old Persian *arta*), which covered movements in the heaven and human conducts as well. He is closely associated with Mitra, the sun-god (corresponding to Avestan Mithra). There is also a separate sun-god, Surya to whom ten hymns of praises were composed. Superb poetical imaginations are available in the 20 hymns in praise of Ushas, the goddess of dawn, who is perpetually youthful and reveals herself before the world like the newly-wed bride reveals herself to her husband. One of the most important deities was Soma, to whom the entire *maṇḍala* IX has been devoted. Soma is both an inebriating drink and also the presiding deity over that drink. Soma certainly corresponds to Avestan Haoma. In the entire cultural range of the Indo-European speakers, only the Vedic and Iranian traditions observed the Soma rituals. The Soma plant, said to have grown in the north-western mountains, is generally identified with

ephedra, though the alternative suggestion is to equate it with the fly agaric mushroom. The extract of the Soma plant was drunk on ritual occasions and according to Thapar, the drink 'acted as a hallucinogen'. What does not escape our notice is that two great male divinities in later Indian religion and classical Sanskrit texts, namely, Vishnu and Śiva, are not at all prominent in the *Ṛigveda*. In fact, both are minor divinities. Vishnu in the *Ṛigveda* is a solar deity in the name of Āditya, while Śiva figures as Rudra. The *Ṛigveda* strongly upholds the worship of nature and various natural phenomena like rainfall (Parjanya being the god of rain), thunderbolt (associated with Indra), dawn (Ūshas) and the river-goddess, Sarasvatī. The *stutis* or hymns in praises of different gods/goddesses are offered, remembering the divine help in the past, with the hope that the invoked gods/goddesses would respond to the needs of those offering the prayer. Though the ritual of sacrifice was known in the *Ṛigveda*, there is little trace of the elaborate and intricate rites that would become a prominent feature of the later Vedic *yajñas*. One of the most salient features of the religious speculations in the *Ṛigveda* is the element of skepticism. These ideas gave birth to the earliest known Indian metaphysical concepts regarding the origin of the universe. There is one view that the universe was created out of a vast cosmic sacrifice and was maintained by the proper performance of sacrifices. But then in another hymn, doubts are heard about the genesis of the universe and even postulates creation emerging from Nothingness. Such doubts cannot but speak of a spirit of enquiry and points to the absence of dogmatism. The celebrated *Nāsadīya sūkta* thus says:

> Then even nothingness was not, not in existence.
> There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
> Who covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
> Was there then cosmic water , in depths unfathomed?...
> But, after all, who knows, and who can say,
> Whence it all came, and how creation happened?
> The gods themselves are later than creation,
> So who knows truly whence it has arisen?
>
> *Ṛigveda*, X. 129 (tr. A.L. Basham)

The later Vedic texts undoubtedly demonstrate that the ritual of sacrifices became much more elaborate, lavish and long-lasting—particularly the sacrifices like *Rājasūya*, *Vājapeya* and *Aśvamedha*. This is particularly evident from the *Yajurveda* and the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, the latter chiefly concerned with the ritualistic side of religion. These spectacular rituals had a public function and only the upper *varṇas* could attend it. The more elaborate the ritual, the more elaborate fire altars were required. As such fire altars were built of mud-bricks, their remains could not be recovered by archaeologists. The patron of the sacrifice, the *yajamāna*, was consecrated for the duration

of the sacrifice. 'The sacrificial ground was also initially consecrated and finally de-sanctified at the termination of the ritual, leaving no permanent locations for acts of worship' (Thapar). That there is a distinct possibility of the incorporation of many pre-Vedic magical rites into Vedic *yajñas* will be borne out by the *Atharvaveda*, which was primarily a book on black and white magic. Both Vishnu and Rudra, relatively minor deities in the *Rigveda*, gained greater prominence in the later Vedic literature. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* seeks to identify Rudra and Agni. The same text shows clear awareness of the various names of Rudra current in various regions, e.g. as Śarva in the eastern sector, as Bhava in the Bāhika (Bāhlika?) country and also as Paśunāmpati (lord of animals). These names indicate the process of gradual transformation of Rudra to later Śiva, though the phallic (*liṅgam*) form of Śiva worship is absent in the later Vedic texts. Among the new deities in the later Vedic texts mention must be made of Prajāpati, the Creator.

A strong reaction to the centrality of sacrificial rituals permeates the realm of philosophical speculations in the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upanishads*. Though the *Upanishads* are generally placed after the *Āraṇyaka* texts, there may not have been major difference—both temporally and conceptually—between the two genres of literature. This will be seen in the name of the text like the *Bṛihadāraṇyakopanishad*. Some of the Upanishads may suggest that the critique of the *yajña* ritual for their ineffectuality to attain salvation was first raised by the kshatriyas. As the name *Āraṇyaka* clearly shows, this literature was concerned with priests who led an ascetic life in forests, away from the settled society, and did not uphold the importance of the cult of sacrifices. Renunciation therefore speaks of a counter-culture, as Thapar argues. The ultimate realization and liberation could not be ensured by *yajñas* but by meditation, through which the highest knowledge (*Jñāna*) could be realized. Thus, the *Āraṇyaka* and *Upanishads* pave the way for the development of deep philosophical speculation. Without going into the intricacies of this philosophy, it may be briefly mentioned that the *Upanishads* stress on the concept of the eternal Soul (*Ātman*) and the Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*). The *Brahman* is neither male nor female and hence often expressed in neuter gender. The Soul (*Ātman*) is differentiated from the body and is indestructible. The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* explains that the death of the body does not cause the death of the Soul; 'the living Âtman has left it (the body), the living Ātman dies not'. The Ātman is not merely an individual's Soul, it is identical with the entire universe. This realization results in the eternal and permanent identity and merger between the Ātman and the Brahman, this identity being the highest realization. 'Having shaken off the body, I obtain, self-made and satisfied, the world of Brahmaṇ, yea, I obtain it' (*Chhāndogya Upanishad*). The concept of the indestructible soul, which does not die with the passing away of the body, is intimately related to the idea of the transmigration of the Soul. This in its turn is likely to have led to the genesis of the doctrine of karma (action), the nature of karma

in one birth deciding upon the nature of one's station-high or low, reward or punishment—in the future birth or existence. The transmigration of the Soul and the doctrine of karma has inseparable association with the concept of rebirth (*saṁsāra*). The Ultimate Bliss, the unity and identity between *Ātman* and *Brahman*, can be realized by going through many cycles of birth-death-rebirth during which higher *karma* ensures gradual elevation to the cherished goal. There are some similarities between these ideas and the speculations of the heterodox groups in the sixth/fifth centuries BC.

Besides religious beliefs, practices and rituals and philosophical speculations, the Vedic literature shows the development of language towards the Classical Sanskrit. It is true that already by the end of the Vedic times many of the words of the *Rigveda* became unintelligible; this required the composition of the *Nirukta*, a text on etymology, by Yāska who tried to offer explanation of the Rigvedic vocabulary. Many non-Indo-European words entered the Vedic corpus. While this required in the fifth century BC the composition of a definitive grammar of Sanskrit (*bhāshā*) by Pāṇini, the presence of non-Vedic words cannot but point to some amount of bilingualism. This bilingualism was the result of cultural exchanges and proximity between the Vedic and the non-Vedic traditions, which were therefore not exclusive and antagonistic to each other. The urge for the correct pronunciation and the recitation of the Vedic mantras, considered essential for their efficacy, was instrumental in the development of *śikshā* (phonetics) with which must have been connected the study of grammar (*vyākaraṇa*). Another subject of study was metre or *chhanda*, once again vitally important for the perfect memorization and flawless recitation and the near inalterability of the Vedic hymns and mantras. The subject called *jyotish* was devoted to the study of astronomy, which was important to ascertain the auspicious time for the performance of the yajña. The observations of lunar movements and constellations probably helped the growth of a calendrical system and calculation of time. No less significant was the advancement in geometry, once again propped up by ritual requirements. The precise locations and the sizes of structures of objects in the large area for sacrifices were determined by mathematical and geometric calculations. The need for sacrificing the animal in the perfect and prescribed manner seems to have given a boost to the understanding of the animal anatomy.

VIII

Archaeological Cultures Beyond the Vedic Milieu

The historical geography revealed by the Vedic texts do not suggest that Vedic culture spread much beyond to the east of the Ganga-Yamuna doab. Vedic texts and Vedic culture were not the sole representative of the developments in the subcontinent during the period under review. The rest

of the subcontinent did not experience any literary culture. The social and cultural life in the rest of the subcontinent is known to us through field archaeology, though the picture is a hazy one. In greater parts over north India, the wide use of the Black and Red Ware (BRW) may point towards some cultural commonalty. Most of the sites yielding BRW bear witness to small farming communities, some of which were familiar with iron technology. The sites of Narhan, Khairadih and Sohgaura lying in the close vicinity of the river Ghaghara (Sadānīrā of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa)* have been dated on C-14 tests to 1300–700 BC period. The people at these sites were associated not only with BRW, but also with the cultivation of wheat, barley, rice, pulses and mustard oil seeds. Typical of a small farming community, the sites have the remains of wattle-and-daub houses, suggesting regular settlements. Further eastwards, the chalcolithic site in Bihar (Chirand) and Mahishadal (West Bengal) also provide evidence of agricultural communities, which also practised burial as the method of the disposal of the dead.

One of the most significant chalcolithic sites bearing traces of an early farming community is Inamgaon in the Pune district, Maharashtra (on the river Ghod). Systematic and precise excavations at this site by the archaeologists of the Deccan College has revealed the remains of what is called the Jorwe Culture divided into two cultural phases: early Jorwe (1400–1000 BC) and later (1000–700 BC). Material life in the Jorwe Culture was a combination of hunting, fishing and farming. The Inamgaon people grew wheat, rice, lentil and barley; rice appears to have been cultivated in small and carefully tended plots. Remains of an irrigation canal (420m. length and 6m. width) clearly speak of the agrarian technology employed by the people of Inamgaon. Inamgaon has yielded remains of structures, with one particular house measuring 9.75m. in length and 5.5m. in width with a partition wall, which divided the structure into two—eastern and western rooms. The house contained remains of storage jars, charred grains, a fire pit and a terracotta figure of a bull. The prosperity of the residents of the house is indicated by the storage jars and the charred grains. No less striking are the houses numbered 51 and 51A by excavators. The structures are not only impressive in size, but had in them large silos for storage of grains (90 × 60 × 25 cm. 65 × 50 × 20 cm. 65 × 55 × 25cm.) and a large rectangular fire-pit (2.18 m. long, maximum width 77cm. and depth 42cm.). Containing ash and chunks of charcoal, the fire pit is too large for the need of an average family, and according to the excavators, 'it is not unlikely that it was used for community cooking'. The combined structures are identified as a granary. Houses numbering 52–56 are taken by excavators to represent 'one residential unit'. Because of the very large size of the unit, it is reasonably presumed to have been the residence of the chief of the community. This possibility gains further ground as the 'granary' was situated in close proximity of the house of the chief. From House no 59 has been found an urn burial, which could have contained the mortal remains of someone

belonging to the chief's family. Adjacent to this, the burial of a two-year old girl is recovered. She was decorated with a necklace of beads of jasper and copper. It speaks of the belief in life after the death of the person and her ornaments also suggest that she belonged to an exalted family.

The greater parts of peninsular India are characterized by what is known as the Megalithic culture, which is in fact a burial culture. As the burial(s) accompanied very large block of stones, erected to mark it as a site for burial, archaeologists coined the expression megalith to denote the particular culture. Burials in the Megalith culture usually contain grave goods consisting of BRW, iron artifacts and various types of beads. There is however no indication of the widespread use of the iron technology for weapon-making and/or agricultural tools. The Megalithic culture continued in the greater parts of peninsular India for many centuries, till at least third century BC. The region must have been inhabited largely by speakers of Dravidian languages.

The phase of nearly a millennium, discussed in this chapter, marks the beginning of the literary culture of India which indeed is a matter of great importance. The creative role of the Indo-Aryan speakers in the making of Vedic language, the philosophical speculations of the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upanishads* and the ritual of *yajña* left a lasting impression on the subsequent social, political and cultural situations of India. The period under review did not of course witness a complex urban society, the like of which was encountered in the preceding Harappan period. The Vedic economy was simpler than the material culture of the Harappan people. The later Vedic literature paved the foundation of the rural society and rural economy of India and established the *varṇa* norms, which institutionalized social inequality and ritual ranking. Outside the pale of the Vedic culture existed a simpler society bereft of *varṇa* ranking. In these cultures outside the Vedic society, one notes the lively continuity of fertility rites, the custom of burial as the method of the disposal of the dead, a less differentiated society and a polity experiencing chieftains.

Reading List

Bridget and F.R. Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*
A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*
A.L Basham ed., *A Cultural History of India*
Sukumari Bhattacharji, *Women and Society in Ancient India*
Dilp K. Chakrabarti, *India an Archaeological History*
G. Erdosy, ed., *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia* (particularly for the two articles therein by Michael Witzel)
U.N. Ghoshal, *Aspects of Indian History and Culture*
———, *Hindu Public Life*
Irfan Habib and V.K. Thakur, *The Vedic Age*
Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*
B.B. Lal, *The Earliest Civilization in South Asia*
R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Vedic Age*
J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*
A.A. Mcdonnell and A.B. Keith, *The Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* in two volumes.
Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*
Kumkum Roy, ed., *Women in Early Indian Societies*
Kumkum Roy, *The Origin of Monarchy in North India*
R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India*
———, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*
———, *The Origin of the State in India*
Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*
———, *Early India from the Origins to c. AD 1300*
———, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*
M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. I
Michael Witzel 'Early Indian History: Linguistic and Textual Parameters', in *The India. Aryans of Ancient South Asia*, ed. Erdosy, pp. 85–125
'Rigvedic History: Poet, Chieftains and Polities', in *The Indo Aryans of Ancient South Asia*, ed. Erdosy, pp. 307–52.
———, 'Indocentrism', in *The Indo Aryan Controversy, Evidence and Inference in Indian History*, ed. Brian and Patton, pp. 341–404.

CHAPTER 3

Mahājanapadas, Urban Centres and Heterodox Religious Movements

(*c.*600–300 BC)

The period of about three centuries (600–300 BC) is a major landmark in Indian history as several changes of far-reaching consequences occured. These changes are simultaneously visible in political, material and cultural life and therefore, demand close attention. For the fist time in Indian history, emerged several territorial political entities, known as *mahājanapadas* in ancient textual sources and located mostly in north India. Greater parts of north India also experienced urbanization. Cities and city life once again appeared in the subcontinent after the decline of the Harappan civilization, which had marked the first phase of urban development in the subcontinent. The Ganga valley, the heartland of north India, witnessed the complexities of socio-economic and cultural life associated with urban life. The period under review thus marks the second urbanization in Indian history.

No less significant than these developments is the advent of a number of new religious groups and thoughts that challenged the infallibility of the Vedas and the ritual supremacy of the brāhmaṇas. The foremost among these new religious movements are Buddhism and Jainism. It is only natural that historians would pay considerable attention to these centuries in the light of so many changes occurring during this period. The period under consideration follows the epoch known largely from the Vedic corpus (1500–600 BC) and precedes the foundation of the Maurya empire (324 BC).

The historian's enquiries are to some extent facilitated by the availability of variety of evidence, both literary and archaeological materials. Names of some of the ruling houses are available in the *Purāṇas*, which are of course of a much later date. Several of the major political personalities of this period were close contemporaries of the Buddha and/or Mahāvīra and figured in Buddhist and Jaina texts. H.C. Raychaudhuri, famous for his masterly treatment of the political history of this time, preferred Buddhist and Jaina texts to Puranic accounts for his reconstruction of dynastic/political history of the period. One has however, to remember that both Mahāvīra and the

Buddha preached orally and their thoughts, ideas and sermons were reduced to writing in the shape of canonical texts, especially the Jaina texts, much later than the time of these two celebrated religious figures. Narendra Wagle's researches established that the Jātaka stories, though narrating the stories of the Buddha's previous births, did not belong to the age of the Buddha and were composed much later, sometime between 200 BC and AD 200. Following him, we therefore, do not use the Jātaka tales to understand the time of the Buddha, and by extension, the period of the *mahājanapadas*. Of greater reliability and usefulness are the Pāli canonical texts. According to Wagle, the earliest Buddhist canonical texts in Pāli belonging to the pre-Maurya days were: (1) *Vinayapiṭaka*, (2) *Dīghanikāya*, (3) *Majjhimanikāya*, (4) *Aṅguttaranikāya*, (5) *Saṁyuttanikāya* and (6) *Suttanipāta*. These Pāli canonical texts may be utilized to glean information about the situation of the time of the Buddha. Another text that offers important data is the *Aṣṭadhyāyī*, the famous grammatical treatise by Pāṇini, who probably lived in fifth fourth century BC. Some ideas of the conditions in the north-western part of the subcontinent are available in the Achaeminid inscriptions, the *History of Herodotus* and the Greek accounts of the Macedonian incursion (327-324 BC). It is true that some of the 'historians' of Alexander wrote their accounts much later. Archaeological sources give us greater specificity with regard to their chronology and provenance. Particularly significant is the utilization of field archaeological data to understand the process of urbanization. Of archaeological artifacts, two type of potteries deserve special mention: the Black and Red Ware (BRW) and the lustrous Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), the latter is especially noted for its technological excellence and generally considered as a deluxe pottery associated with urban life. This is the period when for the first time, one encounters coins as metallic medium of exchange in the subcontinent, though these coins are uninscribed. The diversity of data, though far from being adequate, has nevertheless encouraged historians to study this period exhaustively.

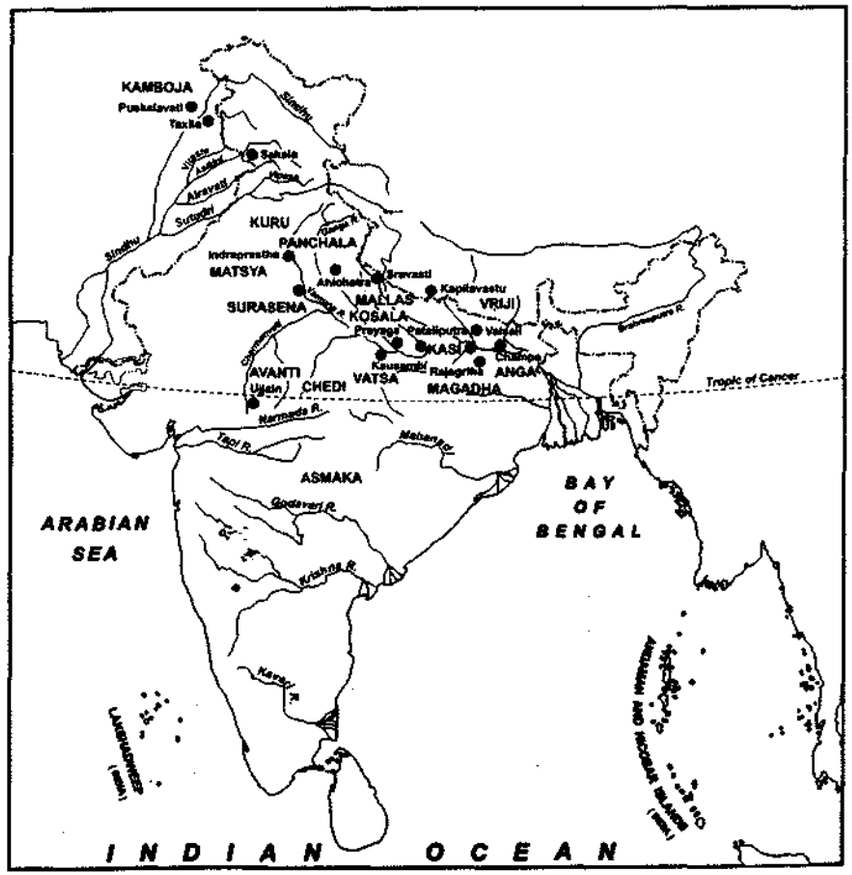
II

Political Situation

Buddhist canonical texts in Pāli, though essentially of religious nature, were not unaware of the political condition of north India in and around the time of the Buddha, i.e. sixth/fifth centuries BC. The exact date of the Buddha is not known; the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicle places his birth in 566BC and his death (*mahāparinirvāṇa*) in 486 BC. Although scholars tend to agree upon the life span of eighty years of the Buddha, dating the Buddha's period has generated some debates in recent decades among scholars. Bechert suggests a later date for the Buddha, assigning it as late as to the fourth century BC. This however, has not been unanimously accepted, and here the well-

established practice of placing the Buddha in the sixth/fifth centuries BC is followed.

The *Aṅguttaranikāya* enlists 16 large territorial polities (*solasamahājanapadas/shodāsamahājanapadas*), which existed during the lifetime of the Buddha. The term *janapada* literally denotes an area where a group of people or a 'tribe'/clan (*jana*) first set its foot/feet (*pada*). The word *janapada*, therefore, clearly implies a well-defined and populated territory. The *term jana* is known from the days of the Vedic literature, but the word *janapada* in the sense of a territorial entity seems to have gained currency only from the post-Vedic times. According to early Indian political treatises, *janapada* (variously called *rāshtra*) is one of seven elements (*prakṛitis*) or limbs (*aṅgas*) of a state, and stands for the territory of the realm. The term *janapada* therefore does not merely suggest a geographical unit, but it conveys the sense of a geo-political entity. Seen in this light, the term *janapada* signifies



Map 3.1: Mahājanapadas

a realm with a well-defined territory inhabited by people over whom rules a political authority. The prefix *mahā* certainly impresses upon the large size of the realm; it will therefore be also logical to assume that the ruler(s) of *mahājanapada*(s) exercised greater power and enjoyed more prominence than the rulers over *janapadas*. The *mahājanapadas* of the *Aṅguattaranikāya* thus speak of the presence of large and powerful political powers. A list of these *mahājanapadas* along with their locations in the present map of the subcontinent is given below:

1. Kāśī, capital Vārānasī, located in the area adjoining Banaras in Uttar Pradesh.
2. Kośala, capital Śrāvastī (present villages of Sahet-Mahet), comprising the present areas of Lucknow, Gonda, Faizabad, Baharaich of Uttar Pradesh.
3. Aṅga, capital Champā near Bhagalpur, in eastern Bihar.
4. Magadha, located in southern Bihar; the first capital was Rājagriha-Girivraja (modern Rajgir); later capital Pāṭaliputra (Patna).
5. Vṛiji, capital Vaiśālī, modern Basadh (Mujaffarpur area, Bihar)—comprising areas of north Bihar, lying in close proximity to the Nepalese terai.
6. Malla, capital Pava, modern Pawapuri in Bihar.
7. Chedi, capital Śuktimatī, located in the area around present Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.
8. Vatsa, capital Kauśāmbī (near modern Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh), comprising the territory around Allahabad.
9. Matsya, capital Vairaṭ (mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*), located in the eastern parts of modern Rajasthan.
10. Śūrasena, capital Mathurā, identified with the famous city of the same name in Uttar Pradesh, located in the Ganga-Yamuna doab area.
11. Kuru, capital Hastināpura, located in the Ganga-Yamuna doab area, in the region of Delhi-Haryana.
12. Pañchāla, having two capitals: Ahichhatra (near Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh) and Kampilya, situated in the present Rohilkhand area.
13. Aśmaka, capital Govardhana (Potana near Nander in Mahārashtra), situated in the Godavari valley.
14. Avanti, two capitals: Ujjayinī (modern Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh) and Māhishmatī (Mandhata, Madhya Pradesh); located in the western part of the present Madhya Pradesh.
15. Gandhāra, capital Takshaśilā (Taxila close to Rawalpindi, Pakistan), located in the north-estern frontier area of the subcontinent, embracing areas both to the west and the east of the river Indus in Pakistan.
16. Kamboja, located in the Hazara district of Pakistan.

The *Mahābhārata* too presents a list of *mahājanapadas* and it varies to some extent from that in the *Aṅguttaranikāya*. Most historians, however, prefer to discuss the political situation in the light of the list in the Buddhist canonical text. The list of powers offers interesting suggestions about the political scenario. The *mahājanapadas*, geographically speaking, have a distribution from the North-Western frontier of the subcontinent to the Godavari valley in the south and from the Malwa Plateau in the west to eastern Bihar in the east. Almost all these territorial polities, except Aśmaka *mahājanapada* in the Godavari valley, were situated in northern India, and partly in central India. North India, especially the Ganga valley, witnessed the maximum concentration of these *mahājanapadas*. One may therefore reasonably argue that north Indian plains mostly experienced this complex territorial polity since the sixth-fifth centuries BC. The formation of the state polity was not uniformly seen in the entire subcontinent and it was not present in peninsular India nor in the Ganga delta and in the north-eastern part of the subcontinent.

The presence of many *mahājanapadas* in north India also suggests that the region in question was not under the occupation of a handful number of dominant powers, but saw the coexistence of multiple powers. These *mahājanapadas* must have attained political prominence at the cost of lesser and weaker contemporary powers. There is a distinct possibility that the smaller and less powerful *janapadas* were overpowered by and annexed to the growing *mahājanapadas*. This process of annexation of territories simultaneously paved the way for the expansion of a *mahājanapada* and reduced the number of its contemporary political entities and/or rivals. The political order of the day was the emergence of states, distinct from—as Romila Thapar demonstrates—chiefdoms and lineage societies. Most of these *mahājanapadas* were monarchical (*rājya*), standing apart and often opposed to non-monarchical polities (*gaṇarājya/gaṇasaṃgha*). The monarchical *mahājanapadas* upheld and maintained a clear differentiation between the ruler (*rājā*) and the subject (*prajā*). Unlike the 'tribal' polity, the state polity has little relevance to kinship ties between the ruler and the ruled; the tie between the ruler and the subject population lies in the common residence in a territorial entity. Here lies the significance of the emergence of the territorial polity like the *janapada* or the larger *mahājanapada* during the age of the Buddha. The claim over the throne is decided by dynastic succession; in other words, on the virtue of being born in a particular ruling family. Dynastic succession generally—but not uniformly—rests on the law of primogeniture or the recognition of the right of the eldest son of the ruling king to inherit the throne. Romila Thapar has underlined the complexity of the political process that the king required an efficient administrative system as a control mechanism. Inseparably associated with the formation of the state is the growing military power of the ruler whose coercive authority is

duly recognized. The maintenance of royal functionaries and a wellorganized fighting force invariably necessitated the availability of resources, which the ruler demanded and extracted through revenue measures. The linkage between taxation and state formation has also been highlighted by R.S. Sharma in his analysis of the political condition in north India during this period. The formation of the state further indicates the emergence of a complex society in which sharp social differentiation, marked by both ritual and actual status, is well established. Society in the prestate polities is relatively simpler and with less sharp differentiation than that observed in the state society. The 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.

During the age of the Buddha, the most prominent monarchical *mahājanapadas* were Kośala, Vatsa, Avantī and Magadha. To this should be added the non-monarchical (*ganasamgha*) *mahājanapada* of the Vrijis or Vajjis. It is not difficult to imagine that the four monarchical *mahājanapadas* attained political prominence by eclipsing their contemporary powers, though the details of this process of territorial expansion are not available in our sources. Barring Avantī, the pre-eminent *mahājanapadas* were located in the middle Ganga plains, from Allahabad in the west to Bhagalpur in the east and embracing areas both to the north and the south of the Ganga. This vast stretch of plain land (nearly 45,000 square miles) offered little geographical barrier and facilitated both overland and riverine communications. That this zone would be naturally conducive to political coalescence was underlined long ago by H.C. Raychaudhuri. Moreover, the extremely fertile alluvial soil of the middle Ganga plain—receiving profuse rainfall and also fed by a few life-giving streams of glacial origin—was ideally suited to the settlement of fully sedentary agrarian population. The strong agricultural material milieu supported the diversified and specialized craftsmen on one hand and provided impetus to commercial transactions on the other. These in their turn were instrumental in the emergence of urban centres, many of which were also political centres of these powerful *mahājanapadas*. The emergence of the early state often coincides with urban formation; the Ganga valley was also no exception to this pattern. The Ganga valley in general, and the middle Ganga plain in particular, was indeed what B. Subbarao labelled as an 'area of attraction'. The middle Ganga plain, especially its eastern sector, possesses extremely rich mineral deposits and iron ore in the Chhotanagpur area of present Jharkhand. Both literary accounts and archaeological materials leave little room for doubt about the growing use of iron technology during the period under review. This not only resulted in improved crafts production, but immensely contributed to the manufacture of better weaponry, which in its turn, must have enhanced the military-political power of the *mahājanapadas*. The *mahājanapada* of Magadha rose to considerable prominence as it was endowed with all the above features, but it

also had a few more special advantages that helped the speedy growth of its power. Raychaudhuri and Kosambi have drawn our attention to the regular availability of elephants in the Magadhan army and the advantage of having its capital Rājagriha naturally secured by five hills around it. The cyclopean wall around Rājagriha increased its security further. Moreover, Magadha was governed by several rulers of great might and ability who however, did not belong to the kshatriya *varṇa* and, therefore, did not enjoy any pedigree. In other words, the relative social laxity in Magadha—lying far away from the heartland of orthodox Vedic norms—was conducive to the rule of able kings irrespective of their *varṇa* status. These geographical, material and socio-cultural factors were instrumental, according to Raychaudhuri, in developing an urge for territorial expansion among the *mahājanapadas* in the middle Ganga valley. He contrasts this expansionist attitude with the love for local autonomy apparent in those *mahājanapadas* that grew up in the Himalayan foothills and dense forest tracts that were difficult to access.

III

Among the 16 *mahājanapadas*, the earliest to attain political prominence was possibly Kāśī with its famous capital at Vārāṇasī. A *Jātaka* story, admittedly of a later date, probably retains this memory as it describes the ruler of Kāśī as the foremost king in Jambudvīpa (*sabbarājunāmaggarājā*). The *Mahāvagga* leaves an impression that Kāśī's rise to power was at the cost of its northern neighbour Kośala, which at the initial stage was inferior to Kāśī. But by the time of the Buddha, the political scenario had already altered. The same *Mahāvagga* suggests that with the accession of Prasenajit (Pasenadi in Pāli) Kośala became powerful, defeated Kāśī and annexed Kāśī to its territory. To the west of Vārāṇasī stood the powerful *mahājanapada* of Vatsa under the leadership of the famous king Udayana. Around the same time, a very powerful *mahājanapada*, namely Avantī, began to raise its head under king Pradyota—often known for his epithet *chaṇḍa* (ruthless, fierce) which implies the ruler's ambitions of territorial expansions through conquests. According to the *Brihatkathā* of Gunādhya, Pradyota sent an expedition as far north-west as to Gandhāra, though not a successful one. The rivalry between Avantī and Vatsa is also frequently referred to in traditional accounts.

Further images of intense political activities are available in the context of the *mahājanapada* of Magadha. As an area and also in the sense of a people, Magadha, far removed from the cradle land of Vedic culture, was described with scorn in the later Vedic texts, before which we have no literary reference to Magadha. It is only from the sixth century BC that it began to be noticed as a political entity. If one believes a *Jātaka* tale, Rājagriha-Girivraja—Magadha's capital—was part of the territory of Aṅga, the immediate eastern neighbour of Magadha. The story implies that Magadha initially was overpowered by Aṅga *mahājanapada* and that Magadha was

inferior to Aṅga. But the situation rapidly changed with the accession of Bimbisāra to the throne of Magadha. Only scanty information is available about Bimbisāra's lineage and early life. The *Suttanipāta* describes him as a devout follower of and contemporary to the Buddha. Aśvaghosha in his *Buddhacharita* describes Bimbisāra as belonging to the Haryaṅka family (*kula*). On this basis, historians generally regard him as the founder of the Haryaṅka dynasty of Magadha, which continued to be ruled by several of his successors. Bimbisāra appears to have been a powerful and astute ruler who did not launch ambitious campaigns immediately after his accession because Magadha was a relatively weaker power. He is known to have contracted dynastic marriage alliances with the Madras of western Punjab, Kośala and the Vṛiji *gaṇarājya*, thereby befriending prominent *mahājanapadas* and bringing them to his fold. The marriage with Kośaladevī procured for Magadha the village of Kāśī (*Kāsigāma*) as a dowry to provide bath money (*nahānachuṇṇamūlam*) for the new queen of Magadha. The marriage alliance resulted in the control of Magadha over Vārāṇasī, a major urban centre and an inland riverine port on the Ganga. Strengthened by these alliances, Bimbisāra successfully fought against Aṅga which, according to the *Dīghanikāya*, was defeated and annexed by Magadha. The later Jaina account that Bimbisāra's son Ajātaśatru was placed in charge of Champā, the capital of Aṅga, also seems to corroborate the conquest of Aṅga by Magadha. The incorporation of Aṅga within Magadha marks the first stage of the territorial expansion of Magadha. Initially a weak *mahājanapada*, Magadha thus joined the ranks of Kośala and Avantī as an expansionist power with the victory over Aṅga. The Buddhist texts credit Bimbisāra not only with military victory, but praise him as an able administrator too.

This transformation of Magadha under Bimbisāra proved to be of great advantage to his successor Ajātaśatru, who pursued aggressive designs with greater intensity. Decried as a parricide in the Buddhist tradition, Ajātaśatru came into conflict with Kośala soon after his accession. When Prasenajit's mother (Kośaladevī), by birth a Kośalan princess, died of grief after the murder of her husband in the hands of Ajātaśatru, the ruler of Kośala in retaliation tried to take back the village of Kāśī, previously given to Magadha. The details of the protracted hostilities, amidst fluctuating fortunes, between Magadha and Kośala are not available, but the contest came to an end with Kośala finally relinquishing its claim over Kāśī and another marriage alliance being contracted between Magadha and Kośala. Kosambi suggested that Magadha realized the importance of occupying Kāśī, a major urban centre and also an inland riverine port on the Ganga, and therefore engaged in a long-drawn conflict with Kośala to retain its hold. Soon after this, Prasenajit himself faced a rebellion by his son Viḍuḍabha in Kośala. Prasenajit left Kośala to seek asylum in Magadha, but unfortunately is said to have died at the gates of Rājagṛiha. What happened after this is not clearly known. But internal problems within Kośala certainly weakened this

mahājanapada, which subsequently was annexed to Magadha. This paved the way for the expansion of Magadha's control over areas to the north of the Ganga.

Ajātaśatru also encountered another adversary of Magadha, the non-monarchical Vṛiji *mahājanapada* in north Bihar. This speaks of Magadha's rejection of the previous policy of befriending the Vṛijis during the reign of Bimbisāra. The *Mahāvagga* narrates Ajātaśatru's vow to crush the Vṛijis. The reasons of this conflict are not clear to us. The Jaina account suggests that Ajātaśatru and the two sons of Chellana (the Vṛiji wife of Bimbisāra) vied for the inheritance over a necklace and a royal elephant, and this subsequently led to a major conflict between Magadha and the Vṛijis. According to the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* of Buddhaghosha (not earlier than AD fourth–fifth centuries), Ajātaśatru became hostile to the Vṛijis as a result of a breach of promise by the Vṛijis over a mine of gems or fragrance located close to a port on the Ganga, and jointly controlled by Magadha and Vṛiji. The *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* may offer a cogent reason of the conflict, but it is admittedly a late source, not corroborated by any other evidence. Buddhaghosha's explanations may at the most be noted, but can neither be proved nor disproved.

What is beyond any dispute is the fact that Magadha was engaged in a protracted battle against the Vrijis. It took Ajātaśatru, according to the *Nirayāvalīya Sutta* (a Jaina text), 16 long years to rout the nine Malla and nine Licchavi clans and 18 *gaṇarājyas* (non-monarchical/oligarchic clans) of Kāśī-Kośala.

The Jaina account demands a close scrutiny. It certainly demonstrates the formation of a confederacy among 36 non-monarchical/oligarchic groups and clans under the leadership of the Vṛijis/Lichchhavīs of Vaiśāli against Magadha. The event, therefore, is not a mere war, but probably represents a major conflict between a monarchical power and a number of non-monarchical clans, which obviously resisted the monarchical system. Its momentous significance is further underlined by the Buddha who, according to the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (a canonical text giving an account of the last days of the Buddha), is said to have prophesied that the non-monarchical groups would not be overpowered by Magadha if they maintained their unity and followed their traditional norms. The same text also describes how Pāṭaligāma (later Pāṭaliputra) was being fortified by Ajātaśatru, anticipating an assault from his northern adversary. No less significant is the description that 18 *gaṇarājyas* from Kāśī and Kośala joined the Lichchhavīs and the Mallas against Magadha. Both Kāśī and Kośala were well-known monarchical powers, yet there were evidently pockets of autonomous non-monarchical groups even in these two monarchical realms. The *gaṇarājyas* of Kāśī-Kośala may have combined and raised their heads, following Prasenajit's death and the resultant internal troubles in Kośala's ruling house. The Buddha's sayings suggest that the key to the strength of the *gaṇarājyas* was their

compactness and unity. It is precisely here that Ajātaśatru struck. The *Aṭṭhakatha* tells us that in addition to sustained military offensives, Ajātaśatru also sowed the seeds of disunion among the *gaṇarājyas* by taking recourse to diplomacy (*upalāpana*) and dissension (*mithubheda*). He thus succeeded in eating into the compactness and cohesion among these non-monarchical oligarchic groups. The seeds of disunion and dissension were planted by two shrewd Magadhan administrators, Sunīdha and Vassākara. The process must have been a long-drawn one, hence the mention of sixteen long years of struggle. As the *gaṇarājyas* became internally weakened and ended up in disarray, Ajātaśatru then launched the final military assault with the help of new weapons like *rathamushala* and *mahāśilākaṇṭaka*. Ajātaśatru's success in demolishing the internal strength and cohesion among the *gaṇarājyas* was, according to Kosambi, a process akin to 'boring from within'. It is likely that the strength of the *gaṇarājyas* was wearing out because of their long resistance to the monarchical power of Magadha. A strong monarchical *mahājanapada* like Magadha was in a more advantageous position to garner adequate resources to maintain a sizeable army, capable of battles over long periods. The complex administrative machinery that would ensure the appropriation of resources through revenue measures was better suited to a monarchical set up than to a *gaṇarājya* type of polity. As a result of this, the resistance from the *gaṇarājyas*, however strong, was not adequate enough to thwart the advancement of the Magadhan monarchy. The account also leaves a strong impression that Kośala and the Lichchhavīs, both northerly adversaries of Magadha, could have joined hands against their common enemy, Magadha. Raychaudhuri aptly remarked: 'The Kośalan war and the Vajjian war were probably not isolated events but parts of a common movement directed against the establishment of the hegemony of Magadha.'

Magadha thus eclipsed both Kośala and Vṛiji *mahājanapadas*, minimizing the number of principal contestants from five to three.

Outside the Ganga valley the *mahājanapada* of Avantī was the pre-eminent power under Pradyota, whose arch rival was Udayana, the ruler of Vatsa *mahājanapada*. Though the details of the events are only dimly known, it appears that the successors of Udayana could not match up to the growing power of Avantī, and Vatsa ultimately succumbed to Avantī. At this juncture, two out of the five powerful *mahājanapadas*, namely Magadha and Avantī, overpowered their rivals. Buddhists chronicles speak of Ajātaśatru's anticipation of an intended attack from Avantī on Magadha, but this did not materialize in the lifetime of Ajātaśatru. If Magadha was the most formidable power in the eastern part of the Ganga valley, Avantī dominated the western theatre.

Ajātaśatru was followed by Udāyin or Udāyibhadra, mentioned in the Purāṇas and the Jaina accounts, both late sources. The most significant event of Udāyin's time was the transfer of Magadha's capital from Rājagriha

to Pāṭaliputra. Pāṭaliputra was formerly known as Pāṭaligāma; but it was not considered a city (*pura* or *nāgara*) in Buddhist sources. It was instead a *puṭabhedana*, a term literally meaning a place where lids (*puṭa*) of the boxes of merchandise were broken or opened (*bhedana*). Pāṭaligāma as a *puṭabhedana* functioned as a 'stockade', as Kosambi cogently argued. The new capital located on the confluence of the Ganga, the Son and the Ghaghra was a riverine port and noted primarily for its commercial significance. The Buddha visited Pāṭaligāma, according to the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, during his last journey to Vaiśālī. The Master was evidently impressed by Pāṭaligāma, rightly assessed its enormous potential and prophesied that the *puṭabhedana* would eventually become the premier city (*agganagara*) of the country. As Magadha's territories spread to the north of the Ganga, following the conquest and annexation of Vajji and Kośala *mahājanapadas*, Pāṭaliputra seems to have been strategically better located as a political centre than Rājagriha in south Bihar. It is also possible that the Magadhan rulers having realized the commercial importance of Pāṭaligāma, transformed it into the premier political centre. Several successors of Udāyin figure in the Purāṇas and Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles, but little definite information is available about them.

The end of the Haryaṅka dynasty of Magadha came when Śiśunāga—possibly a Magadhan administrator in Vārāṇasī—captured power. The ruling house established by him is known as the Śaiśunāga dynasty. The principal event during Śiśunāga's reign was the victory of Magadha over Avantī. The successors of Pradyota on the throne of Avantī were not as powerful as their illustrious predecessor; Magadha was able to overcome Avantī. Thus Magadha, initially an insignificant political entity, became the most powerful among the sixteen *mahājanapadas*. The Purāṇas mention a few successors of Śiśunāga: Kālāśoka, Kākavarṇa, Nandivardhana, and Pañchamaka. It is difficult to suggest a reliable chronology of their rules and the principal events of their reigns. Examining various sources—none really contemporary—Raychaudhuri suggested that the Śaiśunāga dynasty was in the political scenario from 413 to 345 BC, for nearly even decades.

The power that supplanted the Śaiśunāga and became very formidable in north India is known as the Nanda dynasty. There is no contemporary source of information throwing light on this power; whatever little is known is largely from the Purāṇas and the Jaina texts. There is a unanimity among sources in presenting the Nanda rulers as being non-Kshatriyas and of a humble origin. The founder of the line, Mahāpadma (or Mahāpadmapati, also called Ugrasena) figures in the Purāṇas as the son a śūdra woman (*śudrāgarbhodbhava*), while the Jaina *Pariśishṭaparvan* describes him as the son of barber (*nāpitaputra*). The memory of the low social origin of the Nanda family figures also in the accounts of Alexander's historians who wrote about the relatively low social esteem of the last known ruler of the

house, Xandrames or Aggrammes (identified with Dhanananda of Indian sources). The *Harshacharita* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa (AD seventh century) describes him as the killer of Kākavarṇa of the Śaiśunāga family. These portrayals of Mahāpadma as a person devoid of any pedigree and a violent usurper of the throne, however, cannot deny that the power of Magadha immensely increased during his reign. Described as a sole ruler (*ekarāt*) in the Purāṇas, Mahāpadma Nanda is said to have exterminated numerous kshatriya kings (*sarvakshatrāntaka*). The Purāṇas enlist Ikshvāku, Pañchāla, Kāśī, Haihaya, Kaliṅga, Aśmaka, Kuru, Maithila and Śūrasena among the areas/kings conquered by him. The Ishvākus are generally associated with Kośala; Kuru and Pañchāla are contiguous territories in the Rohilkhand and Kurukshetra areas; the Śūraśena country embraced regions around Mathurā, and Maithila stood for north Bihar. In the absence of contemporary accounts, it is difficult to verify the substance of the claims of such widespread territorial conquests as these. It is also possible that such accounts could have belonged to the later literary genre upholding and glorifying the Puranic ideal of the 'conquest of quarters' or world conquest (*digvijaya*). If, however, Mahāpadma won over these adversaries in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and the upper Ganga valley, it is unmistakable that a few of the areas or powers (the Ikshvākus, Pañchāla, Kāśī, Maithila and Śūrasena) had previously been defeated by Magadha. These could have figured in the Purāṇas to give a comprehensive idea of the vast territorial possessions under the Nandas. Alternatively, it could imply that these areas probably challenged Magadhan authority during the troubled times of the last days of the Śaiśunāga house and therefore had to be re-conquered by Mahāpadma. Among the areas not conquered hitherto before by a Magadhan ruler are Kaliṅga and Aśmaka. The Nanda conquest of Kaliṅga (in the Mahānadi delta in Orissa) is however, attested by the Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela (palaeographically assignable to the late first century BC), recording the memory of the Nanda occupation of Kaliṅga. This was the first attempt by Magadha to expand to the south and Kaliṅga, like Malwa, stood as a corridor between north India and the northern part of the peninsula. Whether the occupation of Kaliṅga led to the Nanda conquest of Aśmaka on the Godavari is a matter of conjecture only and cannot be proved.

The Purāṇas refer to the rule of nine Nanda kings who could have been brothers or sons of Mahāpadama Nanda. Only the last ruler of the Nanda dynasty is definitely known among the successors of Mahāpadama: he was Dhanananda. From the accounts of Alexander's invasion of north-west India, Dhanananda seems to have been a contemporary of Alexander and called Agrammes. The name Agrammes is probably derived from Sanskrit Augrasainya, i.e. a son of Ugrasena, an epithet of Mahāpadama Nanda. He is also called Xandrems. The Greek accounts report about an extensive realm to the east of Porus' kingdom; in other words, to the east of the Jhelum. This kingdom is mentioned as that of Gangaridae and Prasioi with its capital at

Palibothra. While Palibothra undoubtedly stands for Pāṭaliputra, the term Prasioi is probably derived from Sanskrit *prāchya* (east). The word Gangaridaei refers to the Gangetic country. The realm located to the east of the Jhelum in the Gangetic country with its capital at Pāṭaliputra cannot but refer to the Magadhan realm. Seen from this light, the Greek accounts possibly offer some validity to the claim of extensive conquests by Mahāpadama Nanda as far as the western part of the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The Greek authors also impress upon the large army of Gangaridae and Prasioi though the figures may be inflated. To the Nanda rulers, especially Mahāpadma, belong the credit of expanding the authority of Magadha over the entire Ganga valley and probably Kaliṅga too. Magadha was undoubtedly the most formidable power in north India at the time of the Macedonian invasion in the Punjab (327 BC). The control over the Ganga valley must have facilitated the Nanda kings to extract considerable resources from the agrarian sector. This was a major pre-requisite for commanding a large army. The Purāṇas allude to the immense wealth (*artharuchi/navanavatidravyakoṭiśvra*) of the Nandas, which the rulers probably amassed by extortionate revenue measures. The later Classical texts and the Purāṇas leave an impression that the Nanda rulers were looked down upon on account of their extortionate practices. The Nanda rule came to an end when Chandragupta Maurya overthrew the last Nanda king in 324 BC. Starting its political journey as an insignificant entity in the sixth century, Magadha indeed emerged as the pre-eminent power of north India in the late fourth century BC.

IV

The political developments experienced in the Ganga valley in course of the rise of Magadha *mahājanapada* are not matched elsewhere in the subcontinent. Contemporary peninsular India had no *mahājanapada*-like formation. In the north-western sector, the prominent power was the *mahājanapada* of Gandhāra with its famous capital Takshaśilā (Taxila). But it was not as powerful as Magadha, Avantī or Kośala. Its importance however lies in its location in the north-western fringe of the subcontinent, which offered opportunities of linkages with West and Central Asia. At the time when Magadha was making its presence felt in the Ganga valley politics, Gandhāra and north-western part of India experienced intimate contacts with West Asia as a result of the conquests of this region by the Achaeminid rulers of ancient Iran. The story of the Achaeminid occupation becomes available to us by their inscriptions and Herodotus' *Historia* and a few later Classical texts.

The Achaeminid rule penetrated into the subcontinent under Darius I (522-486 BC), the greatest ruler of the Achaeminid house. His rule over Gadara (Gandhāra), Thatagu (Sattagydia of the Greek texts), Harauvati (Arachosia in the Greek accounts or present Kandahar in Afghanistan) and

Hidush, corresponding to the term 'India' in Herodotus' accounts, is well attested by both Classical accounts and inscriptions. The name Hidush is certainly derived from the river Sindhu or Indus. Hidush of Achaeminid records and India of Herodotus therefore denoted the lower Indus valley including the Indus delta. Hidush/India was the twentieth and the richest satrapy (province) of the Achaeminid realm, yielding, according to Herodotus, 330 talents of gold dust to the Achaemind ruler as annual tribute. The Acheaminid rule continued over this region till the demise of the Acheminid empire in the hands of Alexander (330 BC). The long political mastery of the Achaeminid rulers on the north-western and western parts of the subcontinent left behind a few significant impacts. The administrative units called satrapy—comparable to provinces—figured in the subsequent rules of Greek, Śaka and Indo-Parthian kings, who seem to have taken the cue from the Achaeminid system. The authorities over such satrapies were satraps, a term that was Sanskritized as Kshatrapa (also as Mahākshatrapa) to denote a subordinate/dependant ruler under an overlord in subsequent centuries. The political presence of the Acheminids must have been responsible for the familiarity with Aramaic, a Semitic language and script of West Asia that became the lingua franca during the Achaemind rule. It is in these areas of Taxila, Kabul and Kandahar that Aśoka issued his edicts in Aramaic that must have gained currency on account of the Acheaminid rule from late sixth to the late fourth centuries BC. B.N. Mukherjee suggests that the incorporation of the north-western extremes of the subcontinent into the Aramaic-using cultural zone seems to have contributed to the creation of Kharoshṭī script since the time of Aśoka (third century BC). Mukherjee therefore disagrees with R.C. Majumdar who saw little or no impact of Achaeminid rule in the north-western part of the subcontinent.

The Achaeminid empire eclipsed in 330 BC as it collapsed before Alexander's army. Having routed the Acheminid rule, the Macedonian conqueror reached the north-western corners of India in 327 BC. The accounts of Alexander's invasion, left behind by 'Alexander's historians' (some like Arrian, Plutarch and Justin being much later than the fourth century BC Macedonian invasion) suggest that there were many powers in the North-Western part of the subcontinent; it is also evident that there was no formidable power in this part, like Magadha in the Ganga valley. These powers in the north-west were:

1. Assakenoi: Identified with the region now in Swat and Buner. Greek texts describe it as a monarchical power with a strong force consisting of 20,000 cavalry, 30,000 infantry and 30 war elephants. It fought with Alexander.
2. Nysa: It represents the area between Kabul and the Indus valley. It figures in the Greek texts as a non-monarchical polity.

3. Peucalaotis: This is certainly ancient Pushkālavatī (represented by the archaeological site of Charsadda) and adjacent area. It was a part of the Gandhāra *mahājanapada*, but located to the west of the river Indus. The ruler here was Astes according to the historians of Alexander; the name Astes may correspond to Hasta or Ashtaka.
4. Taxila: It denotes that part of Gandhāra, which was located to the east of the Indus with its capital at the famous city of Takshaśilā. Omphis (=Ambhi), the ruler of Taxila, is said to have surrendered to Alexander and offered him a huge amount of tributes to avoid a direct confrontation with the Macedonian army.
5. Arsakes: Located in the present Hazara district of Pakistan.
6. Abisares: This king is identified with Abhisāra.
7. Elder Porus: Undoubtedly king Puru of the Indian sources. His kingdom appears to have been situated in the area between the Chenab and the Jhelum. A powerful kingdom, it offered a heroic resistance to Alexander with an army of 50,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry, 1,000 chariots and 130 war elephants. Greek accounts have detailed descriptions of the battle plans of the war of Hydespas in which Porus was defeated after gallant fighting, which earned high praises in these texts.
8. Glauganikoi: located to the west of the river Chenab.
9. Gandaris: located in the Rechna doab area.
10. Adrastai: situated in the Bari doab region.
11. Kathaioi: This territory was possibly in Saharanpur in the Ban doab.
12. Sophytes: This ruler is the same as Saubhuti whose kingdom lay to the east of Jhelum.
13. Phegelus: It was located in the area between the Ravi and the Beas rivers.
14. Siboi: Identified with the Śibi tribe, which was located in an area to the south of the confluence of the Jhelum and the Chenab.
15. Agalassoi: A powerful kingdom close to Siboi; Greek authors describe it as having 40,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry.

18. and 19. Oxydraki and Malloi: These are identified respectively with the Kshudrakas and the Malavas of the Indian sources. The Greek texts noted their martial excellence. Pāṇini, the great grammarian, knew the Malavas as a group of professional warriors (*śastropajīvi*). They were noted by Greek authors for their valiant resistance to Alexander.

20. Abastenoi: Identified with the ancient Ambashtha group, the Abastenoi are believed to have been associated with the lower portions of the Chenab valley. This non-monarchical group possessed a fighting force of 60,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry and 500 chariots.

21-22. Xathroi and Ossadoi: The first is identified with the Kshatri tribe and the second with the Vasati group. Both were located in the lower basin of the Chenab river.

23-24. Sodrai and Massanoi: Sodrai possibly stands for the Śūdra tribe who appear in Indian sources jointly with the Ābhirās. After defeating them, Alexander founded the city of Alexandria as a mark of his victory.
25. Musikanos: Located in the Sukkur region of present Pakistan.
26. Oxukanos: Located in the present Larkana area of Pakistan.
27. Sambos: It was situated in a hilly region adjacent to the kingdom of Musikanos.
28. Patalene: This stands for the Indus delta.

Alexander's invasion of the north-western frontiers began after he had defeated the last Achaeminid ruler, Darius III in 330 BC. He encountered the above powers for another three years from 327 BC and left the subcontinent. On his way back to Macedonia, he died in Babylon. His premature death precluded all possibilities of consolidating his major conquests into a vast imperial domain. Why Alexander decided to return to Macedonia without launching a war against powers in the Ganga valley, notably Magadha, is not clear. The Classical texts give an impression of the tired troops of the Macedonian conqueror and their reluctance to engage in hostilities with the huge army of the Gangaridae and Prasioi. One is not sure whether the size of the Magadhan army and other armies was deliberately inflated in the Greek accounts to underline the degree of difficulty and challenge that could have stood before Alexander's army. In view of the problems Alexander faced in tackling the elephant corps of Porus in the battle of Hydespas, the Macedonian army could have been concerned about the availability of a large number of war elephants in the Magadhan army. All these could have influenced his decision against encountering the most powerful state in north India in a direct battle.

One may not also miss the fact that the principal aim of Alexander was to crush the Achaeminid empire. With the conquest over the north-western frontier areas and the lower Indus valley, Alexander reached up to the easternmost part of the erstwhile Achaeminid domain and any further advancement to the east of the Punjab could have been, in his estimation, redundant. Alexander's conquest of the north-western parts India was indeed a short-lived incident, leaving little political impacts in the history of the subcontinent. Vincent Smith obviously exaggerated the importance of Macedonian incursion from the point of view of colonial historiography, which has been effectively challenged. While rulers like Puru and Abisares and the non-monarchical Malloi and Oxydraki offered very stubborn resistance to the advancing Macedonian forces, rulers of Gandhāra and the region around Kabul offered submission. The Macedonian invasion possibly weakened many powers of the north-western borderland of the subcontinent. This proved advantageous for Chandragupta Maurya when he began expanding the Maurya military and political might over these areas in the very last years of the fourth century BC.

V

Economy and Society

The three centuries under review were witness to many significant changes in social and economic life, especially in north India which experienced the complex process of the formation of the state. The very term *janapada* stands not only for the populated/ settled territory of a state, but strongly suggests a sedentary settlement of people. That an ancient sedentary settlement in Indian subcontinent would be rooted to agriculture, goes beyond any dispute and conjecture. The *janapada* also denotes the countryside, the sustainer of the agrarian sector of the economy, when it is distinguished from *pura* or *nāgara* (an urban centre). The *janapada* is viewed as an area rich in resources (*janapadasampat*), especially agrarian. Settled agrarian society had become well-established in the Indo-Ganga divide, the upper Ganga valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab area already by the later Vedic times (1000–600 BC). The development of the agrarian sector of the economy continued during the succeeding three centuries, as *janapadas* and *mahājanapadas* proliferated in the Ganga valley, and more precisely in the middle Ganga plains. We have already discussed the suitable environmental conditions fostering agrarian development in the Ganga valley. The middle Ganga plains receive an average annual rainfall ranging between 45–55 inches, in some areas as high as 70 inches per year. This, along with the fertile alluvial soil, was not merely conducive to agriculture, but particularly suitable for paddy cultivation. The area to the east of Allahabad gained considerable prominence for flourishing agricultural activities, while the later Vedic period was noted for the concentration of agricultural settlements in the Ganga-Yamuna doab region.

Pāli canonical texts praise agriculture (*kasi*, Sanskrit *krishi*) as one of the excellent professions (*ukkaṭṭhakamma;* Sanskrit *utkrishṭa karma*), the other two being cattle rearing and trade. An excellent portrayal is available in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* on the well-ploughed tract (*sukaṭṭham;* Sanskrit *sukrishṭam*) with good quality soil (*sumattikam*) in which the cultivator (*kassaka*) sowed seeds (*vijāni patiṭṭhāpeti*). Pāṇini's grammar clearly mentions the plough (*hala*). Moreover, the great grammarian shows his awareness of different types of crop and the correspondingly different types of soils or tracts suitable for their cultivation. Thus, a well-ploughed plot was called *suhalī*, while one unfit for tillage was known as *ahalī*. The *vraiheya* type of plot was suitable for the cultivation of paddy (*vrihi*), *yavya* for the wheat (*yava*) and *tilya* for the sesame (*tila*), the last one obviously yielding edible oil. What is even more interesting is Pāṇini's impressions about different crops being grown in different seasons. Thus, the winter crop (akin to modern rabi crop) would be known as *āśvayujāka* (derived from the month of Āśvin when the seeds were sown). Similarly, *graishmaka* was possibly analogous to the kharif

crop, which was sown in late summer (*grīshma*) and harvested in winter/autumn. Pāṇini knew the spring crop as *vāsantaka*.

All sources consider paddy as the principal and pre-eminent crop, and the best variety of paddy was known as *śāli*. According to Pāṇini's *Ashṭadhyāyī*, the *śāleya* type of soil, suitable for the cultivation of *śāli* variety of rice, was amply available in Magadha. As the traditional practice of cultivating the *śāli* rice involves transplantation agriculture, R.S. Sharma inferred that this particular method came into vogue for the first time in the middle Ganga valley around sixth-fifth centuries BC. Pointing to the advantage of profuse production as and when transplantation agriculture is practised, R.S. Sharma cogently argues that such improved agricultural technology would have augmented agricultural output. Though a quantification of paddy production in the Ganga valley in the age of the Buddha is not possible due to scarcity of evidence, it is very likely that growth in crop production would result in the increased collection of agricultural taxes by the rulers of the *mahājanapadas* which required this vital resource to maintain the states' functionaries and fighting forces alike. The possibility of increased crop production, especially paddy cultivation, should also logically imply the availability of some surplus which would sustain the specialist craftsmen, merchants and administrators, none of them being direct food-producers. Drawing on the researches of demographers, Trevor Ling points out that fertility tends to increase in a rice-eating society than in a society which consumes cereals other than rice. Seen from this light, the regularity of paddy production in the fertile Ganga valley could have paved the way for demographic growth, though no quantifiable data can be presented. The period from sixth to the fourth century BC marks the beginning of urbanization in the Ganga valley. One of the crucial factors in the emergence of urban centres is the increase in population as cities experience a much greater number of residents and also a greater density of population than that encountered in a rural settlement. Thus, the development of paddy cultivation in Ganga valley, particularly in the middle Ganga plains, left multifarious impacts and far-reaching effects on the material life in the age of the Buddha. Apart from cereals like paddy, wheat and barley, sugarcane plantation is also mentioned by Pāṇini; this further provided opportunities for producing molasses, which figures in the Pāli canonical texts.

Literary texts frequently refer to the cultivator (*kīnāśa, karshaka/kassaka*). A peasant owning some land was generally known in the Buddhist texts as *kuṭumbika*. On the other hand, the *gahapati* appears in the Pāli canons as possessing vast landed estate and as a fabulously rich person (elaborate discussion on the *gahapati* has been made later), clearly distinguishable from an ordinary cultivator or peasant. Along with the development in agriculture, growing complexities in material life became more pronounced. The period under discussion witnessed clear indications of the recognition of the individual holding over land. This is particularly seen in the

monarchical *mahājanapadas*. The recognition of the individual rights over land cannot but speak of unequal access to land, the most important means of production in a predominantly agrarian society. Anāthapiṇḍika, a wealthy lay follower (*upāsaka*) of the Buddha, donated a pleasure garden named Jetavana in Śrāvastī to the Buddha. The said pleasure garden was first purchased by cash and then given away as a gift. Thus, a particular plot of land was transferred twice, by two different methods (first by sale and then by gift). The transferability of land amply demonstrates the prevalence of individual proprietary rights over land. In such a situation, there would be little possibility of the equal distribution of land among people. The landed possession of a rich *gahapati* far exceeded that of a peasant cultivator like the *kuṭumbi*. The least amount of land was perhaps in the hands of agricultural labourers, labelled as *kulagharapurise* in the Jain literature, who tilled the land of sizable estates of *gahapatis*. On the other hand, Pāli texts tell us that land was held in common in the non-monarchical clans of the Śākyas and Koliyas where the prevalence of individual rights over land had not yet taken its root.

The importance of cattle-keeping has been duly recognized in the Buddhist texts. Cattle-keeping is indeed an inseparable ingredient of an agricultural material milieu. It is important to note that the Pāli texts preferred the word *go-rakkhā* (*go-rakshā*) to *paśupālana*, the latter term meaning cattle-rearing. The term *go-rakkhā* literally denotes protection of the cattle. Both Buddhism and Jainism strongly emphasize on non-violence (*ahiṁsā*) and denounce animal sacrifice—an integral part of the Vedic religion. One may reasonably infer that a huge number of animals, particularly cattle, were sacrificed during the sacrificial rituals (*yajñas*). Elaborate prescriptions for performing *yajñas* are an essential aspect of Vedic religion during the later Vedic times. Widespread destruction of faunal wealth in course of Vedic sacrifices may not have augured well for the agrarian society and a strong reaction and repudiation to this found its voice in the sacred principle of non-killing/non-injury to living beings in Buddhism and Jainism, which effectively challenged Vedic orthodoxy. Judged in this light, the word *go-rakkhā* assumes a special significance. Excavations at Atranjikhera (western Uttar Pradesh) have revealed a large number of animal bones, often with slaughter marks, datable prior to 500 BC. These animals were evidently killed. Interestingly enough, animal bones from the same site, but unearthed from layers subsequent to 500 BC, show a distinct decrease in the number of slaughtered animals. Archaeology therefore may suggest a reduction in the number of slaughtered animals. Such an evidence is compatible with the ideal and practice of *go-rakkhā* upheld in the Pāli canonical texts.

The considerable development in agriculture in the Ganga valley was conducive to the sustenance of the non-agrarian economy sector, in which one notes the active presence of diverse craftsmen and professional groups, and merchants. Both textual sources and field archaeological materials

carry an impression of the diversity in crafts production in the Ganga valley. Mention may here be made of the reed-makers (*nalakāras*), who had a distinct locality as their residence and place of work (*nalakāragāma*). Buddhist texts often refer to the carpenter (*vaḍḍhaki;* Sanskrit *vardhakī*), who is thus clearly differentiated from the reed-maker. Inseparably associated with daily life was the craft of the potter (*kumbhakāra*) who, according to the Buddhist texts, often procured the mud from the banks of a river. The most eloquent testimony to the excellence of the potter's craft comes from archaeology. The most distinctive pottery of this period is known as the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), a fully wheel-thrown pottery, which was technologically more advanced than the PGW of the previous epoch. Raymond Allchin points to the potter's conscious selection of a better quality of clay without which it was not possible to manufacture the NBPW. The most notable feature of the pottery was its shiny black outer surface. The potter's successful exposure of the earthenware to very high degree of temperature in his kiln ensured the blackening of the outer surface, on which subsequently was applied a black slip. That provided the pottery with a mirror-like shine, giving the pottery its very special appearance. The principal manufacturing zone of the NBPW is Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, though its distribution spreads over a very wide area from the north-west frontier to Bihar during the phase from 600-300 BC. Mostly consisting of dishes and various types of bowls, the NBPW technologically is of so high an order that it was not possibly used as a daily necessity item. Most archaeologists would consider it as a deluxe pottery mainly for two reasons, First, the sites from where the NBPW has been reported, the NBPW occur in fewer number than other type of potteries, implying thereby that it was not meant for daily usage. Second, there are known instances of repairing a broken NBPW pottery with a revetment and of not discarding the damaged piece. NBPW is reported almost invariably from urban sites. The NBPW could also have been an item of gift to the Buddhist monk/monstery. Much more numerous than the NBPW was the pottery labelled as Black and Red Ware (BRW). The BRW—with its commonly seen forms in bowls of smaller and wider flans, large water storage vessels and cover of vessels—has been reported from Rajghat (near Vārāṇasī), Prahladpur, Chirand and Sonepur (Bihar) and Pandurajar Dhibi (West Bengal). The BRW appears frequently in the peninsular part too, where it is associated with the megalithic burial culture.

One of the most significant developments in crafts production is seen in the development of iron tools. The blacksmith (*kammāra;* Sanskrit *karmakāra*) frequently figures in the Pāli canonical texts. The Buddha is said to have taken his last meal with the blacksmith Chunda who is given the epithet *kammāraputta*, literally the son of a blacksmith. The term actually denotes a blacksmith, clearly suggesting that the craft of the blacksmith was generally followed in a hereditary manner. Pāṇini speaks of the use of bellow (*bhastra*) in the workshop of the blacksmith. Iron tools and implements are

found in handsome numbers from archaeological sites of Atranjikhera, Noh, Kauśāmbī, Prahladpur, Rajghat and Mason (in Uttar Pradesh) Chirand, Vaiśālī, Patna, Sonepur and Champā (in Bihar). Atranjikhera and Noh have yielded the maximum number of such iron implements. Most of the implements are weapons, though iron sickles, axes, adzes and iron ploughshares (the last in small numbers) have also been discovered. Archaeologists have ascertained by examining the tools from Rajghat, that these were manufactured out of the iron ore extracted from the mines in Singbhum and Mayurbhanj areas. The middle Ganga valley had a great advantage of having within it the iron ore mines. The iron axes and adzes certainly helped clearing the dense forest in the Ganga valley, paving way for the agrarian settlements. The profusion of iron weapons amply demonstrates that iron technology benefitted the aggressive and ambitious masters of the *mahājanapadas* in the Ganga valley. To what extent iron ploughshares were used in the contemporary Ganga valley to ensure a higher output of crops has been debated by historians and archeologists (discussed in a later section). Iron technology was also present in wide areas of peninsular India in the archaeological context of the megalithic burial culture. Trans-Vindhyan sites have yielded iron tools like flat axes, spades, hoes, sickles, spears, blades, knives, swords and other weapons. Though iron technology was known in the Deccan and South India, the iron ploughshare is conspicuous by its absence in the peninsula.

One of the traditionally famous crafts was certainly the manufacture of textiles. The Buddhist texts were aware of the excellence of textiles produced in Vārāṇasī. While the terms *peśakāra* and *tantuvāya* (*Vinayapiṭaka*) denoted the weaver, the tailor and the embroider were respectively known as *tunnavāya* and *suchīkāra* (*Saṁyuttanikāya*). These different terms indicate specialization of crafts of the weaver, tailor and embroider. A craft particularly associated with urban life was that of the jeweller (*maṇikāra*). Field archaeological materials, especially from Śrāvastī, leave little room for doubt about the flourishing bead-making industry. Beads of precious and semi-precious stones (including lapis lazuli) have been regularly reported from this site. Another luxury item catering especially to urban tastes was the ivory product manufactured by the *dantakāra* (the tusk worker or the ivory maker).

Apart from these diverse craftsmen, North India during the age of the Buddha witnessed the advent of a few professionals. Foremost among these was the physician (*vejja*). The outstanding physician of the time of the Buddha was Jivaka komaravachchha, who treated many wealthy *gahapatis, śreṣṭhīs* and rulers. Among his patients were kings like Bimbisāra and Pushkarasarin and the wealthy *gahapati*, Anāthapiṇḍika, capable of paying the celebrated physician with handsome amount of fees for the medical services rendered by him. In addition to the physician, the Pāli canonical texts were also aware of the surgeon (*sallakatta*). Relevant to the advent of the urban society were the professions of the accountant (*ganaka*) and the scribe (*lekha*), both of

which figured as excellent occupations (*ukkaṭṭhasippa*) in the Pāli texts. The reference to acrobats (*laṅghika*) speaks of professional entertainers who probably performed before an urban audience. Mention may be made also of the washerman (*rajaka*) and the barber (*nahāpita*), though the Pāli literature rarely accords an honourable position to these two professions. It is particularly significant to note that the age under review witnessed for the first time the arrival of professional groupings or bodies like the *gaṇa, saṁgha, pūga*, etc., which were organizations of persons following a common craft or trade. The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* further recommends that these organizations should have had their own rules and regulations, which the ruler was expected to recognize.

As we have already stated, the third 'excellent profession' (*ukkaṭṭha-kamma*), according to the Pāli texts, was trade (*vaṇijjā*). Buddhist texts refer to trade more prominently and more regularly than the Vedic corpus of the previous epoch. The most eloquent proof of the growth of trade during the age of the *mahājanapadas* is seen in the arrival of coins as a medium of exchange, the importance of which will be discussed later. The foremost among the merchants was the *setthi* (Sanskrit *śreshṭhi*), known in the Pāli texts for his fabulous wealth. The *setthi* seems to have played the role of an investor in business. Though the *setṭhi* is mentioned in the Pāli canonical texts, he would gain greater prominence in the Jātaka stories of a later period. More frequently encountered in the Pāli texts is the *sārthavāha* or the leader of caravan traders, often described as undertaking a long journey from the eastern (*puvvanta*) to the western frontier (*aparānta*) with many carts or wagons. Pāli canonical literature also speaks of the shopkeeper (*pāpānika*). That there were various type of merchants will become evident from reading of *Ashṭadhyāyī* by Pāṇini who mentions the cattle dealer (*go-vaṇij*), the horse dealer (*aśva-vaṇij*) and merchants of Gandhāra and Madra (*Gandhārī-vaṇij/Madra-vaṇij*).

The extensive north Indian plains offered little geographical barriers and therefore, encouraged movements of merchants and commodities. The rivers are also likely to have been conducive to communications. The account of a journey by a Buddhist monk makes an interesting reading on the routes of communication. Baveru, in the company of a few followers, undertook an overland journey from Pratishṭhāna (modern Paithan) in the central Deccan to Śrāvastī, the capital of Kośala, to meet the Buddha. From Pratishṭhāna, they went through Māhishmatī (Mandhata, Madhya Pradesh), Ujeni (Ujjayinī, the capital of Avantī), Vidiśā (near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh), Tumbavana (Tumain, Madhya Pradesh), Vanasavbhaya (possibly the forest tract in the Rewa region of MP), Kauśāmbī, the capital of Vatsa and finally Śrāvastī. This has been generally recognized as the north-south trunk road in the age of the Buddha. That greater parts of the middle Ganga plains were well traversed, will be evident from the accounts of the itineraries of the Buddha and Jīvaka, the master physician in the Pāli

literature. Both the merchant and the Buddhist monk were itinerant figures; during the rainy season they often had to sojourn together (*vassāvāsa*), leading to appreciable the acquaintance between the monk and merchant. A reliable index of the trade network in contemporary north India will be available from the distribution of the NBPW sites. We have already pointed to the luxury nature of the NBPW, which was manufactured in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The NBPW pottery (belonging to the early phase 600–300 BC) has been found from Charsadda and Taxila (northwest frontier in Pakistan), Ludhiana, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Ambala (in the Punjab), Rohtak, Kurukshetra (Haryana), Mathurā, Agra, Aligarh, Meerat, Bulandshahr (western part of UP), Gorakhpur, Vārāṇasī, Allahabad, Kausambl, Mirzapur (eastern part of UP), Gaya, Patna, Saran, Munger and Bhagalpur (in Bihar). The wide distribution of the particular ware does point to its transportation and transaction to places away from its centres of production, and that is why, it suggests a trade network. Though the Pāli texts mention sea-borne trade (*samuddavāṇijja*) and sea-going vessels (*samuddikāyānāvā*), information regarding the regularity of long-distance maritime commerce is rather scanty.

Narendra Wagle has drawn our attention to a supposed statement of the Buddha in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* about the greater advantages and gains from trade vis-à-vis agriculture, since the latter required the input of immense labour and a long time-frame for a reasonable success; but the gain from commerce was more handsome in a relatively shorter time and with less physical strain. The preference for trade is also quite pronounced in the Jaina view. The great stress on non-violence to living beings in Jainism resulted in assigning more honour to trade than to agriculture, which could have involved unconscious and unintentional destruction of living beings during cultivation. In view of such favourable attitudes to trade, it is not surprising that the Buddhist texts recognized the importance of loans and credits (*iṇa;* Sanskrit *ṛiṇa*) as an important ingredient of commerce. A

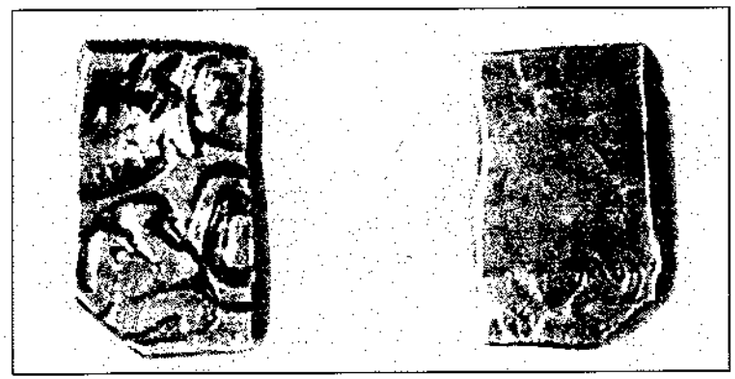


Plate 3.1: Silver punch-marked coin (obv. And rev.): Kośala

merchant, according to the Buddhist texts, should borrow money, provided he was in a position to repay the loan after ensuring the maintenance of his family. Pāli canonical literature stresses on the importance of the freedom from debt for attaining happiness in one's life; it also recognizes that with lawfully acquired money, one could be free from debts. The last statement implies that either a person with a sound financial situation did not have to incur debt, or the person's substantial monetary possession helped the repayment of debt. The Buddha is said to have advised that half of one's wealth should go in one's business, a quarter of it for consumption and the remaining quarter kept aside for meeting an emergency. Gombrich reads in this prescription the possibility of a high rate of reinvestment.

The question of the medium of exchange is inseparably associated with trade and transaction. The undoubted presence of coins as metallic medium of exchange during the period under review definitely underlines that exchanges were not limited to barter and, therefore, assumed considerable complexities. A coin as a medium of exchange must ensure two conditions: its metallic purity (a high percentage of precious metal like silver or gold) and a definite weight standard. In order to assure the user of the coin about the maintenance of its metallic purity and a weight standard, it is necessary to strike various types of designs, devices and/or the name of the issuing authority to be stamped on the coin. The Pāli canonical literature seems to have been familiar with the metallic currency named *karshāpaṇa/kahāpaṇa*. Pāṇini refers to the *rūpyaka* type of coins, which were evidently made of silver. The coin *kahāpaṇa* was struck on a weight standard of 32 *ratis;* each *rātī* (Sanskrit *raktikā*) or berry seed had the weight of 1.8 grains. So 32 *ratis* were equivalent to a weight standard of 57.6 grains (32 × 1.8 = 57.6), which was also known as the *karshāpaṇa* weight standard. Profuse number of coins struck on this weight standard have been found from different areas of

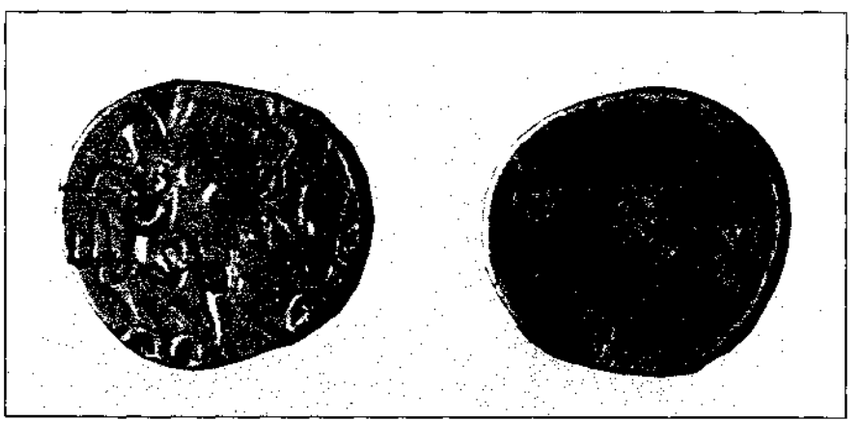


Plate 3.2: Silver punch-marked coin (obv. and rev.): Magadha

north India and also from the north-western frontier of the subcontinent. These coins carry the marks of various type of devices, which were punched on only one side of the coin. That is why these coins, which are uninscribed and do not mention the names of their issuer, are known as punch-marked coins. Nearly 500 hoards of such punch-marked coins, struck on the *karshāpaṇa* weight standard of 57.6 grains, have been found from all over the subcontinent yielding thousands of such coins. These silver punch-marked coins are of diverse shapes: round, square, rectangular and of bent bar shape. In the Ganga valley, hoards of punch-marked coins come from Paila, Śrāvastī and Gorakhpur.

One has to, however, look at the north-western scenario to get greater specificities about the antiquity of this currency system. Excavations at Taxila yielded a hoard of 1171 coins. Only a handful of them belonged to Alexander and Philip, his governor in charge of Gandhāra. The rest were silver punch-marked coins struck on the *karshāpaṇa* (or 57.6 grain) standard. The coins of Alexander and his Greek governor are in splendid mint-fresh condition, implying that these were buried soon after their manufacture. As Alexander left India by 327 BC, these coins and the hoard cannot be dated prior to the last quarter of the fourth century BC. The numerically predominant punch-marked coins in the Taxila hoard, on the other hand, bear a worn-out appearance, in contrast to the freshly minted Greek coins. One, therefore, may logically infer that these punch-marked coins had been in circulation long before the cache of coins were buried in late fourth century BC. In other words, the punch-marked coins appear to have come into vogue at least a century before the coins in the Taxila hoard were buried in the late fourth century BC. The antiquity of the punch-marked *karshāpaṇa* coins, struck on the weight standard of 57.6 grains, has therefore been assigned by leading numismatists (e.g. P.L. Gupta and B.N. Mukherjee) to the fifth century BC, a chronological frame that is consistent with the impressions available in Pāṇini's *Ashṭadhyāyī* and the Pāli canonical literature.

B.N. Mukherjee has further drawn our attention to the coins of the Chaman-i-Huzuri hoard, situated close to Kabul. This hoard has yielded not only punch-marked *karshāpaṇa* coins, struck on the 57.6 grain standard, but some heavier silver coins weighing approximately 90 and 45 grains. Mukherjee believes that these coins were struck on the *śatamāna* standard of 180 grains and therefore would belong respectively to the classes of half *satamdna* and quarter *śatamāna* coins. Interestingly enough, the term *śatamāna* (literally, a standard of one hundred) as a unit of weight is known as early as the later Vedic literature, though there is no known evidence of any metallic medium of exchange being minted in the later Vedic times (1000–600 BC). Numismatists argue that *śatamāna* represented a weight standard 100 times of the basic weight of a *rati* or *krishṇala* of 1.8 grains. So, the *śatamāna* carried the weight standard of 180 grains (1.8 x 100). One may therefore suggest that in addition to the silver *karshāpaṇa* coins, a heavier

silver specie was in circulation in the north-western frontier areas. However, coins struck on the *śatamāna* standard are rare and did not form the bulk of the currency in circulation. The above arguments clearly establish that by about fifth century BC greater parts of north India experienced minted metallic currency (largely in silver and some copper coins). Kosambi attempted to attribute some of the punch-marked coins to certain *mahājanapadas* on the basis of the frequency of the use of some common devices and symbols (sun, moon, tree, elephant, etc.). Monetization was relevant to the appreciable growth in commerce in north India. It has been suggested that the earliest coins of north India could have been minted by merchants and moneyers (and not by a sovereign political authority) who punched one side of the coin with devices and symbols to authenticate its weight-standard and metallic purity. One must keep in mind that this complex system of metallic medium of exchange was limited to north India during the age of the Buddha; in other areas of the subcontinent, the simpler exchange of commodities and barter seem to have continued.

VI

The Beginning of Second Urbanization

The most apparent aspect of the changing material life in northern India was the emergence of urban centres. The first urban centres of the subcontinent go back to the days of the Harappan civilization (2600–1750 BC). After the cities of the first urban phase declined, the subsequent Vedic period offers little information about the city and the urban life. Neither the vast Vedic corpus nor the contemporary archaeological scenario demonstrates the proven existence of cities in the period from 1500 BC to about 700 BC. Almost after a millennium since the decline of Harappan urbanism one witnessed the reappearance of cities in the subcontinent, bringing in the second urbanization in Indian history. There is of course a noticeable shift in the area of the rise of cities since sixth century BC onwards. The cities of the second urbanization are mainly located in the Ganga valley, which did not experience urban development during the days of the Harappan urbanism.

Impressions of cities and urban life are available both in literary accounts and field archaeological materials from explored and excavated sites. For the first time, two words—*nāgara* and *pura*—began to frequently figure in literary sources to denote an urban centre (the term *nāgara* occurs first time in the *Bṛihadāraṇyakopanishad*). Pāṇini was quite conscious about the difference between the two principal types of human settlements, namely, *nāgara* and *grāma* to respectively mean a city and a rural area. Pāṇini, a resident of Śālātura (near present Sialkot in the Punjab of Pakistan), was further aware that *nāgaras* were mostly located to the 'east', implying obviously the concentration of urban centres in the Ganga valley situated

to the east of the Punjab. The *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (of the *Dīghanikāya*), one of the early Pāli canonical texts, enlists 60 *nāgaras* at the time of the great demise of the Buddha. Of these, six cities are specifically marked out as great or premier urban centres (*mahānagara*), distinct from the smaller or less significant ones (*śākhānagaras*). These were Champā, Rājagriha, Vārāṇasī, Kauśāmbī, Śrāvastī and Kusinagara (the last being the site of the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha). Himanshu Prabha Ray informs that out of 1,009 references to cities in early Buddhist literature, as high percentage as 83.43 mentions five cities: Śrāvastī, Rājagaha (Rājagṛiha), Kapilavastu, Vaiśālī and Kauśāmbī. The Pāli texts offer lively descriptions of the cities of the Ganga valley, many of which are said to have been visited by the Buddha. The literary image of the city, however, is often stereotype with more or less the same or similar descriptions of the imposing fortification wall, wide roads, excellent residential structures, palaces and fervent activities of merchants in the city. The specificities of the urban layout and any hierarchy among urban centres are not available in the literary sources. For this, one has to depend on the archaeologist's finding of the remains of cities. Several of the cities mentioned in the texts are explored and excavated. During the last four decades, the study of the second urbanization in the Ganga valley has regularly drawn on archaeological materials. This is not to suggest that early historic urbanization is exclusively an archeological study; a combination of field archaeological and literary data is essential to understand the complex process of urbanization.

One of the early urban centres in the Ganga-Yamuna doab is the city of Hastināpura, the political centre of Kuru *mahājanapada*, prominently figuring also in the *Mahābhārata*. Excavations here reveal that the city experienced flooding, an impression also available in the epic. Another significant urban site in the doab is Atranjikhera, though it is not possible to identify the ruins with a known ancient city. The PGW phase at Atranjikheda measures about 650 sq. m., while the subsequent NBPW phase (more or less coeval with the age of the Buddha) measures 850 × 550m. It is clearly indicative of an impressive expansion of the site, a typical feature of an urban centre. The growth in the size of the settlement to an urban proportion may also suggest an increase in population; demographic growth is one of the accepted markers of urbanization. This phase at Atranjikhera also saw the construction of a fortification wall, which is another typical feature associated with an early urban centre.

One of the most impressive fortifications stood around the famous city of Kauśāmbī, the capital of Vatsa *mahājanapada*. Measuring about 6.5 km in circuit, the fortification wall certainly suggests the largeness of this urban centre. The site of Kauśāmbī is 50 hectare in size, no other sites in the Vatsa territory matched it in scale. G.R. Sharma estimated the construction of this fortification wall around 1000 BC, which is considered too high an over-dating by most archaeologists and historians. There is however, a unanimity

among scholars that the fortification came up prior to the introduction of the NBPW, i.e. prior to sixth century BC. Recent archaeological investigations by George Erdosy have thrown interesting lights on the process of urban formation in and around Kauśāmbī. Kauśāmbī did not stand alone or in isolation as an urban centre in the Vatsa *mahājanapada*. Not far away from it were situated two more sites—Kara and Sringaverpura—both located on the banks of the Ganga and both of an identical size of 12 hectare each. Between Sringaverapura and Kauśāmbī was found out another site of 6.75 hectare. Erdosy has further identified several smaller sites ranging from 0.42 hectare to 6 hectare. There is a perceptible hierarchy of settlements in and around Kauśāmbī. Artifacts from the very small sites indicate that these were primary centres of production, partly agricultural and partly artisanal. More specialized and diversified craft productions are noticeable at Kara and Sringaverapura, which also provided the crucial linkage between the smallest sites and the largest urban settlement. Kauśāmbī as the largest site was evidently the premier urban centre and also the apex political centre of the Vatsa *mahājanapada*. That Kauśāmbī commanded a sizeable hinterland is also well-driven home by Erdosy's studies.

At Rajghat, where the remains of the ancient city of Vārānasī have been found, was raised a fortification wall. Like Kauśāmbī, Rajghat too bears indications of the construction of the fortification wall in the pre-NBPW phase (i.e. prior to sixth century BC). Rājagriha, the capital of Magadha, was naturally secure since it was surrounded by five hills; it further had a cyclopaean wall, covering an area of nearly 40 km. Rājagriha did not have a mud-brick city wall commonly noticed at other urban centres. Śrāvastī, one of the most prominent urban centres hallowed by the memory of the Buddha, was also a flourishing centre of crafts productions as is evident from excavations. Recent excavations at Śrāvastī by Japanese archaeologists (Aboshi and Takahashi) suggest that the antiquity of the settlement may be pushed back to eighth/seventh century BC, though Śrāvastī assumed an urban proportion in about sixth century BC. Archaeology also underlines the urban character of settlements like Ahichchhatra (near Bareilly) and Champā (near Bhagalpur), but no fortification was raised there.

Outside the Ganga valley, fortification walls at Eran (ancient Airikina in eastern Malwa) and at Ujjayinī clearly impress upon their urban character. Here too, the construction of the fortification wall has been dated somewhere between 750 BC and 700 BC, in other words in the pre-NBPW phase. One of the most prominent cities in the north-west was Takshaśilā (Taxila), the capital of Gandhāra. Excavations at the Bhir mound reveal urban development of Taxila in the pre-Maurya and Maurya periods. Remains of habitational structures and streets at Bhir mound also underline the urban character of Taxila. Fortification walls were raised at Charsadda (to the west of the Indus and close to present Peshawar) around fourth century BC, probably in the wake of Macedonian invasion of Gandhāra. What is striking

is the non-mention of Pāṭaliputra as a city in contemporary literature. In fact, the Buddhist texts do not mention it at all; instead Pāṭaligāma appears as a *puṭabhedana* in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. The term means a trade centre where merchants were expected to break (*bhedana*) the lid or seal (*puṭa*) of their merchandise. As a centre for trade, the *puṭabhedana* acted as a warehouse or 'a stockade', according to Kosambi. The Buddha is said to have prophesied the future greatness of Pāṭaligāma, which would become the premier city (*agganagara*) in Jambudvīpa. The Buddha perfectly assessed the potential of this *puṭabhedana*. The text in question underlines the transformation of a trade centre into a leading urban centre and the apex political centre of Magadha after Ajātaśatru's reign.

There is little doubt that the urban centre—even the smallest one—was larger than a village (*gāma/grāma*). The city also had a much greater population and denser population than that in a village. The principal residents in an urban centre would be craftsmen, merchants, administrators and religious leaders/preachers, none of them being direct producer of food. The urban centre therefore is associated with the non-agrarian sector of the economy and society. While the city-dwellers pursue non-agrarian occupations, the urban area had to depend on a secure supply of food for its residents, who were non-food producing groups. It is, therefore, not possible to delink an urban centre from the agrarian material milieu. Crafts production and commerce are certainly important ingredients of city life, but these two alone cannot ensure urban formation. One of the foremost prerequisites of urbanization therefore is a flourishing agrarian condition, which sustains the non-food producing communities in the city after meeting the requirements of food producers in the rural sector. This is a complex and a difficult process, which demands a close scrutiny.

There is little doubt that the Ganga valley and particularly the middle Ganga plains reached the capability to grow profuse amount of crops, including cereals. The key to the remarkable agrarian development lay, according to Kosambi, Sharma and N.R. Banerjee, in the development of iron technology and the availability of iron implements for agriculture. It has been explained that the Ganga plain, prior to the advent of regular sedentary settlements, must have had a very dense forest cover since the area was well-watered because of heavy precipitation and many rivers. The clearance of the thick forest could have been effectively possible not with the copper-bronze technology, but by employing the more advanced iron tools such as axes and adzes. The absence of iron tools during the third millennium BC probably precluded the spread of Harappan urbanism into the densely forested Ganga valley. These scholars have also pointed to the rich deposits of iron ore in the middle Ganga plain, which was ably exploited. Attention has been drawn to the regular use of iron axes and adzes, discovered from many excavated and explored sites in the Ganga valley. It has been also argued that the thick alluvial soil of the middle Ganga plains could be tilled effectively with iron

ploughshare, as copper shares would be rather inadequate for the purpose. The discovery of some iron ploughshares from a few sites, therefore, assumes a special significance. Iron technology is, thus, perceived to have been simultaneously instrumental to the clearance of forests and improved crop production as well. The more advanced iron tools therefore could have paved the way for the profuse production of crops. The logical construction to follow from this line of explanation would be to argue for the availability of an agrarian surplus with which both the urban population and functionaries of the emerging states could be sustained. Thus, the real key to urban formation lies, according to these scholars, in the advanced iron technology, ensuring an agrarian surplus. This in its turn was essential for maintaining the non-food producing urban residents. This particular explanation looms large in the Marxist historiography, which seems to have drawn upon the influential ideas of V. Gordon Childe, who firmly believed that technological change led to social change.

This explanatory model of the emergence of urban centres in the Ganga valley has evoked considerable scholarly debates. The importance of an agrarian surplus towards the making of cities is not however doubted; what lies at the root of the controversy is the process and mechanism of generating an agrarian surplus. It has been pointed out that the application of iron technology is evident mostly in the manufacture of weapons and less in the making of the tools of production. Though there are several references to iron ploughshares in literary texts, archaeology has brought to light only a handful number of iron ploughshares.

Iron ploughshares have been reported from four sites: Ropar (Haryana), Jakheda (Uttar Pradesh), Kauśāmbī (Uttar Pradesh) and Vaiśālī (Bihar). The insufficient number of shares discovered from archaeological context may speak of their limited appearance and use during the age of the *mahājanapadas*. A. Ghosh in fact, suggests that iron technology was not an indispensable factor in clearing the forest and ploughing the alluvial soil in the Ganga valley. The copper and bronze tools were quite effective for these two purposes. Moreover, forests could be cleared also by burning it, as was done in the case of Khaṇḍava forest to establish the city of Indraprastha (according to the *Mahābhārata*). Ghosh has further raised a fundamental issue: surplus was not merely a technological product and the generation of surplus cannot be taken for granted even when the technology to produce it was available. He views surplus more as a sociopolitical product which could be realized as and when there was a demand for it and a politico-administrative set-up to mobilize such resources. It is true that iron technology was in use in the peninsular part in the context of the contemporary megalithic burial culture. But in spite of the availability of the iron technology there, peninsular India did not experience either a *mahājanapada*-like polity or an urban formation during the sixth–fifth centuries BC. George Erdosy, Niharranjan Ray and D.K. Chakrabarti argue that the emergence and consolidation of territorial

states in north India provided the vital politico-administrative structure to articulate the demand for the agrarian surplus and its subsequent realization. F. R. Allchin also demonstrates that urbanization and state formation were interrelated processes and the complex process of city formation cannot be satisfactorily appreciated merely by a technological explanation. The political and the material situations in the Ganga valley were conducive to the formation of the cities in the sixth-fifth centuries BC. That is why urban society and culture was not experienced in those areas of the subcontinent where the state society was yet to emerge.

VII

Social Divisions

Both urbanization and state formation are manifestations of the transformation of a society from a relatively simpler to a more complex situation. The growing complexity in social life in north India found an expression in the rigours of the four-fold *varṇa* system, which institutionalizes sharp social inequalities. Though the earliest reference to the four *varṇas* goes back to the latest stratum of the *Rigveda*, it is from the later Vedic times that *varṇa* differentiations became pronounced. As a result, the social status of the two upper *varṇas* greatly enhanced at the expense of the two lower orders,—the vaiśya and the śūdra. Increasing orthodoxy in the *varṇa* norms and the patriarchal society is clearly noticeable in the latest stratum of the Vedic corpus, the Sūtra literature. The Sūtra literature, though actually outside the Vedic literature and post-Vedic in date (500–200 BC), attempts to codify for the first time, social, economic and religious norms by strongly upholding the Vedic ideology and by championing the position of the brāhmaṇa. There are three strands of the Sūtra texts: the *Śrautasūtra* (prescribing the elaborate Vedic or *Śruti* rituals), *Grihyasūtra* (codifying the norms of domestic life) and *Dharmasūtra* (laying down social and political norms, including those of *varṇa* and marriage). Needless to elaborate that these complex norms were oriented to the orthodox Vedic ideology and laid down by the priestly community. There was hardly any aspect of life that was not brought under the ambit of Vedic rituals, which could be performed only by the brāhmaṇa priests. The brāhmaṇas therefore claimed maximum social superiority and the highest ritual status. One of the principal facets of the *varṇa* society is the institution of marriage. The Sūtra texts strongly uphold the ideal of marriage within the same *varṇa* (*savarṇa*). However, from the later Vedic period marriages between unequal and different *varṇas* (the *anuloma* and *pratiloma* types of marriage) became known, though strongly disfavoured in the Vedic corpus. The Sūtra literature for the first time, laid down the concept of the intermixture of *varṇas* (*varṇasaṁkara*) by marriage among unequal *varṇas*. The offsprings of the 'mixed' marriages

were not entitled to the *varṇa* status of their father as their ritual status was polluted by *varṇasaṁkara* and, therefore, were assigned the *jāti* status. While the number of *varṇas* is fixed and invariable, *jatis* are limitless in number because it originated, according to the *varṇasaṁkara* theory, out of all sorts of 'mixed' marriages. The institutions of *varṇasaṁkara* and mixed *jatis* find strong disapproval in the Sūtra texts. This is a novel Brahmanical explanation of the proliferation of castes; the principle of *varṇasaṁkara* and mixed *jatis* laid down in the Dharmasūtra were later elaborated in the Dharmaśāstra of Manu and Yajñavalkya.

The Sūtra literature for the first time laid down the norms of the sacraments (*saṁskāras*), usually ten in number. Beginning with the conception (*garbhādhanā*) and ending with the funeral (*antyeshti*), the *saṁskāras* were performed as sacred rituals to mark the important stages in a man's life. Among other important *saṁskāras* were the naming ceremony of the child (*namākaraṇa*), initiation (*upanayana*) and marriage (*vivāha*). All these sacraments had to be performed under the guidance of the brāhmaṇa priest, whose claim for the most superior social and ritual status further strengthened. The Dharmasūtras for the first time, enumerated six forms of marriage and strongly favoured the formal transfer of the daughter from the father to the husband amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. Such norms invariably strengthened the strong patriarchal control, which is inseparably associated with the institution of *varṇa*. The Dharmasūtras favoured those forms of marriages, which observed parental control and approval in the choice of the spouse and strict adherence to the *savarṇa* norm. The Sūtra texts enjoined upon the lowering of the age of the marriage of girls and thereby sought to strengthen the patriarchal control over women. The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* advocates that a woman is to be protected by her father during her childhood, by her husband during youth, by her sons during her old age, since a woman is not fit for freedom (*na strī svātantryamarhati*). Recent researches by Sukumārī Bhattacharjee, Kukum Roy and Uma Chakravarti explode the cherished myth that such recommendations in the Sūtra texts signified the glorious and honourable position accorded to women in the orthodox Vedic tradition.

As Buddhism and other heterodox religions rose to challenge the authority of the Vedas and the infallibility of the brāhmaṇas as the highest *varṇa* in the society, sharp critique of the *varṇa* system was offered in the Buddhist texts. The Buddha is said to have underlined the inefficacy of the *varṇa* affiliation of a person seeking the ultimate salvation; he also considered it unseemly to ask the origin of a *muni*. Richard Fick and Wagle draw our attention to a significant passage in the *Majjhimanikāya* that as separate rivers lose their respective identities when they join the sea, similarly people of different *varṇas* shed their varna-affiliations when they entered the Saṁgha. This clearly underlines that the Buddha attached little value to the *varṇa* status within the Buddhist Saṁgha. The Buddha whenever referred to the four

vannas (*varṇas*), invariably placed the khattiya (kshatriya) ahead of the brāhmaṇa, thereby clearly questioning the brāhmaṇa's claim for the highest ritual status.

Wagle has analysed many dialogues between the Buddha and brāhmaṇas by applying methods of social anthropology. While the Buddha was always addressed as the Lord (Bhagavā) or Tathāgata or Arhat by people of non-brāhmaṇa groups, the brāhmaṇa merely addressed him as 'O Gotama' (*bho Gotama*). While the first mode of address clearly recognizes the supernatural spirituality of the Buddha, the brāhmaṇa merely referred to his *gotra* name and refused to accept his spiritual leadership. There are also instances in the Pāli canonical texts where a brāhmaṇa, while discussing with the Buddha, declined to sit before the Master, since the brāhmaṇa would share a seat only with an equal. On the other hand, the Buddhist text also narrates the story of brāhmaṇa Brahmāyu, who initially was suspicious of the Buddha, but subsequently submitted to the Buddha by falling at his feet and kissing his feet. The Pāli canonical texts are replete with the accounts of the social distance maintained by many brāhmaṇas from the Buddha. Wagle, therefore, rightly finds elements of interpersonal—and further, inter-group—social tension between the Buddha and many brāhmaṇas, the latter's claim for social supremacy being challenged by Buddhism.

The Pāli canonical texts also leave little room for doubt that the Buddha was aware of a highly complex and differentiated society at large outside the Buddhist Saṁgha which sought to promote and nurture egalitarian notions. According to Wagle and Uma Chakravarti, the sharply divided society outside the Buddhist Saṁgha was judged not in the light of the four-fold *varṇa* system, but by referring to an alternative scheme of *kula* (family/lineage/pedigree). This is a significant departure from the brahmanical *varṇa* ideology to recognize the differentiated status in the society. In sharp contrast to the four-fold division of the *varṇa* order, the Buddha demonstrates a preference for a two-fold classification of *kulas* (family/group/lineage) into high and low (*ukkaṭṭha* and *hīna*). Those belonging to a high *kula* correspondingly pursued high professions (*kamma*) and crafts (*sippa*, Sanskrit *śilpa*); similarly low professions and low crafts were markers of the position of those included in the low or inferior social groups (*hīnakula*). The members of the high group consisted of the khattiya, brāhmaṇa and the *gahapati*, the latter a new social group not encountered before. Here too, the khattiya precedes the brāhmaṇa among the members of the high *kulas*. These groups followed excellent professions such as agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade and engaged in high crafts/professions like that of a scribe (*lekha*), accountant (*gaṇanā*), royal functionary (*rājaporisa*) and suchlike. The inferior (*hīna*) *kula* comprises chaṇḍala, nesāda, veṇa, pukkusa people, who followed the inferior professions of sweeping, hunting, gathering and practised low crafts of the basket-maker, barber (*nahāpita*), washerman (*rajaka*), etc. The professions which could be followed independently (agriculture, animal husbandry and

commerce) were considered higher than those occupations where a person was an employee of someone. Similarly, the crafts bereft of manual labour are placed higher than those requiring physical labour. In other words, the Buddha not only presents a simpler two-tier scheme of social classification than the four-*varṇa* order, but the principle of ranking into high and low rests less on birth than on material factors like an independent profession and an employed position. According to Romila Thapar, the Buddha therefore seems to have paid greater attention to one's actual status than to one's ritual status in the society. All these are firm pointers to major changes in social life and social organization and present an alternative to the brahmanical orthodox notions of *varṇāśramadharma*.

This is particularly evident from the prominence accorded to the *gahapati* as a new social group. The Pāli term *gahapati* certainly is the same as Sanskrit *gṛihapati*. This has led to the conventional translation of the term as a householder or the male head of a typically extended Indian family. Innovative probings into the Pāli canonical literature by Wagle and Uma Chakravarti offer fresh understanding of the term *gahapati*. The *gahapati* stands in clear contrast to the ordinary householder, who in the Pāli canonical literature, is labelled as *gihi* (*gṛihi*) and *gahaṭṭha* (*gṛihastha*). The principal demarcation between the *gahapati* and a simple householder lies in the fabulous wealth of the former. Interestingly enough, the *Saṁyuttanikāya* enlists in the group of *gahapatis* (*gahapativagga*) king Udyana, Anathapiṇḍika, brāhmaṇa Lohichcha, the celebrated physician Jīvaka komāravachchha and the like. It will be immediately apparent from the above list that the term *gahapati* implied a prestigious and elite position that was accorded to a person of immense eminence irrespective of the *varṇa-jāti* affiliation of that person. Wagle correctly diagnosed that the great wealth and status of the *gahapatis* marked them out from their extended kin-group. The term *gahapatiputta*, literally meaning a son of a *gahapati*, actually connotes a *gahapati*; it surely implies that the status of the *gahapati* could sometimes have become hereditary.

The *gahapati's* immense wealth repeatedly figures in the Pāli texts. But what is the basis of his fabulous fortune? The convenient explanation, based on the assumed identity between the *gahapati* and the *seṭṭhi*, is that the *gahapati* gained his wealth from commerce. The Pāli texts never hold the term *gahapati* synonymous with the *seṭṭhi*; that the *gahapati* was primarily a merchant, is therefore not an accurate assessment. The Pāli texts on the other hand, often depict the *gahapati* as a peasant (*kassaka*). But the *gahapati* was certainly not a simple agriculturist householder like the *kuṭumbika*. It is possibly implied that the *gahapati* derived his vast wealth largely from agriculture; as he was not a common cultivator, it is logical to assume that the *gahapati* was a major landholder. This will be particularly evident from the story of *gahapati* Meṇḍaka in the *Dīghanikāya*. Meṇḍaka possessed magical powers with which his fields could be tilled as many as seven times

even when these were actually ploughed only once. His landholdings were so extensive that he required the service of domestic slaves, servants and hired labourers (*dāsakarmakaraporisa*). His agricultural land was evidently vast enough to have required the employment of non-kin labour, itself a marker of a complex society. The *gahapati*, thus, assumed the position of an employer of labourers. His capability to pay half-yearly wages (*chhammāsikavetana*) at a time to his employees (who were also given food) demonstrates the vast resources at his command. Moreover, Meṇḍaka also supplied provision to the army of the king; this once again speaks of his immense resources. But it also underlines the close proximity of the *gahapati* to the ruler; this would have increased the prestige and position of the *gahapati* to a great extent. The *gahapati* is often described as one who paid taxes to the king (*karakāraka*) and by so doing, augmented the treasury (*rasivaḍḍhaka*). Meṇḍaka also had 1,200 cowherds (*go-pālakas*), implying his possession of a sizeable cattle wealth. He was in a position to send a portion of the milk to the Buddhist Saṁgha everyday. The close ties between the *gahapati* and the Saṁgha are beyond any doubt, and the status of the *gahapati* would further rise by his patronage to the Saṁgha. Meṇḍaka nowhere is said to have derived his wealth from trade; the basis of his fortune lies in his extensive landholdings. Yet he was far from being a peasant cultivator; in fact, Mendaka was a resident of Bhaddiyanagara, evidently an urban centre, and occasionally went to the countryside to oversee his landholding.

It should also be noted that some of the *gahapatis* in the Pāli texts have been described as *seṭṭhi-gahapati*, which is different from a *seṭṭhi* (merchant). Romila Thapar cogently argues that some of the *gahapatis* could have invested a part of their wealth in commerce, without however becoming a full-fledged merchant. This probably necessitated the coinage of the hyphenated expression *seṭṭhi-gahapati*. The *gahapati* also figures in the Buddhist texts as a village headman (*gāmaṇi*), implying his participation in rural administration. It is of significance that the *gahapati* is considered as one of the seven jewels of a universal (*chakkavatti*) ruler. The close correspondence between the professions of the *gahapati* and that of the vaiśya (vessa in Pāli texts) is not difficult to discern. But the vaiśya rarely attained a position of honour in the later Vedic texts, where only a thin line of demarcation separates the vaiśya from the śūdra. Though the vaiśya was the principal wealth-producing group in the four-fold *varṇa* order and was considered to be among the twice-born (*dvija*) groups, his position was increasingly being burdened with disabilities to the advantage of the two upper *varṇas*. The sharp critique of the Vedic norms and the *varṇa* system in Buddhism could have attracted many vaiśyas to its fold. Seen from this point of view, one may suggest the transformation of some of the vaiśyas into the prestigious *gahapatis*. While Buddhism included the *gahapatis* among the excellent social group (*ukkaṭṭhakula*), the *gahapatis* unmistakably provided the material patronage to Buddhism, a monastic religion heavily dependent

on such patronage. A perusal of the Pāli canonical texts suggests that the obvious changes in social life accompanied the shifts in political, economic and religious conditions.

VIII

Religious Life

The period under review has justifiably attracted historians' attention from the point of view of widespread changes in religious life. The sixth century BC marks the rise of two of the most important heterodox religious movements, namely, Buddhism and Jainism, opposing the Vedic Tradition and the supremacy of the priestly community. However, these were not the only two such protestant groups. Even within the Vedic tradition, the *Āranyakas* and the *Upanishads* did not approve of the cult of sacrificial rituals. Besides Buddhism and Jainism, notable heterodox groups included the Chārvākas, the Lokāyatas and the Ājīvikas. N. N. Bhattacharyya traced in the Jaina literature the mention of as many as sixty philosophical strands. The figure at least underlines the existence of great diversity in religious thoughts and philosophical speculations. Among such groups were accommodated the *nāstikas*, mentioned by Pāṇini. Contrary to the popular notion, the word *nāstika* here does not mean atheists, but refers to those who did not subscribe to the authority and infallibility of the Vedic tradition. According to the Sāṁkhya philosophy, the existence of God cannot be proved; though this is an atheist position, the Sāṁkhya philosophy did not belong to the *nāstika* category, as it recognized the authority of the Vedas. As the Buddhist, the Jaina, the Chārvāka and the Lokayata challenged the authority of the Vedas, they were labelled as *nāstikas*.

The Chārvākas and the Lokayatas were materialists. Though these two are often considered identical in many ancient texts on philosophy, N. N. Bhattacharyya considers that in the Lokayata tradition is recognized some importance of a few rituals, devotional elements and worship, which were completely ruled out by the Chārvākas. The Chārvākas considered the sage's or ascetic's practice of smearing the body with the sacred ash (*bhasma*) an act of the foolish. The Chārvāka logic raised the question that if the sacrificed animal in the *Jytoishtoma yajña* was supposed to have gone to heaven, then why the sacrificer (*yajamāna*) would not sacrifice his own father to ensure his heavenly abode. The Lokayata doctrine strongly upheld that man was made of four elements. After his death earth returns to the aggregate of earth, water to water, fire to fire and air to air, and his senses vanish into space. 'When the body dies both fool and wise alike are cut off and perish. They do not survive after death.' The Lokayatas did not propound the concept of an eternal soul surviving the mortal body.

On the other hand, the Ājīvikas were believers of a philosophy of predetermination. As they espoused the concept that even the most insignificant human action was preordained, nothing could alter what had already been predestined. The Jainas viewed them as champions of inaction. The most important figure of the Ājīvikas was Maṅkhaliputta Gosāla, also called Makkhali Gosāla in the Pāli texts. He was so named after his father's profession of a *mankha* or bard. Gosāla for a while, pursued his father's profession, but subsequently renounced the world. The reason for his renunciation is not ascertained. Jaina texts narrate that Mahāvīra met him in the third year of his ascetic life and they stayed together for six more years after which they became bitter critic of each other. Though Gosāla was the most illustrious thinker of the Ājīvika sect, Buddhist texts refer to his two predecessors—Nanda vachcha and Kisa sankichcha. According to the south Indian Buddhist tradition, two prominent Ājīvika monks, contemporary to the Buddha, were Purāṇa Kassapa and Pakudha Kachchana. Since the Ājīvikas believed in destiny and pre-ordained position of every act, Purāṇa Kassapa did not recognize any difference between merit and sin, and morality and immorality. Only a few glimpses of the Ājīvika history is known to us, from the gleanings about this sect by A.L. Basham from Buddhist and Jaina texts.

The most renowned figure in Jainism is Mahāvīra, though he was, according to the Jaina tradition, the last and the twenty-fourth ford-makers (*tīrthaṅkaras*). The first *tīrthaṅkara* was Rishabhanātha or Ādinātha. The last two *tīrthaṅkaras*, Pārśva and Mahāvīra, were certainly historical figures. The Jaina traditions appear to have placed Pārśva to about eighth–seventh centuries BC. Born of Aśvasena and Vāmā (the former being the chief of a kshatriya clan), Pārśva was married to Prabhāvati, daughter of the chief of a clan located close to Ayodhya. Pārśva renounced the world at the age of thirty and attained his supreme realization after a ceaseless meditation for eighty-three days. The next seventy years of his life were spent in unceasing propagation of his philosophy. He laid down four foundational principles of the Jaina way of life: non-injury to any living being (*ahiṁsā*); complete avoidance of falsehood (*anṛita*) in speech and living; non-stealing of other's possession (*asteya*) and not to amass personal wealth and property (*aparigraha*). These constituted the *chāturyāma vrata* to which Mahāvīra added the vow of celebacy (*brahmacharya*).

The most famous and the last one of the Jaina *tīrthaṅkaras* was Mahāvīra, who was born in 539 BC. His father was Siddhārtha, the chief of the non-monarchical Jñātrika clan, while his mother was Triśalā, who belonged to the non-monarchical Vṛiji clan. Known prior to his renunciation as Vardhamāna, Mahāvīra married Yaśodā, according to Śvetāmvara tradition, and their daughter was Anujā or Priyadarśanā. The Digambara group believed that Mahāvīra never married. He is said to have renounced the world at the age of thirty and attained the supreme knowledge (*kevala*) at the age of forty-two at the village of Jimbhrikā, after twelve years of severe

penance and asceticism. Because he conquered all senses, he was called Jina, which led to his creed being labelled as Jaina. The Jainas were also known as Nirgranthas or those who severed all ties. Eight months of the year Mahāvīra spent by wandering and preaching; the rest four months were the monsoon retreat (*vassāvāsa*) when he usually sojourned at various cities (e.g. Champā, Rājagriha, Mithilā and Śrāvastī). He died at the age of seventy-two, at Pavapuri near Patna. Mahāvīra was followed by two *ganadharas*—Indrabhuti Gautama and Sudharma—each heading the Jaina monastic organization for twelve years. As many as thirty-five successive *ganadharas* figure in the *Kalpasūtra* of Bhadrabāhu. Bhadrabāhu is said to have been a contemporary of Chandragupta Maurya, i.e. in the last quarter of the fourth century BC. During Bhadrabāhu's stewardship, the Jaina community experienced its first major schism as they were subdivided into two major sects, the Śvetāmbara (White clad) and the Digambara (sky clad, or the naked) Jaina monks.

Let us now discuss the Buddha and Buddhism. Like Mahāvīra, Gautama Buddha too did not claim to be the sole founder of a religious order. He himself is said to have stated that there were many Buddhas in the past and many Buddhas would follow him in future. According to the older Hīnayāna tradition, there were twenty-four Enlightened Ones (*Mānushī-Buddha*), though the later Mahāyāna texts raised the figure to thirty-two.

There is little doubt that Gautama or Siddhārtha, the Enlightened One, was a historical personality, though there is no contemporary life-story of the Master. Gleanings from later sources enable us to find out the principal events of his life. Born in Lumbinīgrāma in the present Nepalese terai as the son of the Śākya chief Śuddhodana and Māyādevi, he lost his mother soon after his birth. He was brought up by his foster-mother Mahāprajavatī Gotami and hence became known as Gautama. His early life was typically one of a kshatriya prince of a chiefly clan; he married and became the father of a son, Rāhula. But despite all the comforts and luxuries of life, he was ever distressed by the inevitable miseries of old age, disease and death. In search for the ultimate truth, he renounced the world and for a while, became a disciple of Ālāra Kālāma and spent the life of a wondering ascetic for a while. Unable to find a satisfactory solution to his spiritual enquiries, Gautama left Ālāra Kālāma and took to the alternative practice of severe penance, during which he had five more companions. When he was unable to find a proper answer to the cause of human suffering and the ways to ensure emancipation from suffering even after penance, he left the path of asceticism. As a wandering monk, he come to the Uruvela village on the river Nirājanā and attained Bodhi or Enlightenment under a tree (the Bodhi Tree) after prolonged meditation. The place of his attainment of Enlightenment henceforth became known as Mahābodhi or Sambodhi (present Bodhgaya, Bihar). He gave his first sermon at the Deer Park (Mrigadāva) at Sarnath, at the outskirts of Vārānasi, to his first five disciples—an act celebrated as the Turning of the Wheel of Law (*Dharmachakrapravartana*). He established

the Saṃgha or the Buddhist monastery where were admitted *bhikshus* and *bhikshuṇīs* (male and female monks and nuns, begging for alms). He devoted the rest of his life to the preaching of his creed and wandered to different parts of the middle Ganga plains, attracting a large number of followers from all walks of life. His followers ranged from monarchs to brāhmaṇas, from rich *setthis* and *gahapatis* to ordinary artisans and even courtesans. At the age of eighty (483 BC), after having eaten his last meal at the invitation of a blacksmith (*kammāra*), he breathed his last—celebrated in the Buddhist tradition as *Mahāparinirvāṇa*—at Kuśinagara (modern Kāsia in Gorakhpur district Uttar Pradesh).

①The Buddha diagnosed that the wordly experience was full of profound sorrow and suffering (*duḥkha*), a concept which is of foundational significance in the Buddhist doctrine. ②At the root of all suffering is the insatiable thirst or desire (*tanhā* or *tṛishnā*) to acquire objects or reach goals, which the Buddha perceived as impermanent (*anitya*). ③The unquenchable desire led to a seemingly eternal and interminable cycle of birth, death and rebirth and, therefore, the perpetuation of sufferings. The realization of the impermanence of the order of things, through protracted and single-minded efforts, would bring about an end of desire and this would lead to a cessation in the interminable cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The entire argument is based on the concept of the Chain of Causation (*Pratītyasamutpāda*), which the Buddha probably developed from the Saṁkhya philosophical tradition something he had learnt from Ālāra Kālāma. Based on this principle, Buddha established the four Noble Truths (*Chaturāryasatyas*). These are: (1) the entire existence is full of sufferings and sorrow (*duḥkha*); (2) it is possible to explain the genesis of sufferings (*duḥkhasamudaya*); (3) it is possible to bring an end to suffering (*duḥkhanirodha*) and finally, (4) there is a way to bring an end to sufferings (*duḥkhanirodhagāmī mārga*). The highest goal in Buddhism is the state of Nirvāṇa, literally meaning the extinguishing of the lamp, by which an individual attains a state of highest realization, where there is no need of a future birth or descent. The individual, therefore, is capable of going beyond sufferings and attaining the final emancipation. Nirvāṇa is not explicitly defined in the Buddhist philosophy, but is given some attributes like, *Ajara* (beyond decay), *Avyādhi* (beyond affliction), *Amṛita* (beyond death) and *Anuttara* (incomparable). Attainment of Nirvāṇa is extremely difficult and requires the passing through of several stages spanned over many lives. Though each and every individual is capable of attaining Nirvāṇa, one reaches it through four graduated phases: (1) *Srotāpanna*—the initial phase when one has joined the stream of *sādhanā*; (2) *Sakridāgamī*—the higher stage that requires only one more mundane descent and existence; (3) *Anāgāmī*—the stage which does not require any further birth; (4) *Arhat* or the Enlightened One. One of the factors that led to the immensely popular appeal of the new idea was the Buddha's advocacy for moderation. To overcome sufferings, the Buddha preferred a Middle-

Course (*Majjhimapanthā*) to the extremities of a sensuous lifestyle and the ultimate asceticism, which emphasized on inflicting afflictions on the body. The eight-fold path (*Ashṭāṅgikamārga*) that enabled an individual to strive for Nirvāṇa are:

1. Right views (*sammā diṭṭhi*)
2. Right intention (*sammā mati*)
3. Right speech (*sammā vāchā*)
4. Right action (*sammā kammānta*)
5. Right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*)
6. Right effort (*sammā vyāyāma*)
7. Right mindfulness (*sammā samādhi*)
8. Right concentration (*sammā saṅkappa*)

Soon after the demise of the Buddha in 483 BC, the first Buddhist council (*saṁgīti*) was convened at Rājagriha under the presidentship of Mahākassapa. The *Chullavagga* informs us that the Saṃgha suffered from fissures in the discipline and regulations; hence the need was felt to codify the teachings of the Buddha into canons. The Buddha always used to preach orally and his teachings were reduced to writing subsequent to his death. The first Buddhist council is noted for the compilation and codification of the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta Piṭakas*. After a century had elapsed since the *Parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, the second Buddhist council was held at Vaiśālī, presided over by Yasa. The occasion marked severe rifts between the easterners (largely consisting of monks from Vaiśālī and Pāṭaliputra; many belonged to the Vajji or Vṛiji clan and the group, therefore, was also known as *Vajjiputtakas*) and westerners (represented by monks from Kauśāmbī and Avantī). Ten practices of the eastern monks or the *Vajjiputtakas* were declared by Yasa as detrimental to the Saṁgha and they were excluded. The *Vajjiputtaka* monks convened a separate assembly and endorsed all the ten 'tainted' practices as valid. This paved the way for a major schism within the Buddhist Saṁgha: the more orthodox westerners became known as *Sthaviravādins* or *Theravādins* and the easterners as the *Mahāsaṁghikas*.

IX

These new religious groups and thoughts, by challenging the orthodox Vedic tradition, certainly created considerable stirrings in the social and cultural scenario. The animosity of the brahmans towards these heterodox groups is quite clear in their denunciation as *nāstikas* and *pashaṇḍas* (heretics). The Buddhist and the Jaina texts are replete with debates among the new religious groups. It is not difficult to imagine that the Buddha's preaching resulted in renunciation to a considerable extent. That is why the Buddha was criticized for hurling mothers with the pain of sonlessness (*aputtakatā*)

when their sons were indeed alive, and for inflicting upon wives the pangs of virtual widowhood (*vedavyā*) even when their husbands lived. The Buddha was also dubbed as one who destroyed the family life (*kulupachchhedaka*). The Buddha described many of his contemporary teachers as 'eel-wrigglers', inconsistent in their teachings. The sharp differences between Mahāvīra and Gosāla are also well represented in the Jaina literature. The debates and controversies in philosophical speculations and religious teachings however, cannot but underline the openness of the cultural and social milieu, which would accommodate plural and contesting thoughts. The ideal theatre for accommodating and encouraging this diversity and debate was the urban centre, rather than the rural society. One cannot miss that the Buddha, Mahāvīra, Gosāla and other prominent religious personalities of the age invariably preferred the city to the village for preaching their new creeds as well as for their monsoon retreats (*vassāvāsa*). The urban centre was the locale for the congregation of different ethnic groups at various levels of socio-economic developments and was receptive to multiple cultural traits. It is therefore not surprising that the Vedic tradition was, in sharp contrast, steeped in ruralism and invariably favoured the *grāma* than the *nāgara*. The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* enjoins that one becomes impure by visiting a city and needs expiation (*prāyśchitta*) to cleanse himself of the sin. The city, in the eyes of this authority, is polluted and vitiated since it represented the space of permanent non-study of the Vedas (*anadhyāya*).

In other words, the Sūtra literature perceived the urban centre as an anathema to Vedic tradition and culture. The emergence of urban centres in the Ganga valley coincided with the advent of the territorial state (*mahājanapada*), both of which were markers of the growing complexities in socio-cultural and political life. The arrival of the state certainly weakened the erstwhile chiefdoms and the lineage society, as Romila Thapar has demonstrated. The advent of a complex material life brought in a more sharply differentiated society than was known hitherto before. The new religious thoughts and philosophical speculations—especially Buddhism and Jainism—reflected the prospects and travails of an individual in a changing society that was indeed one of the most significant formative phases of Indian history.

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CHAPTER 4

The Maurya Empire

(*c.*325–185 BC)

Preliminaries

The period from sixth century BC to late fourth century BC witnessed significant changes in greater parts of North India. These changes, as already discussed in the immediately preceding chapter, are visible in the emergence of territorial polities, the growing power of one of the *mahājanapadas* (namely Magadha), the formation of urban centres and the attending socio-economic changes, and the increasing appeal of several heterodox religious groups (especially, Buddhism and Jainism) that challenged the infallibility of Vedas and the claim for the social supremacy of the brāhmaṇa. The most apparent change was in the arena of politics; a substantial part of North India—the Ganga valley—came under the authority of Magadha. At the time of Alexander's invasion of India, the most formidable power in north India was indeed Magadha under the Nanda rulers, though any political and military showdown between the Macedonian and the Magadhan forces did not take place. The rise of Magadha that began in the sixth century BC reached its peak during the succeeding century and a quarter. In about 325–4 BC, Chandragupta Maurya established the Maurya empire that lasted for nearly 140 years. Greater parts of the subcontinent came under the domination of a single paramount power, for the first time in the history of India. The making and consolidation of the early pan-Indian empire of the Mauryas was made possible by the first three rulers of the dynasty, namely Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusāra and Aśoka. There is little surprise that the period has received sustained attention of historians.

One major factor enabling historians to probe into the history of this period is the availability of greater number and more diverse type of primary sources than those from the previous ages; no less important is the point that many of these sources are more or less contemporary to the period under review. The discovery of some new source materials and enquiries

into the known evidence have led to fresh assessments of the period, resulting in a rich historiography of the Maurya empire. Enlisting these primary sources, one may begin with the Greek accounts of Megasthenes, the Seleukidian envoy to the Maurya capital. Megasthenes was mostly based in Arachosia or present Kandahar in Afghanistan and visited Pāṭaliputra during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya—the founder of the Maurya empire. The envoy's account, named *Indika*, is based on his impressions about India, especially northern parts of the subcontitent during the times of Chandragupta. Though there is little dispute that he did visit the Maurya capital, his account is lost and is now known only from the quotations or excerpts and summaries of the *Indika* made by later Classical writers. While the historian certainly values his impressions of the Maurya realm, these are not beyond their limitations. Megasthenes seems to have formed his impressions, on many occasions, in the light of his perceptions of West Asia and Egypt, something he was familiar with. Romila Thapar has diagnosed that Megasthenes' understanding of the Seleucid realm in West Asia on many occasions coloured his impressions of the subcontinent. He is known to have made some observations that do not stand scrutiny. For instance, he recorded that famine never visited India—an impression, which is completely inaccurate; his statement that Indians were never accused of lying appears to have bordered on fantasy. Moreover, the summaries of and excerpts and quotations from his *Indika* by later writers are themselves not uniform; this is something not entirely unexpected in the context of the use of a particular account by later writers, who themselves did not visit the land they described. It is also important to remember that for many Classical writers of the later period, the subcontinent was an area of marginal interest; their primary focus was on the history of the Seleucids and by extension to Bactria. Mauryan contact with these areas possibly generated some interests in these writers to write about the conditions in the subcontinent. Also these summaries of Megasthenes are occasionally contradictory. For our present purpose three accounts containing such quotes and summaries of Megasthenes' *Indika* will be used. These are the *Bibliothekes Historikes* of Diodorus Siculus (late second century BC), the *Geographikon* of Strabo (late first century BC) and the *Indika* of Arrian (AD first/second century). It is quite evident that these three Greek writers were aware of Megasthenes' accounts, but belonged to periods considerably later than the Mauryan epoch in Indian history. The descriptions of Plutarch and Justin, who mentioned Sandrokottas or Chandragupta, belong to an even later period. Recent historiography uses the Classical accounts of the Mauryas with a much greater rigour and critical approach than the previous ones.

Among the indigenous texts, the famous *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* must be mentioned. It is ascribed to Kauṭilya or Vishṇugupta or Chāṇakya, considered to have been the chief minister of Chandragupta Maurya. This manual on statecraft is famous for its pragmatic approach to polity and its

thrust on financial/material matters (*arthaiva pradhānam*) for the successful management of the realm. The cherished notion that the author was a contemporary of Chandragupta and that as an exponent of 'realpolitik', he was actually running the administration of the Maurya realm, stems partly from the Sanskrit drama, the *Mudrārākshasa* by Viśākhadatta. The drama, however, belongs to AD seventh century and, therefore, is far removed from the actual period of the Mauryas. Modern scholarship does not rely too much on the *Mudrārākshasa* as an evidence for the contemporaneity of Kauṭilya to Chandragupta. The dating of the *Arthaśāstra* is a controversial topic and its dating to fourth–third centuries BC has been debated. A statistical enquiry into this text by Trautmann establishes that the text took its present shape not earlier than AD first or second century and that it was perhaps not the product of a single author.

However, the earliest portion of the text, namely the *Adhyakshaprachāra* section (concerning the heads of administrative departments) has been assigned by Trautmann to third century BC. Thus, at least this portion (Book II of the *Arthaśāstra*) is contemporary to the Maurya times and can be used as a primary material for the study of the period, though it cannot be ascertained that it was written by a Maurya minister. One has also to be sensitive to the fact that the *Arthaśāstra*, however pragmatic and ruthless in its approach, was a prescriptive text, which does not describe the system of the Maurya statecraft. The *Arthaśāstra* is certainly one of the major sources for studying the Mauryan period, but not the only or the principal primary evidence for understanding the period in question. We cannot assume that the ideals of the *Arthaśāstra* was translated in the management of the Maurya empire. Some historians have attempted to demonstrate parallels between the *Arthaśāstra* prescriptions and some descriptions of the Maurya statecraft in the Greek accounts and Aśoka's inscriptions. But the Maurya polity was not a replica of the *Arthaśāstra* model, though such a view has some takers—especially among nationalist historians.

Later Buddhist texts like the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Aśokavadāna* (belonging to the *Avadāna* literature) and the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles, the *Māhāvaṁsa* and the *Dīpavaṁsa*, speak of the Maurya rulers, especially Aśoka. Though some historians have used these texts, the sources, apart from not belonging to the Mauryan times, often try to overemphasize the role of Buddhism in shaping the Maurya history—particularly that of Aśoka. These texts tend to portray the transformation of the cruel Aśoka (*chaṇḍāśoka*) to the righteous Aśoka (*dharmāśoka*) after he had embraced Buddhism. The Purāṇas, once again of later date, present the genealogy and chronology of the Maurya rule, though it is not free from inaccuracies. Some incidents, said to have occurred during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya—the founder of the dynasty—figure in the *Mudrārākshasa* of Viśākhadatta (AD seventh century), late Jaina sources and Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (twelfth century AD). The memories of the Maurya rule retained in these literary accounts

of much later times are not free from limitations and can be useful only in the light of firm, corroborative evidence. These are, however, indicators of the perception of the Maurya rale and rulers in periods subsequent to the Maurya epoch.

Archaeological materials are more securely datable than the literary ones and, therefore, often treated with greater reliance by historians. There are various archaeological sources belonging to the Maurya period. Among these, the most significant are undoubtedly inscriptions of Aśoka. Aśoka's inscriptions mark the beginning of Indian epigraphy. Aśoka's edicts brought in for the first time, elements of literacy in the history of the subcontinent. The firm beginning of writing, at least for administrative purposes, did not by any means signal the end or discontinuity of orality. Most of these Aśokan records are called 'edicts', thereby differentiated from ordinary inscriptions. Most of his records are promulgations, something analogous to an ordinance and, therefore, are labelled as edicts. Aśoka's edicts are unique in Indian epigraphic tradition because Aśoka issued his instructions therein in the first person, directly addressing his subjects. Such a style of addressing subjects in first person through epigraphic records could have been derived from the inscriptions of the Achaeminid rulers of Iran (especially Darius I) that continued to exist till 330 BC. It faded away just on the eve of the foundation of the Maurya rule. There has been a significant increase in the number of Aśokan edicts in recent times as a result of the discovery of more records. Most of the edicts of Aśoka were written in Prakrit language and in two scripts: Brāhmī (in greater parts of the subcontinent) and Kharoshṭī (in the north-western part of the subcontinent). Clearly designated as *Dhammalipi* (Edicts of Piety) by Aśoka himself, these records are of the following types:

1. Fourteen Rock Edicts or Major Rock Edicts (REs)
2. Two 'Separate' Rock Edicts or 'Kaliṅga' Rock Edicts
3. Two Minor Rock Edicts (MREs)
4. Seven Pillar Edicts or Major Pillar Edicts (PEs)
5. Minor Pillar Edict (MPE)
6. A Rock Edict from Bairat (Rajasthan)
7. Two Minor Pillar Inscriptions
8. Inscriptions engraved on the Barabar Hills close to Gaya

To this must be added seven edicts of Aśoka written in two non-Indian scripts and languages, namely Aramaic (a West Asiatic language and script) and Greek, including one bilingual and bi-scriptual (Graeco-Aramaic) edict. Out of these seven edicts, one comes from Taxila (in north-western Pakistan) and the rest from different parts of present Afghanistan. Thanks to the studies by B.N. Mukherjee, the immense importance of these seven edicts in the understanding of the Maurya rule is now beyond any doubt. In these

Greek and Aramaic edicts of Aśoka, one finds transliteration, translation and summary/adaptation of his Prakrit records.

There are two more inscriptions, which are usually ascribed to the Mauryan period on the basis of being inscribed in Brāhmī script of third century BC. The two inscriptions are from Mahāsthan (Bagura, present Bangladesh—also a major excavated site) and Sohgaura (Gorakhpur district, Uttar Pradesh). Though the two inscriptions do not carry any names of a Maurya ruler, the phraseology and contents of the records indicate that these were administrative documents issued by a powerful ruling authority, the like of which existed during the Maurya times.

Large number of coins, mostly silver, have been generally ascribed to the Maurya period. These are known as *kārshāpaṇa* coins, but do not contain any legend referring to the issuing authority. The distribution and frequency of a few common symbols regularly engraved on these coins have led numismatists to consider it as being minted during the Maurya period. The logical assumption in this case is that only a pan-Indian political power was capable of issuing a large number of punch-marked coins with common symbols, noted for their distribution over disparate regions. Numismatists like P.L. Gupta prefer to consider these punch-marked coins as belonging to the 'national' series carrying marks of uniformity, which could have been maintained by an imperial power like the Mauryas.

Valuable field archaeological materials—mostly urban—are available from excavated sites like Kumrahar (near Patna, ancient Pāṭaliputra), Besnagar (near Bhopal, Madhya Pradeh) and Taxila. Archaeological evidence is also culled from the occupational layers datable to fourth–third centuries BC, from other excavated/explored sites, including those in peninsular India. The Maurya period also ushered in the regular tradition of sculpting stones for creative visual arts. The age further witnessed the profusion of terracotta modelling. The remains of Mauryan art are an invaluable source for cultural and socio-political history of the period.

A study of the political history and the socio-economic seenario and cultural situation of this period rests on the analysis of the combined testimony of the sources enlisted above. A meaningful understanding of the Maurya period cannot be attempted with a single type of source to the exclusion of others.

II

Foundation and Beginning

Chandragupta Maurya founded the Maurya dynasty by overthrowing the erstwhile ruling house of Magadha, namely, the Nanda dynasty. The last Nanda king, Dhanananda (Agrammes of the Greek accounts), was possibly the ruler of Pālibothra or Pāṭaliputra when Alexander fought against

Puru (Porus) on the banks of the river Jhelum (Hydespas) in the Punjab. Alexander's return from India probably took place about 327 BC; it is therefore likely that the end of the Nanda rule and the foundation of the Maurya dynasty can be placed in 325 BC. Some scholars, however, prefer to date the beginning of the Maurya dynasty in 324 or 321 BC. According to the Purāṇas, the Maurya rule lasted for 137 years. If it is granted that the Maurya rule could not have gone beyond the maximum duration of 140 years, then by 185 BC, the Maurya political presence in India became a thing of the past. So what is known as the Mauryan period or Mauryan Age in Indian history spans from late fourth century BC to the first quarter of the second century BC.

Little is known about Chandragupta's ancestry and his life prior to ascending the throne of Magadha. The *Mudrārākshasa* describes him as a scion of the Nanda house (*Nandānvaya*), his mother being a slave woman named Mūra. It is suggested that being the son of Mura, he became known as a Maurya, which eventually turned out to be a dynastic epithet. The historical reliability of this late textual evidence is open to question and the description is not corroborated by any other account. The twelfth century AD Jaina author Hemachandra in his *Pariśishṭaparvan*, held Chandragupta as the grandson of the chief of the peacock-tamers' clan (*Mayūraposhaka*), implying thereby that the dynastic name Maurya was derived from the term *mayura* or peacock. The lack of other evidence in support of the *Pariśishṭaparvan* does not allow us to rely on this account. It is, however, interesting to note that Hemachandra at least hinted that the founder of the new dynasty did not enjoy any pedigree. According to the Sri Lankan Buddhist text, the *Mahāvamsa*, Chandragupta was born in the khattiya (kshatriya) Moriya family. A reading of this text indicates that the principal intention was to establish Chandragupta's kshatriya birth, underlining that he was fit enough by birth to ascend the throne. The earliest of all sources, the Pāli canonical text *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, certainly belonging to the pre-Mauryan times, speaks of a non-monarchical clan named Moriyas located in Pipphalivana. Pipphalivana was situated somewhere in between the Nepalese terai and Gorakhpur district in Uttar Pradesh. This is indeed the earliest known mention of the Moriyas/Mauryas who seem to have been initially a non-monarchical clan. The name Pipphalivana strongly suggests that they were associated with a forest tract. It is difficult to get more concrete data on the early life and family background of Chandragupta Maurya from indigenous sources. His initial association with a forest tract is alluded to in the later account of Justin. Though Justin and Plutarch categorically state that Sandrocottas (i.e. Chandragupta) did not enjoy any royal descent, they recount the legend that the feet of Chandragupta, while asleep in a dense forest, were licked by a lion and also a wild elephant uplifted him by its trunk. Justin probably tries to impress his readers that Sandrocottas, though without a royal pedigree had acquired enough legitimacy to his power, since

both the lion and the elephant are well-known symbols of royal power. Later Greek accounts report that Sandrocottas as an energetic and ambitious young person, went to meet Alexander in the Punjab, urging him (although unsuccessfully) to invade the powerful Indian ruler (the Nandas of Magadha) who was detested by his subjects because of his tyrannical and extortionate rule and low origin as well. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of these accounts in the absence of any other contemporary supporting evidence.

The Greek accounts leave little room for doubt that soon after Alexander's dispersal from India, Sandrocottas established a new dynasty, conquered a vast area and removed the last vestiges of the Greek political presence in the north-western extremities of the subcontinent. It is evident that the foundation of the Maurya dynasty was possible by ousting the Nanda rule from Magadha. Scholars however are not unanimous about the sequence of these events: whether Chandragupta first overthrew the Nandas and then fought against the Greek rulers, or if it happened the other way round. B.N. Mukherjee, having weighed in all possible evidence, holds that Chandragupta first uprooted the last known Nanda king Dhanananda and founded the Maurya rule in Magadha in 325–324 BC. Elaborate accounts of the violent wars between Chandragupta and the Nanda king occur in the *Milindapañho*, the *Mudrārākshasa* and the *Mahāvamsaṭikā*; but all these texts are dated much later than the foundation of the Maurya dynasty. That is why, the course of events leading to Chandragupta's victory over the Nandas cannot be ascertained. What is beyond any doubt that soon after establishing the Maurya rule in Magadha, Chandragupta became the master of the extensive territories formerly under the Nandas. As we have already noted earlier, the western limit of the Nanda realm could have reached the Ganga-Yamuna doab region and the upper Ganga valley. The occupation of these areas by Chandragupta appears to have brought him to hostile encounters with the Greek governors of the Punjab, who were in charge of these areas since Alexander's departure. The most eloquent account of this was penned by Justin: 'India after the death of Alexander had shaken, as it were, the yoke of servitude from its neck and put his governors to death. The author of this liberation was Sandrocottas.'

Justin also indicates that this event followed Chandragupta's securing the throne of Magadha by removing the erstwhile Nanda ruler. Of the Greek administrators, Eudemus was in charge of the areas to the east of the Indus; the territory along the Jhelum was assigned to Taxiles and Peithon held Paropanisadai or the country to the south-east of the Hindukush. The last known date of the presence of these Greek governors is 317–316 BC. Chandragupta's military success against them therefore seems to have taken place in or around 317–316 BC, at least not later than this date. His first major political success being his victory over the last Nanda king in 325/324 BC. His second success against the Greek governors probably came seven or eight years later, during which time Chandragupta must have

consolidated his hold over greater parts of the Ganga valley. His victory over the Greek governors of the Punjab and the North-Western Frontiers of the subcontinent resulted in the steady expansion of the Maurya rule beyond the Ganga valley and into the north-western parts of India. This speaks highly of the military prowess of the newly established Maurya empire in a short span of time. Chandragupta Maurya has been seen by several nationalist historians, especially of the 1920s and 1930s, as an astute political figure bringing an end to foreign rule in India and by extension, a defender of the integrity and sovereignty of the country. Without belittling the military and political success of Chandragupta Maurya against the Greek governors of the Punjab, these cannot be viewed as heroic activities of a patriot back in the late fourth century BC intent upon removing 'foreign' rule, In the wake of the freedom movements in India in the 1920s and 1930s, Chandragupta was enthusiastically portrayed as an exceptional leader capable of driving away foreign rule on Indian soil—a feat fit for emulation by Indians in the early part of the twentieth century.

His victories against the Greek governors paved the way for another encounter with a separate Greek ruler. At the time of the death of Alexander, his vast territorial possessions were apportioned among several of his generals as he did not leave behind any successor. Extensive areas of West Asia up to the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent came under the charge of Alexander's general, Seleucus Nikator. Seleucus from his principal power base in Syria, expanded his authority up to Bactria (north-eastern area of present Afghanistan). This brought Seleucus close to the northwestern borderland of the subcontinent and set the stage ready for a conflict with the expanding Maurya power. Apprehensive of Chandragupta's military designs and political ambitions, Seleucus in 301 BC, marched to the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent. The details of the conflict are unknown as also the definite outcome of this war. But the Greek accounts inform that Chandragupta's hostilities against Seleucus came to an end with the signing of a treaty. As a result of this treaty, Seleucus ceded to Chandragupta, as Strabo, Appian and Plutarch report, three territories, viz., Paropanisadai (areas to the south-east of the Hindukush), Arachosia (Kandahar in Afghanistan) and Gedrosia (Baluchistan). Chandragupta is said to have reciprocated by gifting 500 war elephants to Seleucus. The widely cherished idea that Seleucus also ceded the territory of Aria (Herat in Afghanistan) to Chandragupta cannot be established by any contemporary evidence, as B.N. Mukherjee rightly points out.

It is reasonable to infer that conditions of the treaty proved more advantageous to Chandragupta as he received three significant areas in exchange of 500 war elephants. The Greek fondness of this war-animal has been known since the battle of Alexander against Porus. That considerable portions of Afghanistan came under the Maurya control as an outcome of

this treaty, is well driven home by the discovery of the edicts of Aśoka from Afghanistan. Aśoka therefore seems to have retained the Maurya control over this region, which became a part of the empire founded by his grandfather (an elaborate discussion is made later). One direct result of the treaty is the visit by Megasthenes to the Maurya capital Palibothra (Pāṭaliputra) as a Seleukidian envoy. There is a widely popular belief in historians' circle and also among general public that this treaty coincided with a marriage alliance between Chandragupta and Seleucus, whose daughter was said to have been given in marriage to his Mauryan counterpart. It was first suggested by Vincent Smith whose view then became almost a text-book statement. Though Raychaudhuri criticizes Smith on this point, he too seems to have accepted the marriage alliance between the two rulers as a distinct possibility. On a careful scrutiny of the descriptions of the treaty in the accounts of Strabo, Appian, Justin and Plutarch, B.N. Mukherjee and Romila Thapar have ruled out any such matrimonial alliance between the two rulers. What the treaty recognized is the practice of intermarriage (*epigamia/kedos*) between Indians and Greeks. It is likely that such intermarriages had been quite common in the northwestern borderland of the subcontinent, noted for fluidity in its socio-cultural life, but the practice was given official and social recognition by the treaty between Chandragupta and Seleucus. Chandragupta's name is inseparably associated with the first known international treaty made by an Indian ruler.

The Maurya empire expanded to a nearly pan-Indian proportion during the reign of Chandragupta's grandson Aśoka. Aśoka has only one military conquest to his credit, that of Kaliṅga. Chandragupta's son and immediate successor Bindusāra is not known to have contributed to the expansion of the empire. In other words, the credit of annexing extensive areas in peninsular India to the Maurya realm should go to Chandragupta, though the events and the process of this territorial expansion remain hazy for the historian. There are only a few allusions to the conquest of the Dravida areas by the Maurya upstart (*vamba Moriya*) in much later Tamil sources, but it cannot be totally relied upon. The possibility of Chandragupta's death in Karnataka, recorded in the Jaina traditions, may also indirectly speak of the inclusion of peninsular India within his realm. Apart from his significant achievements as the founder of an extremely powerful ruling house and as a remarkable conqueror, he seems to have also excelled as an administrator. Such an impression emanates from the readings of Classical sources (elaborate discussions on the Maurya polity is made later). A later Jaina tradition in the *Rājavalikathe* informs us of Chandragupta's reign period of twenty-four years. Towards the end of his tenure, Chandragupta is said to have turned a devotee of Jainism and under the influence of his mentor, the Jain monk Bhadrabāhu, went to Karnataka, where he died. The nearly quarter century of his rule probably came to an end in 300 BC.

III

The immediate successor to Chandragupta was his son Bindusāra, who possibly ruled for about twenty-seven years (300–273 BC). In the absence of any contemporary source referring to this Mauryan ruler, very little is known about his reign. Athenaios and Strabo knew the successor of Sandrokottas as Alitrokhates or Amitrokhates. Both the Greek epithets were probably derived from the Indian term *amitraghāta* (a slayer of *amitras* or foes), which could have been an epithet of Bindusāra. The royal epithet is indicative of his prowess and formidable strength. There is no indication that the extensive empire that Bindusāra had inherited suffered any shrinkage during his reign. To Bindusāra may therefore go the credit of retaining the territoriai possessions of the Mauryas more or less intact. The *Divyāvadāna* speaks of a revolt or a popular uprising at Takshaśilā (Taxila) during Bindusāra's reign. Bindusāra sent his son Aśoka to tackle the situation. If the *Divyāvadāna* account is a reliable one, then the subjects of Taxila, according to the *Divyāvadāna*, had little to complain against the Maurya rulers, but they were indeed unhappy with rogue administrators (*dushṭāmātyas*). There is no indication that Bindusāra lost his control over the north-western area of the realm. Bindusāra (Amitrokhates) however, figures in Athenaios' text for having maintained cordial relation with the Syrian king Antiochus I. The Indian ruler requested his Syriac counterpart to buy for him fine wine, fig and a sophist (i.e. a philosopher). Antiochus I is said to have agreed to send him wine and fig, but not the sophist since the latter was not purchasable. It is not possible to prove or disprove any such event in the absence of adequate evidence. But the Greek account certainly highlights the continuity in the Maurya policy of maintaining close diplomatic linkages with Greek rulers of West Asia during Bindusāra's reign.

IV

Expansion and Consolidation

The history of the Mauryas enters its most significant stage during the reign of the third ruler of the dynasty, Aśoka, son of Bindusāra. Aśoka's reign spans for nearly four decades (273–232 BC), which is considered a landmark and of profound importance in Indian history. We have already stated that the most important evidence of his reign comes in the form of his own lithic records, encountered for the first time in Indian history. Significantly enough, his edicts record the events and administrative measures of his times in terms of the years since his coronation. In fact the Greek and Aramaic edicts of Aśoka leave it absolutely clear that the chronology of his reign was counted in terms of 'expired' years since his coronation. For example, the Greek version of the bilingual (Graeco-Aramaic) edict from Shar-i-kuna informs that Aśoka

(Piodasses, i.e. Priyadarśī) promulgated Eusebia (Piety, the Greek equivalent of the Prakrit term Dhamma) 'after ten years having elapsed' since his coronation. A similar statement is also available in the Aramaic version of the same record. The evidence proves that the date(s) in Aśoka's edicts was in expired years. When studied and compared with the Prakrit edicts of Aśoka, the Shar-i-kuna edicts therefore record the promulgation of his Dhamma in the expired tenth year—and therefore in the eleventh current year—since his coronation. This is indeed an unusual way of recording major events in the reign of a ruler. Buddhist legends speak of his accession to the throne in 273 BC, but his formal coronation took place four years later, i.e. in 269 BC. Later Buddhist texts explain this gap of four years between his accession to the throne and his coronation in the light of Aśoka's alleged involvement in bitter fratricidal feuds over a protracted period. The enthusiasm of Buddhist authors to portray the transformation of the cruel Aśoka (*chaṇḍāśoka*) to the righteous ruler (*dharmāśoka*) under the spell of Buddhism is unmistakable. These stories try to glorify the role of Buddhism in the making of Aśoka into a pious Buddhist king. There is no other corroborative account to establish the image of Aśoka as an exterminator of brothers, the rivals to his claim for the throne. R.K. Mookerjee's straightforward and rather uncritical acceptance of the Buddhist legends that Aśoka succeeded in a bloody fratricidal war with the help of his prime minister (*agrāmātya*), Radhagupta, has little corroboration from contemporary epigraphic records. On the contrary, Aśoka in his edict clearly instructed his officials to take proper care of his brothers' households (*olodhanesu*). The possibility of a rivalry for the Maurya throne however cannot be entirely ruled out, as there are precedents of such an event in previous Magadhan regimes.

In his edicts, Aśoka is systematically styled Devānāmpiya (beloved of the gods) and Priyadarsi (of beautiful appearance). The RE VIII suggests that his predecessors too were Devānāmpiyas. Seen from this light, Devānāmpiya could have been a traditional dynastic epithet of the Maurya kings and not a personal epithet of Aśoka. However, we do not know which one of his predecessors actually assumed this title, as neither Chandragupta nor Bindusāra issued any royal document. One of the Maurya rulers of the post-Aśokan phase, Daśaratha, also bore the epithet Devānāmpiya in his inscriptions. The Greek and the Aramaic edicts refer to him respectively as Piodasses and PRYDRS (pronounced as Prydarsh), which were obvious transliterations of Prakrit term Piyadasi (Priyadarsi). While Aśoka assumes the political title *Rājā* (literally king) in his Prakrit edicts, he is called as *basileos* and *MLK* (pronounced as *Malka*, comparable with *Malik*, i.e. lord, king) respectively in his Greek and Aramaic edicts. The terms *basileos* and *MLK* are therefore literal translations of the title *Rājā* respectively into Greek and Aramaic. At the initial stages of researches in Aśoka's edicts, identifying the unnamed *Devānāmpiya Piyadasi Rājā* with a known king resulted in scholarly controversies. The problem was resolved when the MRE

discovered from Maski (in Karnataka) clearly bore the name of Aśoka along with the usual epithets *Devānāmpiya Piyadasi Rājā*. Besides the MRE from Maski, the MREs from Gujarra (in Madhya Pradesh), Nittur and Udegolam (both in Karnataka), discovered in recent decades, also mention the personal name Aśoka.

The four-decade long reign of Aśoka witnessed only one military campaign and conquest, that of Kaliṅga. The RE XIII furnishes information of Aśoka's victory over Kaliṅga. He defeated and conquered Kaliṅga when eight years had elapsed since his coronation (*aṭhavasa-abhisitasa Devanapriyasa Priadraśisa raño Kaliga vijita:* RE XIII). The conquest therefore took place in his thirteenth regnal year, i.e. 261 BC. Aśoka himself admits that the Kaliṅga conquest was associated with terrible bloodbath and violence: hundreds of thousands of people were carried away forcefully, probably as prisoners of war; many more were killed in the battlefield and even greater number than these died because of the war. The massacre perpetrated during the Kaliṅga war left deep impressions on him and though victorious, he was full of remorse (*So asti anusochana Devanapriasa vijiniti Kaligani*). Aśoka is justifiably celebrated for his unique feat of having eschewed war for ever, not in defeat but after a victory. Perturbed by the horrors of war, he is said to have embraced Buddhism soon after the Kaliṅga war and this was followed by his promulgation of the Law of Piety (Dhamma). Interestingly enough, inscriptions indicate that he embraced Buddhism after perpetrating the massacre and violence in the Kaliṅga war, while Buddhist texts of later times connect his conversion to Buddhism on account of his killing many brothers. There is thus a clear divergence between two sets of sources—one contemporary, and the other of later date—on the circumstances leading to his embracing Buddhism. It is logical to place greater credence to the account figuring in the contemporary source, i.e. Aśoka's own edict, than a later textual reference. One of the most significant changes in Mauryan polity since the victorious Kaliṅga war was the official replacement of the sound of the war-drum (*bherighosha*) with the sound of Dhamma (*Dhammaghosha*). Right from the days of Bimbisāra in the late sixth century BC till the Kaliṅga conquest in 261 BC Magadha's rise to political paramountcy in the subcontinent was largely the outcome of pursuing the policy of military conquest and annexation of vanquished areas. The Kaliṅga conquest by Aśoka saw the culmination of this protracted process. Though Aśoka's stated remorse for having unleashed terrible violence against Kaliṅga appears genuine, that did not deter him from annexing the territory of Kaliṅga to the Maurya empire. The RE XIII while recording the violence in the war and Aśoka's repentance also states that such killing of life, forcible carrying away of vanquished people and death of large number of people became inevitable when an unconquered area was conquered (*Avijitaṁ hi vijinamano yo tatra vadha maraṇaṁ vā apavuḍhe vā janasa:* RE XIII). The statement almost

sounds like a justification of the violence and the loss of human life during the Kaliṅga war. It is also interesting to note that Kaliṅga was considered as an unconquered (*avijita*) territory by Aśoka before the war and therefore it was at the receiving end of the Maurya political and military might. The first important ruler of Kaliṅga itself, namely, Khāravela (late first century BC), however, was aware of the former occupation of Kaliṅga by a Nanda ruler (*Nandarājā*). Was this an inaccurate perception, or did Kaliṅga slip out of Magadhan political control after the fall of the Nanda dynasty, thereby necessitating a fresh conquest of Kaliṅga during Aśoka's time?

The victory over Kaliṅga and its annexation to the Maurya realm resulted in the maximum expansion of the empire. Aśoka's edicts are the most reliable evidence for determining the extent of the Maurya empire at its peak. But before embarking on the discussion on the geographical spread of the Maurya rule, another significant point demands our attention here. For the first time, the vast Mauryan realm was given a distinct designation. At least four REs (II, III, XIII and XIV) used the term *vijita* to denote the domain of the Mauryas. As the term *vijita* stands for something conquered, it is therefore clear that Aśoka viewed the area under his jurisdiction as a conquered territory. In RE XIII also figures the term *rājavishaya* (royal domain) as a synonym of *vijita* or conquered area. The Maurya ruler gave a message and perceived that the realm was carved out of military conquests (*vijita rājavishaya*). Aśoka also considered that his energetic exertions (*pakama*, i.e. *prakrama*) resulted in significant changes in the spiritual life in Jambudvīpa (*pakamasa esa hi phale:* MRE I). It is reasonable to assume, in the light of the above passage, that he could exert his authority and efforts over the area under his jurisdiction which in this case is labelled as Jambudvīpa. The term Jambudvīpa in the Purāṇas denotes not only the subcontinent but also some areas beyond the geographical confines of the subcontinent. Aśoka however used the term Jambudvīpa as a distinct geo-political entity under his authority, in other words—his empire. The term Jambudvīpa therefore denotes in this case the Maurya realm itself.

Aśoka also claims to have distributed the message contained in his MRE I all over the *paṭhivi* (*sava-pathaviyām ca vivāsite iti:* MRE I from Nittur). The Prakrit word *paṭhivi* is certainly the same as *pṛithvī* or the world. The passage can literally mean that his message was dispatched all over the world. But an interesting explanation of the term *paṭhivi* or *pṛithvī/pṛithīvī* can be offered in the light of the *Arthaśāstra*, which defines *prithivi* as the area lying between the Himavat (Himalayas) and the sea. The *Arthaśāstra*, thus, equates the term *pṛithīvī* with the *chakravartīkshetra* or the domain of a universal paramount ruler. Put differently, the term prithivi in the *Arthaśāstra* is used in the sense of the subcontinent and not in its literal meaning, the earth. The above argument strongly suggests that Aśoka probably intended to denote by the term *paṭhivi* the territory under his jurisdiction. *Paṭhivi* in this edict

has a geo-political connotation and is more or less the same as Jambudvīpa. Seen in this light, the Maurya empire under Aśoka was variously labelled as a conquered royal domain (*vijita, rājāvisaya*), Jambudvīpa and Pathivi.

Aśoka was aware that his realm was vast (*Mahalake hi vijitam:* RE XIV). The geographical distribution of the findspots of Aśoka's edicts provide a reliable image of the extent of the Maurya empire, since his promulgations would be effective in areas under his control. His PEs from Lauriya Nandagarh, Lauriya Araraj, Rampūrva (all in north Bihar), the MRE from Sahasram and his cave inscriptions from Barabar (near Gaya) point to his rule over present Bihar, which of course included the Maurya capital Pāṭaliputra (Patna). The Nepalese terai has yielded two of his inscriptions from Nigali Sagar and Rummindei (Lumbini village), the latter recording an administrative measure—exemptions from revenue. His control over the Ganga plains will be evident from his MPIs from Sarnath (near Vārāṇasi), Kosam (near Allahabad), an MRE from Ahraura (near Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh) and Bahapur (Delhi) and the PEs from Delhi-Topra (originally standing at Topra in Haryana and transported to Delhi during the reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq in the fourteenth century AD) and Delhi-Meerut. Another important findspot of Aśokan REs is Kalsi near Dehradun in Uttarakhand. The inclusion of former *mahājanapadas* of Gandhāra and Kamboja in the North-West Frontier of the subcontinent will be evident from the Greek edict from Taxila and REs from Manshera and Shahbazgarhi (all in present Pakistan). The locations of the edicts at Manshera and Shahbazgarhi are not far away from northern part of Kashmir. Interestingly enough, the famous twelfth century AD historical chronicle of Kashmir, the *Rājataraṅginī* of Kalhaṇa, spoke of Aśoka's rule over Kashmir. The discovery of his Greek and Aramaic edicts from Kandahar, Laghman and Pul-i-Darunta incontrovertibly establishes the Maurya reign over these regions of the present Afghanistan. The region in question must have come under the Maurya rule as a result of Seleucus' ceding these territories to Chandragupta. Aśoka, therefore, certainly maintained the Maurya control over these areas that he had inherited. His edict from Bairat in Rajasthan and the REs from Junagarh are pointers to the incorporation of extensive stretches of western India within the Maurya realm. The Maurya rule over the Kathiawad peninsula is further corroborated by Rudrādaman's inscription from Junagarh (AD 150). A set of his fourteen REs is available from Sopara (ancient Śūrpāraka), a northern suburb of present Mumbai and an ancient port. Aśoka's MREs are found from Gujara, Pangurariya, Rupnath and a MPI has come from Sanchi (all in Madhya Pradesh). That Kaliṅga was conquered and annexed into the Maurya empire is known not only from his RE XIII, but the two SREs from Dhauli (near Bhuvaneswar) and Jaugada (near Ganjam) also demonstrate Mauryan control over Kaliṅga. The largest number of Aśokan edicts (both REs and MREs) are from western Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka: Brahmagiri, Siddapur, Jatinga-Rameswar,

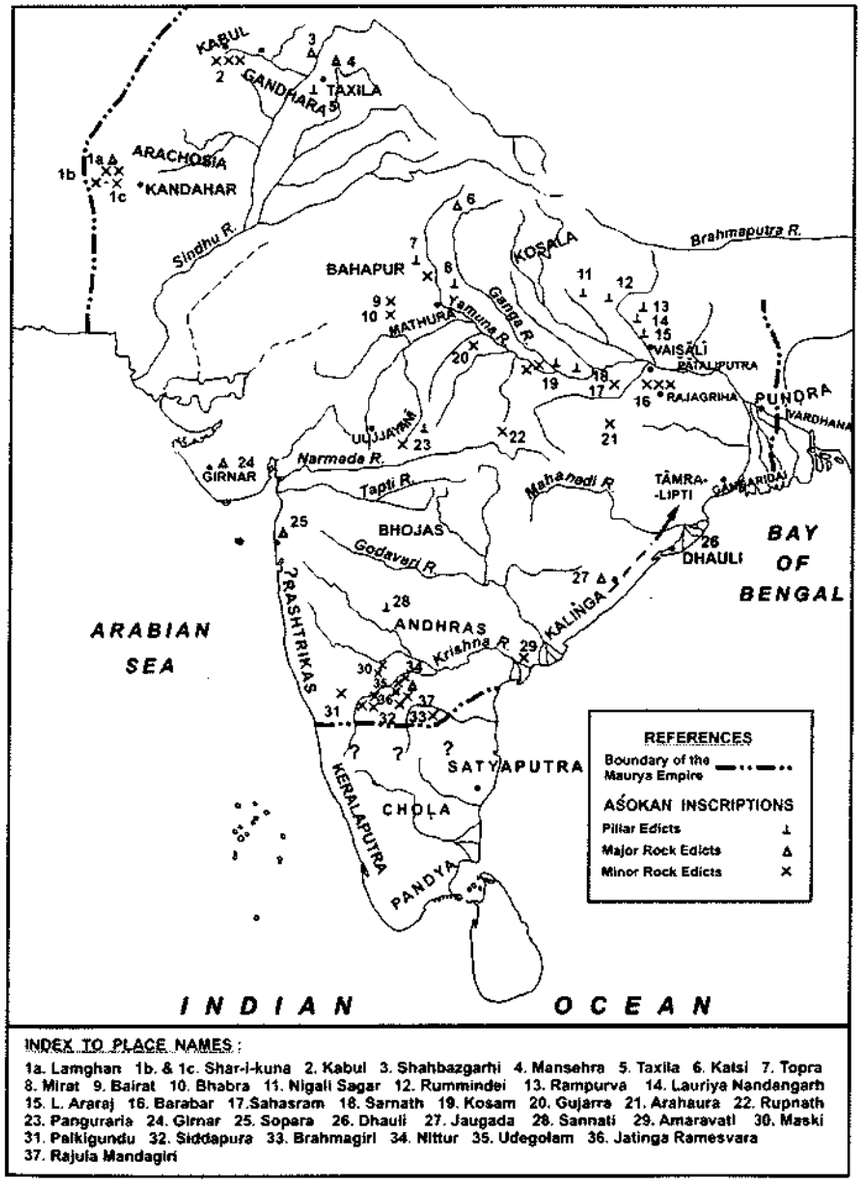
Maski, Govimath, Palkigundu, Nittur, Udegolam, Sannathi, Yerraguddi and Rajulamandagiri.

Aśoka further categorically states that the following people/communities were under his jurisdiction: Yona (= the Yavanas, referring obviously to the people in the north-western borderlands that have yielded his Aramaic and Greek edicts), Kambojas (in the Hazara district of Pakistan, adjacent to ancient Gandhāra), Nābhaka-Nābhapaṁtikas (in present Mahārashtra and Karnataka), Bhojas (in the Vidarbha-Nagpur region of Mahārashtra) Petenikas (location uncertain), Aṁdhas (Andhras in the eastern part of the Deccan) and the Palidas (Pulindas located in the area between the Narmada and the Vindhyas in central India). There is a strong likelihood that north Bengal (ancient Puṇḍra region) was also a part of the Maurya empire, as Mahāsthan (an excavated urban site in Bogura, present Bangladesh) has yielded a stone plaque inscribed in Brāhmī of third century BC. The findspots of Maurya inscriptions thus offer an image of the vastness of the realm, stretching from Afghanistan in the north to Karnataka in the south and from Kathiawad in the west to Kaliṅga in the east, if not as far as north Bengal. What is remarkable is Aśoka's awareness of the extent of his jurisdiction, but also of the unconquered (*avijita*) areas, which lay outside the frontiers (*aṁta/prachanta = anta/pratyanta*) of his realm. Enlisted as unconquered areas beyond his frontiers are the Chola (in the Kaveri delta, Tamil Nadu), Pāḍa (Pāṇḍya country around present Madurai in the Tamraparni-Vaigai deltas, Tamil Nadu), Satiyaputa (Satyaputra, northern part of Tamil Nadu), Ketalaputa (the Chera country in Kerala) and Tambapamni (Tamraparni or Sri Lanka) (REs II and XIII).

Five Yavana kings are also explicitly mentioned (RE XIII) as rulers over areas beyond his realm (*avijita/amta*). They were clearly his contemporary kings to whom he sent Dhamma missions. They are:

1. Aṁtiyoka (Antiochus Theos of Syria 261–246 BC)
2. Turāmaya (Ptolemy Philadelphos of Egypt 285–247)
3. Aṁtekinā (Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia)
4. Maga (Megus of Cyrene, death in 258 BC)
5. Alikasudara (Alexander of Epirus 272–235 BC)

Mention of these rulers as contemporaries of Aśoka immensely helped scholars to determine the possible date of Aśoka's reign. But the striking point is that the areas clearly designated as *anta/pratyanta* and *avijita* (unconquered areas beyond the frontiers of the empire) have not yielded any edicts of Aśoka. Thus the impressions of the physical distribution of his edicts (external evidence) match his own inscribed words (internal evidence) on the extent of his realm. There is absolutely no doubt that the Maurya empire under Aśoka assumed nearly pan-Indian proportions, except the far



Map 4.1: India—The Maurya Emprire

south and areas to the east and north-east of north Bengal. No other power in the history of early India held sway over a more extensive territory than the Mauryas. The distribution of Aśoka's edicts in his far-flung empire also suggests certain patterns. The fourteen REs in their different recensions were engraved at ten sites, all of which are located in the outlying areas of the empire. The six sites yielding seven PEs are situated only in the heartland of the Ganga valley. On the other hand, MREs I and II were distributed over the entire domain. Such a pattern is unlikely to have emerged out of accident; it speaks of a conscious design. Also significant is to note that the earliest of his edicts were his MREs, issued in the tenth year since his coronation, while the latest inscribed record of his reign is the seventh PE, engraved in the twenty-seventh year.

This vast realm is described by historians as an empire. Romila Thapar examined the judiciousness of the indiscriminate application of the term empire to ancient realms of India. She points out that the formation of large colonial empires in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prompted historians to look for predecessors of empires in the remote antiquity. If the term empire denotes a vast area into which were accommodated diverse regions having varied ethnic groups, different socio-economic milieu and plurality of cultural patterns—including religious and linguistic differences—then the complex polity could be considered an empire. The large, nearly pan-Indian expanse of the Maurya realm, is one justification of designating it as an empire. In this empire lived diverse ethnic groups, including the non-indigenous *yavanas*. The Mauryan realm included in it extremely fertile tracts in the Ganga plains and parts of the Indus basin; it also accommodated areas not noted for agricultural prosperity, but conducive to hunting-gathering and animal breeding pursuits. There were areas known for sustaining a complex urban society, in sharp contrast to the relatively simpler lineage societies—especially in peninsular India. The acknowledgement and accommodation of linguistic diversities is best seen in the issuance of Aśoka's edicts in three languages, Prakrit, Greek and Aramaic; the Prakrit used in Aśoka's edicts shows the presence of local variations and dialects. Aśoka's edicts clearly recognizes the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices: Vedic and brahmanical practices, Buddhism, Jainism, Ajikivism and other local cults. That the Buddhist saṁgha experienced sharp differences of opinion and dissents also figures in Aśoka's edict. The attempt at integrating the vast realm amidst pronounced diversities would require the presence of a super-ordinate authority, which comes close to the description of an empire. Multiple foci of administration, as seen during the Mauryan epoch, would also strengthen its candidature as an empire. The accommodation and integration of these diversities by the Maurya rulers therefore do not suggest the prevalence of a unitary polity that stamped out all regional variations. This is a point which will be elaborated in the following section.

V

The Polity

The Maurya rulers are famous for carving out a vast empire by military conquests and the annexation of conquered areas. No less significant was the achievement that this realm embracing almost the entire subcontinent was kept under the political control of a paramount power for at least a century. This speaks of an efficient administrative system, which helped the political integration of the Maurya empire. A far-flung empire as that of the Mauryas indeed accommodated in it many former monarchical entities, which had already experienced state system. The degree of difficulty in managing a huge empire is certainly much higher than that in the cases of relatively smaller and more compact polities. A vast territorial polity has to tackle the difficult problem of adjusting to the inevitable imbalances and diversities in the widely dispersed areas. The mobilization of resources by an efficient revenue system from disparate zones is also one of the prerequisites of the making of an imperial administration. The imperial authority may either choose to impose uniformity by stamping out diversities in the different parts of the empire or establish an overarching authority by accommodating regional diversities and imbalances. The complexities of the system can hardly be missed. The making and the maintenance of the empire, as Romila Thapar underlines, demand constant adjustments, accommodation and manouevering of many factors and, therefore, is not a static situation, but witnesses a lively process. These preliminaries may help appreciate the salient characteristics of the Maurya administrative system.

One may note a sustained preference of scholars for the *Kautilīya, Arthaśāstra* and Megasthenes' account as sources for studying the Maurya administration. The popular view is that the Mauryas established a unitary and highly centralized, if not a monolithic state system, in which every policy and decision emanated from the apex political centre at Pāṭaliputra and was uniformly applied to disparate regions of the empire. Such a position does not allow much scope of accommodation for local and regional features and diversities. It also tries to visualize an early empire as having anticipated the features of a centralized modern nation state which the Maurya polity was certainly not. Recent enquiries into available sources and especially, the discovery of new edicts of Aśoka, have brought in significant shifts in the historiography of the Maurya state. Aśoka designates himself as the Magadhan ruler (*rājā māgadhe:* Bairat edict), implying thereby that Magadha was consciously projected as the most significant unit of the empire. Romila Thapar, therefore, cogently perceives Magadha as the metropolitan state in the Maurya empire. Thapar further argues that the erstwhile *mahājanapadas* (like Kośala, Vatsa, Avantī and Gandhāra), incorporated in the Maurya realm,

became the core areas of the empire. These core areas either had already experienced state formation, or would emerge as secondary states after the collapse of the imperial authority. Situated far away from the metropolitan state and the Ganga valley were the peripheral areas like the north-western borderland of the subcontinent and the peninsular tracts. The composition of the Maurya empire in these three zones suggests, according to Thapar, a complex system of administration. Though the political paramountcy of the Mauryas over the empire is not doubted, it is unlikely that the Maurya political control was uniformly exercised and felt over all these units. Thapar logically assumes that the degree of control by the Mauryas over the metropolitan and the core areas was much stronger than that in the peripheral regions. There is not an iota of doubt that Pāṭaliputra was the apex political centre of the empire.

The Maurya emperor was of course the pivotal figure in the statecraft. We have already indicated that the Maurya rulers assumed the simple title of *rājā*; grand titles like *maharājādhirājā, bhūpati, adhipati* and *chakravartī* are conspicuously absent in the Maurya inscriptions. That the emperor himself strove hard to supervise administration is eloquently described by Megasthenes who wrote about the hectic daily schedule of the ruler. Megasthenes impresses upon us that Chandragupta attended to the affairs of the realm even when he was relaxing. A close parallel to this was also practised by Aśoka. Aśoka clearly instructed that his messengers (*pativedakas*) must inform him about any important matter irrespective of whether he was in his inner chamber or in the pleasure garden. He stressed on the need of the communication of information to the ruler, as in former times conveying information regarding state-affairs (*athakamma*) was not duly performed (RE VI). This constant and energetic exertion by the ruler is referred to as *pakama* or *prakrama* by Aśoka (MRE I) and as *utthāna* in the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra*. All the high ranking functionaries of the realm were probably appointed by Aśoka. Megasthenes notes that the Maurya king used to go out of his palace everyday to supervise the administration of justice. Since the Maurya ruler headed the administration of justice, it was possible for Aśoka to allow a reprieve of three days to a prisoner awarded capital punishment (RE VI). Could the Maurya ruler frame new laws? The traditional sastric view is that the ruler is an upholder of the established norms, usages and customary practices, which are brought under the rubric of dharma, but he was not a source of law. Kautilya, however, advocates that royal proclamations or charters (*rājāśasanas*) could be a source of law. Aśoka's inscriptions are excellent examples of royal edicts; the promulgations therein are expected to be obeyed by subjects and officials of the realm. All these would demonstrate the concentration of immense power in the hands of the Maurya king, though he did not seek the enhancement of his power by performing typical royal sacrifices like the Vājapeya, the Rājasūya and

the Aśvamedha. The *purohita* or priest is conspicuous by his absence in the Maurya polity. The Vedic and/ or brahmanical rituals, especially the cult of sacrifices (*yajña*), have little bearing on the Maurya polity.

The metropolitan and the core areas of the Maurya realm appear to have been brought under the direct control of the ruler. The administration revolved around a number of very high-ranking functionaries. Kauṭilya considers that the ruler, however powerful, could not run the administration single-handedly; kingship is possible only with assistance, a single wheel does not move a vehicle (*sahāya sādhyaṁ rājātvaṁ chakramekaṁ na varttate*). The *Arthaśāstra* recommends the appointment of *amātyas* or high-ranking officers for this purpose. The *amātyas* are to be selected on the basis of a peculiar type of test of deception (*upadhā*), examining whether the applicant would fall prey to the vices of unrighteousness, fear, lust and greed of wealth. While the passing of any one of these tests (i.e not being deceived) leads to the appointment of an *amātya* in the related department, the one succeeding in all the tests of deception (*sarvopadhāśuddha*) is considered more qualified a candidate and therefore should be made a minister (*mantrī*) with an annual salary of 48,000 *paṇas*. Thus, the appointment of an *amātya* and/or a *mantrīn* rests on the candidate's ability to prove his purity (*śuddha*) in the tests of deception (*upadhā*). Kauṭilya also clearly distinguishes between an *amātya* and a minister (*mantrī*), though in later Indian treatises on polity, *mantrī, amātya and sachiva* would often figure as interchangeable and synonymous terms. One is not sure if the Maurya emperors regularly appointed ministers. Megasthenes, classifying the population of India into seven groups, speaks of the last and the seventh one as counsellors and assessors who were small in number, but held the highest positions in the administration. From this group, according to the Greek account, were appointed the highest officers of the realm like the chief of the army and treasury. Those who offered counselling to the ruler could be analogous to ministers. The word *parishā* in Aśoka's edicts (REs III and VI) is often taken to mean the *mantrīparishad* or a council of ministers. The term *mantrīparishad* figures in the *Arthaśāstra*.

K.P. Jayaswal argued for the existence of a very powerful council of ministers that could even question royal decision and send information to the Murya ruler about its debating the king's decision. A careful scrutiny of the edicts by B.M. Barua and U.N. Ghoshal however suggests that the *parishā* during Aśoka's reign was at the most a deliberative body without any executive authority. Under such circumstances, it is highly unlikely that it could challenge the king's decisions. Jayaswal possibly stretched the point a bit too far for portraying the council of ministers as a check on the Maurya ruler. What Aśoka in fact instructs in his edicts is that his messengers should forthwith report to him in case there were differences of opinion in the *parishā* (i.e. among the members of the *mantrīparisad*). Evidently it was not binding upon the Maurya ruler to be present during the deliberations in the *parishā*, a point which does not speak of much importance of the body in

question. Aśoka's edicts also inform us that the *parishā* could meet on an emergency issue(s). Kauṭilya recommends an annual salary of 12,000 *paṇas* for the *mantrīparisad*—only a quarter of the annual payment assigned to the *mantrī*. This too goes against Jayaswal's ascribing excessive importance to the *mantrīparishad* during the Maurya times.

The above arguments may suggest that the burden of administration at the apex level was borne more by high-ranking executive functionaries than by ministers. Aśoka speaks of *pulisas* (= *purushas* in Sanskrit) of three types. Some scholars have interpreted the term *pulisa/purusha* in the sense of secret agents (*gūḍhapurusha* of Kauṭilya). But a close perusal of the Aśokan edict points to a three-fold classification of the *pulisa* into high, low and middle (*ukasa, gevaya and majhima:* PE I). Such gradation in the secret service is rather unusual and may suggest hierarchies among administrative officers. In other words, the word *pulisa* may more cogently be interpreted as *rājapurushas* or royal functionaries of high, middle and low ranks. Such an interpretation also corresponds to the *Arthaśāstra* ideal of classifying the officers into several grades, their gradation being further underlined by the Kauṭilyan scheme of differentiated salary-scales ranging from 48,000 *paṇas* down to 720 *paṇas* a year. The highest officers under Aśoka are, however, not designated as *amātyas* or *adhaykshas* (heads of departments), but as *mahāmātras*.

The *mahāmātras* were of the following types:

1. *Aṁtamahāmātras:* in charge of the *anta* or frontier areas (SRE I)
2. *Itijhakamahāmātras: strī-ādhyakshamahāmātras* or in charge of women in general or the *mahāmātra* in the inner chamber (RE XII)
3. *Vachabhumikamahāmātras*: in charge of the *Vrajabhūmika* or the pasture grounds (RE XII)
4. *Nagalaviyohalakamahāmātras:* in charge of the judicial department in the city (SRE I)
5. *Dhammamahāmātras:* in charge of the Law of Piety, specially created for the propagation of Dhamma (RE V, PEs V and VII). The creation of this post was an Aśokan innovation.

The enormous importance of a powerful armed force in the making of the far-flung Maurya empire can hardly escape our attention. The Greek accounts credit Sandrocottas with the conquest of the whole of India by a huge army of 600,000 soldiers. The Greek authors impress upon us the large number of soldiers employed by the Mauryas, though the number was clearly exaggerated. Aśoka does not speak of the numerical strength of his army but its striking powers are strongly impressed in his accounts of the victory over Kaliṅga. The army was indeed the most visible manifestation of the coercive authority of the ruler. The Greek texts suggest that the administration of the army was assigned to six boards, each consisting of five members (total

of 30 members). These were: (1) concerning the navy (comparable with the *nāvadhyaksha* of the *Arthaśāstra*), (2) concerning the supply of provisions for the army with the help of bullock carts (comparable with the *go'adhyaksha* of the *Arthaśāstra*), (3) in charge of the infantry (comparable with the *patyadhyaksha* of the *Arthaśāstra*), (4) in charge of the cavalry (comparable with the *aśvādhyaksha* of the *Arthaśāstra*), (5) in charge of the chariots (comparable with the *rathādhyaksha* of the *Arthaśāstra*) and (6) in charge of the elephant corps (comparable with the *hastyadhyaksha of the Arthaśāstra*). The *Arthaśāstra* does not prescribe the administration of the army through committees or boards, but places different units of the armed forces under respective heads of departments (*adhyakshas*). Both the Classical sources and the *Arthaśāstra* leave a clear impression of the composition of the army in different units. The *Arthaśāstra* mentions the *senāpati* as the commander of the army; he was one of the four highest paid functionaries, drawing an annual salary of 48,000 *paṇas*. There is at least one historically known *senāpati* of the Maurya army—Pushyamitra Suṅga, the commander of the last known Maurya ruler Bṛihadratha.

It is, however, doubtful if the Mauryas, essentially a land-based power, required and raised a regular navy. Many nationalist historians often read Megasthenes' accounts of the Mauryan navy in too literal a sense. They also point to the account of Nearchus's sailing along the lower Indus area and ultimately voyaging in the Persian Gulf during the return trip of a section of Alexander's vast army. It has been argued that Nearchus was able to build a large fleet with the help of local people in the lower Indus region, thereby implying seafaring traditions by local people in that region. While there is a long-drawn seafaring indigenous tradition in the lower Indus Valley, how much of it was geared to launch and maintain a combative flotilla is open to question. Many scholars also highlight the assumed correspondence between the Greek accounts of the Maurya navy or 'admiralty' and Kauṭilya's recommendations for the functions of the *Nāvadhyaksha*. The *Nāvadhyaksha* in the *Arthaśāstra* did not command a navy, but was the director of shipping, including his supervision of the mercantile marine. Significantly enough, the *Arthaśāstra* speaks of only riverine vessels and not sea-going crafts in the chapter on *Nāvadhyaksha*. All these offer serious problems to the claim for the existence of a navy under the Mauryas. It is, however, true that the *Arthaśāstra* advises the *Nāvadhyaksha* to put down the vessels of the pirates (*himsrikās*). But this alone does not amount to the maintenance of a naval unit in the Maurya army.

The Mauryas were aware of the importance of elephants as an offensive/defensive war machinery, according to Trautmann. The efficacy of the elephant force looms large in the Greek accounts of war between Alexander and Porus. The urge for procuring Indian war-elephants by the Greeks is apparent in the treaty between Seleucus and Chandragupta, who gave 500 war-elephants to Seleucus as per this treaty. Kauṭilya not only recommended

the appointment of the head of elephant forces (*hastyadhyaksha*), but also underlined the importance of maintaining specific forests for the rearing of elephants (*hastīvana*). For Kauṭilya, the elephant was clearly a strategic animal, fit to be brought under state supervision. It is significant to note that early Indian texts, including the *Arthaśāstra*, considered Kaliṅga and Magadha as areas noted for excellent elephants. The other war-animal of great importance was the horse. Good quality war-horses being rarely available in the subcontinent, these were often brought from West and Central Asia through the north-western extremes of the subcontinent. It is therefore not surprising that Kauṭilya enlists several regions of the western and north-western zone (e.g. Gandhāra, Vanāyu, Sindhu-Sauvīra and Pārasika) for the availability of horses for cavalry, which according to him, should be supervised by the *Aśvādhyaksha*. What is striking here is Kauṭilya's recognition of the efficacy of the fighting-forces recruited from forest-dwellers (*aṭavī-bala*).

Closely associated with the organization of the army was that of the secret service, encountered for the first time in the sources of the Maurya period. The Classical texts speak of the overseers, inspectors and spies (*episkopoi/iphor*) who are praised as the most reliable people in the realm. The most elaborate prescription of setting up a secret service (*gūḍhapurushas*) is available in the *Arthaśāstra*. Secret agents, according to this text, are of two types: the stationary (*saṁstha*) and the roving (*sanchara*), further divided into nine sub-types. Kauṭilya also proposes the utilization of a spy on the simultaneous payroll of two kings (*ubhayavetana*), possibly a king and his enemy; this may come close to what is now known as a double agent. The head of the secret service in the *Arthaśāstra* is the *samāharttā*, primarily entrusted with the collection of revenue. Kauṭilya advocates an elaborate network of espionage in which information gathered by the roving (*sañchara*) agents should be routed through the stationary spies (*saṁstha*) to the head of the secret service. In other words, Kauṭilya underlines the need of verifying the information gathered by spies. This system clearly contradicts the romantic impression of Megasthenes on spies, who, according to him, were never accused of lying. Kauṭilya has greatly stressed on the gathering of secret information on the activities and attitudes of high-ranking officers (including the *samāharttā* himself), watching over the officers in the finance department, invigilating upon the suspect elements of the state and the application of force, fraud and dubious means to eliminate them. That the collection and sending of information to the authority was vitally important for the statecraft is not merely underlined by Kauṭilya; the messengers (*paṭivedakas*) in the Aśokan edicts carried out the same function.

This brings us to another vital feature of the government at the apex level, namely the availability and management of resources of the state. The maintenance of the large army and an impressive number of salaried state functionaries would certainly require an enormous amount of resources. Even

before the days of the Maurya empire, the Nandas are said to have extracted revenue by resorting to extortionate measures. The *Arthaśāstra* repeatedly stresses on the significance of a strong treasury (*kośa*). According to this treatise, the collection of revenue is entrusted with a high-ranking officer, the *samāharttā* (collector of revenues). The *samāharttā* should supervise the collection of revenue from the following seven heads: (1) fortified urban area (*durga*), (2) the countryside (*rāshṭra*), (3) mines (*khani*), (4) irrigation projects (*setu*), (5) forests (*vana*), (6) pasture grounds (*vrajā*) and (7) trade-route (*vaṇikpathā*). The theoretician clearly impresses upon the diversified sources of revenue from both agrarian and non-agrarian sectors. The most important source of taxes must have come from agriculture. When Aśoka paid a visit to Lumbinigrāma, the place of nativity of the Buddha, he reduced the rate of the share of the agricultural produce to one eighth and totally exempted the village from *ball* (*ubalike kaṭe aṭhabhāgiye cha:* Rummindei pillar inscription). The share of the produce (*bhāga*) has been the primary demand of the ruler since the pre-Mauryan times. Aśoka does not specify the actual rate of *bhāga*, but it must have been higher than the reduced rate of one eighth (12 per cent). The ruler in early India is generally considered to have been entitled to one-sixth of the produce (*shaḍbhāgin*). The rate of *bhāga* during the Maurya times is likely to have been at least one sixth (16 per cent), if not an even higher rate of one fourth (25 per cent). The *bali* signifying a levy is known since the later Vedic times, but its rate is uncertain. The Greek accounts also inform us that cultivators had to pay to the state a share of at least one fourth of the produce. It is only the *Arthaśāstra* that recommends the levy of an irrigation cess (*udakabhāga*) from cultivators, ranging from one fifth to one third, but no other contemporary source corroborates that the Maurya state actually imposed such a levy on the agriculturists. The ruler in early Indian theoretical treatises is seen as the supreme authority over irrigation projects and that is the basis of demanding a levy on the users of irrigation facilities. In the absence of any other source than the *Arthaśāstra* on the collection of the water-cess, it is unlikely that the Mauryas exacted this particular tax from farmers. There is no ground to hold that the Mauryan realm belonged to what Karl Wittfogel described as hydraulic society, nurturing an Oriental despot. Megasthenses reports that neatherds, shepherds and hunters had to pay a levy, possibly in kind, to the state. This closely corresponds to the *Arthaśāstra* recommendation that both forests and grazing grounds should yield revenue to the treasury. The Maurya rulers were possibly the first to have exploited the faunal and floral resources of forests through revenue measures. It is no wonder that some forests in the *Arthaśāstra* appeared as material forests (*dravyavana*). Kauṭilya is also the first theoretician of early India to have underlined the importance of mines and minerals as valuable resources to the state; here too, the state is perceived as the ultimate authority over the resources lying beneath the soil (elaborate discussion in a subsequent section).

Giving his impressions of the municipal administration at the Maurya capital Pāṭaliputra, Megasthenes reports that commerce was closely supervised by officials and a levy of one tenth was collected from the merchant on sale proceeds. Two Aramaic edicts of Aśoka and Greek texts leave a strong impression that the Mauryas paid some attention to the maintenance of routes of communication. Seen from this light, the Kauṭilyan prescription of raising taxes from trade routes may have materialized to some extent during the Maurya period (elaborate discussion in a subsequent section). The Maurya realm therefore appears to have developed a regular resource gathering machinery, which recognized the importance of both agrarian and non-agrarian pursuits as sources of revenue. While agrarian revenue must have been the most important resource of the state, the *Arthaśāstra* enlists as many as twenty-two and twelve types of imposts, levies and demands available respectively from the urban area (*durga*) and mining operations (*khani*). He thus recognizes the significance of revenue collected from non-agrarian sectors. The vast Maurya realm did not have uniformly fertile areas; many regions were relatively arid and agriculturally less prosperous than the Ganga valley. That such areas could yield non-agrarian resources from forests, craft production (including mining) and trade was attempted for the first time in Indian history by the Mauryas.

For Kauṭilya, one of the most serious crises of the realm was financial stringency. The treatise proposes that the ruler should take recourse to extremely harsh measures to replenish the treasury during an emergency (*praṇayakriyā*). According to the text, the ruler should demand very high rate of taxes from peasants (*karshakas*), artisans (*kāru*), animal breeders (*yoniposhakas*), merchants (*vaidehakas*) and even courtesans. The measures are so harsh that these can be applied only once during a particular reign and never twice (*sakrideva na dviḥ prayojyaḥ*). Kauṭilya also does not rule out the employment of secret agents and of force and fraudulent measures to raise resources during such emergency situations.

The extensive Maurya empire could not be effectively administered only from Pāṭaliputra, the apex political centre. That the Maurya empire had within it administrative centres at regional levels is demonstrated by Aśoka's edicts. Two SREs at Dhauli and Jaugada clearly record that there were regional headquarters at Ujjayinī (in western Madhya Pradesh), Takshaśilā (Taxila in north-west Pakistan) and Tosālī (Dhauli near Bhuvaneswar), each under the charge of a *kumāra* or a prince of the blood royal. At Suvarṇagiri, identified by D.C. Sircar with Jonahgiri in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, there was an *ayaputa* or *āryaputra* (Brahmagiri, Siddapur and Jaitnga-Rameshwar versions of the MRE I). The *āryaputra* was also a Maurya prince and Suvarnagiri is generally regarded as the fourth and southern regional headquarters of the empire.

Before one delves into a discussion on these headquarters, it is important to explain the term *āryaputra*. *Ayaputa* or *āryaputra* is not any ordinary

prince of the Maurya house, but the term probably stands for the eldest son of the emperor. If the term *ayaputa* corresponds to the term *āryakumāra* in Pāṇini's grammar, it is likely that as the eldest son of the emperor, he was the heir designate, closely analogous to a *yuvarājā*. His status was, therefore, surely higher than that of an ordinary *kumāra* and hence a different label was devised to underline his higher rank and status. He could have held a position of the viceroy directly representing the Maurya ruler. Why an *ayaputa* was appointed only at the southern headquarters is a matter of conjecture and logical guesswork. The reasonable inference is that the southern area, which is noted for the maximum concentration of Aśoka's edicts, was rich in mineral resources (the very name Suvarnagiri, literally the hill of gold, is a pointer to this possibility). There is a distinct likelihood that the material interests of the Mauryas prompted them to set up an administrative headquarter at Suvarnagiri under a governor of very high rank. According to Thapar, peninsular India was a peripheral region for the Maurya rulers who could have been keen on exploiting the mineral resources for enriching the metropolitan area of Magadha. What has so far been discussed may suggest that at three centres *kumāras* were placed, while the southern division was entrusted to an authority of a more exalted nature.

Though the *kumāras* belonged to similar rank and status, a perusal of the two SREs speaks of a more complex arrangement. According to these edicts, the *kumāras* at Ujjayinī and Takshaśilā could send officers on tours of inspection (*anusaṁyāna*, itself an administrative innovation by Aśoka) after every three years. On the other hand, similar tours of inspection were sent out from Tosālī after every five year, not by the *kumāra* stationed there, but by the Maurya emperor himself. In fact in the SRE I Aśoka directly instructs local officers (*mahāmātras* and *nagalavīyohālaka*) in Kaliṅga without at all referring to the *kumāra* at Tosālī, who is expected to issue instructions regarding the tour of inspection to his local officers. Does this not leave an impression that the *kumāra* at Tosālī, though of equal rank with two other *kumāras*, enjoyed less power and authority than his counterparts at Taxila and Ujjayinī? Put differently, one may argue that the *kumāras* at Taxila and Ujjayinī had a greater say in the administration of their respective areas than the one at Tosālī. D.R. Bhandarkar has little hesitation that the *kumāras* at Ujjayinī and Taxila enjoyed considerable autonomy in their respective areas. G. Bongard Levin does not agree with the perception that these *kumāras* were under relatively lesser control of the apex authority. He points out that in the case of the *ayaputa* at Suvarnagiri, Aśoka's instructions were not directly addressed to him, but to local officers of inferior rank. It is also possible that there was a greater degree of intervention by Aśoka in the functions of the *kumāra* at Tosālī than that in the case of other *kumāras* since Kaliṅga was a newly conquered area. Even arguing for a strong control of the apex political authority over a powerful governor in a distant territory through a chain of command, it is difficult to miss that there was no uniformity in

the power and authority of *kumāras* of equal rank. This in turns strongly speaks of the allowance for and accommodation of regional diversities in the Maurya administration.

The historiography of the Maurya administration often presents a stereotyped image of a vast realm neatly organized into four provincial units in four cardinal directions: Takshaśilā, Ujjayinī, Tosālī and Suvarnagiri. This image fits well with the perception of a unitary character of the Maurya state. The view in question requires a rethinking in the light of recent studies in Aśoka's edicts. The Aśokan MRE at Pangurariya in Madhya Pradesh reveals to us another *kumāra*, Sāmba by name (the only *kumāra* known by his personal name) associated with Manemadeśa, through which Aśoka toured during his visit to Upanīthavihāra. *Kumāra* Sāmba was possibly in charge of Manemadeśa in central India. The presence of a fifth *kumāra* gives a jolt to the conventional image of an empire divided into four compact provinces under four *kumāras*. There could have been, thus, a fifth unit of regional level administration in central India. There was indeed another zone of regional administration in Kathiawad where we find Pushyagupta and Yavanarāja Tushāspha serving Chandragupta Maurya and Aśoka respectively (Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradāman I, AD 150). These two did not belong to the Maurya ruling house and did not carry the designation *kumāra*. Pushyagupta bore the epithet *rāshṭriya*, in charge of the regional unit called *rāshṭra*. Both governors were outsiders to the royal house. Tushāspha is commonly seen as a Greek on the ground of his epithet Yavanarāja. Though the term *yavana* is derived from Ionia in Greece (and hence a Yavana is identified as a Greek), Tushāspha could not be a Greek. Tusha is an Iranian name and *aspha* or *aspa* is the Iranian equivalent of Sanskrit *asva* (horse). Tushāspha was therefore a person of Iranian origin. The term *yavana* could stand for any Hellenized person of West Asiatic extraction. The significant point is that in Kathiawad the Mauryas consistently appointed persons outside the royal lineage as regional administrators. B.N. Mukherjee's reading of two Aramaic edicts of Aśoka from Laghman brings to light another governor Whsu (Vakshu?), once again possibly of non-Indian origin, in charge of the north-western borderland (the Yona/Yavana area of the empire). In the Maurya empire therefore probably existed large administrative units more than the four in cardinal directions, entrusted to provincial authorities of different types.

The province-like administrative unit is likely to have been divided further into locality-level tiers, known as *janapada* and *āhāra* in Aśoka's edicts (MRE at Rupnath, Sanchi PI and REs II and IV). It was A. Venis who first explained the significance of the term *āhāra* as a locality-level unit of administration, akin to a district. The term could also imply a fiscal unit from where revenue could be procured (*āharaṇa*). The administration of the locality level unit was possibly in charge of the *rājukas*—figuring prominently in Aśokan edicts—who looked after the people of the district (*janaṁ jānapadam*). They were entrusted with the power of rewards (*avihāle*)

and punishments (*daṇḍa:* RE IV and SRE I); this gives an impression of their being associated with the administration of justice at the locality level. The term *rājuka* may have a close affinity with *rajjuggāhakāmacca* of the Pāli text; the latter denotes an officer (*amātya/amacca*) holding the rope. This implies that the *rajjuggāhakāmacca* functioned as a settlement officer holding a rope to measure the field. The description relates to the officer's functions in the countryside which fits in with the term *janapada*. The *rājukas* of Aśoka, therefore, could have also functioned as an officer measuring land in rural areas, in addition to their discharging other important functions at the locality level. Megasthenes labelled officers in charge of the countryside as *agronomoi* who were entrusted with, among other things, collection of revenue, supervision of irrigation facilities, judicial administration and maintenance of roads. One cannot miss some similarities in the functions of the *agronomoi* and those of the *rājukas* of Aśoka's edicts. Aśoka seems to have enhanced the importance and responsibilities of the *rājukas,* since they were associated with the propagation of Dhamma. Acccording to Aśoka, just as the father of a new-born child felt confident having put the child in the care of an expert nurse, Aśoka in a similar way, was assured by having placed many inhabitants of the *janapada* under the care of the *rājuka.* This statement above amply bears the significance of the *rājuka/agronomoi* in Mauryan locality-level administration.

The *Arthaśāstra* prescribes a somewhat different set up of locality-level administration than that apparent in the Classical accounts and inscriptions. The largest unit of rural administration is *sthāniya,* consisting 800 villages; it had two sub-units in descending order, namely the *droṇamukha* (400 villages) and *kārvatika* (200 villages). At the lowest rung stood the *saṁgrahaṇa,* consisting ten villages. The villages were certainly the lowest unit of local administration. It is not possible to ascertain whether the Kauṭilyan scheme of hierarchial rural units of descending order was actually experienced in the Mauryan times.

Megasthenes and other later Greek writers furnish some evidence about the city administration at Pāṭaliputra, the Maurya capital, and also the premier urban centre in the subcontinent. There were officers in charge of city administration, known as *astynomoi.* They were divided into six boards, each consisting of five members. The first board looked after everything concerning industrial arts. The second board was entrusted with information on births and deaths occurring in the city. The Greek account informs us that this helped the administration to assess the amount of taxes to be levied from the city dwellers. The third board took care of the foreigners visiting the Maurya capital. The fourth board supervised exchange-related activities. The fifth board ensured that no old article was to be mixed with the new one. The sixth board was entrusted with the collection of one-tenth of the sale proceeds; failure to pay this levy was, according to Megasthenes, punished with death sentence. The *astynomoi* in their collective responsibility also

supervised the maintenance of marts, ports and shrines. There is not much corroborative evidence in support of the Classical accounts on municipal administration. The *Arthaśāstra* assigns the administration of the urban area to the *samāharttā,* who was primarily the revenue collector. Kauṭilya lays down strict norms to maintain cleanliness, health and hygiene in the urban (possibly the capital city) area. The *Arthaśāstra* also emphasizes the collection of elaborate data on the size of the household, the number of male, female and children in each family, the general trends in income and expenditure, and also the ingress and egress of people from their houses in both villages and cities. This was recommended to form a thorough assessment of revenue to be collected.

This overview of the Maurya administration speaks of the creation of a well-organized polity. But it is difficult to perceive that the administration was run solely and uniformly at the instructions issued from the capital by the apex political authority. The Maurya administration seems to have recognized local and regional variations which were accommodated and not wiped out. Readings into Aśoka's edicts do not uphold the image of a monolithic and/or unitary polity, recommended by the *Arthaśāstra* where every command seemingly emanated from the capital. Aśoka himself admits that his realm being vast, his officers were allowed to issue elaborate (*vistata*), medium-sized (*majhima*) and abridged (*saṁkhita*) versions of edicts (RE XIV). That subordinate officers could modify the central text of royal orders according to their respective local needs and situations, is clearly upheld by the Maurya emperor. The accommodation of local peculiarities is best indicated by the issuance of edicts in Greek and Aramaic languages and scripts, specifically catering to the local needs which could not be served by the use of Prakrit language and Brāhmī or Kharoshṭi scripts. On the other hand, Aśoka chose to cause the engraving of the edicts in peninsular India in Brāhmī script and Prakrit language though the area could well have been more familiar with Dravidian speeches than Prakrit. Some degree of centripetality in the Maurya realm is visible, but this does not imply the existence of a unitary, monolithic polity bereft of local diversities. At any rate, the direct authority of the apex Maurya government was effective mostly in the metropolitan and core areas of the empire, that is in the Ganga valley, while its penetration into the peripheral areas was limited.

VI

Aśoka's Dhamma

The Maurya realm was created by a strong army and maintained by an efficient administrative machinery. Besides these two factors, the integration of the empire probably required an ideology that would provide an overarching framework, accommodating many diversities at local and

regional levels. While the expansion and consolidation of Magadhan power were achieved by powerful rulers like Bimbisāra, Ajātaśatru, Mahāpadma Nanda and Chandragupta Maurya, Aśoka was possibly the first ruler to have realized the need of an ideology for ensuring coalescence in the empire. This is evident in his idea and propagation of what he called Dhamma. This is a subject which has received sustained attention of historians commenting on the nature and dissemination of Dhamma. Dhamma was indeed the central theme of the edicts issued by Aśoka.

The Prakrit term Dhamma is the same as Sanskrit 'Dharma' which is popularly, but not accurately, translated as religion. This is often taken in the sense of the religious leaning of an individual or a group of persons. Thus Aśoka's Dhamma is commonly viewed as his personal religious leaning. The much cherished notion is that Aśoka, out of his deep and genuine remorse of the violence perpetrated during the Kaliṅga war, became a Buddhist. As a devout Buddhist, he steadfastly practised non-violence (*ahiṁsā*), eschewed war for good since the victory over Kaliṅga and followed a pacifist policy. In other words, Aśoka after the Kaliṅga war governed his empire as a devout Buddhist. That is why he is celebrated as a Buddhist ruler and a sage-like king. Such a perception as this is largely based on the portrayal of Aśoka in later Buddhist annals and legends, especially in the *Divyāvadāna, Aśokavadāna* and the Buddhist texts of Sri Lanka. It is therefore not surprising that many scholars hold that through the propagation of Dhamma, Aśoka turned Buddhism into a state religion, and his Dhamma was but a synonym of Buddhism.

Recent scholarship however examines the nature of Aśoka's Dhamma primarily in the light of his edicts as contemporary records dealing with his understanding of Dhamma. He did not clearly define what Dhamma was but spoke of several features of Dhamma in his edicts. The edicts leave little room for doubt about Aśoka's personal leaning to Buddhism. He categorically calls himself an *upāsaka* or a lay Buddhist devotee (MRE I). The MRE at Maski more specifically labels him as a lay worshipper of the Buddha (*Buddhupāsaka*). In some recensions of his MRE (issued in the tenth year since his coronation) he frankly admits that for one year he was not striving as an *upāsaka*, but he became an active lay follower during the last one and half years. The tenth year since his coronation having elapsed, Aśoka visited Sambodhi (modern Bodhgaya), the place of the Enlightenment of the Master. His visit to Lumbini grāma, the place of the nativity of the Buddha (*hide Budhe jāte Śākyamuniti*), clearly figures in the Rummindei inscription. He twice visited the *stūpa* associated with the memory of the Buddha Kanakamuni (a Buddha prior to Siddhārtha Gautama), first in the fourteenth 'past' year and then in the twentieth 'past' year since his coronation when he respectively enlarged the stūpa and erected a stone pillar there (Nigalisagar pillar inscription). He also visited Upanitha-vihāra (a Buddhist monastery)

in Manemadeśa (in Madhya Pradesh: MRE at Pangurariya) when he was away from the capital for 256 nights. Such a tour was described as *Dhammayātā* (*dharmayātrā* or tours of Piety) and was undertaken when ten years had elapsed since his coronation (MRE, especially the recension at Aharaura). He prescribed the following canonical texts for Buddhist monks and nuns in the Saṁgha to study: *Vinayasamukase, Aliyavasāni, Anāgatabhayāni, Munigāthā, Moneyasute, Upatisapasine and Lāghulavada* (Bairat edict). This clearly establishes his familiarity with Buddhist canonical literature. Aśoka strongly admonished those monks and nuns who fomented schism in the Saṁgha and the ordered excommunication of such monks and nuns by making them wear white dress, white being inauspicious to the Buddhist monastic life (Schism edicts at Sarnath, Kosam and Sanchi). Along with these epigraphic data one also takes into account the view of Buddhist texts that during his reign was held the third Buddhist Council (*saṁgīti*) under the presidentship of Moggaliputta Tissa. The *Divyāvadāna* recounts his sending missions to Sri Lanka to propagate Buddhism under the care of his son Mahinda and daughter Saṅghamitrā. The spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia, including Java, has been credited to him in some later Buddhist texts though not supported by any other contemporary evidence. Aśoka figures in Buddhist texts as the ruler who constructed 84,000 *stūpas* all over Jambudvīpa. The seventh century Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang) also spoke of this feat of Aśoka. These legends and perceptions explain why Aśoka was hailed in Buddhist tradition as the paradigmatic Buddhist king (*dhammika dhammarājā*).

All these cannot but show him as a pious and practising Buddhist, his familiarity with canonical texts, his concern for the unity of the Saṁgha and his perceived role in the far-flung spread of Buddhism. But his edicts, on the other hand, are conspicuously silent on certain essential tenets of Buddhism. He never spoke of the Four Noble Truths (*Chaturāryasatya*) and the Eight-fold Path (*Ashtāngikamārga*) in his edicts. He also never instructed his subjects to aspire for Nirvāṇa, the highest goal for a Buddhist; on the other hand, he considered the attainment of heaven (*svaga*, i.e. *svarga*: MRE I) as the highest goal for his subjects to strive for. As these foundational principles of Buddhism are conspicuous by their absence from his concept of Dhamma, it is a pertinent question whether through Dhamma he was propagating Buddhism. S.J. Tambiah feels that Aśoka's Dhamma was strongly embedded in Buddhist principle. He has critiqued Thapar's attempt at separating Aśoka's personal faith in Buddhism from his public official policy of Dhamma. Tambiah argues that Aśoka's edicts do not contain any hint at this crucial separation. He suggests that the contents of Aśoka's edicts were an outcome of the Buddhist stress on *metta* (loving kindness), *mudita* (sympathetic joy), *karuṇā* (compassion) and *dāna* (donorship). He also points out that Aśoka wished that this successors would uphold the

policy of Dhamma and if necessary would apply minimum (unavoidable) violence. Tambiah argues that has a close similarity with the ideals of the Chakkavatti (universal) ruler in the *Chakkavatti Sihanāda Suttanta*.

In the light of the debates on the nature of Aśoka's Dhamma lies the special significance of his Aramaic and Greek edicts, which had not made their impacts on Maurya historiography when Tambiah presented his position. What figures as Dhamma in his Prakrit edicts is called *Eusebia* in Greek, meaning Piety. The Aramaic edicts mention *Data* and *Qsyt* (as synonyms of Dhamma), denoting Law and Truth respectively. In the translation of the term Dhamma in Aramaic and Greek, no association with Buddhism is indicated. B.N. Mukherjee's studies in these edicts demonstrate that Aśoka had no intention of equating Dhamma with Buddhism, his personal faith. In fact Aśoka does not attach any sectarian approach to Dhamma. That is why he lays down on his subjects to show honour and seemly behaviour to Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas alike (RE XI). The *Dhammamahāmātras* (officers propagating the Law of Piety) are instructed to treat the *Saṁgha*, the Brāhmaṇas, the Ājīvikas and the Nirgranthas (Jainas) with equal respect (PE VII). True to this attitude, Aśoka donated cave-dwelling to Ajlvikas monks (Barabar cave inscription). It will be therefore a futile exercise if his Dhamma is studied merely from the point of view of his personal devotion to Buddhism.

In the practice of Dhamma, Aśoka actually emphasizes on the observance of certain conducts. One of the pillars of these principled conducts is the observance of non-violence. Aśoka eschewed war and replaced the sound of the war drum (*bherighosha:* RE V) with the reverberation of the drum of Dhamma (*Dhamamaghosha*) following this principle. This also prompted him to emphasize on the non-injury to living beings and non-slaughter (*anārambho prāṇānaṁ, avihisā bhutāṇām*) and to put an end to royal hunting (*vihārayātra*). His personal zeal and integrity in promoting non-slaughter is replete in his statement that previously, many animals had been slaughtered for the royal kitchen; the number was reduced to just two peacocks and one animal. Even these were not be slaughtered in future (RE I). When 16 years had elapsed since his coronation, Aśoka banished those who were excessively fond of hunting and fishing (Laghman Aramaic edict). Ten years later Aśoka enlisted a number of birds and animals which could not be slaughtered. The policy of abstention of killing of living beings was employed stage by stage, and not clamped down at one single go. The guiding principle in this case was that one living being could not be sustained by another living being (*jivena jive no pusitaviye:* PE V). This attitude is in clear harmony with his instituting facitilies of medical treatment to both animals and human beings (*pasuchikichhā* and *manusa chikichhā*).

Aśoka prescribes the inculcation of certain virtues for the practice of Dhamma. These are, according to the PE II, little sin (*apāsinave*), many

meritorious deeds (*bahukayāne*), kindness (*dayā*), charity (*dāne*), truthfulness (*sache*) and purity (*sochaye*). To these are added the recommendation for avoiding some vices: violence (*chaṁdiye*), cruelty (*niṭhuliye*), anger (*kodhe*), pride (*māne*) and jealousy (*isyā:* PE III). Dhamma, therefore, appears to have consisted of practising a set of virtues and avoiding a number of vices. These conducts have no sectarian approach nor are they typical of a particular religious belief. Such principles were in fact intended to cut across religious differences. The relevance of Aśoka's stress on self-restraint (*sayame*), mental purity (*bhāvasudhi*) and gratefulness (*kiṭanata*) is therefore not difficult to appreciate. He strongly promotes the enhancement of the essence of all sects (*sāravaḍhi:* RE XII) and in that context, restraint of speech is of paramount importance. The ideal of his Dhamma denounces the over-praising of one's own sect and disparaging others' sects, because by doing so, one's own sect suffers. This undoubtedly marks his Dhamma with the spirit of accommodation of and respect for plurality; there is little scope of championing any particular creed, let alone Buddhism in these ideals.

Daily life and chores were also within the purview of Dhamma. Inseparably associated with the practice of Aśoka's Dhamma are respectful behaviour to parents, teachers and elders; seemly behaviour to brāhmaṇa-śramaṇa, kind attitude to the weak, miserly, slaves and servants (PE VII). Festivities like *samāja* (which according to the *Arthaśāstra* was marked with revelry, licentious behaviour and drinking) were not in keeping with the principles of Dhamma and therefore banned. Aśoka also banned the performance of various rituals (*maṅgala*) which he found trivial and replaced these with *Dhammamaṅgala* (REs I and IX). Once again, these principles and ideals are neither specific nor typical of Buddhism; these could be observed by and applicable to various groups irrespective of their ethnic, socio-cultural and material differences. This may explain why Aśoka perceived that Dhamma was based on age-old values, norms and codes (*porāṇa pakiti:* MRE II), thereby underlining the long-standing commonalties among diverse socio-cultural, ethnic, economic and religious groups. The application of Dhamma would ensure welfare of his subjects, both in this world and the other world (*hidalokika, pālalokika*). Aśoka certainly considered that the application of Dhamma enabled him to act like a father to his subjects, who were seen as his offspring (*sabe munise pajā mamā:* SRE).

The above discussions on Dhamma point out that it was not identical with Buddhism, nor was Buddhism reflected in it, though Aśoka's personal leaning to Buddhism is beyond any doubt. There was no attempt to impose Buddhism as a state religion. R.G Basak, however, finds in the universal appeal of Dhamma some affinity with the teachings of the *Dhammapada*. Raychaudhuri considered that Dhamma highlighted the moral and ethical principles common to all religious beliefs. Nilakantha Sastri was the first to suggest that Dhamma represented an ethical code of conducts placed before

all his subjects. This idea seems to have been further refined and elaborated by Romila Thapar who perceived that Dhamma was largely an ethical concept related to the individual in the context of his society.

> In the propagtion of his Dhamma, Aśoka was attempting to reform the narrow attitude of religious teachings, to protect the weak against the strong, and to promote throughout the empire a conscious social behaviour so broad in its scope that no cultural group could object to it.

It is evident that, according to Thapar, Dhamma was therefore an ideology intended to weld a subcontinental society.

Recent readings into the Greek edicts of Aśoka offer another dimension to the policy of Dhamma. The Greek edict from Kandahar enlists some of the salient features of *Eusebia* (Piety)—the Greek translation of the term Dhamma. Among the virtues to be inculcated for the practice of Eusebia/ Dhamma was that Aśoka's subjects 'had to mind the king's interests' (*ta tou Basileos sumpheronta noi*). This implies that the subject had to mind and/or pay respect to the interests of the ruler; in other words, the subjects were to demonstrate firm devotion to the ruler himself. B.N. Mukherjee considers that this concept in Greek edict is in fact an elaboration and elucidation of the term *diḍhabhatitā* occurring in his Prakrit edicts (REs VII and XIII). The Prakrit texts of the two edits did not elaborate on the question of to whom firm devotion was to be shown. Mukherjee cites Pāṇini's grammatical treatise to suggest that in this pre-Maurya text one of the meanings of bhakti or devotion was devotion to the ruler. The elucidation of the term in the Greek edict therefore explains that firm devotion was to be shown not to a particular religious belief, but to the ruler himself. Paying unquestioned allegiance to the ruler was, thus, a component of Aśoka's Dhamma. Aśoka spoke of the lofty ideal of paternal rulership, but it was not a one-way traffic. The Maurya king would behave like a father to his subjects, who in their turn, must pay him complete allegiance. Dhamma certainly accommodated diversities in socio-economic and cultural life; but such pluralities were situated within an overarching commonalty. The Maurya ruler was a cementing factor in the empire marked by diversities and imbalances. In this way personal allegiance shown to the Maurya king became an integral part of Dhamma. Dhamma therefore was indeed a very broad-based code of social and ethical conducts; to this must now be added the political dimension of Dhamma which B.D. Chattopadhyaya views as a unifier. The all-encompassing ideology of Dhamma is eloquently expressed by Aśoka's aim to maintain by Dhamma, to rule according to Dhamma, to make people happy according to Dhamma and to protect according to *Dhamma* (*Dhammena pālana Dhammena vidhāna Dhammena sukhīyānā Dhammena gotīti:* PE I).

An important aspect of his Dhamma programme was his sending Dhamma propagation mission in areas beyond his realm. Here lies the relevance of his appointment of the Dhammamāhāmātra class of high-ranking functionaries.

The Dhamma missions reached the lands of the Choḷa, Pāṇḍyas, Satiyaputra and Keralaputra in south India. The propagation of Dhamma was conducted in Sri Lanka, as both Aśoka's edicts and later Buddhist traditions would bear it out. No less significant is the fact that his Dhamma propagators also went to the far-flung kingdoms of five Greek rulers in West Asia and Ptolemaic Egypt. What does not escape our notice is that while Aśoka accommodated plurality in his principle of Dhamma, he was not prepared to allow a dissenting voice in the matters of the Buddhist saṁgha. Thapar further suggests that PE VII—issued in the twenty seventh year—portrayed his obsession with Dhamma. She noted the possible elements of 'megalomania' and even 'germs of fanaticism' in some of his utterances on Dhamma. One has to admit that however noble and lofty the ideals of Dhamma were, these were Aśoka's own understanding and formulation and left little choice for the individual.

VII

Economy and Society

An overview of the social and economic situation in the Maurya empire may be relevant at this stage of our discussion. Traditional Indian society is expected to have strictly followed the four-fold *varṇa* norm of social divisions, though there are known instances of departures from this ideal code. Kauṭilya also strongly upholds the maintenance of the brahmanical ideal of the social order based on the institutions of four *varṇas* and four *āśramas*. For the understanding of the social life of the period, historians often turn their attention to the Classical accounts. Megasthenes and later Greek authors generally describe Indian society as divided into seven groups. This has led to the common perception that the Greek authors erroneously divided Indian society into seven 'castes'. It must be stated at the outset that the Classical authors referred to seven *genos* or *meros;* none of them referred to the term 'caste'. *Genos* and *meros* are not synonymous with caste. That is why it is difficult to consider that *meros* and *genos* referred directly to castes. These seven groups, according to Megasthenes and other Classical writers were:

1. Sophist or the Philosopher: They were held in highest esteem in the society. The Greek authors while referring to the Sarmanes and Garmanes certainly meant the śramaṇas and the brāhmaṇas. They were considered as public benefactors; sophists made public prophecies in the beginning of the year what would happen during the year. If a sophist failed in his prophecy for three times, he was supposed to have remained silent for the rest of his life. As public benefactors, they were exempted from taxes.

2. Cultivators: They were the most numerous of all groups. This is certainly a correct assessment of the Indian society by the Greek authors. Megasthenes stated that all lands belonged to the king and cultivators tilled the land on condition of paying to the king one fourth of the produce. According to one Greek account, however, cultivators received one fourth of the produce for tilling the land of the king. The second statement implies that they paid the state as high as three-fourths of the produce. The theory of the four-fold *varṇa* society tends to locate the cultivator in the vaiśya *varṇa*. But Kauṭilya states that cultivators mostly belonged to the śūdra group (*śūdrakarshakaprāyaḥ*). This is an interesting position as the theoretician recognizes that the śūdras were engaged in wealth-producing activities, in sharp contrast to the usual norm that they were only fit for the service of the three higher varnas (*dvijātisusrushā*).
3. Hunters and shepherds: The third group lived outside the settled agrarian society. Hunters, neatherds, gatherers were considered public benefactors since they cleared the country from obnoxious beasts and birds. They had to pay to the state a portion of animals reared or captured by them. They may closely correspond to the *vyādhas, nishādas* (forest-dwelling hunters) of early Indian literature. Fishermen (*kevaṭa* or *kaivartta* in Aśokan edict) were possibly included in this group. The orthodox Brahmanical treatises generally assign a marginal position to these groups who were mostly active in forest areas. Kauṭilya includes in the list of forest dwellers (*araṇyacharas*) the *chaṇḍālas, pulindas, śabaras*, etc., who were to be situated at the fringe of rural settlements. The strong admonition of Aśoka to forest dwellers (*āṭavikas:* RE XIII) certainly speaks of the suspicion of the state society to them.
4. Artisans and dealers: The fourth group comprise both artisans and dealers. Some Greek authors describe that all the artisans were employed by the state and hence were exempted from paying any taxes to the state. A variant account is that only armour-makers and ship-builders were employed by the state and hence, only they were not to pay any taxes. This implies that artisans other than these two paid taxes to the state. In terms of the *varṇa* theory, artisans and dealers belonged to the vaiśya category, though artisans and merchants often maintained their distinct identities different from their ritual *varṇa* status.
5. Soldiers/Army: In terms of number, they were only second to the cultivators. They were not only exempted from taxes, but were paid by the state exchequer during the times of wars and peace as well. When there was no war being waged, they led a leisurely life. This group is commonly identified with the kshatriya whose prescribed profession was soldiery. But the term kshatriya actually denotes the ruler, members of the ruling lineage and very close associates of the ruler—in other words, the ruling group. The term to denote ordinary soldiers is *yodhā*. The existence of a professional body of soldiers (*āyudhajīvīsaṁgha*) figures in the *Arthaśāstra*.
6. Spies/Inspectors/Overseers: They are described as the most trusted persons in the realm. Megasthenes makes an exaggerated statement that Indians were never accused of lying. He made this statement obviously to underline the reliability of these spies. The *Arthaśāstra* clearly recommends that the spy's report would be acceptable if and when it is corroborated by three other sources. Thus, Kauṭilya does not recommend the acceptance of an unverified report from a spy. This clearly contradicts Megasthenes' observation.
7. Counsellors and Assessors: The seventh group was small in number but held in high esteem, because from among this group were appointed the highest functionaries of the realm, e.g. the generals of the army, the head of the treasury, etc. The function of this group has close analogies to that of the *amātya* (including *mantrī*) of the Indian sources. That the high-ranking functionaries tended to form an exclusive social group is indicated by the mention of *amachchakula* or the group of *amātyas* in the Pāli texts. Such a social group does not figure in the prescriptive texts but their identity as an important and elite group was recognized in Pāli canonical texts.

Megasthenes and other Greek authors, as was stated earlier, did not intend to describe the *varṇa-jāti* system. What is, however, significant is the observation in the Classical texts that no person was allowed to change professions and nobody was allowed to marry outside one's own group. The mention of the two crucial taboos speaks of their awareness of the importance attached to hereditary profession and the observance of endogamy, both being hallmarks of the *varṇa-jāti* system. But, on the other hand, it is also unmistakable that each and every group in the Classical accounts is described in terms of how it stood in relation to the state. This is an aspect which never figures in Indian normative treatises as a marker of one's social standing. Viewed from this angle, the list of seven social groups may have some resemblance with the Indian concept of the seven elements (limbs) of the state (*saptāṅga/saptaprakriti* theory). It is well-known that there were many more social divisions than the mere four *varṇas* which spoke only of an ideal Brahmanical order. So, the description of the Classical texts cannot be brushed aside on the ground that their authors failed to comprehend Indian *varṇa*-divided society and therefore erroneously increased the number of social divisions from four to seven. The criticism that Megasthenes and other later authors confused occupational groups with *varṇas* may not also stand scrutiny. The most significant difference of the seven-fold division of the society from the *varṇa-jāti* norm of social structure is that the Greek

authors placed the seven groups one after the other without clearly stating their hierarchical positions, while *varṇas-jātis* were invariably arranged vertically with marked inequality.

The *Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* strongly advocates the maintenance of the *varṇa-jāti* order in which the brāhmaṇa is given the highest ritual status. The image of the sharply differentiated society is also furnished by Aśokan edicts which refer to brāhmaṇas, noble (*ārya*), slaves and servants (*dāsa-bhaṭaka*), prosperous persons (*mahat*) and low (*khudaka*) persons. The *Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra* strongly upholds the norm of patriarchal society and family life in which the position of women would be secondary to that of male members. The ideal form of marriage is within the same *varṇa* (*savarna*) but outside the *gotra;* one thus notes a combination of both endogamous and exogamous practices. If we take into account the mention of Karuvakī, the second queen of Aśoka (Allahabad-Kosam Queen's edict), then it indicates the prevalence of polygamy in the society. Moreover, Kāruvākī is also described as the mother of prince Tīvara (*Tīvaramātu*). Kāruvākī was presented as the queen and the mother of a prince—that is, her position is judged in terms of two male members of the family, the husband and the son. This is a feature typical of a patriarchal society. It is striking to note that Kauṭilya in spite of a being staunch upholder of patriarchal social norms, allowed annulling of marriages (*moksha*) by a legal procedure. The same theoretician also recommends the employment of women in espionage network and in textile production. The *Arthaśāstra* not only mentions courtesans (*gaṇikas*), but also advises the *Gaṇikādhyaksha* (officer in charge of prostitution) to regulate the entertainment offered by the *gaṇika;* the theoretician does not propose to do away with prostitution.

Like other periods of early Indian history, the root of the material life of the Maurya period was agriculture. Greek writers were struck by the immensity of agrarian production. They unanimously speak of the profusion and diversity of crops which they attribute to the excellent fertility of the soil, presence of many rivers and profuse rainfall because of two rainy seasons (implying thereby both the south-western and north-eastern monsoon seasons). The Mauryas were the first political power in India to have established a firm control over the areas watered by both the Ganga and the Indus river systems. The bulk of the population was certainly engaged in agriculture, a point correctly observed by Greek authors. According to the Greek accounts, all land of the realm was held under royal ownership, an observation which is not supported by the *Arthaśāstra*. The latter includes disputes about land ownership under the scope of civil suits (*dharmasthīya*); there is little doubt; therefore, that such disputes could not have arisen without the recognition of individual right to own land. The *Arthaśāstra* clearly hints at the prevalence of individual ownership (*svatva/svāmitva*) of land. The text however, suggests that vast stretches of crown land (*sītā*) were held by the ruler and were designated as his own land (*svabhūmi*). The

Arthaśāstra bears a strong image that the state authority should participate in economic activities along with non-governmental initiatives in economic life which should ideally be closely watched over by the ruler. Keeping with this view the *Arthaśāstra* recommends that the overall agrarian production should be overseen by the Director of Agriculture (*sītādhyaksha*). The crown land (*sītā*) should be thoroughly ploughed (*bahulaprikṛishṭa*), and the *Sītādhyāksa* should employ two types of labourers tilling the crown land. This once again underlines Kauṭilya's emphasis on the utilization of resources of the crown land.

One of the most significant agricultural policies laid down in this text is the creation of new rural settlements (*janapadaniveśa*), in other words, the expansion of agriculture. The term *janapada* in the *Arthaśāstra* variously means a territory, a populated area and a rural settlement. The last connotation of the term is intelligible when the term is contrasted with *durga* or fortified urban area. This is so important a measure (and also involving the input of considerable resources) that Kauṭilya strongly recommends administrative supervision for implementing the policy. A new *janapada* should be created either in a virgin area (*abhūtapūrvam*) or in an erstwhile habitat (*bhūtapūrvam*), which is currently fallow or deserted. The area would be populated by shifting people from an overcrowded region within the king's domain (*svadeśa*) or by forcibly carrying people from elsewhere (*paradeśāpavāhanena*). The latter recommendation immediately reminds of the forcible carrying away of many people (*apavūḍhe*) after Aśoka's victory over Kaliṅga. Most of the settlers in the *janapada* should be śūdra cultivators. Most of the land in the *janapada* are meant for allotment among tax-paying peasants (*karadakarshaka*), though some plots should be made free from revenue and distributed among brāhmaṇas and officers settled in the newly created rural area. The watchword being the utilization of resources of the new *janapada,* Kauṭilya recommends eviction of a peasant who neglects agriculture and his plot should be given to another deserving peasant. Providing some financial inducements and assistance to new settlers—in the form of seed, cattle and cash -have also been recommended, but only if it is beneficial to the treasury (*kośavṛiddhikara*) in the long run. To what extent such a policy was implemented under Mauryan administrative supervision cannot be ascertained. In spite of the long occupation of peninsular India under the Mauryas, archaeological evidence does not point to regular plough-based agriculture in the Deccan during the Maurya period. The Mauryas do not seem to have been intent upon restructuring the economy, especially the material milieu outside the fertile Ganga plains. The active role of the state in agrarian production can at the most be perceived in the Ganga valley and the metropolitan area of the empire. Two inscriptions, not directly associated with any Maurya ruler but palaeographically belonging to the third century BC, may suggest some role of the Maurya administration in agrarian economic life. The Mahāsthan inscription from Bangladesh and the

Sohgaura inscription from Gorakhpur region (Uttar Pradesh) inform us of the existence of storehouses or granaries (*kośa/koṣthāgāra*). Crops like paddy and sesamum were distributed among people possibly during the time of an emergency (*ātyayika*).

Agriculture was intimately associated with irrigation. Megasthenes narrates that one of the functions of the officers in the charge of the countryside (*agronomoi*) was to supervise the sluices on rivers so that irrigation facilities duly reached cultivators. This indicates the state's initiative in launching and maintaining river-based irrigation work. Early Indian theoretical treatises, including the *Arthaśāstra*, strongly advocate royal prerogatives over irrigation projects (*setu*). Two type of *setus* are mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra:* hydraulic projects with natural source of water (*sahodaka setu*) and those which were to be fed with water brought artificially (*āhāryodaka setu*). The claim of royal prerogative over irrigation projects justifies the recommendation in the *Arthaśāstra* for raising an irrigation cess (*udakabhāga*), ranging from one-fifth to one-third. The *Arthaśāstra* on the other hand, also informs us about wells (*kūpa*) and tanks/ponds (*taḍāga*) that were local level irrigation projects. It is almost impossible that all the tanks and wells in the realm were owned and managed by the state. There is little dispute that such small-scale and local-level irrigation projects far outnumbered the large-scale ones. One may also reasonably assume that such small scale local-level hydraulic projects were looked after by initiatives of individual(s) and/or group of individuals. The river-based irrigation projects, often associated with sluices (*srotoyantra* of the *Arthaśāstra*), are indeed large scale and supra-local in nature, which required complex organization, employment of a sizeable labour force and investment of resources under the aegis of an impressive authority. The state apparatus was apparently suited to launch and maintain the supra-local irrigation project. The best illustration of the Maurya interests in large-scale irrigation projects comes in the form of the Sudarsana lake (*hrada* and *setu*), mentioned in the Junagarh *praśasti* of Rudradāman I (AD 150). Lake Sudarsana as a *setu* was constructed near ancient Girinagara (Girnar in Kathiawad) during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Aśoka further added conduits (*praṇālī*) to it. Excavations at Besnagar (ancient Vidiśā) near Bhopal by D.R. Bhandarkar reveal the remains of a large irrigation canal (185' × 7' × 5'), which also was possibly built by politico-administrative initiatives. The known instances of the state participation in irrigation projects during the Mauryan rule are only two. Therefore, in spite of Kauṭilya's insistence on state care and control over *setus*, there is a remote possibility that all irrigation projects were brought under the supervision of the state. Most of the wells, tanks and other small-scale hydraulic projects were maintained by non-governmental efforts. There is thus little ground that the control over irrigation projects could have held a key to the growth of the Maurya political power.

The Greek accounts may suggest that armour-making and ship-building activities were under the Maurya state control. The *Arthaśāstra* recommendations for appointing two high-ranking officers, *Āyudhāgarādhyaksha* (in charge of the armoury) and *Nāvadhyaksha* (director of shipping) speak of the strategic importance of these two manufacturing activities, though it is impossible to ascertain whether the Mauryas maintained a regular navy. The logic of imposing monopoly control on armour-making lies in the crucial importance of this manufacturing activity from the point of view of the coercive authority of the state.

Much more pronounced is Kautliyan emphasis on the control and working of mines and minerals (*ākara*). Mines are clearly seen by Kauṭilya as the very root of the treasury (*kośa*), which in its turn greatly influences the army (*daṇḍa*). Thus, in Kauṭilyan argument, the sound condition of the treasury and the strength of the army ultimately depend on the mineral resources of realm. It is not surprising that Kauṭilya would recommend strong control of mines under the supervision of the director of mines (*ākarādhyaksha*). The text also proposes to set up specific state manufactories (*karmāntas*) for the production of different minerals and metals. The production of salt too is viewed as a mining activity under the supervision of the director of salt-making (*lavaṇādhyaksha*). The Maurya interests in mineral resources may be apparent in the large concentration of Aśoka's edicts in Karnataka and western Andhra Pradesh. This was the area where an *āryaputra* was present as a powerful administrator over a wide area. This part of peninsular India is well-known for its deposits of gold, diamond and other gems. Allchin demonstrated through excavations that many areas close to the findspots of Aśoka's edicts bore marks of mining since the pre-Maurya period. Thapar therefore argues that the Maurya interest in capturing and controlling extensive areas of the Deccan was largely prompted by the access to vital mineral resources. It is also important to note that the Zawarmala mines in Rajasthan have yielded archaeological evidence of the production of zinc around fourth century. According to A.K. Biswas, this is the earliest known information on the production of zinc (important for the making of brass) in the subcontinent, if not in the ancient world.

The *Arthaśāstra* recommends the setting up of state textile manufactories under the supervision of the director of yarn/textile production (*sūtrādhyaksha*). The *sūtrādhyaksha* clearly figures as an employer of labourers, including women workers, in the textile manufacturing unit. One of the striking recommendations of the *Arthaśāstra* is the employment of workers with clearly stipulated conditions of the time of their work, amount of production and salary. If there was a shortfall in the production from the stipulated amount of the output of yarns, that would lead to a reduction in the salary (*sūtrahrāse vetanahrāsa*) of the workers. Textile production being one of the traditional crafts of India over millennia, it is unlikely that all

textile manufacturing centres in the vast realm came under state supervision under the Mauryas. In the light of the *Arthaśāstra* recommendations, at the most, it may be conceded that the Maurya state could have participated in textile production along with and parallel to numerous textile production units under non-governmental enterprise. The *Arthaśāstra* also strongly recommends the setting up of state mints under the mint master (*rūpadarśaka*) and distilleries to produce liquors under the director of liquor manufacture (*surādhyaksha*). There is no other evidence to establish that these prescriptions were practised in the Maurya empire.

That the Mauryas tried to supervise trade and commerce; at least in and around the metropolitan area of Magadha, may emerge from the impressions of Classical authors. They report of the presence of 30 city officers (*astynomoi*) at Pāṭaliputra. Some of them looked after different aspects of trade in the Maurya capital. These included the measures that prevented merchants from mixing the old item with the new (an attempt at stamping out adulteration at the the Maurya capital?). Some of the city-officers were responsible for the collection of one-tenth of the proceeds from sale of commodities. Megasthenes says that failure to pay this tithe was punishable with death sentence. It is not possible to check the authenticity of this statement, but the Greek author underlines the importance of trade for yielding some levy to the Maurya treasury. The city commissioners were collectively responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of ports and marts.

The *agoranomoi* class of officers, according to Megasthenes and other Classical authors, were entrusted, among other things, with the maintenance of a royal road or highway. After each ten *stadia* (equivalent to almost five English miles) they erected sign-posts, giving directions and distances of various places. Eratosthenses, a Greek geographer contemporary to Aśoka, informs us of a royal highway connecting the Maurya capital Palibothra with Susa in Iran. A remarkable corroboration of this account is offered by two Aramaic edicts of Aśoka from Lamghan in Afghanistan. Both the edicts speak of a *karapathi* or a royal road (*kara* or *kar* means the lord/king in Iranian and *patha* in Sanskrit denotes way, road). The two edicts also mention several places and give distances and directions. The two Aśokan edicts from Laghman may be the typical instances of the signposts and road-registers on the royal highway figuring in the Classical accounts. The highway mentioned in the two Laghman edicts could well have been the same as the royal road stretching from Susa to Pāṭaliputra, going obviously through the north-western borderland of the subcontinent. Aśoka's emisaries on Dhamma missions to the kingdoms of five *yavana* rulers in West Asia must have traversed by this route. The very fact that Aśoka and his officers went out on tours—for pilgrimage, propagation and inspection—also reflects upon the existence of the network overland routes connecting different parts of the empire. The same image also looms large when one takes into account the despatching of royal edicts from the capital to dispersed territories of the

empire. One cannot ascertain how and how much the Mauryas were aware of the possibilities of sea-borne commerce. Two sets of Aśoka's REs have come from Girnar and Sopara, both close to the west coast—especially Sopara or ancient Surparaka being well known as a port in Buddhist texts. Recent excavations at Failaka (near Kuwait) by Salles highlight the importance of the Persian Gulf as the major sea-lane connecting the west coast of India. If the *Divyāvadāna* account of Aśoka's sending his son and daughter to Sri Lanka for propagating Dhamma is taken into account here, then one has to recognize the significance of the port of Tāmralipta in the Ganga delta for the maritime network with Sri Lanka.

The *Arthaśāstra*, as expected, sees trade from the point of view of the monarchical state. The theoretician does not hide his suspicion of merchants (*vaidehaka*) who were considered as dangerous as thorns to the state and therefore fit to be literally purified—actually suppressed—by the state (*kaṇṭakaśodhana*). To keep merchants under invigilation and to enable the administration to engage in exchanges, the *Arthaśāstra* prescribes the appointment of the director of trade (*paṇyādhyaksha*). The *paṇyādhyaksha* should be aware of the different products (*nānāvidhānāṁ paṇyānām*), whether grown in land or in water (*sthalajalajānām*), whether brought to the market place by land route or by water route (*sthalapathavāripathopayātānām*), their changing demand (*priyāpriyatām*) and changes in their prices (*arghāntaram*). The *paṇyādhyaksha* is also entrusted with the sale of royal products (*rājapaṇyam*), probably produced in royal farms and manufactories, through a single channel (*ekamukham*). One of the major duties of the *paṇyādhyaksha* is to keep the profit-making motive of merchants under check: five per cent profit on indigenous goods and ten per cent profit on non-indigenous items were prescribed. Merchants trying to increase the price of commodities to derive more profit than the stipulated amount should be strongly dealt with by the *paṇyādhyaksha*. *The paṇyādhyaksha*, according to the *Arthaśāstra*, should go wherever there is profit and avoid absence of profit (*yato lābhastatogachchhet, alābhaṁ parivarjayet*). The *Arthaśāstra* also recommends the appointment of two other officers connected with trade and commerce. They are the officer in charge of the market place (*saṁsthādhyaksha*) and the officer in charge of the collection of tolls and customs (*śulkādhyaksha*).

The *Arthaśāstra* prescriptions have been heavily drawn upon by a large number of scholars to construct the character of a unitary and monolithic organization of the Maurya empire, effectively establishing a state-controlled economy, or realizing the potentials of an early welfare state. Both these positions now need considerable rethinking. The *Arthaśāstra* with all its pragmatic approach to material matters lays down norms. How far these norms were put to practice during the Maurya times is a debatable issue. The Maurya interests and participation in material life are visible at the most in the metropolitan area of Magadha and some parts of the Ganga valley. The Mauryan efforts at controlling economy, if any, aimed at enriching the

treasury by realizing the revenue-yielding potentials in agriculture, crafts and trade. Our foregoing discussions on the Maurya revenue system may suggest that resources gathered were mostly expended for the maintenance of the large army and the sizeable number of functionaries. It is doubtful whether and how much care was taken by the Mauryas for the redistribution of resources, even when one takes into consideration the wide scope of state activities.

VIII

Visual Art and Architecture

An outstanding political power often attempts to record and glorify its might and magnificence through visual culture. This may manifest in the creation of monumental architecture and visual representation of rulers. A major case in point was the Acheminid empire of Persia, which collapsed shortly before the foundation of the Maurya realm. While royal palaces and massive sculptures mark the grandeur of this very formidable power not far away from the subcontinent, the Mauryas do not offer a close parallel to the Achaeminid rulers in this matter. Little traces of monumental architecture associated with the Mauryas have been found, save the excavated remains of what is identified as the Maurya palace at Kumrahar near Patna. Megasthenes however, left behind an eloquent description of the Maurya royal palace at Palibothra. Excavations at Kumrahar revealed the floor of a large pillared hall marked by eight rows of ten columns each. The columns were systematically placed at 35 feet apart from one another. The columns are monolithic shafts made of Chunar sandstone and they stand free on the wooden floor of the hall without any pedestals or sockets or holes. As we shall see later, workings on Chunar sandstone are typical of the Mauryan period. The other important feature is their polished surface, which also is first encountered in the Maurya period and is a salient feature of the visual art of this epoch. These are the principal grounds on which the pillared hall is generally identified with the Maurya palace. The superstructure is completely lost. To the south of the pillared hall stand a series of long wooden platforms, each measuring 30' × 6'× 4'. According to the excavators, the superstructure of this building consisted of heavy logs of *sal* wood. The wooden construction in the Mauryan palace complex also finds mention in Megasthenes' descriptions. This is the only known instance of Mauryan secular architecture. Apart from wood being a perishable building material, it could also easily be damaged by fire. In fact, the Kumarahar excavations bear marks of conflagaration at the site. The Maurya palace could have been destroyed by a fire. One may include in the monumental architecture the fortifications of some of the cities in North India, but these fortifications

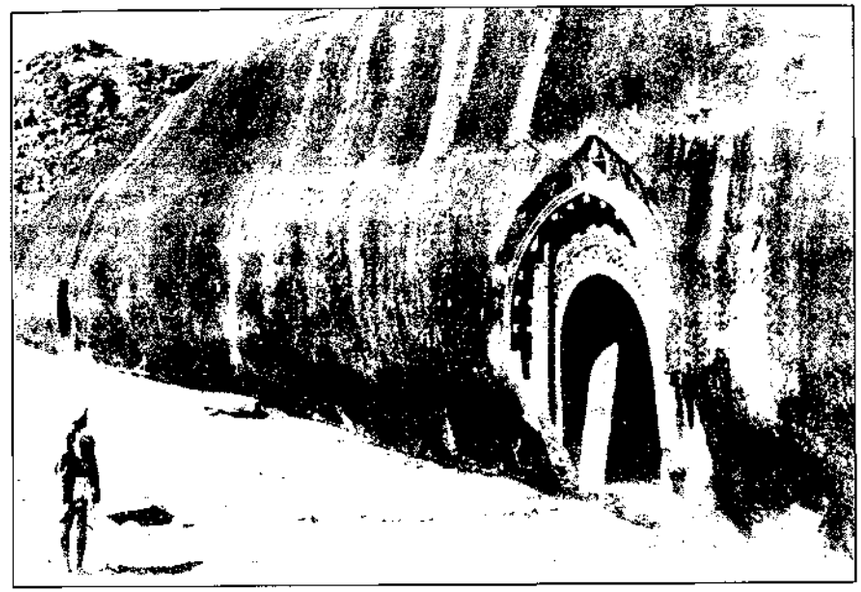


Plate 4.1: Lomasa rishi cave Barabar Hill (near Gaya)

could have also been constructed during the pre-Maurya phase and therefore continued during the Maurya period.

Buddhist traditions of later centuries credit Aśoka with the construction of 84,000 stūpas (the stūpa as a Buddhist architecture is discussed in the next chapter). In the seventh century AD, the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang is said to have seen and visited some of the stūpas originally built by Aśoka. Aśoka himself spoke of his two visits to the stūpa of Buddha Konakamuni (a former Buddha) and his efforts of enlarging the said stūpa when fourteen years had elapsed since his coronation. This may suggest that the stūpa architecture was prevalent or known in the Mauryan epoch, but there is no stūpa that can be securely assigned to the Maurya times on the basis of archaeological records. Aśoka and one of his later successors, Daśaratha donated cave shelters for wandering Ājīvika monks in the Barabar hills near Gaya, as their respective inscriptions record these donations. These cave shelters were artificially created. These mark the beginning of the rock-cut architecture that would take the form of the well-known chaityas in post-Mauryan times, especially in western Deccan.

The period in question will remain as an important landmark in the history of visual culture of India because the Maurya period witnessed the regular introduction of stone as a medium for the art of sculpting. It is true that the earliest stone sculptures in the subcontinent go back to the days of the Harappan civilization, after which stone sculpting disappeared as a creative activity. It is in the Maurya period that stone sculpting re-emerged

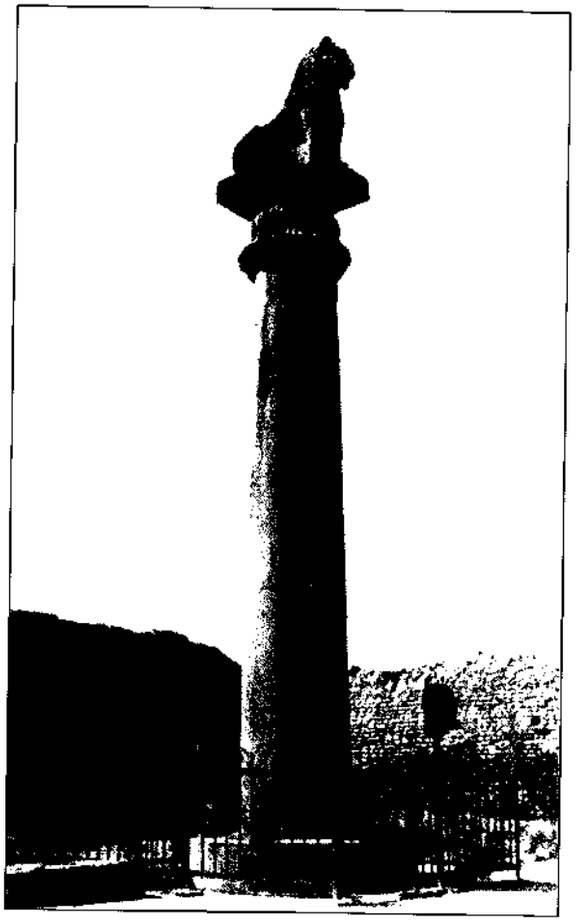


Plate 4.2: Asoka Pillar

and continued since. The outstanding examples of Maurya sculptural art are the Aśokan pillars and the capitals atop them (consisting of animal figures). The Mauryan columns are free-standing pillars, made of Chunar sandstone and noted for their mosaic-like polish on their outer surface. Some of the pillars were inscribed, like those at Sarnath and Allahabad, while several were left with plain columns, like those at Lauria Nandangarh, Lauriya Araraj and Basar Bakhira (all in Bihar). These are indeed the examples of what Aśoka himself mentioned as stone pillars (*sīla thamba*). Noted for their superbly chiselled form, these tall, circular and free-standing columns have a graceful and slightly tapering shape. The columns are sculptures made out of monolithic pieces and not created by mounting blocks of stone one above the other. There is no precedence of this kind of sculpting of stone to create pillars. The Achaeminid empire had known the use of pillars earlier than

the Mauryas, but the Achaeminid pillars were not monolithic; unlike the Mauryan columns, these were more architectural components, rather than sculptured stone pieces. Moreover, the Achaeminid columns were fluted, whereas the Mauryan pillars were plain and undecorated. The Maurya columns could have been inspired by Achaeminid ones, as the latter had been fashioned earlier than the Mauryan columns. It may not altogether be impossible, as has been suggested by some scholars, that some Persian artists had initially been present at the court of Pāṭaliputra and helped create the form of the Mauryan columns. But the Mauryan pillars are too distinctive to be considered a mere copy of the Persian columns. The polished and yet undecorated, plain outer surface of the Mauryan columns enhances their grace; on the other hand, their tall tapering shape inevitably attracts the attention of the onlooker from afar.

Contrasting the plain and tall shaft of the monolithic pillar was the decorative crowning element atop the column. At the top of the pillar stood the 'bell capital' with its flowing downwards linear contour, resembling an inverted lotus. Above the bell capital is seen an abacus, square (Basar Bakhira) or round (Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampūrva) in shape. The topmost portion carries the figure of a crowning animal: lion (single lion figure at Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampurwa; quadruple lions at Sarnath), bull (Rampurwa), elephant (Sankissa). The modelling of the lion figure calls for our attention. Niharranjan Ray notes a gradual stylistic evolution in the modelling of the lion, which is a seated or couchant image. At Basar Bakhira, the hind portion of the lion seems to have protruded out from the abacus, thereby hampering the harmony and the linear arrangement of the composition as a whole. This was gradually overcome in the specimens at Lauriya Nandangarh and Rampurwa, where the figure is well integrated with the bell capital and the abacus. The most famous example in this case is certainly the figure of the quadruple lions at Sarnath (which is the symbol of independent India). The lions are delineated in a tight and compact modelling, while the four lion figures face the four cardinal directions. The lion figures on Aśokan columns are sculptures in the round, visible from all angles—a remarkable artistic feat as there is no known beginning of this sculpting tradition. The Mauryan artist displays amazing skills in his realistic portraying of the animal figure, specially the flowing linear contour and a roundness of form. The four lions are shown frontally, the immense power of the animal is faithfully portrayed in the modelling of the chest and the two forelimbs. The artists' preference for anatomical details and precision are unmistakable in the treatment of the veins of the forelimbs and the paws with prominent claws. Considerable stylization is visible in the modelling of the mane, the gaping mouth, the flexed whiskers and the large bulging eyes staring at the onlooker. The entire composition is permeated with a formal and frontal approach that is intended to instill a sense of awe and reverence in the viewer. Ray rightly considers the lion figure as the image and symbol of the Mauryan imperial

authority. The static, tightly spaced and compact composition of the quadruple lion-figure has a pleasant contrast to the figures of other animals (the lion, the elephant, the horse and bull) portayed with lively moving gaits in the round abacus immediately at the bottom of the lion figures. These figures in the abacus are shown in high relief. The galloping horse, the slow moving bull, the majestic gaits of the lion and the elephant, each separated by a spoked wheel, impart a sense of continuous and flowing movement vis-a-vis the formal and compact composition of the four lions above them. The lion, the elephant and the horse shown in the abacus could simultaneously symbolize both the Buddha and the Maurya ruler. The three animals are generally associated with the royal insignia in ancient India; these could also denote the Buddha, the Śākyasimha who is said to have first appeared in the dream of Mayadevi in the form of an elephant and who left Kapilavastu on his horse.

If one compares the treatment of the lion figure(s) with those of the bull (as an independent figure on the Rampurwa column) and the elephant figures at Sankisa, Kalsi and Dhauli, one cannot but note a difference in style and composition. The fleshiness of the form, the power of the animals, the roundness of the plastic form—especially seen in the treatment of the dewlap of the bull-figure and the of trunk of the elephant—are stylistically akin to the portrayal of these animals in the Harappan seals, though there is no known connectivity in the two sculptural traditions separated by more than fifteen centuries. Of particular significance is the superb figure of the elephant at Dhauli. Hewn out of a rock, the composition imparts the

Plate 4.3: Rock-cut elephant figure, Dhauli

sense of the majestic and benevolent emergence of the animal from out of the rock itself. The artist has achieved here the delineation of the full weight of the massive animal although only the front half of the figure is actually carved out. The treatment of the flowing trunk of the elephant has immensely contributed to the aesthetic appeal of the sculpture. This can also be compared with the complete image of the elephant in outline on the rock at Kalsi (near Dehradun), which has the accompanying inscription, *gajatame* (the elephant par excellence). There is also a frieze of elephant figures adorning the entrance to the Lomasa Rishi cave in the Barabar hills (near Gaya) which Aśoka donated to the Ājīvika monks. The flowing rhythm and movement is also clearly marked in the composition of geese and floral motifs.

In the visual art of the Maurya period is conspicuously absent a human figure, especially that of the ruler. One salient exception to this general

Plate 4.4: Didarganj Yakshi

pattern is the enchanting female figure, celebrated as the Didarganj *yakshī*, which was found from Patna. A free-standing sculpture in the round, this is a wonderful instance of modelling the female figure with all the charms and grace of youth. She holds a chowrie in her right hand that apparently rests on her right shoulder. Elaborate ornamentations on the head and neck enhance her sensuous appeal. The typical features of portraying a female figure as per the Indian sculptural tradition are already visible: roundish face with the hint of smile, open and inviting gaze, flowing shoulder blades, heavy breasts, attenuated waist, deep-set navel and broad hips around which is worn a thin, almost transparent garment with stylized bands of drapery. Though some scholars tend to situate this sculpture in the first century BC, the typical Mauryan polish may indicate that it was created somewhat earlier.

Niharanjan Ray cogently argued that the stone sculptures of the Maurya period—best illustrated in the pillars and their crowning elements—were created under the direction and patronage of the court, the awe-inspiring and reverential image of which was carefully symbolized and represented by the artists, who were employed by the court. Morevover, the principal medium of sculptures, the Chunar sandstone, came from a single specific area, namely Chunar to the west of present Vārāṇasī. Recent archaeological findings reveal working of the query site near Chunar and remains of unfinished and semi-finished stone pillars. Querrying the stone from a single site, fashioning them and designing them in a specific shape and style and distributing them over distant areas, all these undoubltedly speak of the presence of an impressive authority that directed the production of the art form. Therefore, according to Ray, Mauryan art was a court art—a unique and isolated chapter in the history of early Indian visual art—which needs to be situated in the context of the propagation of the ideology of Dhamma with a view to integrating a vast realm marked by immense diversity. It did not enjoy any root to the existing social and cultural norms at a popular level. As a court art it had no known antecedent in the subcontinent, nor did it leave behind any legacy for the subsequent times. From the points of view of the theme, composition, treatment and even the material (the Chunar sandstone), there is a visible change in the art and architecture of the post-Maurya times from the Mauryan tradition. There was, in the view of Ray, little urgency or agency to promote a court art with the collapse of the Maurya power.

IX

Decline and Collapse

The first nearly pan-Indian power of the Mauryas was not however a long-lasting one. The Satavahanas of the post-Mauryan times, the Guptas and the Palas lasted much longer than the Mauryas as a dynasty. The Purāṇas

indicate that around 187 BC, the Maurya empire collapsed when the last ruler of the dynasty, Brihadratha, was overthrown and assassinated by his military commander (*senāpatī*), Pushyamitra Sunga, the founder of the succeeding Sunga dynasty. The memory of the overthrowing of Brihadratha by Pushyamitra also figures in the AD seventh century *Harshacharita* of Bāṇabhatta. In other words, the mighty Maurya realm collapsed in less than half a century after the demise of Aśoka (232 BC). It is difficult to ascertain how many successors ruled after Aśoka, since the Puranic genealogies are not uniform. One of the later Maurya rulers, Daśaratha, is definitely known and is a historical figure, because he had issued an inscription. On the basis of later Buddhist legends, Romila Thapar suggests that one cannot rule out the possibility of the division of the empire between two post-Aśokan rulers. Such a situation as this could have symbolized the growing weakness of the empire. H.C. Raychaudhuri and B.N. Mukherjee explain that the arrival of weak rulers after Aśoka doomed the future of the empire, which was built by Chandragupta Maurya and Aśoka. While one concedes that great charismatic political personalities could add to the strength of a political power, the formation and demise of a formidable empire cannot satisfactorily be explained by highlighting the personal calibre of one or two rulers and/or the presence of less prominent persons in a dynasty.

The integration of the Maurya empire could have been threatened by the invasions of the Bactrian Greeks in early second century BC. The *Mahābhashya* of Patañjali alludes to the *yavana* inroads into Sāketa (near Ayodhya) and Mādhyamikā (near Chittor), both of which had been included in the Maurya territory during the heydays of the empire. The *Gārgī saṁhitā* of the *Yugapurāṇa* also speaks of the *yavana* military success over Pañchāla (around Ahichhatra in Uttar Pradesh), Mathurā (in western Uttar Pradesh) and even Pāṭaliputra. In the light of the emergence of an independent Greek kingdom in Bactria in the late third century BC, it is unlikely that the Maurya occupation of some areas in Afghanistan and North-Western Frontier region would remain intact after the death of Aśoka.

The historiography of the Mauryas has also critically assessed the role of Aśoka himself in the speedy decline of the ruling house. Long ago, Haraprasad Sastri held Aśoka responsible for the downfall of the Maurya empire. The principal thrust of Haraprasad Sastri's arguments was that Aśoka, by following the policy of Dhamma, which Sastri held equivalent to Buddhism, deliberately downgraded the position of the brāhmaṇa, the highest group in society. The discontent of the brāhmaṇa community, according to him, erupted in the form of the military coup led by Pushyamitra Sunga, who was of brāhmaṇa birth. This critique of Aśoka by Sastri is not free from doubt and inaccuracy. First, Aśoka's Dhamma, we have already discussed, was not sectarian in character, never projected Buddhism as the state cult to the detriment of the brāhmaṇa and was admirably broad-based. Aśoka's edicts amply show his equal respect to all religious groups, Budhdism, Jainism,

Ajivikism and the brāhmaṇas. That Pushyamitra was the Maurya *senāpatī* is a clear pointer to the fact that the brāhmaṇa was not discriminated against in the Maurya realm and could rise high in politico-administrative circle. It is merely a coincidence that Pushyamitra overthrew the last Maurya ruler and was also a brāhmaṇa by birth. There is absolutely no ground nor any empirical validity that he represented the brāhmaṇa *varṇa* when he assassinated Bṛihadratha and overthrew the Maurya rule.

H.C. Raychaudhuri who disagreed with Sastri, also found fault with Aśoka's policy of Dhamma, but from a different perspective. He equated Dhamma of Aśoka with a pacifist policy, which reversed the age-old policy of blood and iron that was, in his opinion, at the very root of Magadha's military and political success since the days of Bimbisāra in the sixth century BC. By banning the war drums which were replaced with the reverberation of Dhamma, Aśoka virtually signalled the disbanding of the Maurya army to the great peril for the later Mauryas. Aśoka, in Raychaudhuri's estimation, was a dreamer and not equal to the tough task of ruling like his grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya. It must be pointed out here that nowhere in the entire range of Aśoka's edicts is there even a hint that the Maurya army was disbanded after Kaliṅga war. Aśoka was far from being a weak and pacifist king. His strongly worded admonition to the forest dwellers bear ample testimony to this. Moreover, Aśoka also sternly stated in one of his edicts that he would pardon only up to the limit that was pardonable. His advice to his successors regarding the application of violence was that if that was inevitable and unavoidable, only the minimum violence was to be taken recourse to. That he continued with capital punishment even when he personally was a Buddhist, does not portray him as a weak ruler, who is erroneously thought to have been more a sage than an astute political personality. In the light of these arguments, it is difficult to hold Aśoka responsible for weakening the Maurya state by following the soft and pacifist policy of Dhamma.

One may, however, ponder whether the policy of Dhamma, with its lofty ideals and noble aims, ever acquired any root among people in general. Without at all belittling the broad-based appeal and approach of Aśoka's Dhamma, it has to be admitted that everything concerning Dhamma emanated from the apex political authority. One of the effects of the Kaliṅga war was Aśoka's banning the *samāja*. *Samāja* was brought back to popular cultural life in Kaliṅga by the first major political figure of Kaliṅga, Khāravela, in late first century BC (Hathigumpha *praśasti*). This may symbolize a negation of the Dhamma policy of Aśoka in Kaliṅga itself.

Was it possible by even a ruler of Aśoka's calibre to ensure smooth administrative functioning all over the vast empire, perhaps an overstretched empire? In his edicts Aśoka had to admit that his instructions did not always reach his subordinates, nor did his officers always comprehend the significance of his instructions. If these problems of politico-administrative

integration persisted even during the lifetime of Aśoka himself, then administrative malfunctioning and the fissiparous tendencies among powerful officers of the realm can hardly be ruled during the time of rulers less authoritative than Aśoka. One may recall here the *Divyāvadāna* narrative about the popular discontent at Taxila against the misrule by Maurya functionaries (*dushṭāmātya*). The problems of administrative integration, a problem from within the empire, could have threatened the longevity of the Maurya rule.

The maintenance of a strong army and a large number of officers in the Maurya empire must have required enormous resources. Thapar argues that the Mauryas were not able to strengthen their resource-base by expanding agriculture, because vast areas of peninsular India did not experience plough-based agriculture during Maurya rule. The *Mahābhāshya* of Patanjali may suggest a period of financial crisis during the later phase of the Maurya rule. The text in question depicts the Mauryas, by whom divine images were designed, as seekers of gold (*hiraṇyārthibhiḥ Mauryaiḥ archā prakalpitā*). This queer description will be better intelligible in the light of Kauṭilya's recommendations for replenishing the depleted treasury on an emergency basis. Strongly advocating dubious means to raise funds during financial stringency, Kauṭilya advises to plant fearful images of gods by spies, who would encourage people to donate lavishly to appease the wrath of gods. The fund thus raised will be surreptitiously taken away by spies to the royal treasury. The depiction of the Mauryas as seekers of gold and encouraging the making of divine images, when read in the light of Kauṭilya's recommendations, leaves an impression of financial stringency in the Maurya realm, probably during the later phase of the empire. If such a situation prevailed, it could contribute to the declining power of the Mauryas.

The Maurya empire is a landmark in Indian history as the pioneer in establishing a nearly pan-Indian parmountcy, an efficient administrative system with a centripetal orientation. The ideal of *chakravartī* (universal) rulership was realized during this period. It will be remembered for the formulation of the policy of Dhamma to underline and accommodate plurality in the socio-economic and cultural situation in the subcontinent. Two other legacies that the Maurya period left behind were the tradition of inscribing royal orders and documents, and the use of stone as a major medium of sculptural art in India.

Reading List

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CHAPTER 5

Confrontations, Commerce and Cultural Scenario

(*c.*200 BC–AD 300)

Preliminary Remarks

The Maurya empire collapsed in 187 BC and with it, ended the epoch of a nearly pan-Indian political power. The five centuries subsequent to the fall of the Maurya empire saw several formidable political powers, often engaged in conflicts in different regions of the subcontinent. The political scenario of what is called the post-Maurya period in Indian history assumes further complexities as some groups of West and Central Asian extractions began to play an important role in the subcontinental polity. For instance, the Greek, Śaka (Scythian), Pahlava (Indo-Parthian) and Kushāṇa rulers left their marks in the politics of this phase. The principal arena of their political and military prowess is the north-western part of the subcontinent and the north-western borderland. In the Deccan, for the first time, monarchical polity emerged and consolidated, due to the rise of the Sātavāhana dynasty. The period in the historiography of early India has often been portrayed as an age of crisis, even a dark age. Such an estimation probably stems from the historian's preference for the study of long-lasting empires, which are frequently believed to have been periods of peace and stability generated by centralized polities. The ideal polity, in this genre of historical enquiry, is an expansive and centralized polity, which is projected as a norm; an absence of the same is viewed as a deviation from the norm, signalling a period of overall crisis. The traditional historiography of early India often looks for oscillations between a centralized polity and a decentralized situation, marking, as it were, a swing of the pendulum from a glorious epoch to a dark age and vice versa. It is from this point of view that the post-Maurya phase is presented by many historians as a period of crisis. One possible reason for this gloomy portrayal was the presence of what is perceived as 'foreign' powers on Indian soil. Such a historiographical position emanates largely

from the nationalist agenda of writing the history of early India in the early twentieth century. The period is situated between two celebrated empires, respectively of the Mauryas and the Guptas, both lauded as indigenous powers vis-à-vis the 'foreign rulers' like the Greeks, the Śakas and the Kushāṇas. Romila Thapar has recently questioned whether the northwestern parts of the subcontinent, which were indeed the principal stronghold successively of the Indo-Greeks, the Śakas and the Kushāṇas, viewed these powers as foreigners, since that zone had been open to interactions with and influences from West and Central Asia since sixth century BC onwards. The borderland of the subcontinent did not stand as an inflexible political frontier, typical of a modern nation state, and instead, was porous enough to allow continuous movements and exchanges among neighbouring communities.

As our study in the following pages would reveal, there was no major catastrophe in spite of the absence of a pan-Indian political power and the presence of rulers of non-Indian extraction in the north-west. The period in question witnessed unprecedented development in crafts and commerce, and especially experienced far-flung commercial and cultural exchanges. The fall of the Maurya empire also did not prove as an impediment to the ongoing process of the second urbanization, which in fact, reached its peak during the period from 200 BC to AD 300. At least three major schools of sculptures (Gandhāra, Mathurā and Amaravati) flourished during this period, which is also noted for the composition of many literary texts, including the early Dharmaśāstras, the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories, compositions in Prakrit and hybrid Sanskrit and the earliest literary creations in Tamil.

Historical probing into this phase is to some extent facilitated by the proliferation and diversity of source materials—inscriptions, coins, field archaeological sources and various type of literary texts. The last mentioned source includes both indigenous and non-indigenous texts. Indian literary sources range from the normative Dharmaśāstras to the two great epics, creative literature in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Tamil, and technical treatise like the grammatical work, the *Mahābhāshya* by Patañjali. It is not surprising that India's growing interactions with the Hellenistic world resulted in the depictions of India in the Greek and Latin texts. The most important of the Classical texts throwing lights on India are the *Bibliothekes Historikes* by Diodorus (second century BC), the *Geographikon* by Strabo (late first century BC), the *Naturalis Historia* by Pliny (late first century AD), the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* by an anonymous Greek mariner (late first century AD), the *Indika* by Arrian (second century AD) and the *Geographike Huphegesis* by Claudius Ptolemy (AD 150). Recent historiography stresses on the utilization of sources of descriptive categories to assess the situation, a distinct methodological shift from the erstwhile tendency to judge early India merely through the lens of normative treatises.

II

Political Situation: North India

In 187 BC, Pushyamitra Suṅga—the Maurya general (*senāpati*)—revolted against his master Brihadratha and overthrew this last ruler of the Maurya dynasty by what is comparable with a modern military coup. He founded in Magadha the dynasty of the Suṅgas, which according to the Purāṇas, lasted for 112 years. The Suṅga rule on that count came to an end in 75 BC. Pushyamitra's capture of political power figures in a much later text, the *Harshacharita*. Bānabhatta in his *Harshacharita* (seventh century AD) considered Pushyamitra, a brāhmaṇa, an ignoble person (*anārya*) for this treacherous act. What is surprising is that Pushyamitra did not assume a sovereign political title despite overthrowing a ruling house and founding his own. Dhanadeva, a Suṅga ruler of Ayodhyā and sixth in the line of descent from Pushyamitra, remembered his ancestor as a *senāpati*. It is logical to assume that Pushyamitra wielded his authority over Ayodhyā, though that is difficult to prove in the absence of any contemporary records. Besides founding a dynasty Pushyamitra's political fame also rests on his countering the Yavana invaders in the Ganga valley.

The *Mahābhashya* of Patañjali (a commentator on Pāṇini's *Ashṭadhyāyī*) indicates that he was Pushyamitra's contemporary. The same text, while illustrating grammatical rules to refer to a recent event, mentions the successful invasion of the Yavanas at Sāketa (near Ayodhyā) and Mādhyamikā (near Chitore, Rajasthan). The invāding Yavanas are generally identified with the Bactrian Greeks (to be discussed later). It is possible that soon after the collapse of the Maurya empire, the Greek ruler of Bactria (north-eastern Afghanistan) raided north India just when Pushyamitra had established his power over the Ganga valley. Hostilities between the Suṅgas and the Yavanas are also alluded to in the *Mālavikāgnimitram* of Kālidāsa, admittedly a drama of a much later date. The drama depicts Agnimitra, son of Pushyamitra, as the governor of Vidiśā (near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh) and also describes a victory of Vasumitra (Pushyamitra's grandson) over a Yavana king in an area to the south of the river Sindhu (this is the river Kalisindh in Madhya Pradesh and not the river Indus). Although the drama does not record a historical event, it may suggest the Suṅga control over eastern Malwa. The Suṅga rule, with its centre at Pāṭaliputra, seems to have embraced territories in the middle Ganga plain, the upper Ganga valley and eastern Malwa. According to the Purāṇas, Pushyamitra ruled for thirty-six years, which appears to have ended in 151 BC. He is praised by Dhanadeva as an ancestor, who performed two horse sacrifices (*dvirāūvamedhayājin*), which alludes to his military success. It is also significant to note that this Vedic sacrifice, with a view to enhancing the power of the sacrificing king, reappeared after

it had been discontinued in the Maurya times. Though the Purāṇas mention as many as ten Suṅga rulers, only Agnimitra, Vāsudeva and Dhanadeva can be considered as historical figures among the successors of Pushyamitra.

The Suṅga rule was terminated by a new dynasty at Magadha, namely, the Kāṇvas. Four Kāṇva rulers figure in the Puranic dynastic lists: Vāsudeva, the founder of the line, his son Bhumimitra, Nārāyaṇa (son of Bhumimitra) and Susarman (son of Nārāyaṇa). The Purāṇas assign 45 years as the total reign period of the Kāṇva kings; if that is believed, then the short-lived dynasty ceased to exist by 30 BC. The Purāṇas considered the Kāṇvas as servants of the Suṅgas (*suṅgabhṛityas*), which may imply that the Kāṇvas began their political career as subordinates of the Suṅgas, but later removed their suzerain and assumed an independent position.

Around the same time, in the second half of the first century BC, a new power appeared in Kaliṅga, which denotes the coastal and eastern part of Orissa, embracing the Mahānadi delta area. The Mahāmeghavāhana dynasty, also known as the Chedī house, rose to considerable prominence, because of the political exploits of the third and the most illustrious member of the ruling house. He was Khāravela, a devout Jaina ruler, known exclusively from inscriptions, particularly from a *praśasti* or eulogy in Prakrit found close to present Bhubaneswar in Orissa. A *mahājanapada* type of monarchical polity had not existed in Kaliṅga hitherto before. Kaliṅga figured in connection with the possible conquest of the area by a Nanda king and it certainly was a part of Aśoka's empire. The emergence of a monarchical polity in Kaliṅga seems to have drawn upon the process of state formation in the Ganga valley to which it had been exposed. No less interesting is the fact that Kaliṅga's geographical position made it a corridor between north India and the peninsular part.

King Khāravela's various military exploits and other achievements appear in the *praśasti* in chronological order of his reign. Khāravela is said to have ruled 300 years after (*tivasasata*) a Nanda king had excavated an aqueduct in Kaliṅga. The last known date of Nanda rule being 324 BC, Khāravela therefore seems to have been in power 300 years after that; in other words, around 30 BC. The alternative interpretation of the word *tivasasata* in the sense of 103 years does not hold true, as the palaeography of the Hathigumpha *praśasti* is not as old as the third century BC (324–103 BC = 221 BC). *Kaliṅgâdhipati* (Lord of Kaliṅga) Khāravela's military exploits began in the second year of his reign when he sent an army without considering a ruler named Sātakarṇi (an early Sātavāhana king) of the west (*dutiye cha vase achitayitā Sātakaṁniṁ pachhimadisaṁ*). The account speaks of his westward campaign (from Kaliṅga), towards parts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. His large and powerful army crossed the river Kahṇaveṇa (river Krishṇā or Wainganga) and threatened Asika (Ṛishika)-nagara, located somewhere between the Godavari and the Krishṇa. The Raṭhikas and Bhojas (possibly of Vidarbha, i.e. Nagpur area in Mahārashtra) are said to have succumbed to him in

the fourth year. The eighth year marked a successful raid of Goradhagiri (Barabar caves near Gaya, Bihar) and Rājagṛiha in Magadha, forcing a *yavana* King Ḍimita to run away to Mathurā. It is difficult to satisfactorily identify this Indo-Greek ruler; but it certainly demonstrates Khāravela's campaign in Magadha. Commemorating these military successes and his growing political power, Khāravela built an impressive palace of victory (*mahāvijayaprāsāda*) in the ninth regnal year. This was followed by a victorious invasion of Bhāradhavasa (Bhāratavarsha) in the tenth regnal year. This is the earliest known epigraphic mention of Bhāratavarsha, which certainly did not connote here the entire subcontinent. The same inscription clearly distinguishes it from Mathurā and Uttarāpatha, and this Bhāratavarsha should therefore be located in the Ganga valley, somewhere between Magadha and Mathurā. In the same year, Khāravela is said to have ploughed Pithuṇḍa, settled by a previous king, with donkeys (*Pithuṇḍaṁ gadabhanāṅgalena kasayati*). Such poetic exuberances were used as an expression of inflicting humiliation to the vanquished enemy. Pithuṇḍa, identified with Pityndra in Ptolemy's *Geography*, possibly stood in the coastal area of southern Andhra. Next fell before Khāravela a group of rulers of the Tamil-speaking area (*Tramira-daha saṁghātaṁ*) of the far south. Khāravela therefore must have continued his campaigns further south after his victory over Pithuṇḍa in coastal Andhra. The description underlines his possible interests in pushing his military victories to a southern direction in his tenth regnal year. Another successful campaign against Magadha and Uttarāpatha was launched two years after this, in his twelfth regnal year, when the Magadhan ruler Bahasatimita (Bṛihatsvātimitra?) fell at Khāravela's feet and he captured a vast amount of wealth from Aṅga and Magadha (*Aṅga-magadhaṁ vasuṁ cha nayati*) possibly in the form of war booties. In the same year, the ruler of Kaliṅga is credited with having caused to have brought many pearls and gems from the Pāṇḍyas near Madurai in south India (*Pāṁḍarāja... mutamaṇiratanani āhārapayati idha satasahasāni*). This claim cannot be taken at its face value since it is unlikely for the Kaliṅga ruler to have established his control in the Tamraparni-Vaigai valleys in far south India; nevertheless it speaks of Khāravela's interests in the eastern sea-board areas of south India. It is, however, not impossible that Khāravela could have sent his expeditions as far south as the Pāṇḍya area when he fought against rulers of Tamilakam in his tenth regnal year. The inscription leaves little room for doubt that his military campaigns were directed particularly against Magadha. Does it indicate a Kaliṅgan reaction to and retaliation of long Magadhan dominance over it? Apart from being a powerful ruler and a successful campaigner, Khāravela has been repeatedly lauded in the *praśasti* for his support to Jainism, his charity and his patronage to works of public utility (like extending an old aqueduct). In spite of Khāravela's achievements, the Mahāmeghavāhana dynasty did not last long in Kaliṅga, subsequent to Khāravela's reign; only one of his successors, namely Vakradeva, is known.

III

The North-west: Greeks, Śakas, Pahlavas and Kushāṇas

The political situation in the north-western part, especially the borderlands of the subcontinent became considerably complex from the close of the third century BC. The north-west provided regular linkages with West and Central Asia because of its geographical location. As we have noted earlier, the Maurya political control over Kabul, Kandahar and the Laghman regions of Afghanistan was established by gaining these territories from the Seleucidian authority. Near Kabul was situated the ancient area of Bactria, under the Seleucid control. By late third century BC the local Greek satrap Diodotus I overthrew his allegiance to the Seleucid authority and established what is known as the Bactrian Greek kingdom in Bactria with its capital at Bactra (Balkh, modern Majr-i-Shariff in Afghanistan). Bactria was ideally in a position to maintain intimate connections—political, commercial and cultural—with Central and West Asia on the one hand and South Asia on the other. Its capital Bactra stood at the crossroads of Asian overland long-distance commerce. Basing largely on the Classical accounts, W.W. Tarn, among others, contributed to the reconstruction of the dynastic history of the Greeks in Bactria. To this was further added the numismatic evidence. Nearly 30 Greek rulers are known through their coins, thanks to the studies of A.K. Narain. Its importance for early Indian history lies in the fact that the subcontinent experienced for the first time the coinage with the names and portraits of the ruling authorities engraved on it. This has important bearing on the political attitude towards coinage. When coin legends of Greek rulers carried both Greek and Prakrit languages (in Greek and Kharoshṭī scripts), these undoubtedly point to political control of these rulers over certain areas of the subcontinent where the bilingual coins would be in circulation.

Plate 5.1: Silver coin of Demetrius (obv.) with the figure of Athena (rev.)

During the early years of the second century BC, the Greek rulers of Bactria became ambitious enough to have launched several incursions into the subcontinent through the north-western corridor. These are the rulers who are referred to in the Purāṇas as Yavana invaders towards the last days of the Maurya rule Euthydemus or his son Demetrius is generally credited with the beginning of the Yavana incursions into the subcontinent. This pattern of Greek incursions continued during the successive reigns of Apollodotus, Pantaleon and Agathocles. According to B.N. Mukherjee, the coins of the last named ruler suggest his control over the north-west frontier and Taxila in Gandhāra. It is in Agathocles' one type of silver coins, found from the famous excavated site of Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan, that the first iconic representations of Vāsudeva Kṛishṇa and Saṁkarshaṇa (Balarāma, Kṛishṇa's elder brother) are seen. The inclusion of the figures of these Indian divinities on the reverse of Greek coins amply demonstrates the occupation of some territories in the north-western part of the subcontinent. We have already noted the allusion to the Yavana invasions of Mādhyamikā and Sāketa in the *Mahābhashya*. Mitchiner has shown that the *Gārgīsaṁhitā* section of the *Yugapurāṇa* narrates, in the form of a pseudo-prophecy, the victorious campaigns of the Yavanas at Pañchāla (Rohilkhand region), Mathurā and Kusumadhvaja (Pāṭaliputra?). The text in question also informs that the Yavana control over the Ganga plains would be of a short duration. The Yavana rulers (Bactrian Greeks), according to this text, would withdraw to their original stronghold, which faced a serious internal power struggle among the Yavanas. The Puranic narrative gains credence from the well-known fact (mentioned by Justin) that Eucratides rose in revolt against Demetrius while the latter was campaigning in north India. Eucratides not only became the master over Bactria, but also possibly controlled Kapiśa area (contiguous to Gandhāra) to the west of the Indus; a particular type of his copper coin mentions the city-deity of Kapiśa (*Kavisiye nagaradevatā*).

The power struggle in Bactria between two contestant groups eventually resulted in the establishment of the rule one group of Greek kings exclusively in the subcontinent; they came to be known as Indo-Greeks, distinct from the Bactrian Greek kings. One such Indo-Greek ruler, Antialkidas was certainly in control of Gandhāra in the second century BC; his ambassador Heliodorus (later a Vaishnava, with the Prakritized name Heliodora) visited Kāśiputra Bhāgabhadra, the king of Vidiśā (Besnagar pillar inscription of Heliodorus), near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. The most formidable among the Indo-Greek kings was probably Menander. His silver tetradrachm coins (bust of the king: Athena hurling thunderbolt), according to B.N. Mukherjee, may indicate his association with Bactria, as these carried a typical Bactrian coin device. These coins also carry legends both in Greek and Prakrit, clearly implying their circulation in the north-western part of the subcontinent, which was under his control. His other type of coin depicting the figure of Nike appears to have been issued from mints in Arachosia (Kandahar). The

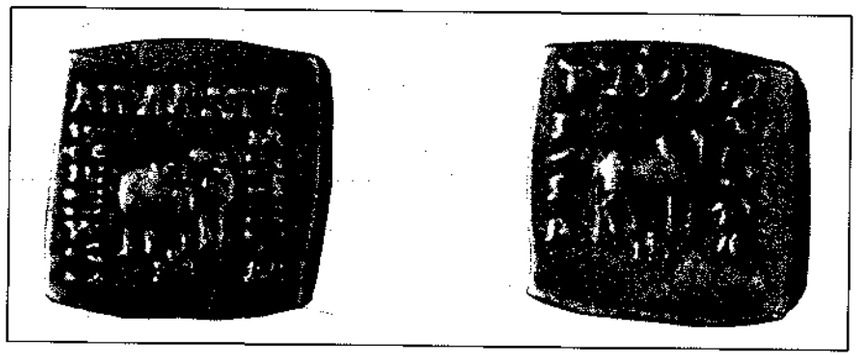


Plate 5.2: Square silver coin of Indo-Greek ruler Apollodotus I with legends in Greek (obv.) and Kharoshṭī (Dev.)

use of numismatic evidence thus helps reconstruct political history, at least to some extent. Strabo credits him with extensive conquests over the areas watered by the Beas and even as far east as the Yamuna; according to the same author, his control embraced Patalene (the Indus delta) and Saraostus (Saurashtra?). Menander, identified with king Milinda, is particularly famous for his conversion to Buddhism under the influence of his teacher Nāgasena, a matter which is the subject of the Pāli text, *Milindapañho* (Questions of Milinda). His capital was Sagala, near Sialkot (Pakistan).

The Greek rule in Bactria came to an end in 130 BC, judging in the light of Strabo's account and the annals of Early Han dynasty of China (*Chien Han shu*), as it succumbed to the raids of a few fierce Central Asiatic nomadic groups. Among such nomadic groups were the Sai or Sek or the Scythians (the Śakas in Indian sources) and the Yueh-zhi (probably pronounced as Ye-tti, according to B.N. Mukherjee), the latter speaking Tocharian language. These groups obviously moved westwards from the Central Asian steppes and destroyed the Bactrian Greek kingdom. By about 75 BC the Paropanisadae (Kabul) area came under the control of a new Iranian power, the Arsacids of the Greek accounts, also known as the An-XI in the Chinese texts. One group of the Scythian people, according to the Chinese texts, migrated from the lake Issyk-Kol area in Central Asia and reached Chi-pin (Jibin) or Ki-pin after having passed through Kashgarh and the Pamir plateau. It was Sylvan Levi who first successfully identified Chi-pin (Jibin) with Kashmir. That Kashmir, Gandhāra and the contiguous Swat area (to the west of the Indus) came under Śaka rule is indicated by an inscription. It records a donation made by kshatrapa (subordinate ruler) Patika at Taxila in the year 78 when his overlord Maues (Moga) was in power. The year refers to an Old Śaka era, beginning from 170 BC (not the better known homonymous era beginning in AD 78). Calculating the 78th year of the Old Śaka era, B.N. Mukherjee has assigned the rule of Maues to 92 BC (170 BC–78 = 92 BC). Maues' control over Kandahar was suggested by John Marshall on the basis of a particular

coin of Maues, though his view has not met with unanimous acceptance. In his silver coins (carrying both Greek and Prakrit legends), Maues bears the Indian epithet—*rājātirāja* (king of kings). Such an epithet strongly suggests his control over a sizeable territory in the north-western part, including the borderlands of the subcontinent. No less significant is the use of an Indian epithet in the coins of a Śaka king.

Another branch of the Śaka rulers had their stronghold in Kandahar and adjacent areas. The earliest rulers of this branch were Vonones, his junior co-ruler Spalahora and Spalahora's son Spalagadama. The names bear clear Scythian and Parthian elements, the latter coming from Iran. Inscriptions and coins throw light on three powerful and prominent Śaka rulers of a later time. They are Azes I, Azilises and Azes II. The existence of two Azes will be evident from an inscription from Bajaur. It was engraved during the time of king Azes and his subordinate local ruler Vijyamitra and dated in the year 63 of an era named after the dead (*ātita*) king Azes. Thus the reigning king Azes was certainly different from the dead king of the same name. The senior and the dead king Azes was Azes I and his successor was Azes II. The inscription also establishes that Azes I founded an era or a regnal reckoning, which was continued by his successors. Recent researches by G. Fussman and B.N. Mukherjee show that Azes I founded his era in 57 BC. This is of considerable significance as the era of 57 BC is widely known as the Vikrama era. Its founder was therefore not a Vikramāditya, but a Śaka king. His two successors Azelises and Azes II were able to retain the authority intact over Gandhāra and adjacent territories. What is more important is the possibility of the eastern extension of the Śaka power during their time. Four inscriptions from Mathurā inform us about the presence of Śaka *kshatrapa/mahākshatrapa* Rajuvula and his son Soḍāsa at Mathurā where they must have ruled as subordinates of a superior authority. One of these records bear the date of year 72, which probably is dated in the era of 57 BC (Azes era). It therefore should be dated to AD 15 (72-57=15) when Rajuvula probably ruled as a subordinate of Azelises and Azes II. Seen in this light, the Śaka rulers belonging to the Vonones group carved out an extensive area comprising the north-western region, the Indus basin, the Punjab, upper Ganga valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab, upto Mathurā.

The growing power of the Śakas was thwarted by the rise of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares. He is particularly known from an inscription from Takht-i-Bahi near Peshawar. This Kharoshṭī inscription bearing a date of year 103 is assigned to AD 46, since it was possibly issued by following the Azes era of 57 BC (103-57=46). Described in Prakrit as Guduhvara, Gondophares had this important record inscribed when he had ruled for twenty-six years. In about AD 46 Gondophares had already ruled for twenty-six years; he therefore came to power in AD 20/21. Takht-i-Bahi and the adjacent areas of ancient Gandhāra appears to have come under his possession at the expense of the erstwhile Śaka rulers. A particular type of his billon (an alloy of silver

and copper/tin) coin, issued jointly with his subordinate ruler Aspavarman, depicts him as a horse-rider. This device had already been in use in the coins of Indravarman (father of Aspavarman), which had been in circulation in the Bajaur area. The Bajaur area, one may recall, formed a part of the territories of the Śaka rulers. It is therefore likely that the billon coins of Gondophares were struck after he had captured Bajaur from the Śakas; the local ruler Aspavarman transferred his allegiance from his previous overlords, the Śaka kings, to the Parthian ruler. Another type of his silver coins were meant for circulation in the lower Indus valley, which also is likely to have come under Gondophares' authority. A third type of his silver coins are associated with the Mathurā region, which too may have been included within his realm. In view of the possible expansion of his authority over Gandhāra, the territory to the west of the Indus, the lower Indus valley and north Indian plains up to Mathurā, Gondophares fittingly used the title *rājātirāja* (in Prakrit) and *basileos basileon* (in Greek) in his coins.

The political career of the Śakas having been threatened and cut short in this manner, their activities can be seen more in the western and peninsular parts of India in the subsequent times. This will figure in our discussion in a later section.

Among the Central Asian nomadic warlike groups that entered Afghanistan and the north-western areas of the subcontinent, the Yueh-zhi people were the most important and left a lasting impression on Indian polity and society. Their history as a Central Asian nomadic people is available in the Chinese annals of the Han dynasty, the *Chien Han Shu* and the *Hou han shu*. Strabo knew them as the Tokharoi people, probably because they spoke Tokharian language (belonging to the Indo-European group of languages). The Chinese textual accounts recall continuous conflicts among the Yueh-zhi, the Sai or the Śakas and the Xiongnu (from the last one emerged the dreaded Huns of the later centuries). These incessant wars forced a large body of the Yuezhis (da Yueh-zhi) to migrate westwards from the lake Issyk-Kol area in Chinese Central Asia. The *Shi-ji* narrates that this eventually brought them to Bactria, then under Greek rule, which was overthrown by several nomadic groups, including the Yueh-zhi. The arrival of the Yueh-zhi in Bactria has been assigned to the end of the second century BC. The Chinese evidence, analyzed by Zurcher, leaves an impression that in course of time, the Yuezhi group became further subdivided into five clans (*yabgus*); one of the five clans was called Guei-shuang. The Guei-shuangs gradually became more powerful than the four other groups, captured Da-xia—the eastern part of Bactria. They subsequently conquered the whole of Bactria along with its capital Bu'ta (Bactra, modern Majar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan). The Guei-shuang of the Chinese annals then became better known in history as a mighty and celebrated power, the Kushāṇas. The strategic importance of Bactria has already been underlined. The control over Bactria holds a crucial clue to the political fortune of the Kushāṇas. The expansion of the Kushāṇa

power has been a subject of sustained enquiry for the last four decades and the discovery of several important evidence has significantly added to the knowledge about this power. Scholarly contributions from G. Fussman, R. Gobls, R.N. Frye, A.D.H. Bivar, J. Harmatta, B. Litvinsky , G. Pugochenkova, J.M. Rosenfield, B.N. Mukherjee and many other specialists have offered new insights into the Kushāṇa history.

The earliest possible Kushāṇa ruler known from coins was Miaos, who not only ruled over Bactria, but also over areas to the north of the Oxus (Amu Dariya) river. The Kushāṇas later conquered vast stretches of land in northern India, but the core area of their power was situated not in the subcontinent, but in Bactria. Bactria was indeed the launching pad from where the Kushāṇa power expanded in different directions and over a vast area. There has been a significant change in the orientation to the Kushāṇa studies. Till the 1950s, most Indian historians viewed the Kushāṇas as a ruling house of 'foreign' origin, which later became Indianized and began to expand from northern/ north-western India to different areas. The emerging historiography of the recent decades shows that the Kushāṇas, with their base in Bactria (which is oriented more towards Central Asia than to South Asia), expanded their authority over the northern parts of South Asia. The spectacular growth of the Kushāṇa power was largely the outcome of the military and political success of formidable rulers like Kujula Kadphises, V'ima Kadphises, Kanishka I, Huvishka and Vāsudeva I. There was a long-standing idea that the Kushāṇas had two groups of rulers: first, the Kadphises group—consisting of Kujula and Vima, then followed by the Kanishka group of rulers. A recent discovery of a Kushāṇa inscription from Rabatak (in Afghanistan) very clearly demonstrates that there was no second group of Kushāṇa rulers; Kanishka and his successors enjoyed an unbroken descent and genealogy from Kujula Kadphises onwards. This very important inscription in Bactrian language (a middle Iranian language written in Greek script, so christened by W.B. Henning) has been edited and translated first jointly by N. Sims, Williams and J. Cribb and later by B.N. Mukherjee. The inscription is of monumental significance for our understanding of the Kushāṇa territorial expansion.

The rapid growth of the Kushāṇa power is noticeable from the time of Kujula Kadphises. He figures as K'iu-tsiu-k'io in the Chinese sources and as Kujula kara kapha of the Kushāṇa *yabuga* in a particular type of copper coins. According to the Chinese textual sources, he conquered Gao-fu (Kabul) and Jibin/Chi-pin (Kashmir). Kabul was conquered possibly from the Arsacid (Xi or the Imperial Parthian) rulers of Iran and Kashmir from the Indo-Parthian control. This marks the beginning of the long-drawn hostilities between the Kushāṇas and the Parthian empire of Iran. The Chinese sources refer to his long reign till the age of eighty years, after which his son and successor V'ima Kadphises ascended the throne. The *Hou Han shu* credits V'ima with the conquest of Shen-du (the lower Indus valley and the Indus delta), which

was noted for its maritime commerce with Da-chin (Roman empire). V'ima's success in the lower Indus valley at once resulted in territorial expansion and economic gain for the rising Kushāṇa power. Mukherjee argues that the Kushāṇa ruler was well aware of the commercial significance of the lower Indus valley with a major port in the Indus delta, named Barbaricum in Greek texts. Kandahar has yielded Indo-Parthian copper coins over which was struck a new device of the king at the altar, typically associated with Kushāṇa coins. This strongly suggests the conquest of Kandahar area by V'ima from the Indo-Parthian rulers. The king at the altar device on Kushāṇa coins was introduced by V'ima, who modelled it on a similar device seen on the coins of the Arsacid ruler Gotarzes II (AD 38–51). A contemporary of Gotarzes II, V'ima too seems to have been in power till the sixth or seventh decade of the first century AD. The *Hou Han shu* suggests that the credit of conquering Sha-chi (Sāketa in former Kośala *mahājanapada*) should also go to him. That he was able to expand the Kushāṇa authority even further east, up to Mathurā, is evident beyond any doubt from an inscription from Mat (near Mathurā), which has also yielded his famous statue seated on a lion throne with full regalian glory. An inscription from Dasht-e-Nabur firmly points to his continuous and uninterrupted control over northern Afghanistan. This inscription of V'ima is a trilingual one, one of them being Bactrian language, which was issued in year 279 of the Parthian era of 247 BC; the record is, therefore, dated in AD 32 (279–247=32). V'ima Kadphises is the first Kushāṇa ruler to have issued gold coins; the practice of issuing gold coins in the subcontinent also begins from his reign. An extremely powerful ruler, he assumed fittingly grandiose titles like *mahārāja, rājātirāja, sarvalogīśvara, mahīśvara*, etc.

The growing Kushāṇa power reached its peak during the reign of Kanishka I, undoubtedly the most celebrated figure in the Kushāṇa dynasty. The Rabatak inscription, according to the reading by Sims-Williams and Cribb, may suggest that between V'ima and Kanishka I stood another ruler V'ima Taktoo. The reading has been challenged by B.N. Mukherjee who prefers the suggestion by H.W. Bailey that V'ima had a son Saddashkana (known from another inscription). Saddashkana, according to Mukherjee, either did not ascend the throne perhaps due to his premature demise, or ruled for a very short period. The reign of Kanishka is known largely from his several inscriptions, many coins and textual evidence. The epigraphic data demonstrate that he ruled for twenty-three years. Kanishka founded an era, probably marking his accession to the throne, since his regnal reckoning was continued by his successors. There is now epigraphic evidence suggesting the continuous use of the Kanishka era for 170 years by his successors. One of the most controversial problems of the Kushāṇa political history is to fix the beginning of Kanishka's reign. Even after an international conference having been devoted exclusively to solving this problem of chronology, no decisive, conclusive and unanimous position could emerge. The beginning of his reign

has been variously placed in AD 128, AD 144 and AD 248 (the last mentioned date is now virtually ruled out as the time of Kanishka's accession). But a very large number of scholars prefer to assign him to the last quarter of the first century AD. Since Kanishka certainly established an era, these scholars strongly considered that it was the famous Śaka era of AD 78 that must have been founded by Kanishka I. The view that Kanishka initiated the Śaka era in AD 78 has gained considerable currency and acceptance among many scholars, but this is not a unanimous view.

The newly discovered Bactrian inscription from Rabatak actually belongs to Kanishka's reign, possibly issued in the very first year of his reign or the first year of the reign of his subordinate ruler. The longest Kushāṇa inscription in 23 lines has thrown many new lights on the Kushāṇa history. It records that Kanishka's commands were obeyed at Ozono (Ujjayinī), Zagido (Sāketa), Kozombo (Kauśāmbī), Palibothro (Pāṭaliputra) and Sro-tchompo (Srīchampā or Champā near Bhagalpur). His sway over Kauśāmbī and Sarnath had already been known from his two inscriptions found in these two places, dated respectively in the second and third year of his reign. Mathurā was certainly under his control, which is evident from his record of year 23. Two of his records from Śrāvastī cannot but point to the inclusion of ancient Kośala within his realm. In some Chinese texts impressions of his campaign in Pāṭaliputra are available. But the Rabatak inscription for the first time presents an indisputable evidence of his rule as far east as Pāṭaliputra and Champā near Bhagalpur in eastern Bihar. Two inscriptions, dated respectively in year 20 and year 22 of his reign from Sanchi clearly demonstrates the inclusion of eastern Malwa in the Kushāṇa realm; to this should be added also the region around Ujjayinī in western Malwa in the light of the Rabatak inscription. If Śaka kshtrapa Chashtana and his grandson Rudradāman had served the Kushāṇas as subordinate rulers of western India till AD 150, there is a strong possibility that they acknowledged the Kushāṇa suzerainty. Put differently, it suggests Kanishka's control over western India, including Gujarat and Kathiawad. Kanishka's empire certainly included almost the whole of modern Pakistan, as will be evident from his inscriptions found from Suivihar (year 11), Zeda (year 11) and Manikiyala (year 18). Bactria indeed continued to be the most important territory of the vast Kushāṇa realm. It is from Kanishka's reign that Kushāṇa coins began to be issued in Bactrian language, demonstrating thereby the immense importance attached to Bactria. His inscription from Surkhkotal presents a further proof of Kanishka's hold over Afghanistan. There is no indication that there was any shrinkage of the Kushāṇa control over the territories to the north of the Oxus since its very inception. Chinese sources speak of his control over Khotan in Central Asia. Though admittedly an author of the later ages, Xuan Zang mentioned about Kanishka's rule over areas to the east of the Tsungling mountains or Pamir plateau. Central Asian territories like Kashgarh, Sogdiana and Tashkent were incorporated within his realm. The

Kushāṇa expansion in Central Asia seems to have brought him into conflict against Han China. Chinese sources narrate his campaign against the Han ruler Wu-ti, but Kanishka is said to have been defeated by the Chinese general Pan-chao. Kanishka evidently expanded the authority of the Kushānas over a huge area embracing almost the whole of north India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Pamir region and extensive areas of Central Asia. His reign witnessed the final transformation of the Kushāṇas from a nomadic group to a vast territorial empire.

Whether and to what extent Kanishka's successors were able to retain control over areas to the east of Mathurā is doubtful. But the Kushāṇa control over Mathurā till the very end of the Kushāṇa dynasty is well recorded in inscriptions. His immediate successor Vāsishka (also called Vājheshka and Vaskushāṇa) ruled over Sanchi during his reign (Śaka era 20–28). The next ruler Huvishka had a long reign (year 28–60, i.e. AD 106–138). A number of his inscriptions are from Mathurā. His control over Afghanistan, Bactria and the western part of Central Asia is borne out by inscriptions from Wardak, Surkhkotal and Airtam (in Uzbekistan). The *Hou Han shu* indicates that about AD 125 (during the reign of Huvishka) the Kushāṇas held sway over Pu-li (Tashkurgan in the Chinese Xinjian area) and Mu-lu (Merv in Turkemenistan).

The Kushāṇa realm has a distinctive feature of the simultaneous rule of two co-rulers, one senior and the other—a junior co-ruler. In fact, it was a legacy from the practice of the Śakas. This can be observed in the cases of Kanishka and Vāsishka; Vāsishka and Huvishka, especially in the light of inscriptions. When Huvishka was ruling his junior co-ruler in Śaka year 41 (AD 119) was one Kanishka, the son of Vāsishka, as is known from the Ara inscription (from Pakistan). This Kanishka is certainly different from Kanishka—the grandfather of Huvishka. Kanishka of the Ara inscription is therefore Kanishka II, who according to the Kamra inscription of year 20 (AD 98), was born in that year. Paucity of evidence does not allow us to ascertain whether Kanishka II ever rose to the status of a full-fledged senior Kushāṇa ruler.

The long reign of Huvishka is followed by an equally long reign of Vāsudeva I, Śaka era 64/67–98 (AD 142/145–176). The Kushāṇa hold over Mathurā was intact, so was their control over the north-western part of the subcontinent and Bactria. In view of the rise of Mahākshtrapa Rudradāman I as an independent ruler in western India in or before AD 150, the Kushāṇas seem to have suffered a territorial loss in western India. Two more successors of Vāsudeva I are known from coins which bear the names of their issuers. They were Kanishka III and Vāsudeva II. A recently discovered inscription from Mathurā, dated 170 Śaka era (AD 248) carries the name of the king *rājātirāja devaputra shāhi* Vāsudeva, who can be identified with Vāsudeva II. A Chinese text, *San-kuo-chi*, places the accession of the Yue-zhi king Po t'iao in AD 230. He is possibly the last known Kushāṇa king. The Kushāṇa

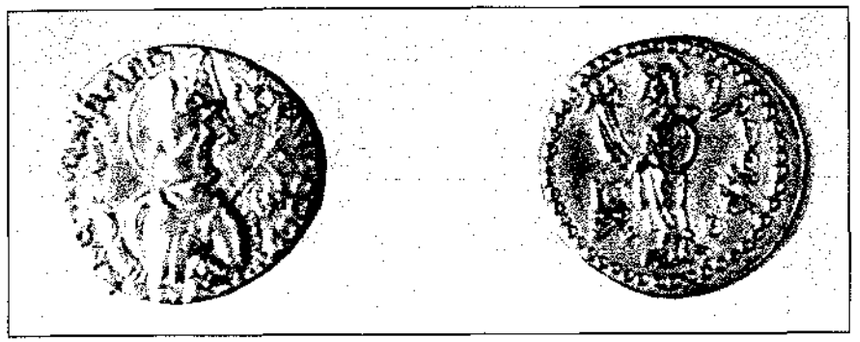


Plate 5.3: Gold coin of Huvishka showing the king with a halo around His head (obv.) and the figure of Ardoxsho (rev.)

control over Mathurā, therefore, was uninterrupted since the days of V'ima Kadphises till the very last days of the empire. While Bactria was the core area of the far-flung Kushāṇa empire, Mathurā functioned as their apex political centre in the subcontinent.

The end of the empire came in the wake of their defeat in the hands of the Sassanid ruler Shahpur I of Iran. The sustained hostilities between the Kushāṇas and their rivals in Iran are wellknown; the new Iranian dynasty of the Sassanids inherited this hostility from the Arsacids. The Naqsh-i-Rustam inscription of Shahpur I (AD 262) records his victory over the Kushāṇas, his rival possibly being Vāsudeva II, the last known Kushāṇa ruler. Bactria went out of the Kushāṇa control, hastening the process of the decline of the Kushāṇa power. However, even at the time of Shahpur's victory, the Kushanshahr (Kushāṇa realm) was still of an impressive exent: it embraced Pushkbur (Peshawar) and adjacent areas Kashgarh, Sogdiana and Shashastan (Tashkent) in Central Asia and certainly Mathurā in North India. The centrality of Bactria in the processes of the foundation, growth and decay of the Kushāṇa power can hardly escape our notice. Nationalist historiography of

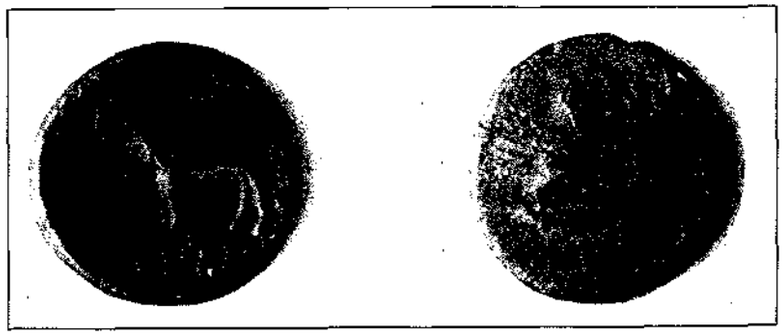


Plate 5.4: Copper coin of Satyamitra from Ayodhyā

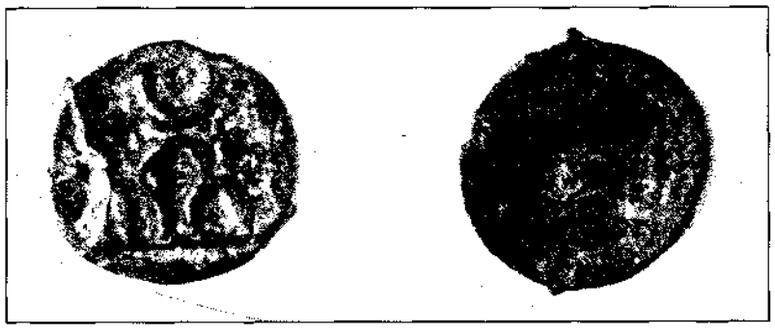


Plate 5.5: An uninscribed copper coin of the pre-Sātavāhana period

India used to glorify the role of a few non-monarchical groups of northern and central India (e.g. the Yaudheyas, the Mālavas, the Ārjunāyanas) in bringing about the downfall of the Kushāṇa empire. Implicit in such a position as this is the nationalist historian's agenda to establish precedents when 'foreign' rule in India was terminated by indigenous 'democratic'/'republican' forces. This view gained currency during the upsurge of nationalist movements against the British Raj. Recent researches negate such an explanation and do not give centrality to these non-monarchical groups for the downfall of the Kushāṇas. The non-monarchical groups at the most began to enjoy some political prominence when the Kushāṇa empire had already been tottering since its loss of Bactria. It is, however, not impossible that these non-monarchical groups could have represented autonomous spaces within the strong Kushāṇa monarchical polity.

IV

The Deccan: The Sātavāhanas and the Kshatrapas

An overview of the political scenario in the Deccan during the post-Maurya period will be now in order. The Deccan for the first time experienced a monarchical polity with the emergence and consolidation of the Sātavāhana dynasty. However, as B.D. Chattopadhyaya has shown, a gradual process of the emergence of the monarchical polity is possible to trace prior to the advent of the Sātavāhanas. Coins bearing the name of Mahārathi have come to light from the stratified context at Veerapuram for both pre-Satavhana and Sātavāhana times. The Kura rulers issued coins in ancient Brahmapuri, once again during the pre-Sātavāhana days. As early as the second century BC, a rāja by the name Kubīraka figured in an inscription from Bhattiprolu in the eastern Deccan. These may speak of the emergence of ruling elites in different parts of the Deccan after the decline of the Mauryan power. There is a distinct likelihood that the Bhojas and Raṭhikas, associated with peninsular India and figuring in Aśoka's records, became prominent enough

during the second and first centuries BC to be given the epithets like Mahābhoja and Mahārāṭhika. All these point to the process of the formation of political localities, almost like the *janapadas* of north Indian experience, after the fall of the Mauryas and before the beginning of the Sātavāhana rule in the Deccan.

Inscriptions, coins and the Purāṇas furnish principal information about the Sātavāhana realm. The Purāṇas provide the genealogical list (though not a uniform list) of the rulers of this dynasty. Some of the names of these rulers are also known from inscriptions. However, while the Purāṇas knew this dynasty as Andhras and Andhrabhṛityas, inscriptions labelled the ruling house as Sātavāhanas and never as Andhra/Andhrabhṛityas. The Andhras—as a people of the Deccan—had already figured in the edicts of Aśoka; the Sātavāhanas could have been a particular branch or clan of the Andhra 'tribe' or people and became renowned in course of their growing political power. The founder of the Andhra dynasty, according to the Puranic evidence, was one Simuka, who is also known from inscriptions and coins. That he was a historical figure is therefore beyond any question.

Historians however are sharply divided about their opinions on the duration and chronology of the Sātavāhana rule and determining the primary stronghold of the dynasty. Though historians more or less agree that the Sātavāhana rule terminated around AD 225, the initial period of the Sātavāhana rule is difficult to ascertain. The problem lies with the varying lists of kings available in different Purāṇas and sometimes even in the different manuscripts of the same Purāṇas. The longest list of 30 rulers with a total chronological span of 460 years is available in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, which on the other hand, in some of the manuscripts, also presents a much shorter duration of the Andhra rule of 272 years or 275 years. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* lists range from nearly 30 to 19 or 18 or 17 kings of the Andhra dynasty. Relying on the Puranic evidence, scholars have presented two alternative chronologies of the Sātavāhana/Andhra rule, a longer one of nearly 450 years and a shorter one of nearly 275 years. R.G. Bhandarakar and Gopalachari, in support of a long chronology of the Sātavāhana/Andhra rule in the Deccan, argued that the Andhra rulers were related to and/or originated from the Andhras of the Aśokan edict. According to these scholars, the Andhras asserted independence in 225 BC, soon after Aśoka's death and continued to wield power till AD 225. In their view, one of the early Sātavāhana rulers—Sātakarṇi—was a contemporary of Khāravela who was in power after *tivasasata* had elapsed since the Nanda rule. The word *tivasasata* is interpreted by them as 103 years and Khāravela accordingly has been placed in the late third century BC (324–103=221 BC). His contemporary Sātakarṇi is also similarly assigned to the same period, implying thereby the Sātavāhana political presence in the Deccan in the late third century BC. The problem, however, is that both the Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela and the earliest Sātavāhana inscriptions palaeographically cannot be dated prior

to late first century BC. We have already pointed to the distinct possibility of Khāravela's (and therefore his Sātavāhana contemporary) rule in the late first century BC. That further strengthens the possibility of the existence of his contemporary Sātavāhana ruler around the same time. In other words, scholars nowadays prefer to assign the beginning of the Sātavāhana rule in the Deccan in and around the second half of the first century BC. As we have already stated, some of the *Matsya Purāṇa* manuscripts speak of a shorter duration of the Andhra rule of 272/275 years. Inscriptions, which are surer index of the existence of reigning kings (since they refer to the issuing authority) than the Purāṇas, enlist only about fifteen Sātavāhana kings who had actually ruled. It is therefore more logical to prefer a shorter span of 275 years under fifteen Sātavāhana rulers in the Deccan (from 50 BC to AD 225) to the long chronology of 450 years. This is further supported by the coins of king Sātavāhana (possibly identifiable with Simuka Sātavāhana, the founder of the house), discovered from the excavations at Nevasa. The stratified evidence of one of the earliest of Sātavāhana coins suggests their manufacture in the second half of the first century BC.

Many scholars believe that Andhra being a region in the eastern part of the Deccan, the Sātavāhana homeland should be located in that region. The Kṛishṇa-Guntur area has been mentioned as Andhrapatha in an inscription, prompting some scholars to locate the earliest Sātavāhana territory in this area. The inscription, however, does not belong to the Sātavāhana house, and it was issued by the Pallavas who succeeded the Sātavāhanas in eastern Deccan. There is little concrete evidence to suggest that eastern Deccan was under Sātavāhana authority in the initial period of the Sātavāhana rule. Attention has been drawn also to a record from Bellary district, Karnataka, which mentions a district (*āhāra*) named after the Sātavāhanas (Sātavāhanī). Once again, this inscription belongs to the third century AD and at the best, indicates the Sātavāhana association with Karnataka only at the very late stage of their rule, instead of demonstrating the Sātavāhana political presence in Karnataka in the initial phase of their history. The most reliable index is offered by the findspots of the earliest Sātavāhana inscriptions issued by the early rulers of the dynasty. These are available from Nasik and Nanaghat in the western Deccan. The inclusion of Nevasa in central Deccan (Ahmednagar district, Mahārashtra) in the early Sātavāhana realm is indicated by the availability of the coins of king Satavhana from the excavations at Nevasa. That the Sātavāhana capital was situated at Pratishṭhāna (Paithan, Aurangbad district, Mahārashtra)—also in central Deccan—is evident from the Purāṇas and also the *Geography* of Ptolemy. It will be therefore logical to locate the earliest stronghold of the Sātavāhanas in western and central Deccan.

Simuka (also called Śiśuka), the first Sātavāhana king, seems to have held sway over the region around Pratishṭhāna or Paithan and Nanaghat near Mumbai; he figures in an inscription from Nanaghat too. The next ruler

Plate 5.6: Silver Coin of Śaka Kshatrapa Nahapana

Kṛishṇa I is mentioned in his inscription from Nasik, which therefore should have come under the Sātavāhana authority. The king Sātakarṇi, certainly one of the early rulers of this dynasty, is known from two records found in Nasik; he is possibly the same with the Sātakarṇi of the west figuring in Khāravela's *praśasti*. As he figures also in an inscription from Sanchi, there is a likelihood of the spread of the Sātavāhana rule in the Vidiśā area in eastern Malwa. His coins coming from Kaundinyapur in Vidarbha may also suggest an expansion of the Sātavāhana territory to the east. In view of his likely identification with the Elder Saraganus (Sātakarṇi I) in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, the Sātavāhana domain appears to have embraced the northern Konkan (Aparānta) coast, including the port of Kalliene (modern Kalyan near Mumbai).

The steady rise of the Sātavāhanas in the western and central parts of the Deccan and also in Vidiśā area to the north of the Narmada received a major jolt from Nahapāna, the Śaka kshatrapa ruler of western India. Nahapāna (in Iranian language *nah* means people and *pāna* means protector) belonged to the Kshahārāta family (the dynastic name is derived from *shahr* or realm and *raday* or protector, i.e. the protector of the realm) which was one of the two Śaka ruling lineages in western India. He is the same as king Nambanus (Mambanus) of Barygaza (ancient Bhrigukachchha, modern Broach in Gujarat), mentioned in the *Periplus*. That he was gaining political control at the expense of the Sātavāhanas will be evident from the distribution of his records: three inscriptions from Nasik, one each from Karle and Junnar (both located close to Pune). All these areas under the Śaka rule had previously formed part of the Sātavāhana realm. A Nasik inscription impresses upon his sway over Bhrigukachchha, Daśapura (Mandasore in western Madhya Pradesh), Surparaka (Sopara, a suburb of Mumbai) and Govardhana (Nasik). The *Periplus* reports that Kalliene was a lawful port (*nominos enthesmos*) under the rule of Elder Saraganus (Sātakarṇi I), but during the reign of Sandanes (identified either with Sundara Sātakarṇi or Chandana Sātakarṇi of the Purāṇas) it suffered a decline. The king of Barygaza, Nambanus put a naval blockade around the port and forced the visiting ships to go to

Barygaza. Kalyan's prosperity suffered and it did not figure in the list of ports available in the *Geography of Ptolemy* (AD 150). Nahapāna probably ruled from the late first century AD to the second decade of the second century AD. His reign marked the beginning of the Śaka-Sātavāhana struggle, which became a major feature of the politics in the Deccan.

The second phase of the Śaka-Sātavāhana rivalry began with the accession of Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi, the greatest ruler of the Sātavāhana family in the early part of the second century. His two inscriptions from Nasik clearly point to the recovery of Nasik by the Sātavāhanas from the Śakas. The most eloquent testimony to his achievements are available in the Nasik *praśasti*, which was caused to be engraved by his mother Gautamī Balaśrī during the reign of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvī. Gautamīputra is eulogized as one who re-established the glory of the Sātavāhana family after having exterminated the Kshaharāta dynasty (*khakharātavasa niravasesakara Sātavāhanakulayasapatiṭhāpanakara*). The most clinching evidence of the defeat of Nahapāna in the hands of Gautamīputra comes from the Jogulthembi coin hoard near Nasik. Thousands of Nahapāna's coins were restruck and overstruck with the legends and symbols of Gautamīputra. In his eighteenth regnal year, he also donated to a Buddhist monastery near Nasik a piece of land, which till then had been enjoyed by Usavadāta, Nahapāna's son-in-law (*khetaṁ ajakalakīyaṁ Usavadātena bhuktam*). Only after the political and military ouster of the Śaka ruler could Gautamiputra have held the plot once possessed by his rival and made a gift of the same plot to the Buddhist monastery. The inscription in question also underlines that his victory over the Śakas must have been complete in or before his eighteenth regnal year. This marks the second phase of the Śaka-Sātavāhana conflict that tilted clearly in favour of the Sātavāhanas.

Gautamīputra's success was however, not merely limited to his victory over the Śaka Kshaharātas. The Nasik *praśasti* describes him as the ruler of Asika (Ṛishika between the Godavari and the Kṛishṇa), Asaka (Aśmaka to the north of Ṛishika), Mūlaka (area around Pratishṭhāna in the central Deccan), Kukura (northern Kathiawad), Anupa (Māhishmatī to the south of the Narmada), Vidabha (Vidarbha in Nagpur), and Ākarāvantī (Avantī located around Ujjayinī in western Malwa and Ākara in eastern Malwa around modern Sanchi-Vidiśā-Bhopal region in Madhya Pradesh). He is also praised as the lord of the following mountains (*pavata-pati*): Vijha (Vindhya or the eastern part of the Vindhya range), Achhavat (Ṛikshavat, part of the Vindhya to the north of the Narmada), Parichāta (Pāripātra or the present Aravali mountains), Sahya (Sahyadri or the Western Ghats), Kanhagiri (Kanheri near Mumbai), Mahendra (Eastern Ghats) and Setagiri (the hill near Nāgārjunakonda in the Guntur area of Andhra Pradesh). When he is lauded as the ruler whose chargers drank the water of the three seas (*tisamuda toyapīta vāhana*), there seems to have been an allusion to the expansion of the Sātavāhana power over the entire Deccan from the western to the eastern

sea-board. He fittingly assumed the epithet, the lord of the Deccan (*Dakshiṇā-pathapati*). Gautamīputra was certainly the first Sātavāhana ruler to have conquered the eastern Deccan. For the first time, the Sātavāhana authority penetrated into the southern and western part of Gujarat and Malwa too.

The end of Gautamīputra's reign of twenty-four years came in AD 130, when the throne passed on to his son and successor, Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvī who also ruled for twenty-four years (AD 130-54). Clearly identifiable with Siro P(t)olemaios (Śrī Puḷumāvī) of Ptolemy's *Geography*, his political centre continued to be at Betana (Paithan). He indeed retained the Sātavāhana control over Nasik, which has yielded his four inscriptions (years 2,6,19 and 22) and also over Karle near Pune. The latter has yielded two records (years 7 and 24). That Amaravati region in the eastern Deccan was controlled by him is evident from his inscriptions from Amaravati. He issued a particular type of coin with ship motif, which was specifically meant for circulation in the eastern Deccan. The numismatic evidence thus further corroborates the continuity of the Sātavāhana mastery over the eastern Deccan.

The political and military success of the Sātavāhanas since the days of Gautamīputra was once again cut short by another group of Śaka rulers, known as the Kārddamaka house. This Śaka ruling family appears to have come into prominence under Kshatrapa Chaṣhṭana, who was ruling in western India conjointly with his grandson, Rudradāman I in Śaka era 52 (AD 130; Andhau inscription coming from Kutch in western Gujarat). Chashtana who figures as Tiastenes in the *Geography* of Ptolemy seems to have had his capital at Ujjayinī in Avantī, according to Ptolemy. This probably speaks of the loss of control of the Sātavāhanas over Ujjayinī in western Malwa, which had earlier been captured by Gautamīputra.

The Śaka-Sātavāhana struggle thus entered its third phase at the peak of which the Śaka power experienced a major expansion, thanks largely to the exploits of Rudradāman I. His famous inscription from Junagarh (the first *praśasti* in classical Sanskrit), dated Śaka era 72 (AD 150) credits him with the assumption of the higher title, *Mahākshatrapa* (*svayamadhigata mahākshatrapa*). This implies that he had become an independent ruler in or before AD 150 by disregarding his erstwhile overlords—the Kushāṇas. Rudradāman I established his power over Ākarāvantī, Ānartta (northern part of Kathiawad), Surashṭra (Kathiawad peninsula), Śvabhra (on the banks of the Sabarmati), Kaccha (Kutch), Sindu-Sauvira (lower Indus valley both to the east and the west of the Indus), Kukura, Aparānta and Nishāda (located somewhere between the Vindhya and the Pāripātra mountains). Several of the conquered areas had also figured in the list of territories under the Sātavāhanas, according to the Nasik *praśasti*. One can easily infer that there were a few common areas which proved to be the bone of contention between the Sātavāhanas and the Śakas. Rudradāman I, according to the Junagarh *praśasti*, twice defeated Sātakarṇi, the lord of the Deccan, but spared him on account of the nearness

of relation; this brought him glory (*Dakshiṇāpathaptessātakarṇerdvirapi nirvyājamavajityāvajitya sambandhamaviduratayā anutsādanātprāptayaśa*). The defeated Sātakarṇi was doubtless a Sātavāhana king. But his identity has not been conclusively proved. Some historians consider the defeated Sātavāhana ruler to be Gautamīputra himself, some others seek to identify him with Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvī. However, an inscription from Kanheri informs us that the Sātavāhana king Vāsiṣṭhīputra Sātakarṇi married the daughter of *Mahākshatrapa* RU (the name is unfortunately broken and not legible therefore). If *Mahākshatrapa* RU is the same as Rudradāman I, then the defeated Sātavāhana king would be Vasishthiputra Sātakarṇi, who by the virtue of being the son-in law of Rudradāman, was not uprooted by his Śaka adversary. The third phase of this hostility clearly marked an ascendancy of the Śakas.

Despite the heavy losses suffered, the Sātavāhanas somehow managed to retain their control over their primary stronghold in Nasik and western Deccan (two inscriptions of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Sātakarṇi from Nasik and Nanaghat in his year 13). Some of his coins were meant for circulation specifically in the eastern Deccan, which continued to be part of the Sātavāhana realm. Of the three successors of this ruler, Yajñasri Sātakarṇi was a prominent king. Inscriptions attest to his long reign of at least 27 years during which the Sātavāhana territorial possession comprised Nasik, western Deccan, eastern Deccan and Vidarbha (indicated by his inscriptions and some of his coins). He was probably the last of the powerful Sātavāhana monarchs. His three successors, Vijaya Sātakarṇi, Chandrasvātī Sātakarṇi and Puḷumāvī ruled over a much truncated territory confined to Andhra Pradesh and in the Bellary area of Karnataka.

The spectacular spread of the Śaka prowess under Rudradāman I could not be kept up by his successors, who however, retained their independent position in western Malwa, Gujarat and Kathiawad till the early fifth century. There is little doubt that the Deccan came into considerable political limelight with the emergence and consolidation of the Sātavāhana power. The Śaka-Sātavāhana rivalry over a protracted period was indeed a salient feature of the politics of peninsular India. An analysis of the Śaka-Sātavāhana struggle underlines that there were a few areas which were commonly sought after by the two rivals. One such area was certainly the Malwa region which stood, as it were, as a corridor between north and peninsular India. The western part of Malwa, with Ujjayinī as its premier political and urban centre, was in intimate contact with the Gujarat coast where was situated the famous port of Barygaza. Ākara, or the eastern part of Malwa probably provided the access to the diamond mines of Panna in eastern Madhya Pradesh (therefore the ancient name Ākara meaning mine), which too was a bone of contention between the Śakas and the Sātavāhanas. Both the powers appear to have been aware of the importance of the sea-borne trade with the Roman empire

and vied with each other to capture and control ports like Barygaza, Sopara and Kalyan. Economic factors seem to have strongly influenced the course of the Śaka-Sātavāhana rivalry in the Deccan.

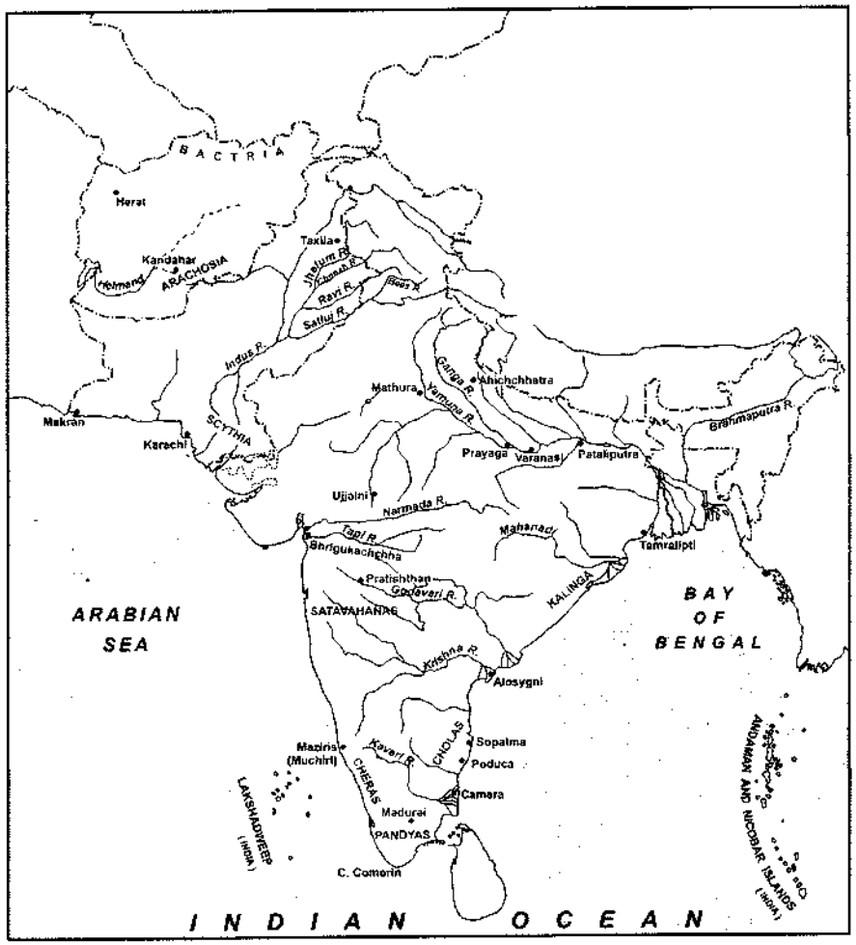
The demise of the Sātavāhana power in AD 225 brought in a few successor states of lesser prowess in different parts of the Deccan. Of them, the Ikshvākus attained prominence in eastern Deccan. Four Ikshvāku rulers were in possession of this area for nearly a century (AD 225–325) and ruled from their capital Vijyapurī, the remains of which have been unearthed from the famous archaeological site of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh.

V

Politics in the Far South

The region to the south of the Krishna was known as Drāvidadeśa from which the author of the *Periplus* and Ptolemy must have derived the term Damirica (or Limyrike). While the Deccan experienced a full-fledged monarchcial state system during this period, the contemporary far south does not offer evidence of a similar development. The earliest Tamil literature—Sangam literature—offers some images of the political activities in the deep south where ancient Tāmilakam was gaining greater prominence. The recent discovery of the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions have also helped a better understanding, thanks to the researches of Iravatham Mahādevan. One may recall that Aśoka was aware of the Choḷas, Pāṇḍyas, Cheraputras and Satyaputras as his southern neighbours.

These groups appear prominently in the Sangam texts. The Sangam literature is bardic in character, composed in praise of heroic figures. Among dominant themes of this poetry are wars and love. Datable from 200 BC to AD 300 (though this is by no means a unanimous opinion), the Sangam texts refer to five *tinais* or ecological zones. The fertile river valleys were known as the Marudam *tinai;* the Neidal *tinai* stood for the coastal tract and the deltaic area; the hilly regions were labelled as Kurinji *tinai* and the Mullai *tinai* connoted the dry pasture grounds. The Mullai *tinai,* though representing an arid zone, could be made fit for cultivation by artificial irrigation. The fifth *tinai* was Palai, an arid and scrub region, located not far from Madurai. The most suitable area for the rise of political powers was of course the Marudam *tinai.* The three most prominent powers in the Sangam texts were the Choḷas in the lower Kaveri valley and the Kaveri delta, the Pāṇḍyas in the Tāmraparni-Vaigai valleys with Madurai as their seat of power and the Cheras with Karur as their capital in the western part of the Kaveri valley. All these three powers were located in the Marudam *tinai.* The Sangam texts are replete with descriptions of the heroic exploits of rulers of these three groups. Incessant clashes among the three groups form a major theme



Map 5.1: The Subcontinent during the Śaka-Kushaṇa-Sātavāhana Phase

of the Tamil heroic poetry. Of them, specially celebrated were Nedunjeral of the Cheras and Karikala of the Cholas. The Cholas, the Cheras and the Pāṇḍyas are distinguished from other powers as *ventara* or *vendara*, i.e. leading political entities. The hilly area and the zone covered with shrubs and bushes were unsuitable for sedentary agriculture, but supported grazing of animals. It is therefore logical that these two zones are prominently associated with the accounts of cattle-raids in the Sangam texts. It is true that political situation was changing in the Tamilakam from the set up encountered during the fourth-third century BC. But it is doubtful if the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pāṇḍyas had by this time acquired the typical features of a monarchical polity. Romila Thapar argues that their condition was analogous to that of chiefdoms in north India in the age of the Buddha, rather than to the well-developed territorial state system.

VI

Polity and Administration

The period under review marks the spread and consolidation of the monarchical state system, especially in peninsular India: this will be evident from our preceding discussion on the political situation. Brahmanical law-books (Dharmaśāstras) delved into various aspects of the kingdom, which was considered as the ideal polity in these treatises. A state (*rājya*), according to the Dharmaśāstra of Manu and the *Śāntiparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, consisted of seven limbs (*saptāṅga*). An earlier discussion on the same topic had already figured in the Kauṭilya *Arthaśāstra*, which enlisted seven elements (*prakṛitis*). Though the number seven is constant, the change of the terminology from *prakṛiti* to Aṅga is of crucial significance. The list in the *Arthaśāstra* and that in the Dharmaśāstras indeed share many common features, though there are significant departures between the two types of treaties. The seven elements/limbs are: *svāmī, amātya, janapada, durga, kośa, bala* and *mitra*.

Svāmī: It stands usually for the king (*rājā*), though the possibility of a *svāmī* in a non-monarchical polity (*vairājya*) has not been ruled out. It is logical, therefore, to consider the *svāmī* as the head of the state. The *svāmī* is unanimously held as the foremost element or limb of the state.

Amātya: The *amātya* stands only second in importance to the *svāmī*. Most of the theoretical treatises regard the *amātya* as equivalent to *mantrī* (minister) and *sachiva* (secretary), though Kauṭilya clearly differentiates between the *amātya* and the *mantrī*. *Amātya*, in the broader sense of the term, should denote the high-ranking functionaries of the state, including ministers.

Janapada: It is called *rāshṭra* in the *Manusaṁhitā*, which places it in the fourth position. The terms *rāshṭra* and *janapada* stand for territory, and more precisely, a populated territory. Ancient Indian theorists, therefore, clearly recognized the importance of both (subject) population and territory as elements of the state.

Durgā: Known as *pura* (city) in the *Manusaṁhitā*, the term *durga* does not merely mean a fort, but a fortified urban area—possibly the capital. Manu places it in the third position unlike Kauṭilya, who considers it as the fourth element.

Kośa: The treasury is considered a vital organ of the state. The *Arthaśāstra* understandably attaches great importance to a flourishing treasury as consideration about financial matters, according to Kauṭilya, should precede all other aspects of statecraft. All theoretical treatises underline that the ruler should always be active to enrich the treasury by collecting various types of revenue.

Bala: Literally meaning force, its interchangeablity with the term *danda* (rod) implies that it signifies the coercive authority of the ruler who is given the epithet, the wielder of the rod of chastisement (*daṇḍadhara*). *Bala* and *daṇḍa*, by extension therefore, also denote the army (according to U.N. Ghoshal, the standing army), which indeed was the most apparent manifestation of the coercive authority of the ruler.

Mitra: The last and seventh element means a friend, an ally (*suhṛit*, according to Manu). The inclusion of an ally in the list of elements of the state implies that in view of these normative texts, a state should not remain in political isolation, and, therefore, required the support of allied/friendly powers.

The order of enumeration of these elements/limbs of the state is meant for showing the graded importance of these elements, which were therefore not of equal status. According to this scheme, each preceding element is more important than each succeeding element; the *svāmī* is the foremost element, followed by the *amātya* and the *mitra*, being of least importance, is placed at the end. The graded importance of these elements is judged not in terms of their normal condition, but in the degree of their affliction under calamitous condition or distress (*vysana*). The greater the degree of affliction of the element/limb by the calamity, the more is the importance of the *prakṛiti/aṅga*. The calamity affects the *svāmī* more seriously than that affecting the *amātya*; so, the *svāmī* is above the *amātya*. U.N. Ghoshal aptly labels this concept as 'political pathology'. The *Arthaśāstra* not only considers the *svāmī* as the most important element, but equates the *rājā* with *rājya* since the king epitomizes all other elements (*rājārājyamiti prakṛitisaṁkshepa*). In other words, the all-pervasive importance of the king actually leaves other elements as superfluous and redundant. By preferring the concept of *aṅga* to that of *prakṛiti*, later theorists highlighted a body polity. Though the *svāmī* is unanimously viewed as the most important limb of the body politic, each *aṅga* or limb has a prescribed and specific function which, however significant or otherwise, can be rendered best by that specific *aṅga* and not by any other limb. This concept then upholds that each and every limb, in spite of their graded importance, was indispensable and beneficial to six others (*parasparopakārīda*). This represents a more organic view of the state than the one available in the *Arthaśāstra*.

The growing importance of monarchy is clearly reflected in the assumption of grandiose titles of many rulers of this period. Many Greek and Śaka-Parthian kings used titles like *rājātirāja, mahārāja, shaonanashao* (king of kings: Kushāṇa title). This is in sharp contrast to the rather simple political epithet of *rājā* used by Aśoka. The period also witnessed the regular performance of Vedic sacrifices like Aśvamedha, Rājasūya, etc., with a view to augmenting royal power. Apart from Pushyamitra Suṅga, such Vedic sacrifices were performed by the Sātavāhanas and the Ikshvākus. These Vedic sacrifices endowed the performer with divinity, as has been

laid down in the later Vedic texts. Spellman considers this as 'occasional divinity' claimed by the king, who is elevated to the exalted position of a deity by performing a Vedic ritual on a sacred occasion. Theoretical treatises of this period uphold the concept of divine creation or divine origin of the king. The *Manusmṛiti* explains that Prajāpati (the Creator) created the king by combining the essence of divinities like Indra, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Yama, Agni, etc. More or less, a similar description also figures in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which presents the king as someone who must not only be always obeyed, but revered as well (*mānyaścha pūjyaścha nityadā*). Spellman finds in such a concept the manifestation of 'corporate divinity'. The concept implies something beyond the literal sense that a king was made of elements taken from different gods. The king resembles Indra because of his Indra-like prowess and leadership qualities; like Kuvera, the god of wealth, he showers wealth; like Agni he purifies all evil by burning it; like Yama, he represents death to his enemies, punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous. In view of the implied resemblance between the specific function of a deity and that of the ruler, Spellman discerns in such a concept the element of 'functional divinity'.

The most eloquent testimony to the practice of this concept in a monarchical set-up is offered by the Kushāṇa polity. The Kushāṇas regularly presented themselves in their inscriptions and coins as son of god (*devaputra*), which was their dynastic epithet. The title seems to have been derived from the Chinese practice of considering the ruler as the son of heaven (*Tien tzu*). One of the early Kushāṇa monarchs, V'ima Kadphises bore the epithet Dom-arta (the upholder of the cosmic order: Dasht-i-Nabur inscription). Vāsishka had the title *devamanusha*, or a god in human appearance (Kamra inscription). This has a striking correspondence to the famous dictum of Manu that even an infant ruler should not be disobeyed, as he was verily a great god in human form (*mahatīdevatāhyeshā nararūpeṇa tishṭhati*). The claim for royal divinity and divine descent assumes a special position in the Kushāṇa polity. The Kushāṇa rulers did not take recourse to the performance of various Vedic sacrifice to establish the claim for their divine descent and divine authority. On the other hand, the Kushāṇa rulers were often portrayed on the obverse of their coins with a halo behind their head. The nimbate figure of the ruler was certainly designed on the coin to visually represent him as a supra-mundane being. Similarly, Vima Kadphises appears in some of his coins as soaring over the cloud, thereby stressing on his super-human attributes. Among many deities figuring on the reverse of the Kushāṇa coins, those of Nike (goddess of victory), Nana (goddess of fortune), Shaoreoro (the desirable kingdom) and suchlike were regularly depicted. As circulating coins carried the images of the Kushāṇa king on the obverse, the special position of the ruler vis-à-vis the deities was stressed upon; the coins must have served the purpose of the propagation of the cult of the emperor. B.N. Mukherjee has drawn our attention to a particular gold

coin of Vāsudeva I. The obverse shows the standing Kushāṇa ruler, with a halo behind his head, and dressed in heavy coat, boots and trousers. The reverse carries the image of a four-armed male deity in almost identical attire; of the four arms, three arms are clearly shown to have carried a conch-shell (*śaṅkha*), a wheel (*chakra*) and mace (*gadā*), the object in the fourth arm is unclear. The deity represented is undoubtedly Vāsudeva Krishṇa, in whose depiction the similarity with the royal figure on the obverse was deliberately stressed. Moreover, the deity is also introduced on the coin as *bazodeo*, i.e. Vāsudeva (Krishṇa). Thus the identity between the name of the king and that of the deity was also strongly underlined.

The Kushāṇa rulers pushed the claim of their divinity even further by constructing dynastic sanctuaries (*devakulas*). *Devakulas* were constructed at Mat near Mathurā (wherefrom comes the famous seated figure of V'ima), Surkhkotal (in Afghanistan), Khalchayan and Airtām (Uzbekistan). Our knowledge about the fifth Kushāṇa *devakula* derives from the Rabatak inscription, recording the construction of a *devakula* under Kanishka I order. The reigning Kushāṇa monarch ordered the installation of the images of his ancestors (Kujula and V'ima) and also of himself, obviously for propitiation. The Kushāṇa monarch was therefore deified in his life time along with his deceased ancestors. The Kushāṇa empire was not only far-flung; in it were included an immense variety of ethnic, religious and cultural groups in widely differing socio-economic conditions. The Kushāṇa monarch, by deliberately establishing a cult of the emperor, sought to make the ruler the cementing factor among the diverse groups of people inhabiting the widely dispersed territory of the Kushāṇa realm. Put differently, this ideology resulted in the concentration of immense power in the hands of the Kushāṇa ruler and also helped integrate the polity.

The two large polities—the Kushāṇas in the north and the Sātavāhanas in the south—consisted of territorial/administrative divisions. One is not sure whether the junior co-ruler of the conjoint rule in the Kushāṇa realm was entrusted with the administration of a provincial unit. The Sātavāhanas used to appoint *amātyas* in charge of the large territorial units of their realm. These *amātyas* could have belonged to the rank of a minister (*mantrī*), since in the theoretical treatises of the time, *mantrī* and *amātya* are considered synonymous and interchangeable terms. The administrator of large regions in the Kushāṇa realm was known as *kshatrapa*, a system in vogue since the days of the Achaeminid rule in north-western India. Kanishka's two administrators at Vārāṇasī, possibly an administrative centre, were *kshatrapas* Vanasphara and Kharapallana; in the same vein, Chashtana and Rudradāman I probably served the Kushāṇas as provincial governors (*kshatrapa*). Significantly, both Vanasphara and Kharapallana were primarily military officers (*daṇḍanāyaka*); it also implies that there was little differentiation between military and civil administration since a military officer was entrusted with the administration of a locality.

When Rudradāman I was ruling as an independent *mahākshatrapa*, the administration of the Kathiawad region was placed in charge of an *amātya*, Pahlava Suviśākha. Rudradāman I, according to the Junagarh *praśasti*, had two types of high-ranking functionaries: *karmasachiva* and *matisachiva*. The first appears to have been an important executive officer, while the second literally means an officer offering intellect (*mati*). The *matisachiva* probably gave counsel to the ruler and, therefore, could have functioned as a minister. In the outlying areas of the Kushāṇa realm were employed an officer, *karalang*, who was probably in charge forts in the outlying areas (Iranian *kar/kara*=lord, master; *lrang=draṅga* =a fort in the border).

A salient feature of administrative system was the mobilization of resources through revenue measures. The *Śantiparva* of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Manusaṁhitā* often lay down that the ruler was entitled to taxes in the form of a share of the produce (largely agricultural) since he ensured protection of his subjects and maintained the ideal social order based on the *varṇāśramadharma*. Implicit in this theory is a kind of contract or agreement between the ruler and his subjects as the basis of the king's entitlement to taxes: the ruler was entitled to taxes from subjects in lieu of rendering protection and maintenance (*rakshaṇa* and *pālana*), which were considered as sacred and foremost duties of a ruler. Rudradāman was lauded for raising in a just manner (*yathāvaprāptaiḥ*) levies like *bali*, *śulka* and *bhāga*, all of which were well-known revenue terms. *Bhāga* stood for a share in agricultural produce (usually one-sixth), while *bali* was an obligatory impost on land. *Śulka* denotes tolls and customs, which were doubtless raised from commercial transactions. The Śaka-Kushāṇa-Sātavāhana phase in the Indian history is noted for its widespread trade contacts and, therefore, it is no accident that tolls and customs would figure among the heads of revenue. As epigraphic evidence shows, the Sātavāhanas levied *kārukara* and *deya-meya*. *Kārukara* evidently was a tax (*kara*) imposed on crafts/artisans (*karu*). The term *meya* means something (levied) in measure, in other words, a tax in kind; the corresponding first part *deya* (what is to be given) should, therefore, logically denote a levy in cash. The remarkable proliferation of crafts during this period (discussed later) must have encouraged rulers to extract a levy from craftsmen. The Sātavāhana inscriptions often record remissions from certain kinds of taxes when land was donated by rulers to a Buddhist monastery. This implies the collection of those taxes on usual occasions, an exemption being allowed as a special concession at an auspicious occasion. One of such taxes was that levied on salt-production which in early Indian theoretical treatises was always considered as a mining operation and on which the political authority demanded a levy. Significantly enough, Pliny noted that salt was regularly extracted from Mount Oromenus (the Salt Range in Pakistan) and the ruler could raise larger resources from the cess on salt than that from even the mines of diamond. There were possibly a few more taxes which were viewed as painful by Rudradāman I, who, therefore,

desisted from collecting such taxes: these were *vishti* and *praṇaya*. Both the revenue terms have been known since the days of the *Arthaśāstra;* the first denoted forced labour and the second, an emergency taxation noted for its harshness. In fact, the first epigraphic reference to these two revenue terms figures in Rudradāman's Junagarh *praśasti*.

While monarchical polity was indeed surging ahead during the period under review, certain areas in west-central part of India witnessed the presence of a few non-monarchical clans who are mostly known from their coins and seals. When the Malavas and the Yaudheyas proclaimed victories as *gaṇas* in their seals (*Malavānām jayaḥ; Yaudheyagaṇasya jayaḥ*), they certainly underlined the non-monarchical character of their polity. The Dharmas'astras do not display a favourable attitude to the *gaṇa-saṁghas*, which were considered as an irritant to the monarchical state.

VII

Economy and Society

Significant changes are noticeable in the economic and social situation of this period, though there were indeed elements of continuities. The most important facet of continuity in material life was the on-going dependence on agriculture as the mainstay of economic life. What requires our attention is the spread of sedentary agriculture for the first time to peninsular India. The place name Dhānyakaṭaka, a famous Buddhist centre in the eastern Deccan, literally means a rice-bowl, and is an indicator of the general spread of the fully sedentary agrarian society in the Deccan. But for the foundation of regular plough-based agriculture, as Sudarsan Senaviratne has argued, the formation of the state polity would have hardly materialized under the Sātavāhanas and in Kaliṅga. Of the variety of crops, paddy was of course the most important and the *śāli* continued to be the rice par excellence. The *Milindapañho* shows an awareness of the difference between the *śāli*, fit for royal dietary practice, and the coarse *kumudbhaṇḍikā* rice (of Aparānta or Konkan), which was consumed by slaves (*dāsa*) and servants (*karmakara*). Mention must also be made of wheat and barley among cereals. The production of sugarcane figures in Pliny's account, which also speaks highly of the Indian cotton. Cotton plantation was absolutely essential for the production of the famous Indian textiles. The spread of agriculture in the Deccan is likely to have augmented cotton production as the black soil of the Deccan was suited for it. Thanks to Kosambi's insightful reading of an inscription from Nāsik, one notes the beginning of the large-scale coconut plantation in the western Deccan. The said inscription speaks of the plantation of 32,000 coconut saplings (*dvātriṁśatasahasra śiśunārigelamūlāni*) in a village near Nasik. Apart from bearing excellent fruit, the plant also yielded coconut coir, which was widely used as cordage to fasten the wooden planks of water-crafts. For

the first time, black pepper plantation in Kerala gained immense economic prominence. The Classical texts, especially Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* and the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, speak highly of the production of this spice.

The cultivator (*kuṭumbika, hālika* and *karshaka*) is present in many literary texts and inscriptions. In the latter source, the cultivator (or at least a prosperous one) often figures as an important donor or patron to the Buddhist *saṁgha*. One of the best visual representations of the peasant is available in a Gandhāra sculpture. At the pedestal of a seated Buddha image was depicted the figure of a cultivator, ploughing the land with a pair of oxen which were driven by his goad. Agriculture became so commonplace that a purely religious text like the *Milindapañho* contained information about eight different stages of agricultural operations right from removing weeds from the field to the final harvesting and winnowing of crops. Compatible with these literary images are the archaeological findings of agricultural tools—mostly of iron—like the ploughshare, axes, adzes, spade and sickle from Taxila and Sanchi.

In India, agrarian development was considerably linked with irrigation system (*setu*). Manu favours capital punishment to those who were accused of breaching a hydraulic project, though he also recommends a lighter punishment of 1000 *paṇas* if the offender repaired the damaged *setu*. Excavation of a tank (*taḍāga*) and a well (*kūpa*) has been lauded in the normative text as a highly meritorious act. Inscriptions are replete with recording of the donation of these two types of small-scale, local-level irrigation projects under individual and/or group initiative. Taxila has yielded several such instances of the excavations of tanks and wells in the early centuries of the Christian era. A Greek named Theodoras donated an excavated tank near Taxila, according to an inscription of the first century. At Mathurā a state functionary under *kshatrapa* Soḍāsa not only caused a tank to be excavated, but also strengthened the western embankment of another tank and donated a well. Similar encouragement came from Nahapāna and his son-in-law Usavadāta to dig tanks (Nasik inscription of Nahapāna). A local *amātya*, Skandsvātī, was credited with the excavation of a tank in Vaijyantī (near north Kanara coast) in the third century. These are instances of individual initiative in launching and maintaining local-level irrigation projects.

The normative treatises on the other hand, uniformly maintain that all hydraulic projects (*setus*) belonged to the king. It is reasonable to assume that administrative initiative and political support were necessary and better visible in the construction of large-scale, supra-local irrigation projects for bringing a wide area under irrigation by channelizing the water of a river through a network of canals. This was certainly a much more complex operation—technologically, administratively and from the point of resources—than excavating a well or a tank for local-level irrigation. Supra-local and river-based hydraulic projects therefore seem to have required

enormous amount of resources and administrative organization, which would have been normally beyond the scope of an individual or several individuals. Royal initiative and direct patronage are mostly associated with large-scale irrigation projects. The most eloquent testimony of this comes from the Junagarh *praśasti* of Rudradāman I. Close to present Junagarh, once stood a large reservoir named Sudarśana, originally built during Chandragupta Maurya's reign; during the subsequent rule of Aśoka, the *setu* was further provided with channels (*praṇālī*). This was done with a view to distributing the water from the reservoir to cultivated tracts. In the very first year of Rudradāman's reign, the entire water in the reservoir drained out (*nihṣritasarvatoyam*) because of a breach in the embankment of the *setu;* this brought to the locality the appearance of a terrible desert (*marudhanvam kalpamatibhṛsham*). Rudradāman, by spending a huge amount of money (*mahatādhanaughena*) from his own treasury (*svasmātkośat*), repaired the embankment in a short time (*anatimahatākālena*), strengthened and broadened the embankment three times (*triguṇadṛiḍhatara vistārāyāmāsa*) and enhanced the visual appeal (*sudarśanatarakāritam*).

The remains of a large hydraulic project (200 BC–AD 200) were found from the excavation site at Sringaverapura (near Allahabad). The water of the Ganga was brought to the project by a channel through which water entered a storage tank (120m. × 26m. × 7m.). The first storage tank was connected with a smaller second storage tank (34m. × 10m. × 4m.) with a help of an inlet channel (5.30m. × 1.35m.). Both the tanks were brick-built. The greater depth of the first storage chamber may suggest that it offered opportunities of sedimentation of water from the river; then the desilted water entered the second chamber. It is true that this project was meant for providing drinking water to a religious complex and not directly to an arable area. But it carries clear impressions of a complex technology and organization to distribute water from a distant riverine source. There is a distinct likelihood that it was built under administrative supervision, though it is not possible to identify the politico-administrative authority. It must be underlined clearly here that there are small number of known examples of the construction and maintenance of large-scale, supra-local and complex irrigation projects under royal initiative. The instances of individual and non-government efforts to promote irrigation facilities through tanks and wells far outnumber those under state initiative. It is also unlikely that all hydraulic projects were under the control of the ruler, though that is regularly recommended in normative texts. There is, therefore, little possibility to locate a hydraulic state and hence, despotic power of the ruler following Karl Wittfogel. That there were, however, skilled hydraulic mechanics during this period is borne out by an inscription referring to artisans, making hydraulic machines (*odayantrikas*). One new irrigation device was a water-wheel to which were attached pots (*rahaṭṭagaḍiyā*, Sanskrit *araghaṭṭaghaṭikā*, in the *Gāthāsaptaśatī* of Hāla) filled with water. The circular rotation of the wheel helped in pouring water from the attached pots.

The spread of agriculture and the diversity of crops were also associated with the growing complexities in the agrarian economy. There are clear instances of the transfer of land—though largely as a religious donation—which cannot but demonstrate the recognition of the individual holding of land. Thus in the first century AD, Nahapāna's son-in-law Usavadāta purchased a plot of land from a brāhmaṇa, Vārāhīputra Aśvibhūtī and the purchased plot was then donated to a Buddhist monastery near Nasik. The brāhmaṇa owned the plot because he inherited it from his father (*sapitusatakam*, Sanskrit *sapitṛisatvakam*). Thus ownership was decided, among other things, by inheritance and by the transferability of the object from the owner to another by sale, gift or mortgage. Interestingly enough, the early Dharmaśāstras, unlike the *Arthaśāstra*, do not speak of the extensive crown lands (*sītā*) cultivated under the supervision of the director of agriculture (*sītādhyaksha*). However, occasional mention of a royal land (*rājakam khettam*) is not unheard of in inscriptions.

VIII

Crafts and Artisanal Activities

The non-agrarian sector of the economy did not also lag behind. A spectacular proliferation of crafts and professions will be unmistakable from a perusal of the Jātaka tales and other Buddhist texts, inscriptions and field archaeological evidence. Various craftsmen figure in inscriptions as donors to the Buddhist and Jaina monasteries. Prominent among them were the carpenters (*vaḍḍhaki*), who according to a Jātaka story, resided in a village near Vārāṇasī. Close to that village stood a forest, which provided them with the primary raw materials; the finished manufactured items were obviously sold by them at Vārāṇasī. The separate references to the bamboo-worker (*vasakāra*) and reed-maker (*konāchika*) clearly suggest some degree of crafts specialization. The *mālākāra* or gardener or florist seems to have been engaged in garland-making. The perfumer (*sovāsaka/gandhika*) seems to have catered to the urban taste. Another artisanal activity, closely related to urban life, was that of the ivory-worker (*dantakāra*). The *Periplus* and the *Geography* refer to the excellence of the ivory from Dosarene, which is identified with the southern Kaliṅga and/or northern Andhra area, noted for the availability of fine elephants. Another urbane craft catering to the luxurious taste of city-dwellers was the manufacture of jewellery and ornament-making. *Suvarṇakāra* must have been the goldsmith, while *maṇikāra* was the jeweller. Excavations at different early historical sites reveal the profusion of the craft of bead-making with beads of precious and

semi-precious gems and stones. One of the foremost crafts was certainly the manufacture of textiles, which earned widespread fame. The Jātaka stories repeatedly highlight the importance of Vārāṇasī and Mathurā as leading centres of textile production. The *Periplus* showers praise on the excellent and precious textiles from the Gangetic delta (possibly Bengal). The same text also informs us of two centres in the Deccan, namely Pratishṭhāna (Paithan) and Tagara (Ter), which were noted for the production of large quantity of ordinary cotton cloth. Weavers (*kaulika*) figure prominently in an inscription from Nasik, which must have been an important weaving centre. Ter and Arikamedu (near Pondicherry) have yielded remains of dyeing vats, which were connected with textile production. Two types of craftsmen are marked by their remarkable continuity and proliferation: *kammāra* or the blacksmith and *kaulāla* or potter. The *kammāra* figures very prominently and regularly in the Jātaka stories, which point to the dependence of the farmer on the blacksmith for getting his indispensable agricultural tools. The great diversity of potteries is best furnished by excavated and explored materials.

Artisanal activities are marked by a strong tendency on the part of the craftsmen to come under an organization of crafts and professions. Textual and epigraphic sources repeatedly refer to such organizations variously labelled as *śreṇī, gaṇa, saṁgha, puga* and *nikāya*, all of which denoted an organization of people following a common craft or profession. There was hardly a craft or profession, which did not come under the influence of the *śreṇī* type of organization. The *śreṇī* strongly encouraged hereditary profession and often arranged for apprenticeship for upcoming craftsmen who were often trained by their fathers. The emphasis on hereditary profession also paved the way for specialization and localization of crafts. The Jātaka account of a village with a thousand huts of blacksmiths (*sahassaku tika kammāragāma*) certainly impresses upon the common residence of blacksmiths. Similar descriptions of specified quarters of ivory workers and gardeners/florists (*dantakāravīthi* and *mālākāravīthi*) in urban centres point to the same direction. The leader of such a professional organization was known as *jeṭṭhaka* or *pamukha*, who was probably the most senior or the ablest craftsman or both. The normative literature seems to have been aware of the importance of these organizations of crafts and, therefore, recognize what is called *śreṇī dharma* (rules and regulations of the *śreṇī* organization). Though details of the rules of *śreṇī* are not available in the śāstras, immense importance has been attached to the cooperation among members, and to compactness and cohesion in the organization.

Inscriptions throw light on the participation of these *śreṇīs* in the existing credit network, an activity which is not known from other sources. The *śreṇī* often figures in inscriptions as having received permanent cash deposits on which interest was paid. During Nahapāna's reign, Nasik had two such organizations of weavers (*kaulikanikāya* and *aparakaulikanikāya*). Nahapāna's son-in-law deposited on a perpetual basis (*akshayanīvi*) a principal amount

of 2000 *kahāpanas* to one organization and 1000 *kahāpanas* in the second organization. The two principal amounts were never to be expended, only the accruing interest was to be enjoyed (*vriddhibhojya*). The rate of interest on the first deposit was 12 per cent a year (i.e. 240 *kahāpanas*) and 9 per cent on the second deposit (90 *kahāpanas*). The total amount of 330 *kahāpanas* as interest was used for procuring provisions and other needs of monks in a nearby Buddhist monastery. In the same vein, a high-ranking Kushāna official deposited the amount of 550 *purāṇas* (silver coins) to a flour-makers' organization (*samitkara śreṇī*) in AD 106 on the condition that the accruing interest would ensure the daily supply of *saktava*, green vegetable (*haritakālāpaka*) and salt (*lavaṇa*) to a local temple. In Nāgārjunakonda, four such organizations jointly received an amount of 330 *kārshāpaṇas*. The custom of perpetually depositing a sum strongly underlines the credibility of the *śreṇī* to people from all walks of life—from kings and members of royal families to state functionaries and common people.

All theoretical treatises strongly uphold the concept of royal authority over all mines and minerals. We have already pointed out that salt production was considered to be a prerogative of the state, which was therefore entitled to a levy on minerals and metals extracted. A reading of Ptolemy's *Geography*, together with a late Tibetan account of Lama Tāranātha, suggests that there were diamond mines at Cosa to the north of the Narmada. It probably refers to the diamond fields near Panna in Madhya Pradesh. The place was probably known as Ākara in inscriptions of second century AD. Following an in-depth probing into various sources, B.N. Mukherjee pointed to the interests of the Kushāṇas, the Sātavāhanas and the Śakas of western India in capturing and controlling this area in eastern Malwa. The *Periplus* and Ptolemy's *Geography* also inform us of the pearl fisheries at Colchi (identified with the archaeological site of Korkai near Tuticorin), which was under the control of local Pāṇḍya chieftains. Ptolemy further spoke of mines of beryl at Pounata (near Coimbatore in western Tamil Nadu). Pounata was probably located in the vicinity of Kodumanal, an archaeological site in western Tamil Nadu, famous for its crafts, especially jewelleries. No theoretical treatise of this period presents a systematic argument like the *Arthaśāstra* in favour of the working out of mines under state supervision. Political powers, however, seems to have been aware of material advantages derived from mines and the revenue bearing potential of mines and minerals.

IX

Trade and Commerce

The period under review witnessed an expansion of the trade network of India, to an unprecedented extent, both within and beyond the subcontinent. Merchants of various types began to figure prominently and regularly in

textual (especially Buddhist and Jaina) and epigraphic sources, in the latter category of sources often in the role of donors. The petty or ordinary merchant was known as *vaṇik* or *vaidehaka;* the leader of the caravan merchants or the caravan merchant himself was called the *sārthavāha.* The Jātaka tales are replete with accounts of *sārthavāhas,* maybe stereotypical, undertaking long-distance journeys from the eastern (*puvvanta*) to the western end (*aparānta*). The Tamil Sangam literature knew the salt-dealer as *uppu-vaṇikam,* dealing obviously in an essential and bulk commodity. According to the same source, the merchant in gold was distinguished from the others as *ponvaṇikam;* he evidently traded in a luxury and prestige commodity. A *lohavaṇija,* who dealt in iron/iron tools—once again, an essential commodity—figures as a donor in a Mathurā inscription. However, the most eminent among merchants was certainly the *śreshṭhi* or *seṭṭhi* who enjoyed great prominence in Buddhist and Jaina sources. Meticulous probings into the Buddhist Jātaka tales led Ivo Fiser to suggest that the *seṭṭhi* was primarily an investor in business; he appears to have invested a part of his resources/wealth with the hope of reaping a handsome amount of profit out of such investments. Fiser and Roy have rightly pointed out that though the term *seṭṭhi* was derived from Sanskrit *śreshṭhi,* known since the late Vedic times, the term *śreshṭha* in the later Vedic texts had little in common with the connotation of the term *śreshṭhi* in the sense of a merchant of fabulous wealth. Fiser infers that he actually emerged from the *gahapatis* (of the Pāli texts), who as rich land-holders, invested a part of their wealth in trade; this paved the way for the emergence of the *seṭṭhi-gahapati.* It is from the rank of the *seṭṭhi-gahapati* that the *seṭṭhi* subsequently rose to eminence. The Jātakas describe—often stereotypically—the *seṭṭhi* as someone possessing 80 crores of wealth (*asitikoṭivibhava*). Though this is indeed a figurative description, it points to his vast wealth. His fabulous wealth certainly separated him as an individual merchant millionaire from other traders. Richard Fick and A.N. Bose also argued for another role and function of the *seṭṭhi* on the basis of their studies of the Jātaka stories, where the *seṭṭhi* is often described to have maintained very close linkages with the ruler. The *seṭṭhi* is said to have visited the royal court thrice a day (*divasassa tayovāre rājupaṭṭhanam gachchhati*); but he does not figure in the list of the royal functionaries (*rājabhoggas*). The Jātakas too portrayed the ruler as having maintained a friendly relation with the *seṭṭhi.* Fick and Bose infer that the *seṭṭhi* visited the royal court not in his capacity as an outstanding individual merchant prince, but in his role as the leader of the mercantile community. The recognition of the *seṭṭhi* as the leader and representative of merchants was surely rooted to his vast wealth, which reflects his success in trading ventures. The linkages of the *seṭṭhi* in the corridors of power must have further enhanced his eminence. As the *seṭṭhiputta* (son of a *seṭṭhi*) was synonymous with the *seṭṭhi,* it implies that the profession of the *seṭṭhi* tended to become hereditary. Based on their enormous wealth and leadership among merchants, *seṭṭhis* tended to form

an exclusive social identity that is best expressed in the term *seṭṭhikula* (the *seṭṭhi* as a social group).

The social and cultural ethos of the period under review was conducive to the growing importance of commerce. Gregory Schopen, on the basis of his insightful studies of the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya,* enlightens us how monks started owning private property. The injunction that monks would be subjected to the payment of tolls and road taxes is a clear pointer to the participation of itinerant monks in transaction and transportation of trade goods. The tolls and customs, which the monks had to pay, is likely to have come out of their personal property and/or their personal financial resources. The *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya* suggests the practices of lending on interests and writing of loan contracts. Both are intimately associated with commercial processes and both were beneficial to the material well-being of the Buddhist Saṃgha. The discovery of inscribed gold tablets from the Central Asian site of Dalverjin Tepe, mentioning the monks from Kalyāṇa, a well-known port (close to Mumbai) of the early historical times, assumes considerable significance in this context.

Available sources speak of various routes of overland communication: this itself is pointer to the development of trade. The well-known north-south trunk route linking Śrāvastī with Paithan continued to be regularly traversed. Another route, figuring in the Jātakas, connected Champā (near Bhagalpur) with Pushkalāvatī (Charsadda near Peshawar, Pakistan). A third route provided overland connectivity between Pāṭaliputra to Pāṭala in the Indus delta. Barygaza (Bhṛigukachchha or modern Broach in Gujarat), the premier port in western India could be reached, according to the *Periplus,* from Kabul by a overland route that passed through Peucalaotis (Pushkalāvatī), Taxila, the Punjab and Mathurā. From Mathurā, the route proceeded towards Ujjayinī in western Malwa and from thereon to the Gujarat coast. Himanshuprabha Ray and Upinder Singh take a close look at the donative records at Sanchi where numerous donors from far and near assembled. Their studies give us the emergent image of Sanchi as a nodal point that facilitated both communications with and donations to Sanchi. The importance of the passes in the Western Ghats (especially Thalghat, Bhorghat and Nanaghat), providing the vital linkages between the Konkan coast and interior mainland of Maharashtra, was first underlined by Kosambi. Himanshuprabha Ray further elaborated this idea by arguing for the interactions among the itinerant merchants, the monks in the Buddhist monasteries and the *śreṇīs* of artisans and craftsmen. The monasteries, often located on or close to these passes in the western Deccan, helped exchange and circulation of information among merchants and craftsmen, who often were significant donors to the monasteries.

The contacts of the subcontinent with areas abroad make significant reading in the context of the linkages of South Asia with West and Central Asia on the one hand, and the eastern Mediterranean regions on the other

by overland and maritime routes. The development of overland routes probably has a longer tradition than maritime contacts. The expansion of the Roman empire resulted in the growing demands among the wealthy and powerful Romans for exotic and luxury commodities from the eastern lands. The social and cultural approvals of luxurious lifestyle in the Roman empire, according to G. Parker, gave a fillip to long-distance commerce, including trade with the subcontinent.

One of the most coveted items was silk, which was produced only in China and which reached markets in the Roman empire by a far-flung network of overland routes from East Asia. A combined testimony of Chinese and Greek texts and some archaeological evidence offers interesting glimpses of this overland route. The eastern terminus of this route was Loulan in China; from there, it proceeded westwards to Tun-huang or Dunhuang (celebrated for its cave paintings of Buddhist themes). In order to avoid the terrible Taklamakan desert, the route then bifurcated into two: one to the north and the other to the south of the Taklamakan desert. Chinese silk being the most coveted commodity transported along these routes, these became famous as the northern and the southern silk routes (the coinage of this expression 'Seidenstrasse' or silk route took place in the nineteenth century and not during the ancient times). The northern route touched Turfan, Kucha, Aksu and reached Su-le or present Kashgarh. The southern route passed through Shanshan, Niya, Khotan and Yarkand and converged with the northern route at Kashgarh. Strabo called the same place as Serike as his informants had the knowledge of the availability of Chinese silk at Kashgarh, beyond the east of which the Classical writers had no direct knowledge. The route then extended up to Merv (Mu-lu in the Chinese texts) or Margiana, that could be reached either through Ta-Yuan (Samarkand in Ferghana) or through Bactra (Mazr-i-shariff in Afghanistan). From Merv the overland route went through Hecatompylos and Ecabatana in Iran; Hatra in Iraq; Palmyra and Petra in Jordan, and from there it terminated in the eastern Mediterranean sea-board. The important point here is that Bactra had regular political and economic linkages with Kabul, Peshawar and Taxila. The overland silk road was indeed full of hazards and uncertainties. A considerable stretch of this network passed through the Arsacid empire in Iran, which occupied the vantage position of an intermediary—both from geographical and commercial points of view. Taking full advantages of this position, the Arsacid rulers extracted considerable tolls and customs from the overland trade passing through it. The hostile attitude of the Roman empire to the Arsacid realm is well-recorded in history. There was, therefore, an earnest need for an alternative intermediary power through which commodities could pass with fewer exactions of tolls and customs. The rise and expansion of the Kushāṇa power, with its core area in Bactria, provided the required alternative space. Commodities, including the Chinese silk, could now be

routed through the Kushāṇa realm and this was instrumental in integrating South Asia with the silk route network.

Recent discoveries of antiquities, including inscriptions and rock art in Chilas, Gilgit and Hunza areas in the Karakorum highway furnish fascinating evidence of overland networks through this area. The simultaneous presence of Kharoshṭī, Chinese and Sogdian inscriptions in the Karakorum highway sites certainly speaks of the convergence of peoples at these points. Rock engravings regularly depict men dressed in typical Central Asian attire, sometimes with conical Scythian caps, and worshipping Buddha images and *stūpas*. Thanks to the researches by Jettmar, Dani and Fussman, exchanges of commodities and ideas in what was the Jibin (Kashmir) route have come to light; the Jibin route, though extremely hazardous, offered a shorter approach from Yarkand to South Asia through northernmost Kashmir. However, the well-established overland network linking Bactria with Kabul and then with Pushkalāvatī and Taxila remained the main artery of overland communication in the north-western borderland of the subcontinent.

Another major change occurred in Asian long-distance trade in the late first century BC and had profound impacts on India. Increasingly better knowledge and utilization of the monsoon winds by sailors and shippers opened up immense possibilities of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. The author of the *Periplus* and Pliny noted that the Hippalus wind (south-western monsoon wind) began blowing from the month of Epiphi (July) and greatly facilitated the shipping from the Red Sea ports to the western littorals of India. The long-cherished notion that the wind was so named after Hippalus, a Greek sailor who discovered it, has been of late questioned, thanks to the researches of S. Mazarino. There are sufficient empirical grounds to argue that Asian and African shippers and sailors had already been acquainted with the more or less predictable alterations of the monsoon wind system. It will be difficult, however, to deny that Greek and Roman sailors and perhaps Arab and Jewish merchants also regularly utilized the monsoon wind system to increase the volume of maritime trade with the subcontinent. The incorporation of Egypt in the Roman empire considerably contributed to the growth of sea-borne trade between the Roman empire and India. During his stay with his friend Aelius Gallus, the Roman governor of Egypt (20-19 BC), Strabo noted that each year about 120 ships sailed to India—something which was inconceivable previously. Even if one discounted this number of ships as an exaggerated figure, the clear impression of a considerable shipping is unmistakable in Strabo's accounts. Lionel Casson points out, on the basis of his meticulous examination of the *Periplus* and the *Naturalis Historia*, that a voyage from the Red Sea port of Berenike or Myos Hormos (both excavted sites) would bring a ship to Adulis at the mouth of the Red Sea from where it was possible to reach the famous port of Muziris in Kerala in less than 40 days, if not actually in twenty days. The subcontinent, thus, experienced

long-distance trade both by overland and maritime routes during the first three centuries AD. The much coveted Chinese silk could now enter the north-western part of the subcontinent from Bactria and Kabul; then the overland route passed through the Punjab to reach Mathurā, which in its turn was connected with Ujjayinī. From there, the overland route brought merchants and merchandise to Barygaza—the greatest port in western India—from where silk and other precious commodities sailed for destinations in the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. This is popularly known as Indo-Roman trade, though it is an inaccurate description. India did not have any direct linkage with Rome, but commercial contacts prevailed between South Asia and the eastern Mediterranean region, which was included in the Roman empire. A perusal of different Classical accounts, indigenous literary texts and archaeological materials highlights the importance of the following ports on both the sea-boards of India.

1. Barbaricum, a port in the middle mouth of the river Indus, figures prominently in the *Periplus* and also in Ptolemy's *Geography*. Chinese texts inform us about the flourishing sea-borne commerce between Shen-du (lower Indus valley and the Indus delta) and Da-Chin (the Roman empire). The *Periplus* further describes how commodities were taken from the port of Barbaricum to the political centre at Minnagara lying further inland.
2. Barygaza was perhaps the outstanding port in western India. Identified with Bhrigukachchha of ancient Indian texts, it stood at the mouth of the river Narmada (Namados of the *Periplus*). The *Periplus* mentions that the entry to this port was difficult for non-local vessels because of the shallow water, a fact also confirmed by Sunil Gupta with his recent archaeological researches in western India. Nahapāna (Nambanus) arranged for the piloting of vessels from abroad into Barygaza by employing local fishermen who used to guide non-local vessels to Barygaza from as far Syrastrene or Saurashtra. That the contemporary political authority appreciated the significance of Barygaza as a port of international trade is clearly borne out by this account.
3. To the south of Gujarat were three ports in northern Konkan: Souppara (Sopara, ancient Śūrpāraka/Suppāraka), Kalliene (Kalyāṇa) and Semylla (Chaul). The first two are now suburbs of Mumbai, while Chaul stands to the south of Mumbai. Sopara was more prominent than the other two, being known at least since the Mauryan period. We have already mentioned the temporary decline of the port of Kalliene on account of the naval blockade imposed around it by Nahapāna.
4. Several small harbours in the south Konkan and north Kanara coast find mentions in the *Periplus* and Ptolemy's *Geography*; these were minor ports, which did not figure prominently in the overseas trade between India and the Red Sea region.

5. The outstanding port in the Malabar port was certainly Muziris (Muchiripattanam of the Sangam texts), traditionally identified with Cranganore in Kerala. In the light of recent excavations, Rajan Gurukkal and C. Whittaker seek to locate ancient Muziris at Pattanam, situated close to Cranganore. The Sangam literature often describes the arrival of *yavana* (non-Indian, possibly Graeco-Roman) ships at Muchiri; these are said to have brought profuse amount of gold, with which black pepper was purchased as their principal cargo during the return voyage. A mid-second century AD loan contract document written on a papyrus (now preserved in a museum in Vienna and superbly translated by Lionel Casson) records that a ship named Hermapollon lay at anchor at Muziris. On board the Hermapollon were loaded sixty containers of gangetic nard (a fragrant oil), excellent textiles, ivory products and raw tusks of elephants—each being an extremely costly commodity. The ship was to sail from Muziris to a port in the Red Sea (most probably Berenike or Myos Hormos, though the specific name is lost) where the imported Indian goods would be unloaded and sent to Coptos on camel. From Coptos, boats plying on the river Nile would transport those goods to Alexandria, the premier port in Egypt. All the imported items were to be entered into the Roman imperial warehouse and a customs duty of 25 per cent was charged on the imported items. The far-flung commercial linkages of Muziris with the Ganga delta on the one hand and Alexandria (through the Red Sea network) on the other, are illuminated by this fascinating trade document.
6. Several ports in the coastal region of modern Tamil Nadu also figure prominently in the Classical texts and the Sangam literature alike. One cannot miss that Ptolemy's *Geography* enlisted more ports on the eastern sea-board than those figuring in the *Periplus*. By the middle of the second century AD, ports on the east coast seems to have played a prominent role in the trade with the Roman empire, though they had not attracted similar notice in the *Periplus*. It also implies that the growth in the knowledge of the Greek and Latin authors about the eastern sea-board and the Bay of Bengal. These ports are located in what was designated as the neidal *tinai* in the Sangam texts. According to these texts, a port-town (*mārungur*) was situated in the Vaigai delta and included within the Pāṇḍya country. This is generaly identified with the recently discovered site of Alagankulam. To the north of it stood Colchi, the remains of which are found in the archaeological site of Korkai. Colchi prominently figures in the Classical texts for the availablity of excellent pearls, once again a luxury item. The foremost port in the Kaveri delta was Kāverīpaṭṭinam (identified with the site of Puhar or Pumpuhar), which Ptolemy knew as Khaberos emporium. To the north of Khaberos was situated the port of Poduke, identified with the famous site of Arikamedu at the outskirts of Pondicherry. Excavations at Vasavasamudrām (near Mahābalipuram)

clearly bear out the lively maritime commerce at this coastal site during the early centuries of the Christian era.

7. In coastal Andhra (especially the deltas of the Krishṇa and the Godavari, named Masalia/Maisolia in the Classical accounts) two ports command our attention. These are Kontakossylla and Allosygne. The former doubtless is the same as Kaṇṭakasola or Ghantasala in coastal Andhra. The mention of a leading mariner (*mahānāvika*) in a first century AD donative inscription from Ghantasala further illustrates the importance of this port. In the same region was situated, according to the *Periplus*, an *aphaterion* or point of departure of ships bound for Chryse Chora and Chryse Chersonesys, corresponding respectively to Suvarṇabhūmi and Suvarṇadvipa of ancient Indian texts. It strongly underlines the maritime linkages of coastal Andhra with south-east Asia across the Bay of Bengal. The importance of coastal Andhra in the maritime commerce will also be evident from the ship-type coins of the Sātavāhanas, specifically meant for circulation in this area.
8. Coastal Bengal, which was designated as Gange country in both the *Periplus* and Ptolemy's *Geogrpahy*, had an excellent port also named Gange. It was named after a mighty homonymous river that flowed through it. The port must have stood in the Ganga delta. The port is generally sought to be identified with the extensive archaeological site of Chandraketugarh (to the north of Kolkata). Chandraketugarh has yielded, among numerous antiquities, several inscribed terracotta seals and sealings, carrying clear visual representations of sea-going vessels. B.N. Mukherjee has identified the script as the mixed Brāhmī-Kharoshṭī script. The outstanding port in the Ganga delta was Tāmralipta (modern Tamluk in West Bengal), which Pliny mentions as Tamalites and Ptolemy as Taluctae. In the discussions on India's maritime trade with the Roman empire, scholars tend to focus mostly on ports on the western coast; our survey above suggests that the eastern sea-board too began to figure prominently in this commerce since the mid-second century AD. In the background of the growing importance of the maritime trade in the eastern Indian Ocean, Ptolemy seems to have taken the Bay of Bengal network into consideration; he was the first European intellectual to have named it as the Gangetic Gulf. According to Pliny, India's overseas contacts with the 'west' developed in four stages, each stage being shorter and safer than the previous one. The latest stage, which must have been well in vogue before Pliny's death in AD 79, witnessed the arrival of ships from Berenike or Myos Hormos to Muziris in about six weeks. Prior to the first century BC, the principal sea-lane in the western Indian Ocean was the Persian Gulf; subsequently it shifted to the Red Sea area. The Red Sea network facilitated India's contacts with Egypt, which often acted like a hinge between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.

The sustained demand for Indian commodities, especially luxury items, repeatedly figures in the accounts of the *Periplus*, Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy. Textile products loom large in the list of exports from India. While the finest and the costliest textiles went from the Bengal coast, Paithan and Ter produced much ordinary cotton cloth shipped out from Barygaza (the *Periplus*). Ivory products also were in considerable demand; while Indian ivory was discovered from Pompei, a cachet of excellent ivory items were unearthed from the excavations at Begram near Kabul, suggesting their transportation by overland routes also. The shipping of both tusks and finished ivory products figure in the mid-second century AD maritime loan contract, already mentioned. Among Indian gems, diamonds, pearls and beryls were much sought after in the Hellenistic world. Of outstanding importance among Indian exports were exotic spices, the black pepper from Malabar indeed being the most important. The enormous price the Malabar black pepper fetched, as Pliny mentions, justifies its labelling as 'black gold' by Romila Thapar.

North Indian markets regularly received the coveted Chinese silk through the northwestern overland routes. Field archaeological evidence throws significant lights on items imported into India; the previous studies on this aspect were largely based on textual evidence. One of the most significant artifactual evidence comes in the form the Arretine ware, manufactured in Arrezo in Italy. First discovered from Arikamedu, the Arretine ware also sometimes carries legends at the bottom of the vessel, showing the name of its manufacturer. No less important are the imported amphorae, which proably served the purpose of storage vessels for the imported wine and olive oil from the Mediterranean world. The *Periplus* reports about the bringing of various types of Mediterranean wines to Barygaza for the consumption of local ruling elite. Some vessels have yielded evidence of the storage of fish-oil, which along with olive oil must have been a part of Mediterranean dietary culture and practice. Excellent intaglio designs on signet rings of Mediterranean workmanship are available from Karur in the Chera area. Similarly Kolhapur has yielded a figure of Poseidon, the god of the sea, and also a few copper mirrors which were imported objects. Glass beads and other glass products were certainly brought to India from the Mediterranean world by way of trade. The most eloquent testimony to India's commerce with the eastern Mediterranean comes from numismatic evidence. Many hoards of Roman coins have been found in India, especially from the western part of Tamil Nadu. These Roman coins range in date from the time of Augustus (31 BC-AD 14) to that of Caracalla (AD 213), though coins of the subsequent Byzantine empire continued to reach India by way of trade. Whether these Roman coins became integrated to the Indian monetary scenario as a medium of exchange is doubtful. Since many of the Roman coins bear a deep cut mark, it is likely that these were used as bullion. Interestingly enough, north India has yielded few instances of imported

Roman coins. Many scholars explain this situation that the Kushāṇa and other north Indian rulers melted the imported Roman gold coins.

There are reasons to believe that the Indian exports outnumbered goods imported into India. This implies that the balance of trade between India and the Roman empire could have tilted towards India. This reminds one of a famous lamentation by Pliny that the treasury of Rome was drained to the extent of fifty million sesterces in order to import Indian luxuries. To this may be added the recorded debates in the Roman Senate on the desirability and adverse effects of importing eastern (including Indian) luxuries. These figures and accounts could have been exaggerated since Pliny's statement had a clear moral overtone rather than a statement of accounts. However, the enormity of the cost of importing Indian luxuries to the Roman empire finds a confirmation in the famous papyrus loan contract document mentioned before. G. Parker considers that in the light of the Vienna papyrus, Pliny's figures of imported Indian luxuries may not have been entirely imaginary. Historians and archaeologists like Warmington and Wheeler tried to portray that the entire initiative to this trade came from the West, since India was, in their views, essentially an agricultural country barely oriented to trade and adventure. In this historiography, Roman trade with India is perceived almost as a precursor to the European commercial and political domination in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The obvious attempt at justification of colonial expansion through the lens of Roman trade with India is flawed and seriously questioned in recent historiography. The Roman trade with India did not result in any rupture of the existing system and structure of trade. Moreover, the presence of Indians in the Red Sea area and in Egypt during the early centuries of the Christian era is now proved beyond doubt by inscriptions discovered in these regions, negating the long-standing notion that Indians rarely travelled beyond the subcontinent.

X

Urban Proliferation

The development in agriculture, proliferation of crafts and expansion of trade gave considerable filip to the non-agrarian sector of the economy. The most visible and eloquent testimony to this is manifest in the pan-Indian growth of cities. The process of urban formation began in the Ganga valley in seventh-sixth century BC; the most mature and prosperous phase of the second urbanization in Indian history was during the period from 200 BC to AD 300. One of the salient features of urban spread and development is the rapid proliferation in cities in peninsular India. The advent of many new urban centres, especially in the peninsula, coincided with the continuity of already existing cities in north India.

In the north-western frontier of the subcontinent was situated Pushkalāvatī (Peucalaotis in Classical literature), identified with the site of Charsadda near Peshawar to the west of the Indus. Not only was it a prominent city, but even the Greek coins carried the image of Ambā, the city-deity of Pushkalāvatī, adorned with a turreted crown (*Pakhalavaḍiye devatā Ambā*). Contiguous to Charsadda stood the famous urban centre of Taxila, the remains of which during the phase of Greek, Śaka-Kushāṇa occupation are available from the Sirkap mound. During this period (200 BC-AD 300), Taxila is characterized by a much-improved and planned layout of the city in comparison with its earlier phase represented by the Bhir mound. The entire city had a grid pattern with a chess-board type city plan; residential structures were built in a distinct orientation. All these speak of an efficient municipal administration, maintaining a flourishing urban life. The influence of Hellenistic town planning on the city planning of Taxila is unmistakable. A. Ghosh aptly remarked, foreign in origin and conception, Taxila was not a representative Indian city. One encounters a new city close to Sialkot, namely S agala, known from literature. The *Milindapañho* describes it as the political centre of king Milinda (Menander) and a major commercial cente (*nānāpaṇya-puṭabhedana*) as well.

In the Ganga valley proper, Ahichchhtra continued uninterurupted as the premier city of Pañchāla kingdom, known for its metallic currency; around 200 BC was built a new street in this city. The most outstanding urban centre in the Ganga-Yamuna doab was Mathurā, which looms large in Classical accounts, epigraphic records, sculptures and field archaeological evidence. The excavations at Sonkh by Herbert Hartel, now a suburb of Mathurā, have considerably added to our understanding of the urbanization at Mathurā. The noticeable diversity in house-plans of residential structures provide a reliable marker of the prosperity of the city, which witnessed the use of both mud bricks and burnt bricks. Installation of corner stones close to houses at the turn of a road probably served the purpose of protecting houses from damages by vehicular traffic. This, in its turn, should imply a growth in movements of merchandise and people in a city celebrated for its commercial character. Mathurā was also a famous cultural centre noted for the simultaneous efflorecence of Buddhism, Jainism and brahmanical cults. Mathurā attained widespread fame as a centre for sculptural art too. That Mathurā was a major political centre is beyond any doubt, particularly during the heydays of the Śaka-Kushāṇa rule when it became politically integrated to the north-western part of the subcontinent. The multifunctionality of Mathurā contributed to its immense prominence. One can hear the voice of admiration for this city in the Buddhist text, *Lalitavistara*. The city of Mathurā was prosperous, expansive, beneficial and with an abounding population where profuse alms were easily available (*Iyaṁ Mathurā nagarī ṛiddhā cha, sphītā cha, kshemā cha, subhikshāchākīrṇabahujanamanushya cha*).

The same city had earlier been a subject of scorn in the Pāli canonical text as it was bereft of good roads, full of dust and offered only meagre alms. The remarkable transformation of Mathurā during the five centuries is impossible to miss. Major cities in the middle Ganga plains, like Śrāvastī, Kauśāmbī, Varansi, Champā and Pāṭaliputra not only continued, but seem to have attained their most prosperous phase, as will be evident from field archaeological materials.

The Ganga delta and northern part of Bengal also experienced urbanization. The earliest city in Bengal was Puṇḍranagara, identified with the famous site of Mahasthangarh (Bangladesh), which came into existence during the Maurya phase. This centre along with Bangarh, or ancient Koṭivarsha, (in the Dinajpur area of West Bengal) continued to flourish in the post-Maurya phase. A few more new cities came up in western part of the Bengal delta, known largely through archaeology, e.g. at Mangalkot, Chandraketugarh and Tāmralipta. Chandraketugarh impresses one with its extensive site and extremely rich antiquities, especially the terracotta artefacts found there. The last two, we have already discussed, were leading port towns in the Ganga delta. Orissa too, like neighbouring Bengal, experienced city life for the first time. This is best illustrated by the discovery of the very impressive site of Sisupalgarh (near Bhuvanesvar). A massive fortification was construced here sometime between 200 BC and AD 100. Though the fortification wall was initially of mud-bricks, the structure was evidently strengthened later by using burnt bricks. A gateway was another feature of the city at Sisupalgarh.

The advent of cities in the Deccan will be evident from references to a number of cities in the inscriptions of the Śakas, Sātavāhanas and Ikshvākus. The portrayal of city life—large residential buildings, streets full of people and wagons and impressive processions—is a regular theme in the Amaravati school of sculptures in eastern Deccan. Excavations at Adam point to the emergence of an urban centre in the ancient Vidarbha region. Satanikota (Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh) is marked not only by a fortification wall, but by a moat too; the latter surely intended to provide greater security to the city. Its prosperity is borne out by the discovery of many beads, burnt bricks and a very impressive gateway. The premier city in eastern Deccan was Vijayapurī, the capital of the Ikshvākus. Its remains were found out at Nāgārjunakonda. Most of the residential structures were built in the eastern part of the city, suggesting some planing and orientation in the urban layout. The city had wide streets and several smaller and narrower lanes and alleys; a tri-junction of roads and a four-point meeting of roads are also noticed. Apart from being a political centre, it was a major cultural centre too since Buddhism, Brahmanical religion and the celebrated Amaravati school of sculpture flourished here. One of the most spectacular structure is an amphitheatre—like open air sporting arena with seating arrangements for spectators.

A combined testimony of the Sangam texts and archaeological materials points to the emergence of cities in the far south too. Champakalakshmi brings to light the particular prominence of Kāverīpaṭṭinam, the premier port town in the Kaveri delta under the Choḷas. Described as a large city (*mānagaram*) in the Tamil literature, the impressive size of this city is registered by as many as forty sifts around the principal site of Puhar, which is identified with Kāverīpaṭṭinam. To the north of Kāverīpaṭṭinam, Kāchchī (modern Kanchipuram) was a major city having its inland riverine port of Nirappeyuru on the river Vegavati. The Pāṇḍya country had its premier urban centre at Madhura, or modern Madurai, praised in the Sangam literature. How an area rich in mineral resources could transform into a major crafts production centre, thereby assuming an urban character, will be evident from the excavations at Kodumnal in the western part of Tamil Nadu. Urban formation, according to Champakalakshmi, seems to have been confined to the agricultural and coastal tracts (marutam and neidal *tinais*) and had not yet spread to other ecological zones in the Tamilakam.

Urbanization indeed reached its peak during what is often called the post-Maurya phase in Indian history. Field archaeological materials leave little room for doubt about some of the common markers of city life, e.g. fortification wall, occasional gateway, an orientation of roads and lanes, increasing presence of burnt brick structures, the disposal of waste water by the terracotta ringwell, crafts activities in the form of bead-making, seals and pottery and the availability of coins. These traits had already been encountered in the Ganga valley around sixth century BC, when second urbanization started. The geographical spread of these traits to areas outside and far away from the Ganga valley may imply that the Ganga valley was the epicentre of the second urbanization. If cities in the Ganga valley since the sixth century BC signified the primary phase of the second urbanization, the proliferation of cities elsewhere should therefore logically be seen as 'secondary' cities. B.D. Chattopadhyaya considers this as 'secondary urbanization'. Taking cue from the anthropologist's concept of primary and secondary state formation, Chattopadhyaya cogently argues that urban centres -principally in the Ganga plains—were examples of the primary urban centres and that the Ganga valley stood as the epicenter for the subsequent spread of the urban formation outside the Ganga valley, especially in peninsular India and the Ganga delta. The process of secondary urban formation results and gains momentum from the close interactions between the epicentric area (i.e. Ganga valley) and the erstwhile peripheral areas. The emergence of seconday urban centres, thus, has a close linkage with external (external not in the sense of foreign or non-Indian, but signifying the non-local) stimuli, including external political factors and long-distance commerce.

Urban impulses from the Ganga valley appear to have reached the peninsular parts through Vidiśā-Ujjayinī and Kaliṅga regions. As urban

experience was felt in the Tamilakam only in the coastal tracts and agricultural zones, Chamapakalakshmi has convincingly argued that urban process there had not yet taken a deep root and was largely a result of external stimuli, including long-distance maritime trade. As the period under review was noted for long-distance commerce and urban development alike, the former is often considered as the principal factor in the urban growth. It must be stressed here that early Indian cities were not merely manufacturing and consumption centres. The primary requisite to city formation was the availablity of enough agricultural resources capable of sustaining the sizeable non-food producing communities. To this, long-distance trade indeed provided an additional impetus to urban growth. An insightful analysis of the commodities involved in long-distance trade of this period by H. Sarkar shows that most of these items were either agrarian products or animal products. He therefore considered most of the cities of the period under discussion as 'agro-cities'. A notable departure from this pattern can be seen at Mathurā. Mathurā did not possess a highly fertile tract located in the relatively dry areas of western Uttar Pradesh, neither was it noted for excellent crafts. Its rise to a major urban centre was largely due to its role as a node in the extensive overland trade network in north India, connecting Mathurā simultaneously with the north-west, the middle Ganga plains and the Malwa plateau.

XI

Varṇa-Jāti Scenario

The study of the prevailing social condition is often discussed from the point of view of the four-fold *varṇa* system, which assumes great importance in the Brahmanical Dharmaśāstras of Manu and Yajñavalkya and the *Anuśāsanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*. A reading of these normative texts offers an image of inflexible *varṇa* norms with increasing orthodoxy. Needless to explain, the perpetuation of the ideal social order of four *varṇas* primarily meant that the principal marker of the *varṇa* identity was birth. If sharp social inequality was determined by birth, then the system, at least theoretically, provided little scope of social mobility. Inseparably associated with this notion was the ritual superiority of the two upper *varṇas*—brāhmaṇa and kshatriya—and the inevitable subordination of the vaiśya and śūdra. The maintenance of the purity of descent was sought to be ensured by the ideal marriage within the same *varṇa* (*savarṇa*) but outside the same *gotra* (*gotrāntara*). The rigour of the *varṇa* system depended on two major planks: purity of descent, which was guranteed by marriage within the same *varṇa*. Yet, even as early as the later Vedic times and definitely in the Sūtra texts, marriage among unequal *varṇas* was encountered, recognized but strongly disfavoured. While the normative texts allowed the marriage between the

the higher *varṇa* male and the lower *varṇa* female (*anuloma* marriage), the reverse order (*pratiloma:* between lower *varṇa* male and higher *varṇa* female) was severely reprobated. The very reference to these two type of marriages cannot but speak of their existence in society. The marriage between unequal *varṇas* resulted in the admixture of *varṇas* (*varṇasaṁkara*), a theory which first appeared in the Dharmasūtra lieterature, but elaborated in the *Manusaṁhitā* and the *Yajñavalkyasmṛiti*. The 'mixed' marriages gave birth to offsprings who could not have been entitled to their father's *varṇa*, so the offsprings were assigned *jāti* or *miśrajāti* (mixed caste) status. Thus, brahamnical ideology upheld the traditional *chaturvarṇa* system, yet accommodated numerous *jātis*. The son of a brāhmaṇa father and a vaiśya mother, for instance, would not inherit the *varṇa* status of either of his parents, but would be known as ambashtha *jāti*. Since the caste system can function only when hereditary and fixed occupation is observed, these *mixed jātis* were assigned specific occupations. Thus, the *ambashtha* was assigned the profession of a physician. The worst form of *varṇasaṁkara* was the marriage between the śūdra male and the brāhmaṇa female, giving birth to the lowest of all social groups—the chaṇḍālas—who were assigned the lowliest of occupation of an undertaker and executioner. The number of these mixed *jātis* would multiply by (1) marriage between a *miśrajāti* and one of the four *varṇas* and (2) marriage between one *miśrajāti* and another *miśrajāti*. In short, the permutations and combinations of marriages among unequal *varṇas* and *jātis* are infinite; the number of mixed castes is also unlimited. This is in sharp contrast to the inflexible and fixed number of four *varṇas*, which referred only to an ideal situation according to the brahmanical code, but was inadequate to explain the growing complexities of a sharply divided society. The recognition of the prevalence of numerous *miśrajātis* cannot but speak of the existence of social groups—vertically positioned—whose number far exceeded the traditional and inflexible figure of four.

Yet, Manu emphatically laid down that the society was divided only into four *varṇas*, and that no fifth *varṇa* existed. The statement seems to have emanated from an attempt at reconciling two dissimilar number of social divisions of four *varṇas* and numerous *jātis*. The normative position explained the genesis of all *miśrajātis* by some form of matrimonial combinations among the primary four *varṇas:* thus, even the lowliest chaṇḍāla was born of a śūdra male and a brāhmaṇa female. According to the sastric explanation, the origin of the chaṇḍāla was rooted to the combination between two of the four primary *varṇas*. Seen from this angle, all *miśrajātis* could be absorbed into the overarching four *varṇa* framework.

There is little doubt that the theories of *varṇasaṁkara* and *miśrajātis* did not belong to the realm of descriptive categories. The proliferation of *jātis* was due, to some extent, to the absorption of many tribes (*jana/gaṇa*) into the brahmanical social structure with the gradual spread of the agrarian and state society. Another factor contributing to the process was the absorption

of the *yavanas* in Indian society; the *yavanas* (in the form of various ethnic groups of West Asian and Central Asian background) interacted with Indian society through political/military activities and trade. The ambivalent attitude of the brahmanical society to them will be evident from the fact that they were initially perceived as outsiders, then as śūdras who were not exiled (*aniravasita śūdra*) and finally as fallen or degraded (*vrātya*) kshatriya. As many of the *yavanas* became prominent because of their political, military and material importance, the brahmanical code had to take them into considertation by gradually assigning them a respectable status. The third factor was that many of the craftsmen and professional groups tended to assume a *jāti*-like character as they often observed hereditary occupation and strict rules of marriage.

That social practices differed and departed from the *varṇa-jāti* code of the *śāstras* can be discerned from epigraphic records. The very large number of contemporary donative records rarely, if at all, refer to the *varṇa-jāti* affiliation of the donors, but on the contrary, highlight their respective occupations/professions and their places of origin as the principal markers of their social identities. Thus the criteria of birth and marriage were not the sole determinants of one's social position. At Mathurā, a woman donor describes herself as the daughter of a jeweller (*maṇikāra*) and a daughter-in-law of an ironmonger (*lohavaṇiya*). Such marriages between dissimilar occupational groups could have been frowned upon in the normative texts, but the lady concerned did not shy away from explicitly stating such a 'mixed' marriage. The Jaina monastic organization had little problem in accepting her donation/patronage. It is also questionable whether all brāhmaṇas enjoyed the social preeminence accorded to them by sastric norms. The wretched condition of Droṇāchārya when he first met the Kuru-Pāṇḍava brothers is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata;* Droṇa was in fact driven out from the Pañchāla realm by king Drupad. The *Mahābhārata* also graphically portrays the abject poverty of a brahmana a family in Ekachakra village when the five Pāṇḍava brothers met them. The exalted status of a brāhmana was really enjoyed by the priests in royal courts (e.g. Viśvāmītra and Vaśiṣṭha). In the position of the brāhmaṇas—the highest *varṇa*—therefore, one notes the difference between what Romila Thapar marks the ritual and the actual status. In this context, attention may be drawn to the Jaina text, *Aṅgavijjā*. The *Aṅgavijjā* offers four different statements on social divisions: (1) the society was divided into four *varṇas;* (2) social position was marked by both birth and profession, thus a brāhmaṇa could be a brāhmaṇa-brāhmaṇa, a brāhmaṇa-kshatriya, a brāhmaṇa-vaiśya and a brāhmaṇa-śūdra; (3) there were two social groups: *ayya* (*arya* or noble) and *milikkhu* (*mlechchha* or impure) (4) there were two social groups: *ayya* (*ārya* or master) and *preshya* (servile group). The author of this text could have been confused in his understanding of the society, but it also underlines that brahmanical code was not the single prism through which social complexities would

be visible. Even the apparently strict and orthodox brahmanical norm accommodated flexibility in the form of allowing deviations from sastric standards by formulating the code of conduct during distress or calamity (*āpaddharma*). This was indeed the sastric attempt at legitimizing many transgressions of the 'sacred' and 'eternal' code of conduct.

XII

Marriage and Position of Women

The brahmanical social norms invariably upheld patriarchal society where descent and inheritence would pass from the father to the offspring. The regular occurrence of metronymics in Deccan however, may suggest a different system of reckoning lineal descent, though family life here too was receiving brahmanical influences. As we have noted earlier, a brāhmaṇa like Vārāhīputra Aśvibhūti inherited a plot of land from his father (*sapitusatakam*), but his lineal descent was presented from his mother.

Theoretical treatises always favoured the birth of son to that of a daughter. Brahmanical śāstras offer little advice on the formal education of the daughter. For her, the only training in her maiden days was gaining expertise in domestic chores, which she was to perform during the greater part of her life as a wife and a mother. She was not considered fit for any Vedic education and the *upnayana* ceremony, her presence was frowned upon during the last mentioned ceremony. These texts strongly recommend the lowering of the age of the marriage of a girl, preferably to a pre-puberty stage. The *Manusaṁhitā* lays down that the difference of age between the bride and the bridegroom should ideally be three times: bridegroom being thirty or twenty-one years of age, the bride should then be ten or seven years old. On the other hand, the descriptions of both Sītā and Draupadī as brides do not at all portray them as children but as grown up women. To what extent society in general observed the sastric norms of lowering the age of marriage for girls is open to question, especially in the case of women of aristocratic/royal lineages. By lowering the age of marriage for girls, law-givers intended to ensure strong parental control and little choice on the part of the bride regarding the choice of her spouse. The *Manusaṁhitā* lays down the famous eight forms of marriage: (1) brāhma, (2) daiva, (3) ārsha, (4) prājāpatya, (5) āsura, (6) gāndharva, (7) rākshasa and (8) paiśācha. The first four forms are always lauded in the normative texts as righteous marriages (*dharmyavivāha*) because these forms required the formal and ritual transfer of the daughter to the husband by the father of the bride, accompanied by the chanting of sacred Vedic mantras. These forms obviously followed the *savarṇa* and *gotrāntara* traditions and were performed under strict paternal guidance. The fifth form does not meet much favour of the theoretical texts as it involved a monetary transaction. The gandharva form recognizes mutual love and

courtship between the future husband and wife. Little parental control and approval were required in such a marriage and the bride too was certainly a mature and grown up person. On the other hand, the creative literature offers an image of its considerable popularity in the contemporary society. The rākshasa marriage took place when the bride was forcibly carried away from a battle-field by the bridegroom. The most illustrative case in point is the marriage between Arjuna and Subhadrā in the *Mahābhārata*. It may have survived as a custom tracable to hoary antiquity, when abduction of the bride was associated with a victorious battle. The marriage between Arjuna and Subhadrā suggests that the abduction was really a mock one, since it was pre-arranged. Paiśācha is the savage enjoyment and violation of a woman either asleep or intoxicated; it is uniformly condemned as the worst and the eighth form of marriage (*ashṭamo 'dhama*). It is quite strange that the theoretical treatises did not include the *svayamvarā* as a form of marriage though it figures prominently in both the epics. In the *svayamvarā* form, the bride was in a position to independently choose her spouse among a large number of suitors. The choice of the spouse depended on the outstanding performance—usually peerless martial/heroic skills—by one among the many competitors. The classic examples are the marriage of Sītā and Draupadī, where they chose their respective spouses on the basis of superlative heroic feats. The bride in a *svayamvarā* marriage was usually a grown up woman, who could exercise some kind of choice. However, the choice was often restricted to members of the kshatriya families as they were the invitees to the occasion, and the invitation came from the father of the bride, usually the king himself.

The wife is given a seemingly honourable position in the śāstras as being in overall charge of the husband's household. In the two epics, some women of the kshatriya families are portrayed as heroic characters. Thus, it was possible for Śakuntalā, in the *Mahābhārata*, to scold her husband, king Dushyanta, in no uncertain terms in an open court when the king refused to recognize her. Similarly, Gāndhārī rebuked her husband Dhṛitarāshtra for not being firm enough to have controlled his sons and thereby not preventing the Kurukshetra war. Yudhishṭhira says to the five Pāṇḍava brothers that Draupadī was to be treated like an elder sister and revered like a mother (*mātevapūjanīyā jyeshṭheva paripālyā cha*). The *Mahābhārata* also gives an account of the sharp criticisms and a curse from Gāndhārī to Krishṇa at the end of the Kurukshetra war that witnessed the extinction of the sons of Gāndhārī and Dhṛitarāshtra. No less significant is the story of Vidulā, who immensely enthused and encouraged her son to fight as her son felt dejected. The story was narrated by Kuntī to arouse the Pāṇḍavas on the eve of the Kurukshetra battle, so that they too could emulate the heroic son of Vidulā. These portrayals of heroic and powerful women in the epics probably refer to the old kshtriya hero stories. But the portrayal of women significantly changed when the epic stories were subsequently

used for propagating brahmanical ideology. Recent researches by Sukumārī Bhattacharji, Kumkum Roy and Umā Chakravarti have strongly questioned the validity of the stereotyped glorification of women in the epics, as these contain numerous instances of growing intolerance to women and systematic degradation of women's position in the society. When Draupadī was asked how she lived happily with five husbands at a time, she is said to have replied that she did not eat, sleep, decorate herself more than her husbands, never quarelled with her mother-in-law and remained always manoueverable like a device (*ahaṁ nātyaśne nātiśaye nātibhūshaye na parivade śvaśruṁ sarvadā pariyantritā*). Here Draupadī is presented as an ideal wife by personifying submission to her husbands and relegating herself to a secondary position viś-a-viś her husbands. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā—the ideal wife—is celebrated for her love, admiration and complete loyalty to Rāma. But Rāma was ready to forsake her (*muktā sā*), because in Rāma's estimation, Sītā was as defiled as the *havi* of the *yajña* licked by a dog, and therefore Rāma had little interest in enjoying her (*notsahe paribhogaya svavalidham haviryatha*). The wife was obviously discriminated against, and Sītā was exiled by Rāma merely on the suspicion that she could have lost her chastity when she had been abducted by Rāvaṇa. The general plight of widows was even worse than that of the wife. The widow's life is burdened with disabilities as laid down in the normative treatises. The remarriage of widow was not entirely unknown to the law-givers; Manu was aware of a remarried widow (*punarbhū*), but brahmanical society never accorded honour and dignity to a remarried widow. The law-books and the *Mahābhārata* speak of the *niyoga* custom, which allowed the cohabitation with a sonless widow by her younger brother-in-law till the birth of a male child. This is not the remarriage of a widow and does not reflect upon the widow's dignity since the entire custom was geared to the need for a male progeny. The *Mahābhārata* suggests that in the event of the husband's inablity to procure a child, the wife was to be united with his near relation from within the family. The son born out of such union was designated as *kshetrājā putra*. In the two epics, however, there are not many instances of the custom of *satī* (except that of Mādrī giving up her life after Pandu's death)—neither Kunti nor the three queens of Daśaratha were required to ascend the funeral pyres of their respective husbands.

As most women had little education and were given no vocational training, they were perpetually dependent on either their father, or husband or son. The woman was however entitled to her *strī dhana*, over which she seems to have exercised her control. It is interesting to note that women appear in many inscriptions of this period as donors to Buddhist and Jaina monasteries. The source of their patronage is difficult to ascertain. In sharp contrast to the idealized role of women as a subordinated personality in a patriarchal family, the courtesan (*gaṇika*) appears in our sources as well-versed in various performing arts, if not herself being literate. She is portrayed as a highly accomplished lady and not merely as an object of lust. It is true that literary

accounts often present her from the point of her physical attractions and attributes. The wretched condition of a courtesan in old age when she had lost her physical charm also figures in contemporary literary accounts. The position of the *gaṇika* emerges from a donative record from Mathurā. The inscription explicitly states that the donor *gaṇika*'s mother too was a *gaṇika* and she donated handsomely to the Jaina monastery. There was apparently no hindrance to the acceptance of her gifts to the Jaina monastery. Such a situation illustrates the actual status of the *gaṇika* in an urban society; this is almost impossible to encounter in the normative brahmanical texts.

XIII

Cultural Scenario

A discussion on the cultural scenario of the age under review will be in order here. We propose to present here an overview of the literature, religious beliefs and pratices and art activities. The composition of the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, largely belongs to this period. While the *Rāmāyaṇa* attained its present form in seven cantos by about AD 200, the *Mahābhārata* was yet to reach its final form as a text consisting of 1,00,0000 *ślokas* (*śatasāhasrī saṁhitā*). To the five principal and original cantos of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which narrates the story of the great ruler Rāma and his forefathers in the kingdom of Ayodhyā, were added two interpolated *kāṇḍas*, viz., the *Balakāṇḍa* and the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The principal thrust in the *Balakanda* is on delineating Rāma as Vishṇu, being born in the mundane world as a human being; the *Uttarākāṇḍa* too underlines the divine character of Rāma, who merges into Vishṇu at the end of the narrative. The *Mahābhārata* too was no longer a lively heroic story narrating the rivalry between the Kuru and the Pandva brothers, and stories of other great heroes; it now included the didactic *Anuśāsanaparva* and the *Śāntiparva*. The two sections contained maxims on society and polity, said to have been uttered by Bhishma while lying on the bed of arrows. The didactic sections are different from the narrative sections, which centred around the life and achievements of great kshatriya heroes. The didactic sections preached many codes of conduct in social and political life by championing the brahmanical ideology. Both the epics were going through the process of significant transformation as literary creations, because they were increasingly assuming the character of a sacred *śāstra* from their original nature of hero stories.

The spread of Sanskrit language will further be evident from the use of hybrid Sanskrit for many Buddhist Mahāyāna texts; for instance, the *Mahāvastu-avadāna* (dated sometime in between second century BC and fourth century AD). The *Avadāna* literature was a new addition to the growing volume of the Buddhist texts, the oldest specimen of which is possibly the

Avadānasataka (AD second century). Other *Avadāna* texts like the *Divyā vadāna* and the *Aśokāvadāna* also belong to the same time-bracket. Composition of the biography of the Buddha has a special place in the Buddhist literature. The earliest of the full-fledged biography of the Master is the *Lalitavistara*, while the *Buddhacharita* of Aśvaghosha also belongs to the same genre of literature. Aśvaghosha is also the author of the *Sāriputraprakaraṇa*, the manuscript of which in portions was discovered from Turfan in Central Asia. The earliest specimen of a Sanskrit eulogy (*praśasti*) in an inscription is the Junagarh rock inscription of Rudradāman in AD 150. This, according to Sheldon Pollock, was a major turning point, signifying the employment of the language for court chronicling and political elites, and not merely restricted to sacred ritual compositions. Sanskrit was indeed the vehicle for the two early Dharmaśāstras, the *Manusmṛiti* and the *Yajñavalkyasmṛiti*. Among technical treatises in Sanskrit, mention must be made of the *Mahābhashya* of Patañjali (early second century BC) who composed a voluminous commentary on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭadhyāyī*. The *Yavanajātaka* of Sphūjidhvaja is a treatise devoted to the study of zodiac signs. The text was so named because it was translated from original Greek in AD 150. It speaks as much of the importance of Sanskrit as a vehicle for writing technical treatises as also for the intimate transactions between the Hellenistic and Indian cultural world during a phase which experienced extensive commercial contacts. Among other technical treatises in Sanskrit, particularly prominent are two medical texts (*saṁhitās*) by Śuśruta and Charaka. For the first time, it was established that wind (*vāyu*), bile (*pitta*) and phlegm (*kapha*) are three primary elements in human physiology and the good health of a person would depend on the proper balance of the three elements in the human body. While Charaka is celebrated for his contributions to therapeutic treatment, Susruta is famous for his mastery of surgery.

The earlier preference of the Buddhists for Pāli language began to change. This, however, does not mean that the use of Pāli for Buddhist literature came to an end—the famous Jātaka stories in Pāli assumed their present literary form during the period from 200 BC to AD 200. The wide appeal and popularity of Prakrit is illustrated by its very regular use in inscriptions (*praśastis*, donative records and landgrant charters alike) over disparate regions of the subcontinent. One of the finest examples of poetry in Prakrit is seen in the *Gāthasaptaśatī* of Hāla. This anthology of poems by Hala (possibly a Sātavāhana ruler) revolve around the theme of love, which is often depicted with considerable sensuousness. As we have discussed before, to this period belongs the earliest Tamil literature, the Sangam texts, which were primarily oral literature on the themes of war, love and eulogies of rulers. That Tamil by this time also emerged as a language for composing inscriptions, is clearly borne out by Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions, thanks particulalry to the painstaking study by Iravatham Mahādevan.

XIV

Religious Scenario

The five centuries under discussion are noted for significant developments in religious beliefs and customs. The immediately preceding Maurya age does not offer substantial images of the dominant prevalence of the Vedic sacrificial practices. On other hand, elaborate Vedic sacrificial rituals like the Vājapeya, Rājasūya and Aśvamedha were regulalry performed by rulers of both north India and the Deccan during the post-Maurya times. But premier Vedic gods like Indra and Varuṇa receded somewhat to the background. Though Brahmā figures as the creator in the Purāṇas, not much prominence was accorded to the cult of Brahmā. Among the male brahmanical deities, Vishṇu and Śiva were rapidly coming to considerable limelight in the religious scenario.

Vishṇu was a relatively minor deity in the Vedic corpus. During the period under review, the devotees of Vishṇu were known as Bhāgavatas (not Vaishṇavas). The growing popularity of Vishṇu worship as early as the second century BC is best illustrated by the coins of Agathocles found from the Ai-khanoum excavations (in Afghanistan). These coins display the earliest known iconic representation of a four-armed dhoti-clad Indian deity holding a disc (*chakra*), a mace (*gadā*), a conch-shell (*śaṅkha*) in three of his four hands (the object in the fourth arm is indistinct). He is undoubtedly Vishṇu. Kṛishṇa-Vishṇu's elder brother, Saṅkarshaṇa Balarāma, also figures in another type of Agathocles's coins, where the deity is depicted with the plough, the diagnostic attribute of Balarāma. The worship of these two divinities became popular enough in the north-western borderland of the subcontinent to be represented as reverse devices on the coins of a Bactrian Greek ruler. That Vishṇu was also known as Nārāyaṇa, will be evident from the Ghoshundi inscription (first century BC) where an enclosed sanctuary for the worship of Nārāyaṇa is explicitly mentioned (*pūja-śilā -prākāra Nārāyaṇavāṭaka*). The shrine was constructed by king Sarvatāta, who was a Bhāgavata and also performed the horse sacrifice. The said shrine housed the images of Vāsudeva (i.e. Vāsudeva Kṛishṇa) and Saṅkarshaṇa (Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛishṇa). The inscription indicates the identification of Kṛishṇa Vishṇu with Nārāyaṇa in or before the first century BC. This Kṛishṇa is indeed the same as the son of Vāsudeva and Devakī and hence known as Vāsudeva. The *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas inform us on the genealogical affiliation of Vāsudeva Kṛishṇa with the Yādavas. Thus in or before the first century BC, three following elements—Kṛishṇa the son of Devakī, Kṛishṇa of the Yādava clan and the deity Nārāyaṇa—appear to have merged in the Bhāgavata cult. Kṛishṇa is also hailed as belonging to the Vṛishṇī group of the Yādava clan. When the Śaka *kshtrapa* Sodāsa was in charge

of Mathurā in the early first century AD, images (*pratimāḥ*) of five Vṛishṇī heroes were propitiated in a stone-built shrine as divinities associated with the Bhāgavata cult (*Bhāgavataṁ Vṛishṇīnāṁ pañchavīrāṇāṁ pratimāḥ śaila-devagṛihe sthāpitāḥ*). The five heroes of the Vṛishṇīs were Saṅkarshaṇa, Vāsudeva-Kṛishṇa, Pradyumna (son of Rukminī and Vāsudeva), Śāmba (son of Jāmbavatī and Vāsudeva) and Aniruddha (son of Śāmba). Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the increasing popularity of the Bhāgavata cult—even to a person of non-Indian origin—is available from the Besnagar Garuḍa pillar inscription (second century BC). According to it, Heliodorus, the Greek ambassador of Antialkidas, came from Taxila to Vidiśā (ruled by Kāśīputra Bhāgabhadra), where as a devout worshipper of Vāsudeva (Kṛishṇa-Vishṇu), he erected a pillar with the image of Garuḍa (Vishṇu's mount and also possibly Vishṇu himself in the zoomorphic form). Heliodorus was undoubtedly a devout worshipper of Vāsudeva, whom he considered as the foremost or outstanding divinity and he introduced himself as a Bhāgavata (*Devadevasa Vāsudevasa Garuḍadhvajaṁ ayaṁ kārite iya Heliodoroṇa Bhāgavatena ....Takkhasilākena Yonadūtena*). It is no accident therefore that Vāsudeva would figure prominently among the deities worshipped in the Deccan by the Sātavāhana queen Nayanikā (Nanaghat inscription).

A brahmanical deity who was not far behind Vishṇu in popular appeal was Śiva, who like Vishṇu, was also a minor deity in the Vedic corpus. Patañjali mentions both Rudra and Śiva as divinities. The *Mahābhārata* is replete with references to Śiva as a great god and to the worship of Śiva. The popular appeal of Saivism was the result of a long and gradual process and does not appear to have suddenly burst into the cultural scenario. The legend of deliberately keeping out Śiva from the *yajña* performed by his father-in-law Daksha perhaps reflects a stage, according to N.N. Bhattacharyya, in the history of Saivism when Śiva had not yet been fully accepted in the brahmanical pantheon. This implies that there could have been contestations to the growing appeal of Saivism. The earliest possible indications of the iconic representation of Śiva are available from the coins of the second century BC found from Ujjayinī. In these coins, Śiva is represented as a three-faced deity, holding a staff (*daṇḍa*) and a water-pot (*kamaṇḍalu*) in his hands. One Śivarakshita, the name itself indicative of the Saiva leanings of the person concerned, had the figure of two-armed Śiva holding the trident (*triśūla*) engraved on a bronze seal found from Taxila. The appeal of Saivism in the north-western region is amply borne out by the regular representation of Śiva in the reverse device of the coins of Maues, Gondophares, V'ima Kadphises, Kanishka, Huvishka and Vāsudeva. In these representations Śiva is either shown in his anthropomorphic form accompanied by Nandi—his mount—or symbolically delineated as Nandi, which is both his mount and also the zoomorphic form of Śiva. The worship of Śiva in the phallic (*liṅgam*)

form was also gaining ground. The famous sculpture from Gudimallam (Andhra Pradesh, first century BC) depicts an upright *liṅgam* accompanied by a two-armed image of Śiva.

Among other brahmanical gods, mention may be made of Sūrya, the sun god, who was worshipped in the form of an image as early as in the sculptures of Bharhut (second century BC) and Bhaja. Most Sūrya images show him riding a chariot drawn by horses; he is occasionally accompanied by goddesses Ūshā and Pratyūshā. In the Kushāṇa coins, the sun-god is named Mihr (also in the recently discovered Rabatak inscription), which speaks of his Iranian connection. Interestingly, the Purāṇas credit Śâmba (son of Kṛishṇa) with introducing the solar cult from Magadvipa or Iran. The Iranian element in the spread of the solar cult cannot be ignored. Kārttikeya, the great warrior god, was also regularly worshipped. Known to Patañjali as Skanda or Viśākha, his *Mahābhāshya* speaks of the making of images of this deity. This is indicative of the image worship of the warrior-god. He is variously called Skanda, Visago (Viśākha) and Ma'aseno (Mahāsena) in the Rabatak insciption of Kanishka. Huvishka's coins frequently depict him. In a contemporary Kushāṇas sculpture, he appears in the dress of a warrior, which highlights his Mahāsena aspect. In the early iconic representations—whether in sculpture or on coins—Kārttikeya is generaly not associated with his traditional peacock mount. He holds instead a cock in his hand; this iconography is available in the image of Kārttikeya in the Yaudheya coinage, where he figures as a six-faced deity. He is considerably prominent in the Sangam literature as Murugan, who too holds a cock in his hand.

One also notes continuity of the worship of the cult of the goddess(es) during our period. Known from remote antiquity, the worship of the goddess is best evident from the profuse number of terracotta female figurines, usually nude or semi-nude, elaborately ornamented and decorated with a prominent head-dress. In a predominantly agricultural country, the belief in and the popularity of the mother goddess as a deity presiding over life and fertility was deep-rooted. Several sculptures of the Śaka-Kushāṇa phase depict a female deity Hārītī (often accompanied by the male god Pañchika), along with several children. She was simultaneously a benevolent and a malevolent deity in her twin capacity of a protector and a devourer of children. Closely associated with this concept was the idea of a goddess of prosperity or fortune, who in subsequent centuries, would assume the identity and form of Lakshmī. Seals and coins of this period often bear an image of a goddess, either seated or standing, two elephants sprinkling water on her from two sides: she is given the epithet of both Gajalakshmī or Abhishekalakshmī. When the goddess of fortune was also propitiated as the deity ensuring the prosperity of a realm, she was considered as Rājyalakshmī. G. Fussman has recently read an inscription accompanying a Gandhāra image of a female deity (in the collection of the British Museum,

London) as the image of goddess Sri or the goddess of wealth and fortune (*Siriye paḍimā*). The great goddess slaying the buffalo-demon (*asura*) is lauded as Mahishāsuramardinī or Mahishamarddinī. The earliest known iconic depiction of this deity is seen in a terracotta piece from Tonk in Rajasthan (first century BC). She is sought to be equated with Umā, the daughter of Himalaya (cf. Umā Haimavatī first mentioned in the *Kenopanishad*). This Umā is probably the same as Ommo in Kushāṇa coins and in the Rabatak inscription of Kanishka. A close parallel to the goddess slaying the buffalo-demon may be seen also in the famous West Asiatic goddess Nana, who too stands on a lion. All these features underwent a process of syncretization, argues B.N. Mukherjee, that finally paved the way for the worship of the great goddess, Durgā Mahishasuramardinī.

The five centuries mark a glorious phase in the history of Buddhism, which took great strides within and beyond the subcontinent. Since the holding of the third Buddhist council during the reign of Aśoka, the importance of the Sthaviravādī or Theravadi, a Hīnayāna sect, was firmly established. The clear separation between the Lesser Vehicle (Hīnayāna) and the Greater Vehicle (Mahāyāna) came to be established after the fourth and the final Buddhist council. There is a strong tradition that the fourth Buddhist Council was held in Kashmir during the reign of Kanishka I, though it is a controversial issue among scholars. The followers of Hīnayāna are spread over Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma and South-East Asia. Mahāyāna Buddhism reached China via Central Asia and from China, it spread as far as Korea and Japan, though the spread of Buddhism in the last two countries took place in subsequent times. The division in Buddhism into Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna was a landmark in the history of Buddhism.

Besides the Sthaviravādins, another sect of the Hīnayāna, attained great prominence; this sect is known as Sarvāstivādins. They received considerable patronage from Kanishka I and made their presence felt in Kashmir, Gandhāra and in Central Asia. The Sarvāstivādin view does not deny the existence of the material world, nor did they perceive the Arhat as infalliable; they did not consider the Buddha as a supra-human being. The other notable Hīnayāna sect—the Mahāsāṅghikas—followed the Hīnayāna fundamental tenets (e.g. the Four Noble Truths, Eight-fold Path and the Chain of Causation), but also accepted the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas as celestial beings. This position seems to have brought the Mahāsāṅghikas quite close to the Mahāyāna sect. From the Mahāsāṅghikas emerged another sect, the Bahuśrutīyas, whose active presence in the Nagarjunakonda-Amaravati area of the eastern Deccan is clear from epigraphic evidence.

The most distinguishing features of Mahāyāna Buddhism were the recognition of the Buddha as a god, the development of the philosophy of Void (*Sūnyavāda*) and the concept of Bodhisattvas. The Pāli canonical texts never propounded the divine status of the Buddha and therefore the Buddha

was represented in art through aniconic symbols, like the elephant, horse, the Bodhi tree, the Wheel of Law (*Dharmachakra*), etc. From the first century BC/AD, the Buddha began to be propitiated in human form under the influence of the Mahāyāna thinking. Revering the Master through images rather than abstract and aniconic symbols had immediate and widespread appeal for both monks and nuns and also for the lay worshipper. Mahāyāna philosophy laid great emphasis on the aquisition of merit (*puṇya*) by a person through charity and liberality (*dāna*). This implied that a rich and/or powerful person donating lavishly to the Buddhist Saṁgha was in a position to acquire merit which, being constantly on the increase by the virtue of more and more charity, ultimately would pave the way for the person's emancipation. In other words, such a concept would render redundant the steadfast practices, like the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-Fold Path and one's emancipation through the gradual four stages: salvation could be ensured instead by giving regular and lavish gifts to the Saṁgha. It is therefore not difficult to appreciate why Mahāyāna had a great following among rulers, merchants, prosperous artisans and craftsmen. Mahāyanism also made signal contribution to the concept of Bodhisattva, who actually replaces the Arhat of the Hīnayāna thought. The Bodhisattva could be a divinity, a recluse and even a householder. Theoretically, all Mahāyanists were potential Bodhisattavas. The Bodhisattava is the Buddha Becoming, different from the Buddha Being. Though the Bodhisattva has attained a very high spiritual status and perfectly capable of attaining the Buddhahood, yet he refrains from reaching that ultimate state till the entire humanity reached the sacred goal of salvation. As the Bodhisattva is full of compassion (*karuṇā*) for human miseries and always strives for the amelioration of human sorrow, the concept naturally attracted great attention. Particularly prominent among the Bodhisattvas are Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Maitreya. Mañjuśrī presides over Knowledge and removes the darkness of ignorance; he is also the preceptor of Maitreya, the future Buddha. Two Mahāyāna philosophies immensely enriched Indian classical thoughts; one is Yogāchāra founded by Vasubandhu and Śunyavāda (the concept of Void), the latter established by the celebrated philosopher Nāgārjuna.

Jainism did not expand beyond the subcontinent like Buddhism, but its popularity within India is beyond any doubt. The formal division of the Jaina religion between Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras was complete by about first century AD. A premier centre of Jainism was Mathurā, which has yielded many specimens of Jaina images and also several records of donations to the Jain monastery. Another lively centre of Jainism was Ujjayinī. The spread of Jainism in Kaliṅga by the late first century BC is clearly borne out by the Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela, who was a devout Jaina follower and caused the excavation of cave-shelters near Bhuvaneswar in Orissa.

XV.

Art and Architecture

One of the most important markers of a thriving cultural life is in the arena of art and architecture. Secular elements can be discerned in both sculpture and architecture, but both were primarily inspired by religious life and activities. The village life, the urban scenario and both rural-urban architecture have been ably delineated by artists in sculptures, the vast majority of which directly linked to various religious cults and sects. Architectural remains of brahmanical shrines are rare; but most architectural creations were related to Buddhism in the form of the *stūpa*, the *chaitya* and the *vihāra* (monastery). Though the *stūpa* was venerated by both the Buddhists and the Jainas, it has a special association with Buddhism.

The Buddha, just before he passed away, is said to have enjoined upon Ānanda to erect *stūpas* on his mortal remains (*Mahāparinibbānasutta*). It immediately establishes that the *stūpa* was primarily associated with funerary practices, which must have been in vogue at the time of the demise of the Master because he did not leave behind any instruction about the *stūpa's* shape and construction. The *stūpa*, as the term suggests, is a mound, which initially was an earthen one, raised over the mortal remains of the deceased. The *stūpa* was therefore a funerary structure, at least initially. The most distinctive feature of the *stūpa* architecture is its hemispherical, semi-circular dome. Aśoka is credited with the construction of 84,000 *stūpas* in the Buddhist tradition, which obviously exaggerated the figure to glorify the Maurya emperor's efforts in promoting the *stūpa* architecture. What is important is that Aśoka probably began the construction of brick-built *stūpas* or provided a brick encasing to the already exisitng earthen *stūpas*. The *stūpas* would consequently be more durable and last longer. During the post-Maurya times, there was a remarkable spurt in the *stūpa* architecture, which spanned over a vast area from the north-western frontier areas to Andhra Pradesh in the south; Sri Lanka too experienced regular construction of *stūpas*. *Stūpas* are of three broad types: (1) *Śarīra/Dhātu stūpa*—these were raised over the mortal remains of the Buddha and his direct disciples. Such *stūpas* were objects of great veneration and held in the highest esteem, (2) *Pāribhogika stūpas*, which were associated with the veneration of the objects used by the Buddha, (3) *Nirdeśika* or *Uddeśika stūpas*, which were commemorative in nature, raised to perpetuate the hallowed memory of some aspects of the Buddha's life and/or some important event in the history of Buddhism. In subsequent times, devout Buddhists constructed small/miniature *stūpas* as a remembrance of their visits to some sacred Buddhist centres; these were votive *stūpas*. Of the *stūpas* of the post-Maurya phase, those at Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati are regarded as outstanding representatives of the *stūpa* architecture.

These *stūpas* were usually made of stones or its brick layers were encased with stones. The *stūpa* stands on a raised circular platform, (*veḍikā*) on which stood the semi-circular dome (*aṇḍa*). The top of the hemispherical dome is flat in order to accommodate a square box-like member (*harmikā*). The *harmikā* was protected with railings. The *harmikā* served the purpose of a storage space, in which were deposited within a casket, the mortal remains of the Buddha or portions of objects used by him. As the contents within the *harmikā* were meant for veneration, the *harmikā* was protected by an umbrella-like object (*chhatrāvalī* with the *chhatradaṇḍa*) that was raised above the *harmikā*. The upraised *chhatradaṇḍa* added an impression of accentuated height to a structure which was primarily semi-circular in shape. The *stūpa* was also provided with a circumambulatory path for the devotees and visitors. The *stūpa* was usually enclosed by stone railing pillars, which clearly were modelled on the traditional fencing made of wood or bamboo. In the four cardinal directions were the four superbly sculpted gateways, their ornate designs presenting an interesting contrast to the bare and plain outer walls of the hemispherical dome. There are instances of royal support in the construction of large *stūpas*. As the principal component of the *stūpa* is its hemispherical dome (*aṇḍa*), it offers considerable difficulties to accentuate the height of the *stūpa* with a view to attracting the attention of the devotee and the onlooker from a great distance. The wayout lay in adding a drum-shaped component (*medhi*) between the base and the semi-circular superstructure; providing the *stūpa* with a two-tier base instead of a single one; and finally, increasing the height of the *chhatradaṇḍa* and the number of parasoles attached to the *chhatradaṇḍa*. This helped enhancement of the size of the *stūpa* without disturbing its basic semi-circular superstructure.

Another architecutral form specially associated with Buddhism was the *chaitya*, the genesis of which too may have been connected with funerary practices (*chitā*). The *chaitya* was constructed by cutting rocks to provide a cave-shelter for monks. The *chaitya* was therfore a rock-cut architecture; it was also a cave-shelter which was, however, artificial and man-made. The best specimens of the *chaitya* architecture are situated in the western part of the Deccan: Nasik, Bhaja, Kondane, Junnar, Karle, Pitalkhora, etc. The Karle *chaitya* is considered to be the outstanding specimen of this architecture due to its structural excellence, technical accomplishments and superb sculptural decorations.

The ground plan of the *chaitya* is usually oblong or rectangular with an apsidal back. At the end of the *chaitya* hall usually stood a *stūpa* for worship. Along the length of the hall on both the sides are seen several decorated columns with the base resembling the pitcher (*pūrṇakumbha*). The superstructure consists of a barrel vaulted roof, which is formed by pairs of rib-like vaults from the two sides. Between the wall and the pillars was located the circumambulatory path, a constant feature of the *chaitya* architecture. The most spectacular component of the *chaitya* was its facade

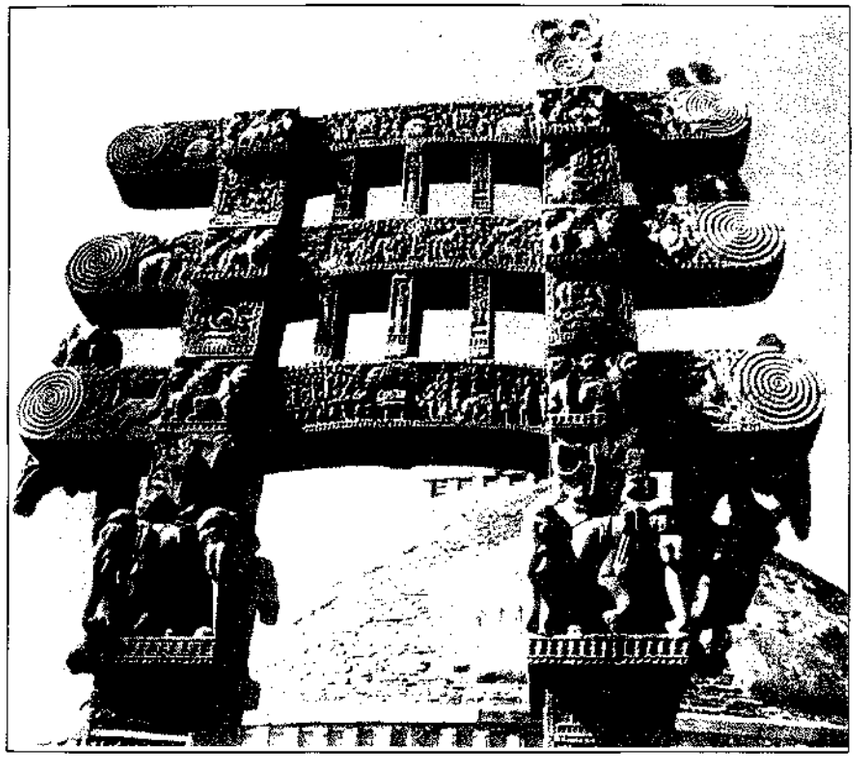


Plate 5.7: Eastern gateway, Sanchi Stupa

through which the entrance was provided. The *chaitya* opening resembled a horse-shoe; the horse-shoe shaped facade was embellished with a window through which sunlight entered *chaitya* hall. The entrance was usually decorated with beautiful sculptures, including the figures of donors to the *chaitya*.

Besides the *stūpa* and *chaitya*, another architecutral form was *vihāra* or the monastery meant for the residence of monks and nuns. Buddhist and Jaina *vihāras* at the initial phase were often a combination of several caves. Usually a little flat land in a hilly tract was surrounded by caves on three sides. The caves were meant for the residence of monk, the larger cave was set aside for congregation and worship and the flat land served the purpose of a courtyard. With the growing need for larger *vihāras* in later times, brick-built *vihāras* came into existence; such brick-built *vihāras* indicated the preference for permanent structures of monasteries.

Artistic creativity is superbly manifested in the sculptures of this period. Both stone and terracotta were used as the medium for sculpting. The sculptural tradition visible in the art of Sanchi and Bharhut and in the three major schools of sculpture, Gandhāra, Mathurā and Amaravati is stylistically

distinguishable from the previous Mauryan sculptures. The latter was largely a court art, as Niharranjan Ray has demonstrated. No such influence and demand of the royal court is evident in the sculptural art of the post-Maurya period. If the Maurya art is noted for the conspicuous absence of human figures, such figures abound in the stone sculptures of the post-Maurya times. The stiffness and formalism of the Mauryan sculpture are replaced with flowing tenderness of forms—human, floral and faunal. Though the three schools of sculptures, Gandhāra, Mathurā and Amaravati have their distinctive feautres, they all share the common theme of depicting the life of the Buddha in the form of narrative art. Principal stages of the Buddha's life, his birth, his schooling, renunciation, meditation under the Bodhi tree, delivering the first sermon, performing miracles at Śrāvasti and the *parinirvāṇa* are delineated with admirable details. We have already mentioned that the Buddha was earlier represented aniconically through various symbols, but later he was shown in the human form.

Most of the sculptures at Bharhut and Sanchi are seen on the gateways and on the railing pillars. The sculptures are in low (*bas*) relief and the sculptor was rarely able to portray the sense of perspective and depth. If a human figure is meant to be shown behind a house, the figure is actually shown atop the house since the artist here was not able to impart the sense of perspective. But these technical limitations and deficiencies paled before the fascinating richness of the delineation of the unceasing flow of life. The aesthetic treatment of the floral world is a major achievement of the artist. The human figures are marked by softness and plasticity of forms and a flowing linear rtiythm. Special mention must be made of the smiling female figure in the form of a bracket figure on the gateways of the Sanchi *stūpa*. Elaborately ornamented, these nude or semi-nude female figures with heavy breasts, attenuated waist and broad hips are endowed with a frank sensuous modelling. The top portions of gateways at Sanchi show three parallel horizontal bars on which appear wonderfully sculpted scenes of an endless procession of life and creation. The sculpted bars represent, as Niharranjan Ray convincingly argues, the narration of a story or stories in a painted scroll which was, as if, rolled out gradually and sequentially before the viewer. The idea of this representation appears to have been drawn from the folk art in which the *paṭachitra* (scroll painting) is a common medium of simultaneous verbal and visual narrations. Thus the art form drew its inspiration from popular life around the artist and not from the preferences and ideologies of the court.

The figures of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas hold the centre stage in the Gandhāra sculptures, which were made mostly of grey and black schist, but later in stucco as well. There are visible non-indigenous elements in the physiognomy and attire of the Buddha/Bodhisattva figures in the Gandhāra art. The oval face, sharp nose, elegant eyebrows, graceful eyes and a well-proportioned body exuding the charms of youth—all these features in the

Gandhāra Buddha/Bodhisattva images remind us of the figure of Apollo in the Hellenic/Hellenistic art form. Whether standing or sitting, the Buddha figure was carved out with admirable anatomical precision. His garment is thin and fine and clings to the body like a sheet of wet cloth in highly stylized folds (or draperies). The Gandhāra Buddha figure generally has both the shoulders covered by a wrapper-like garment. The same tradition also appears in the seated Buddha figure in the *Dharmachakrapravartana mudrā*, etched on the rock surface in the Karakorum highway. The footwear of the Bodhisattva has a strong affinity with Roman sandals. The Buddha is often accompanied by Vajrapāṇi, wielding thunderbolt: here Vajrapāṇi strongly resembles Zeus. All these features of the Gandhāra sculptural style evolved when the area was occupied at different phases by the Greeks, Śakas, Pahlavas and Kushāṇas. That Gandhāra maintained far-flung commercial contacts with West Asia and Central Asia has already been discussed. V.A. Smith, Ludwig Bachhoffer and A. Foucher argued that the naturalistic depiction of the human figure with anatomical precision and physical grace was not the forte of Indian artists, who are thought to have borrowed these features from the contemporary Hellenistic art. The 'foreign' elements imbibed in the Gandhāra sculptures placed it on a high pedestal of artistic achievements and made possible the naturalistic depiction of the human form for the first time in Indian art history. This position largely stems from the imperial/colonial historiography, which was strongly refuted by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch and later by many other scholars. Coomaraswamy and others pointed out that though there were several non-Indian stylistic features in the depiction of the Buddha/Bodhisattva figures in Gandhāra, these were at the most external attributes. The very basis and theme of this art was deeply rooted to Indian tradition and religion, especially Buddhism. A further counterpoint was also placed that the Buddha figure originated from the concept and form of the figure of the Yaksha, a semi-divine being. To these strong indigenous roots were successfully blended many Hellenistic features in the Gandhāra art. Gandhāra art combined in it not merely Hellenistic traits, but also many West Asiatic and Central Asiatic features. Thus one encounters the regular depiction of fire worship in the Gandhāra art, a trait which probably was derived from Iranian sources. Many figures with conical and pointed caps on their heads remind us of the Scythian caps of similar design.

The extremely rich sculptural tradition of Mathurā is easily distinguishable by its principal medium, the red-spotted sand stone, locally available in Mathurā. The Yaksha figure was sculpted in large numbers in this school of art. These are massive figures with very strong muscular features and a powerful body. Large bulging eyes, smiling countenance and slightly heavy and pot-like belly of the Yaksha permeate a mundane character. Along with Gandhāra, Mathurā is renowned for the creation of numerous Buddha images. The famous figure from Katra demands a closer look. It is a sculpture in high

relief (*alto relivo*) with a pedestal inscription that has helped to assign it to AD first century on palaeographic grounds. Three lion figures in the sitting posture at the bottom of the seated Buddha figure suggest that the Buddha was a Chakravarti. He is seated in the *padmāsana* pose, left hand touching the left knee, the right is upraised in the gesture of assurance (*abhayamudrā*). The upper torso was covered by a wrapper which covers the left shoulder, leaving the right one bare. The eyes are open and the Buddha is endowed with a smiling and calm countenance. The hallmark of Indian sculptural tradition, plasticity of modelling and a flowing linear rhythm can be easily seen in the depiction of this image. The Mathurā sculptures are also famous for its female figures. The soft pliable body with a frank sensuousness and love for purely mundane pleasures strongly attracted the the imaginations of the artist of Mathurā. Women are also portrayed in Bacchanalian scenes, in the bath and attending to their toilette.

The art of Amaravati also drew heavily on Buddhist tradition. Here too, narrative art concerning the life of the Master is the dominant theme. Like the Mathurā and Gandhāra schools, Amaravati too shows a preference for *alto relivo* sculptures. A distinctive feature of the Amaravati style is a thrust on delineating figures in a pronouncedly elongated manner, though plasticity of the form was never hampered nor compromised. The other feature of this style is to densely pack the surface of the sculpture with many figures, leaving little vacant space between figures. The scenes are often endowed with a pronounced element of whirlwind movements and an attempt to impart a sense of dramatic movements. The deliberate portrayal of elongated limbs, sometimes even by elongating the head-dress or crown in the Amaravati sculptures gives a special effect of linear rhythm. This had lasting influence of the modelling of the human figures in the sculptural style in south India during subsequent centuries.

At the end of our survey, it is reasonable to conclude that the absence of a paramount power in the political scenario, the presence of several 'foreign' powers were not a deterrant to the fascinating cultural accomplishments of the age; neither did it preclude the possibilities of major strides in material life during this period. In fact, the five centuries left major landmarks in the development of Indian history; these centuries paved the way for the maturation of many cultural features in the next three centuries which are celebrated in Indian historiography.

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CHAPTER 6

A Political, Social and Cultural Overview: The Epoch of the Guptas and their Contemporaries

(AD 300–600)

The period from AD 300 to AD 600 is one of the most worked out phases by historians of early India. Textbooks celebrate these three centuries, marked by the presence of major political powers—the Guptas in north India and the Vākāṭakas in the Deccan—and a great efflorescence in cultural arena, especially in creative literature, art and architecture. There is a sustained belief in the conventional historiography that the disappearance of 'foreign' powers (e.g. the Śakas and Kushāṇas) not only paved the way for the rise of the Gupta and the Vākāṭaka powers, but inspired the great strides in art and literature too. The period under review is recorded in Indian historiography under various labels as the 'golden age', the 'classical age' and 'the late ancient'. In recent decades, however, such a standpoint of historians has come under considerable criticism and contestation. This is a point to which we shall return at the concluding part of our discussion.

Like the immediately preceding period, bulk of the evidence for the Gupta period—especially for the study of politics, polity and economy—comes from the growing corpus of inscriptions, many of which are copper plate charters. This shift in the nature of epigraphic materials signals significant changes in the political and socio-economic setup, a point which will be taken up later for an elaborate discussion. The age is noted for the availability of excellent gold coins issued by the Guptas, and also for silver and copper coins. The historian also profitably utilizes the vast literary data, culled from normative and creative literature alike. The period is indeed marked by the spread of Sanskrit all over India as a court and elite language, as a medium of expression of the elite culture. Among the non-indigenous sources throwing light on this period, prominent are the travels of the Chinese pilgrim Faxian (in India from AD 399 to AD 414) and the *Christian Topography* by a Syrian Christian monk named Comas Indicopleustes (late sixth century AD).

II

Political Conditions

North India, for the greater part of these three centuries, came under the domination of the Guptas, the most formidable political power of the period. A study of the rise and expansion of the Gupta ruling house will, therefore, be in order here. Like many of the early Indian powers, the process of the rise of the Guptas to political prominence is only dimly known. A few persons with the Gupta name-endings figure in the pre-fourth century AD records, wherein they appeared as important officials. A well-known example was Chandragupta Maurya's provincial governor, Pushyagupta of vaiśya origin (Junagarh *praśasti* of Rudradāman I AD 150). Similarly, some persons with Gupta name-ending appeared as *amātyas* or high-ranking functionaries in inscriptions from the Deccan too, assigned to the early centuries of the Christian era. Official genealogies of the Gupta ruling house, admittedly of later times, however, do not associate any ruler of this house with any of these officials or their families. Many scholars have paid considerable attention to the problem of determining the *varṇa* status of the royal Gupta family, though without much success. This exercise itself is a pointer to the preceding nature of political historiography with a discernible thrust on the origin/original homeland, genealogy and chronology of a ruling house. That the Guptas enjoyed any discernible pedigree will be difficult to prove, and it may not be unlikely that the Guptas could have belonged to the vaiśya *varṇa*. S.R. Goyal, though, is of the opinion that the *gotra* of the Guptas, namely Dharana, indicates that they could be of brāhmaṇa origin. The rise of the Guptas in Indian history, like some other ruling houses, strongly suggests that a kshatriya origin was not a binding condition—following the sastric dictum—for gaining political mastery.

The Gupta genealogy recorded in the Gupta inscriptions and official seals begins with one Śrīgupta, followed by his son Ghaoṭkachagupta, with no known ancestry. That the first two personalities were vassals or at best petty rulers is indicated by their title, *mahārāja*, definitely less prominent than the more impressive title *mahārājadhirāja* assumed by the third member, Chandragupta I. R.C. Majumdar has drawn our attention to the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Ijing (in India from AD 675 to AD 695) to find some clues to the early history of this family. Ijing speaks of the grant of land to a Buddhist monastery at Mi-li-kia-si-kia-po-no by a ruler Che-li-ki-to, who had prospered five centuries before his visit. Majumdar identfied the ruler with Śrīgupta and the monastery with Mṛigasthāpana or Mṛigaśikhāvana *stūpa*, said to have been situated in Varendri in ancient north Bengal. This account of granting some land in north Bengal by Śrīgupta was interpreted by Majumdar to mean that the earliest member of the family possessed some territories in northern Bengal or Varendra. A later modification of

this view by Sudhakar Chattopadhyay sought to locate the territory in the present Murshidabad area of West Bengal. Thus, the theory of Bengal as the original homeland of the Guptas emerged in historiography. This has been challenged by questioning the reliability of the Chinese text, which belongs to a much later period. Ijing places Śrīgupta's reign in AD 175 whereas it is nearly impossible to assign him prior to the last quarter of the third century AD. It was further pointed out that the indisputable proof of the Gupta rule over Bengal cannot go back prior to the fourth decade of the fifth century AD. Goyal and Agrawal have drawn our attention to the definite concentration of the Gupta epigraphic records—by far the most authentic source material for the Gupta history—in the middle Ganga valley and particularly in eastern Uttar Pradesh. There has been a considerable scholarly claim to regard eastern Uttar Pradesh as the original homeland, or at least the primary stronghold of the Guptas with Pāṭaliputra as their apex political centre. The controversy cannot be resolved in the present state of our knowledge.

The uncertainties of the Gupta history are much removed with the rise of Chandragupta I. As the Gupta records give him a much higher political title of *mahārājadhirājā* he is logically taken as an independent ruler distinct from his two predecessors merely having the *mahārāja* title. As the first sovereign ruler of the family, he is credited with initiating an era (named after the Guptas, hence the term Gupta era) which was continued by his successors uninterruptedly. As late as the first part of the eleventh century AD the celebrated scholar Al Biruni was aware of this era. On the basis of his accounts it appears that the era began from AD 319–20, marking the accession of Chandragupta I to the throne. The independent political existence of the Guptas started from this date. The use of this era has a distinct political implication. The chronological span of the use of this reckoning system suggests the duration of the Gupta political control. The spatial spread

Plate 6.1: Gold coins showing Chandragupta I and Kumāradevi (obv.) and goddess seated on lion (rev.)

of the use of this era, especially in the records of non-Gupta rulers, is an indicator of the expansion of the Gupta power and the acceptance of the Gupta suzerainty. The cessation of the use of the era in records, on the other hand, points to the decay and ultimate decline of the Gupta political control. The foundation of the Gupta power seems to have been laid by Chandragupta I who has been assigned a reign period of roughly fifteen years (320–335 AD). His two less prominent predecessors, Śrīgupta and Ghatotkachagupta, are placed respectively from AD 275–300 and AD 300–320. How the Guptas rose to an independent and prominent political position is not very clear. Chandragupta I's reign is understandable only from later records and some literary accounts. A Puranic passage reflecting the conditions not later than the fourth century AD suggests (in the form of a pseudo prophecy) that the territories (*janapadas*) of Prayāga (region round present Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh), Sāketa (around present Ayodhyā in northern Uttar Pradesh) and Magadha along the Ganges (*anugaṅgā*) would be enjoyed by the Guptas. No Gupta ruler prior to Chandragupta I was powerful enough to exercise control over these substantial territories, and so the passage probably indicated the extent of the Gupta kingdom at the time of Chandragupta I.

An early type of the Gupta gold coin is also associated with the name of Chandragupta I, but whether he was the issuer of this gold coin is a debatable issue. The political importance of this coin lies in the representation of the Gupta monarch along with the Gupta queen Kumāradevī whose Lichchhavi origin is unmistakable from the legend *Lichchhavayaḥ* in the coin. The description of the Lichchhavīs in plural certainly speaks of their non-monarchical polity. They have been traditionally associated with the area around Vaiśālī in Muzaffarpur in north Bihar at least since the sixth century BC. The Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of gold coin leaves little room for doubt about the marriage alliance between the rising monarchical power in the middle Ganga valley and a well-known non-monarchical clan in north Bihar. In the long run the marriage probably resulted in the incorporation of the area around Vaiśālī within the Gupta realm. There is evidence of the Gupta official seals of the subsequent times to attest their rule over Vaiśālī. Vaiśālī is never known to have been directly conquered by the Guptas. A logical surmise would be that the Guptas acquired this territory through their marriage alliance with the Lichchhavīs. The political significance of this matrimonial connection is intelligible not only by the coin legend *Lichchhavayaḥ*, but also by one of the epithets of Samudragupta (progeny of this marriage), namely, the grandson of the Lichchhavīs (*Lichchhavīdauhitra*). Like the militant Magadhan power under Ajātaśatru who claimed to have crushed the Lichchhavīs in the fifth century BC, the Guptas too—argues Raychaudhuri—were fully conscious of the strategic importance of a territory to north of the Ganga and close to their capital, Pāṭaliputra. The Lichchhavīs too must have somehow withstood the terrible political and military reversal inflicted by Magadha in the pre-Mauryan

times. The foundation of the Gupta power by Chandragupta I seems to have brought the middle Ganga valley and the region around Pāṭaliputra back to political limelight. During the rule of the Kushāṇas, the most formidable empire in north India before the rise of the Guptas, the political citadel was certainly Mathurā in the Ganga-Yamuna doab, which, because of the very nature of the Kushāṇa polity, was largely oriented towards the north-western borderland of the subcontinent. This shift of the geo-political focus merits consideration in the study of the Gupta politics and polity that was firmly rooted to the central sector of the Ganga valley. Chandragupta's reign saw that the Guptas were in firm control of the middle Ganga valley, in areas both to the north and the south of the river. This provided the vital platform for their impressive political expansion during the rule of the next king Samudragupta (AD 335–75).

Though there has been some debates whether Samudragupta was the direct successor of his father Chandragupta I, he was definitely the most outstanding political figure of his family. His stupendous efforts to raise the Guptas as the supreme political power are presented in the Allahabad pillar inscription, the Eran stone inscription and his coins (there are two copper plates said to have been issued by him, but they are considered spurious by epigraphists). A great conqueror, Samudragupta uprooted (*unmūlya*) no less than ten kings of north India (Āryāvartta), according to the Allahabad *praśasti* of Harisheṇa, the court poet of Samudragupta. They are:

1. Rudradeva (generally identified with a Śaka king of Western India)
2. Matila (ruling near Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh)
3. Nāgadatta (a Nāga ruler of north India or in northern Bengal)
4. Gaṇapatināga (ruling over Mathurā)
5. Nāgasena (a Nāga ruler associated with Padmāvatī in Madhya Pradesh)
6. Chandravarman (ruling in the Bankura district, West Bengal)
7. Achyuta (probably ruling over Ahichchhatra in Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh)
8. Nandī (possibly a Nāga king, because many Nāga rulers bore the name Nandī, but his kingdom cannot be properly identified)
9. Balavarman (identified either with a king of upper Assam or of eastern Malwa)
10. A petty king of the Kota family (*Kotakulaja*), generally located in Ludhiana, Punjab

There are of course scholarly debates on the identifications of these rulers and their respective territories, mainly because Harisheṇa did not mention their respective kingdoms by name. Since they were defeated and their territories annexed to the Gupta empire, these kingdoms became non-existent in the perception of the court-poet. That is why Harisheṇa probably remained silent about the kingdoms of these defeated rulers. The Guptas,

firmly entrenched in the middle Ganga valley, aimed at the extermination of rivals in Ganga-Yamuna doab, upper Ganga valley, Punjab and Haryana, central India and Malwa plateau and tried to expand in the lower Ganga regions. The Nāga kings seem to have been the most powerful rivals in contemporary north India and borne the brunt of the assault launched by Samudragupta. That the Gupta power penetrated into eastern Malwa, i.e. the region around ancient Vidiśā, is proved by Samudragupta's inscription from Eran (ancient Airikina). Here the adversary of the Guptas must have been the western Śaka kshatrapas ruling over Malwa and western India. Samudragupta's victories over these rulers reduced the multiplicity of powers in the greater parts of north India, paving the way for the political supremacy of the Guptas. The Gupta emperor, who is said to have aimed for the unification of the earth (*dharaṇī-bandha*)*also* reduced the forest chiefs (*ātavikarājas*) to his servants (*parichārakīṭkṛita*). These forest-chiefs may conveniently be located in the present Baghelkhand region where existed such *ātavikarājas* in the Gupta Era 209 (AD 529). His claim of being the exterminator (*sarvarājocchettā*), in the context of the then north Indian political situation, has some justification, though not entirely free from court-poetical exaggeration.

His south Indian campaign was no less spectacular. He claims victories over all south Indian kings (*sarvadakshiṇāpatharāja*). Twelve such kings in peninsular India are explicitly stated along with their respective territories in the Allahabad *praśasti*. Harisheṇa appears to have enlisted them in a definite geographical order which helps us judge the extent of the south Indian campaign. But more important is the mention of the territories of vanquished enemies in the south, a pattern of narration distinctly different from the account of his north Indian military and political exploits. This was deliberately done as Samudragupta followed a different policy in trans-Vidhyan territories: capturing the defeated enemy, then favouring by releasing the captive as the victor was sure of his suzerainty (*grahaṇa-mokshānugraha* policy). In other words the territories of the defeated *dakshiṇāpatharājas* were not annexed to the Gupta empire and therefore the kingdoms of these rulers continued to exist. Samudragupta then must have followed a policy in Dakshiṇāpatha different from that in Aryavarta. We shall discuss this later. Below is the list of the twelve south Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta:

1. Mahendra of Kośala (south Kośala, comprising Raipur, Bilaspur, Śāmbalpur areas in Chhattisgarh)
2. Vyāghrarāja of Mahākāntāra (the forest tracts in the Bastar region)
3. Maṇṭarāja of Kaurala (eastern Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh)
4. Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithapuram near Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh)

5. Svāmidatta of Koṭṭura (identification uncertain, but possibly in the Vizagapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh)
6. Damana of Eraṇḍapalla (identification controversial, probably in either in the Vizagapatnam district or the Western Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh)
7. Vishṇugopa of Kāñchī (Kāñchīpuram in northern Tamil Nadu)
8. Nīlarāja of Avamukta (probably in the Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh)
9. Hastivarman of Veṅgi (present Veggi or Pedda-vegi in the deltas of the Godavari and the Kṛishṇa)
10. Ugrasena of Pālakka (possibly located in the Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh)
11. Kuvera of Devarashṭra (probably on the eastern coast, Vizagapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh)
12. Dhanañjaya of Kusthalapura (possibly in the western part of Andhra Pradesh).

Despite many debates among historians about the identifications of rulers and their respective territories, it is more or less certain that Samudragupta penetrated the Deccan through central India and the forest tract of western Orissa and Chattisgarh to reach the coastal areas of Kaliṅga. From here, he followed the eastern sea-board southwards right up to Kāñchī in what was later called Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. Of the defeated twelve rulers Vishṇugopa was definitely a Pallava king and Hastivarman a Sālaṅkāyana ruler. The campaign eloquently speaks of the striking power of the Gupta army and the great military generalship of Samudragupta. It is indeed a rare military feat for a ruler with his power-base in north India to plan and so successfully execute such a long-distance campaign in trans-Vindhyan regions. Equally exceptional is the *grahaṇa-mokshānugraha* policy. Various explanations have

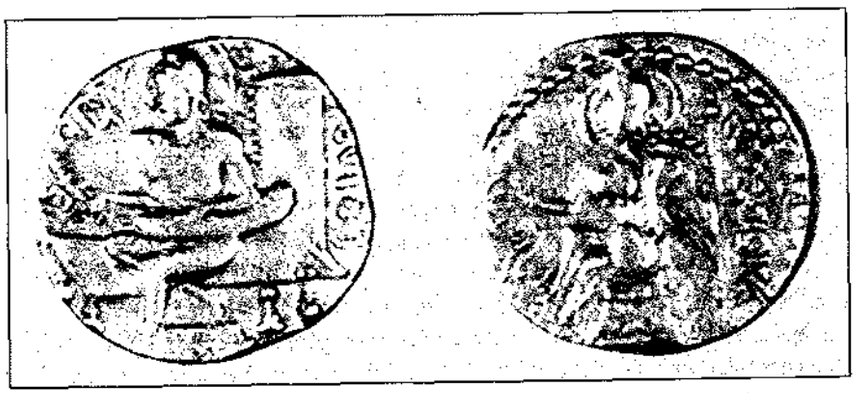

Plate 6.2: Gold coin showing Samudragupta playing vina (obv.) and goddess Lakshmī (rev.)

been offered towards understanding the motives of this campaign. In the Allahabad *praśasti* there are names of three north Indian rulers uprooted by Samudragupta, followed by the account of the defeat of twelve south Indian kings and then once again, the full list of ten north Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta.

If this is interpreted as a strict sequence of events, Samudragupta then first defeated only three north Indian kings, after which he proceeded to south India and finally returned again to the north to exterminate ten north Indian rivals. This led a number of scholars to infer that while Samudragupta was away in the south his north Indian rivals challenged his supremacy taking advantage of his absence. Samudragupta, therefore, had to rush to north India to defeat them, but left his southern campaign unfinished. Thus the *grahaṇa-mokshānugraha* policy is seen as a softer one which was required by the contingent situation in north India. The Allahabad *praśasti* however has no corroborative evidence of any political challenge from his contemporary north Indian powers. The other alternative explanation was that Samudragupta could have been actually defeated by a confederacy of south Indian rulers under the leadership of Vishṇugopa of Kāñchī. That is why the Gupta king had to take recourse to a policy of freeing the captured kings. Once again, there is no supporting information from the Allahabad *praśasti*, our main evidence. It has also been argued that Samudragupta realized the practical difficulties integrating such a vast territory from his north Indian base or more precisely, the Magadhan core region, and wisely allowed the defeated rulers of the Deccan and south India independent political existence. But it will be extremely unlikely to imagine an astute military and political leader like Samudragupta to have launched such a distant campaign without prior calculations of the political advantages realizable from a possible victory. What is more or less clear is that Samudragupta definitely directed his attention to the eastern seaboard adjoining present Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and northern Tamil Nadu. Significantly enough, this littoral was dotted with a number of flourishing ports. On the basis of early classical texts, Tamil Sangam texts and archaeological materials (excavated and explored coastal and deltaic sites and the distribution of the Rouletted Ware) these ports appear to have participated in maritime commerce along the eastern coast and also with Sri Lanka and South-East Asia. Moreover, Veṅgi was a prosperous agricultural region.

Harisheṇa claims that Samudragupta was in touch with Sri Lanka and the islands of South-East Asia (*sarvadvīpa vāsibhiḥ*). For a north Indian ruler over a land-locked territory, political control over the eastern coast may have provided a much needed outlet for reaching Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Such a political control could be secured by stamping upon the defeated rulers of eastern Deccan the superior military might of the Gupta monarch without necessarily having to annex them. Seen from this angle, Samudragupta might have been prompted to launch his *dakshiṇāpatha* campaign more for

strategic and economic advantages rather than territorial annexation. Some scholars argue that Raghu's conquest in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁśam* echoes the Deccan campaign of Samudragupta. The same has also been explained as an application of the Kauṭilyan model of the *dharmavijaya*, different from annexation of territories (*digvijaya*). Even if it amounts to *dharmavijaya* it is definitely not similar to Aśoka's conquest by Dhamma (*dhammavijaya*).

Attention now may be turned to another category of the-then powers who satisfied *Prachaṇḍśāsana* Samudragupta by paying him all tributes, obeying orders, attending the court and paying him obescience (*sarvvakāradānājñākaraṇāpraṇāmāgāmana-paritoshitaprachaṇḍaśāsana*). These include five frontier chiefs (*pratyantanripati*) and nine non-monarchical groups. The five frontier areas were Samataṭa (Southeastern Bangladesh, to the east of the Meghna), Ḍavāka (probably in the Nowgaon district, Assam), Nepala (Nepal), Kamarūpa (upper Assam) and Kartṛipura (Kartarpur near Jullundhar in the Punjab or in the Gadhwal areas of Uttar Pradesh). The non-monarchical groups are clubbed together by Harisheṇa. They are Mālavas (Jaipur area, Rajasthan), Ārjunāyanas (located in the Delhi-Jaipur-Agra triangle), Yaudheyas (Bharatpur, Rajasthan), Madrakas (between the rivers Chenab and Ravi in Pakistan), Ābhirās (in western Deccan around Nasik?), Prabhiras, Kākapuras (near Sanchi), Sanakānīkas (near Vidiśā, Madhya Pradesh), and Kharapārikas (possibly in the Damoh district, Madhya Pradesh). That many of these were non-monarchical polities is clearly indicated by the legends of their coins and the seals. This is a political relation clearly different from that between the Gupta emperor and the *Āryāvarttarājas* and *Dakshiṇāpatharājas* respectively.The frontier chiefs and the non-monarchical groups stood as tributary powers to Samudragupta who spread his political superiority over an extensive outlying zone from south-eastern Bangladesh to Rajasthan and from the Himalayan foothills to the western fringes of the Deccan. The Gupta power significantly penetrated into what is called the tribal belt of central India.

The Gupta empire was in intimate contacts with a number of independent powers outside and on the borderlands of the subcontinent. The Allahabad *praśasti* enlists Daivaputra-shāhī-shāhānushāhī (a Kushāṇa ruler to the west of the Indus and in the north-western borderlands), Śaka-muruṇḍa (a Śaka king whose exact area of rule is not clear)and all island dwellers including Sri Lanka (*Saiṁhalakādi-sarvvadvīpavāsibhiḥ*) as maintaining friendly relations with Samudragupta by presenting themselves at the Gupta court (*ātmanivedana*), offering him the gifts of maidens (*kanyopādyanadāna*) and by seeking the Gupta royal seal with Garuḍa emblem as a guarantee for the rule over their own territories (*garutmadaṅkasvabhuktī-śāsanayāchana*). These powers, though independent, appear to have been deeply impressed by the political supremacy of the Guptas. To what extent the Gupta emperor really exerted influence over these distant rulers, or whether Harisheṇa composed a *praśasti* in conformity to the expected standard of an eulogy in favour of

a political biographee, is open to question. But it may at least be granted that Samudragupta by his matchless military leadership and by maintaining different types of political and diplomatic relations with different types of contemporary powers made the Guptas the most formidable power in north India.

III

The growth and spread of the power of the Guptas continued unabated under Chandragupta II, son and successor of Samudragupta, during his reign of nearly four decades (AD 375–414). The seventh century dramatist Viśākhadatta in his drama *Devīchandraguptam* narrates that Chandragupta II had an elder brother, Rāmagupta, the actual successor to the throne. He was defeatd by a Śaka king and tried to buy peace by offering his chief queen Dhruvadevī to the Śaka adversary. In order to maintain the family's glory, Chandragupta II killed the Śaka king, dethroned his elder brother and married Dhruvadevī. This story has led a few historians to infer a struggle for succession between two brothers. It is however difficult to prove the identity and existence of Rāmagupta as a ruler of the imperial Gupta family, except for a few copper coins bearing his name, found from Malwa. D.C. Sircar dated these coins to *c.* sixth century AD on the basis of the palaeography and therefore denied the existence of a Rāmagupta as a successor to Samudragupta in the late fourth century AD. It is difficult to consider the existence of any ruler between Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. The earliest known inscription of Chandragupta II is dated in his fifth regnal year, which is dated in GE. 61 (380–381). The beginning of his reign is therefore assigned in 375 and he cannot but be the direct successor to Samudragupta.

Chandragupta II seems to have continued with the marriage alliance policy of his grandfather to derive political mileage. He is known to have married the Nāga princess Kuveranāgā, thereby implying his attempt to befriend the Nāgas of Central India and the *doab* even after their ouster in the hands of Samudragupta. The daughter of this marriage, Prabhāvatiguptā, was given in marriage to the Vākāṭakas, the foremost political power in peninsular India. Chandragupta II is also credited with entering into marriage alliance with the Kadambas of Kuntala (in Karnataka). All these matrimonial alliances are likely to have strengthened his position. According to an inscription from Vidiśā, the Gupta emperor was present in eastern Malwa with an ardent desire to conquer the world (*kṛitsnapṛithvī jayārthena*). His principal aim was to put an end to the Śaka rule in western India. While eastern Malwa had already come under the Gupta rule during the reign of Samudragupta, western Malwa and Gujarat were still under the control of the Śaka kings. The memory of his victory over the Śakas is possibly retained in the *Devichandraguptam*, mentioned earlier. The crucial clue to his victory over the Śakas is found in his coins. He was the first Gupta ruler to have

issued silver coins which were clearly modelled after the circulating silver coins of the Śakas. These Gupta silver coins bear a date of GE 90+x; in other words, the numismatic testimony speaks of his conquest of the Śaka realm sometime around AD 411–12. This further implies that he achieved this victory in the closing years of his reign. The other possible indication of his victory over the Śakas of Gujarat and Kathiawad is borne out by his portrayal as a lion-slayer in his coins. The lion being still available in this area, the coin probably signifies his conquest of western India. With this conquest, the Gupta territorial expansion reached the westernmost part of the subcontinent and included the prosperous area of Gujarat noted for its maritime trade.

An inscription on an iron pillar at Mehrauli near Qutb Minar in Delhi records the military achievements of a king named Chandra. He is said to have raided Vāhlīka (Balkh in Afghanistan) by having crossed the seven mouths of the river Indus; he also conquered a confederacy of enemies in Vaṅga (central deltaic Bengal); the ruler was a devout Vaishṇava. Scholars are sharply divided on the question of the identity of the ruler. Some has favoured his identification with Chandragupta I. The main problem in this attempted identification is the question as to why Samudragupta had to conquer so many north Indian contemporaries, if his father had already enjoyed extensive victories. The other alternative is to identify him with Chandravarman, a ruler in West Bengal, contemporary to and defeated by Samudragupta. Once again it is difficult to believe that a local ruler Chandravarman can be credited with such widespread military campaigns. Most historians tend to identify him with Chandragupta II, in view of his great prowess and known military success. The inscription palaeographically belongs to the fourth century AD which also fits with the reign period of Chandragupta II. It is unlikely that his campaign to Vāhlīka—even if true—led to any territorial annexation; it probably speaks of a successful raid. The description of the military achievements of king Chandra may also suggest a

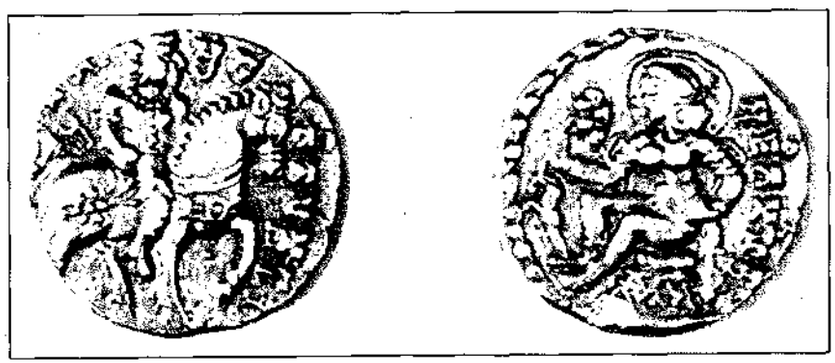

Plate 6.3: Gold coin showing Kumāragupta I riding a horse (obv.) and seated Lakshmī (rev.)

standardized eulogy, highlighting the model of the conquest of four quarters (*digvijaya*).

The Gupta rule thus embraced greater parts of north India and stretched as far as the Kathiawad peninsula at the time of the death of Chandragupta II. As there was hardly a power to measure sword with the Gupta rulers in north India, the reign of Kumāragupta I (AD 414–54), son and successor of Chandragupta II, was marked by few military campaigns. This was a period of political consolidation and integration of an extensive north Indian realm. For the first time, definite evidence of the Gupta rule over north Bengal, north Bihar and Rajasthan comes from his inscriptions. Along with that Kumāragupta certainly retained firm control over the core area of the empire lying in the middle Ganga plains. The overall prosperity during this period will be best evident from a large variety of superb gold coins issued by Kumāragupta I.

The phase following his reign, however, is marked by problems within the realm, incursions from without and dissension within the imperial family itself. Skandagupta, who apparently succeeded Kumāragupta after AD 454, does not figure in the genealogical list of Gupta kings (in inscriptions and seals) where a son of Kumāragupta I, namely, Purugupta, is mentioned. It has been suggested that Skandagupta was possibly not the son of the chief queen of Kumāragupta and, therefore, was not the legal claimant to the throne following primogeniture. While Skandagupta's records make a vague allusion to his mother (possibly Devakī), the mother of Purugupta is categorically mentioned as Mahādevī (chief queen) Anantadevī. However, even if one concedes the possibility of a struggle of succession after or on the eve of the death of Kumāragupta I, Skandagupta seems to have been the direct successor. Kumāragupta's last known inscription is dated in GE 136, and in 136 GE, the earliest known inscription of Skandagupta was issued. This hardly allows any inter-regnum between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. The Bhitari inscription informs us that either the last days of Kumāragupta or the very early years of Skandagupta witnessed the trouble created by the Pushyamitras whose identity is difficult to ascertain. Skandagupta successfully suppressed them. The condition in the initial phase of his reign seems precarious since the Gupta emperor had to spend three nights on the bare earth (*kshititalaśayanīye yena nītātriyāmā*). Soon after that a much greater threat appeared in the northwestern part: the advent of the dreaded Hūṇas (Huns), a fierce Central Asian nomadic group. It goes to the great credit of Skandagupta that he defeated the Hūṇas, as was celebrated in his Bhitari inscription. Skandagupta was, therefore, lauded by Raychaudhuri as the greatest hero of the Gupta dynasty. He was last Gupta ruler who retained the vast territories of the empire intact, though it was not free from troubles. After his reign the Guptas lost forever their authority in western India.

Determining the genealogy and chronology of the Gupta dynasty in the post-Skandagupta phase is problematic because scholars sharply differ in their opinions. The Gupta seals and genealogies describe that Purugupta, the son of Kumāragupta, was followed by Kumāragupta and Vishnugupta. On the other hand the definite rule of Budhagupta (*c.* AD 475-496/500) is beyond any dispute. In AD 474, a Gupta ruler, Kumāragupta is found to have been ruling around Sarnath (near Vārāṇasī). He is possibly Kumāragupta II, as he ruled later than Kumāragupta I. If Purugupta at all ruled he enjoyed a very brief reign. Both he and Kumāragupta II could have ruled between AD 467 (death of Skandagupta) and AD 475 (beginning of Budhagupta's reign). Budhagupta's relatively long reign of nearly 25 years witnessed the retention of the Gupta political control over the Ganga valley, north Bengal and eastern Malwa around Eran. Budhagupta's hold was still over an impressive territory. He was perhaps the last of the major Gupta rulers to have exercised effective control over greater parts of the Gupta realm, minus western India.

Three more or less simultaneous rulers were on the scene in the post-Budhagupta phase of the Gupta political history. All bore high-sounding Gupta titles to impress upon their authority. They were Vainyagupta, ruling in the eastern most part of Bengal (AD 507), Bhānugupta (AD 510) who was present in eastern Malwa and Narasiṁhagupta Bālāditya (AD 515–30). These rulers figure in their inscriptions and coins. Such a situation of three nearly contemporary rulers claiming the Gupta descent may suggest that they ruled in three different sectors of the Gupta realm. The scenario hardly speaks of a well-consolidated polity and the signs of wear and tear in the Gupta empire are not difficult to read. The political situation became more complex and troublesome for the Guptas with the reappearance of the Hūṇas after half a century—this time under Toramāna and Mihirakula—and the almost inevitable rise of the former vassals of the Guptas to de facto independent position. According to a Jaina tradition, the tottering Gupta realm finally came to end around AD 550 or AD 555. The last vestiges of the Gupta rule was discerned by D.C. Sircar in Orissa, where an inscription dated in GE 250 (AD 570) spoke of the Gupta rale, now a shadow of its past greatness. The presence of the Guptas in the political arena of northern India therefore remained for a maximum period of two centuries and a half.

New lights on the military and political successes of the Hūṇas, especially Toramāna are available from three copper plates from Sanjeli in Gujarat. The latest of these inscriptions belongs to Toramāna's regnal year 19, suggesting his rale of almost two decades (AD 500-20). His reign was previously assigned to 15 years on the basis of the Eran Stone Boar inscription (regnal year 1) and the undated Kura Inscription from the Salt Range area in present Pakistan. The Hūṇa occupation of parts of Gujarat must have taken place by the third year of Toramāna's reign (AD 503): in other words, almost immediately after his rule is recorded in eastern Malwa in his regnal year 1 (AD 501)

in the Eran Stone Boar Inscription of his subordinate Dhanyavishṇu. The three inscriptions under review reveal the name of a family of subordinate rulers in Gujarat under Toramāna, namely Māṭridāsa (I), his son, Bhuta and Māṭridāsa (II), son of Bhuta and grandson of Māṭridāsa I. Their subordinate position is clearly shown by their title *mahārāja*, distinct from the superior titles *mahārājadhirāja* and *paramabhaṭṭāraka* assumed by Toramāna as the suzerain political authority. The fall of the Gupta empire is generally attributed to succession problems, Hūṇa invasions and the ambitions of feudatory powers since the last quarter of the fifth century. Many scholars consider that the Hūṇa havoc was the principal factor in the demise of the Gupta power. Though the Hūṇa invasions must have posed politico-military problems for the Guptas, were they as dreadful in the Indian context as they had been in contemporary European scene? Apart from Skandagupta, Narasiṁhagupta is credited with a victory over Hūṇa Mihirakula. The claims of resounding victories over the Hūṇas appear in the inscriptions of the Aulikaras and Maukharis who were raising their heads at the cost of the attenuating Gupta authority and control. The Aulikara king Prakāśadharman claims in the Risthal inscription (of the Vikramasamvat 572, i.e. AD 515) that by him 'who had established himself in the kingdom of the Hūṇa ruler through his foot stool being flooded with the brightness of the gems of the kingly crown of king Toramāna, the word adhirāja was the was rendered factual in battle'. Prakāśadharman was the son and successor of Rājyavardhana, ruling from Daśapaura (Mandasore in western Madhya Pradesh).

Shorn of literary embellishments, the inscription records Prakāśadharman's victory over the Hūṇas. The Hūṇas were overpowered even by a local ruling house of western Malwa, besides being defeated by the imperial Gupta rulers and other powers in the Ganga valley. How much dent did the Hūṇas therefore create into the Gupta empire? The internal problems of the empire posed more serious threats to it than the external ones. The growing power of the vassals of the Guptas ate into the strength of the Gupta authority, on the ruins of which these powers then established their respective political strongholds, This process explains the rise of the Maukharīs of Kannauj, the Pushyabhūtis of Sthāṇvīśvara and the Later Guptas of Magadha. All these areas had earlier formed intergral parts of the Gupta empire. Coupled with the political problems of the empire were the economic strains indicated by the regular debasement of the Gupta gold coinage especially since the end of the fifth century AD.

As the Gupta empire finally ceased to exist in north India the political arena was apportioned among the erstwhile vassals of the Guptas, viz., the Maitrakas of Valabhī, the Pushyabhūtis of Thaneśvar, the Maukharis of Kannauj, the Later Guptas of Magadha (distinct from the imperial Guptas), some independent rulers of Vaṅga, the Parivrājaka and the Uchchakalpa rulers in central India. These powers first ended their allegiance to the Gupta

emperors, then assumed independence and finally established mastery over their respective regions. Once their authority was well entrenched in their core territories, their political and aggressive designs led to the formation of new kinds of relations, hostile and friendly, over various parts of northern India. These new formations, incipient in the latter half of the sixth century AD, took more concrete shapes at the turn of the seventh century.

IV

The Guptas were the most prominent political power for about two centuries and a half and hence our discussion of the political conditions mainly focussed on the north. The trans-Vindhyan territories in central India and particularly the Deccan, which were outside the Gupta control, were politically quite prominent. The multiplicity of political powers in the eastern Deccan in the second quarter of the fourth century AD is clearly evident from the list of the *dakshiṇāpatha* rulers, contemporary to and defeated by Samudragupta. Conspicuous by their absence in the Allahabad *praśasti* are the Vākāṭakas, the most important power in central India and the central Deccan, indicating that the mighty Gupta emperor probably avoided any direct confrontation with them.

Our understanding of the Vākāṭaka history primarily depends on their epigraphs. The discovery of a dozen of fresh Vākāṭaka inscriptions has led to considerable addition to and some modification of our existing knowledge about the Vākāṭakas, thanks largely to the researches by Ajay Mitra Sastri and Hans Bakker. Their early history is only dimly known and it is possible to suggest their brāhmaṇa origin. The earliest ruler of this family was Vindhyaśakti (*c.* AD third century), a name indicative of the close association of the Vākāṭakas with the Vindhyan region. His successor, Pravarasena, had two sons, Gautamīputra (who predeceased and never ruled) and Śarvasena. Two landmarks in their early history were the emergence of the parallel collateral branch of the house, founded by Śarvasena, at Vatsagulma or modern Wāsim in Akola district, Mahārashtra. The successors of Gautamīputra had their stronghold in the region around present Nagpur in Mahārashtra. The latter had their seat of power at Nandivardhana (identified with Nāgardhan/Nandardhan near Ramtek, or Nandapur, about 21 miles north of Nāgardhan in the Nagpur district, Mahārashtra), As ten kings of this branch are known from epigraphic records as against six known rulers of their collateral branch, this is labelled as the main branch—Nandīvardhana of the Vākāṭaka family. The Vatsagulma branch is also called the lesser branch of the house.

Like the Guptas, the Vākāṭakas also have a dimly lit early history of their rule. The similarities with the Guptas continue; the Vākāṭakas with a view to enhancing their political standing contracted dynastic marriage alliance with the Bharasiva ruler Bhavanāga, a powerful figure of central India assignable between the fall of the Kushāṇas and the rise of the Guptas. This could

have been instrumental in pushing the Vākāṭaka control over Bundelkhand, evident from the records of the vassals of Vākāṭaka Pṛithvīsheṇa I (third quarter of the fourth century). This area subsequently passed under the Gupta control with the expansion under Samudragupta. Pṛithvīsheṇa who is said to have lived nearly for a century probably had a long reign which witnessed the consolidation of the Vākāṭaka power in central India. The growing power of the Vākāṭakas was soon taken into consideration by the Guptas. This found expression in the famous dynastic marriage between Prabhāvatīguptā, daughter of Chandragupta II, and Vākāṭaka Rudrasena II, son and successor of Pṛithvīsheṇa I. With the reign of Rudrasena II begins the Vākāṭaka epigraphic tradition. A rather premature death of Rudrasena II around AD 400 brought Prabhāvatiguptā to political limelight, as she ruled for thirteen years as a regent while her three sons were minor. Prabhāvatīguptā's regency is viewed in early Indian historiography as an indirect penetration of the Gupta political influence over the Vākāṭakas who so far had not been overpowered by the Gupta army. This inference gains ground in the continuity of the use of the maiden Gupta name-ending by the Vākāṭaka queen-regent, her leanings to Vaishnavism despite being married to a royal house known to be Śaivas and her retaining the maiden *gotra* affiliation, Dhāriṇi. Some historians have gone to the extent of considering the Vākāṭakas as merely a subordinate or subsidiary ally of the Guptas during the regency of Prabhāvatīguptā. In their own inscriptions of this time the Vākāṭaka rulers are presented as mere *mahārājas*, while the Gupta kings are given the much higher epithet of *mahārājadhirāja*. The Vākāṭakas however never appear to have been reduced to this position, even allowing for some Gupta influence at the Vākāṭaka court during Prabhāvatīguptā's regency. There is no evidence of the use of the Gupta era in the Vākāṭaka area. An able administrator, Prabhāvatīguptā was able to keep intact the Vākāṭaka territories in the central Deccan.

Of her three sons, the eldest remained the heir- designate (*yuvarāja/ yuvamahārāja*) without ever actually ruling. The second son also never ascended the throne probably on account of premature death. The third and youngest one, Pravarasena II, was perhaps the foremost ruler of the house. Recent discovery of inscriptions indicates that he ruled as long as 32 years up to the middle of the fifth century AD (AD 420–452). An important development of his reign was the Vākāṭaka attempt to consolidate their power beyond the Nagpur region, the primary stronghold of the Vākāṭakas. This is indicated by his shifting of the Vākāṭaka capital from Nandivardhana (which had served as their headquarters from the time of Rudrasena II) to Pravarapura, identified with present Paunar (a well-known excavated site), Wardha district in Mahārashtra. The new capital was evidently named after Pravarasena II. Newly discovered inscriptions of his reign prove that the capital was shifted in or before his regnal year 16, i.e. AD 436. His latest record, dated in his thirty-second year, mentions Achalapura corresponding to modern Ellichpur

located in Amraoti district, Maharashtra, thereby indicating his control over this area. The Vākāṭaka authority over major areas watered by the river Benna (=Wainganga) can safely be assumed from epigraphic references to place names like Bennāṭaṭa and Bennākaṭa (the banks of the Wainganga and an administrative centre). A copper-plate of his year 23 (AD 443) describes him as residing at Tripuri (*Tripurīvāsaka*), a well-known town in the ancient territory of Ḍāhala, identifiable with the present-day area around Jabbalpur in Madhya Pradesh. This may logically indicate the extension of the Vākāṭaka power in the Baghelkhand region. One is not sure if such an expansion took place at the cost of their ally, the Guptas, since in 487-88 the same area was being ruled by at least two vassal rulers owing allegiance to the Guptas. Another significant event of this time was the marriage alliance between the Vākāṭakas and the Kuntala rulers of Vanavāsī. The latter is similar to the Kadambas of Banavāsī, who also contracted similar dynastic marriage with the Guptas. The Vākāṭakas and their north Indian counterpart therefore seem to have had similar attitudes of maintaining amiable relation with the Kadamba rulers of south-west Karnataka. Interestingly enough, the friendly relation between the Kadambas and the main branch of the Vākāṭakas is contrasted by the hostilities between the Kadambas and the Vākāṭakas of the Wasim branch. The last known ruler of the main branch Pṛithvīsheṇa II—appears to have ruled at least for seventeen years which is the latest known date in his inscriptions. He seems to have been in control over the traditional strongholds of his family, viz., Rāmagiristhāna (probably Ramtek near Nagpur) and Bennāṭaṭa. The early part of his reign and/or the immediately preceding period of Narendrasena seems to have faced some political problems. This is indicated by the praise of Pṛithvīsheṇa II as the one who resurrected the sunken family (*nimagnavamśoddhātṛi*). If the variant reading of the same expression, is accepted, then he appears to have rescued his house at least twice (*dvimagnavamśoddhātṛi*). The nature or cause of this political problem cannot be ascertained at this moment, but some discomfitures could have been due to hostilities by the rulers of the collateral branch. Nothing further is known about this branch after the end of Pṛithvīsheṇa II's reign is AD 500.

We shall survey the collateral Vatsagulma (Wasim) branch. A separate entity of this branch starts with the time of Śarvasena, younger son of Pravarasena of the main branch. The next ruler was Vindhyaśakti II who enjoyed a long reign of at least 37 years, as is evident from his record. Their hold over ancient Nandīkaṭa, (modern Nander) is also known from the same document. The close association of the Vatsagulma branch of the Vākāṭakas with the Ajanta area (Aurangabad district, Mahārashtra), celebrated for its rock-cut caves, sculptures and paintings, is borne out by inscriptions from Ajanta. The fourth ruler of this line was unknown so far and only recently has been identified with Śarvasena II on the basis of new epigraphic disooveries. He is followed by Devasena, whose inscription from Hisse-Borala (9 km.

south of Wasim) is the only known definitely datable Vākāṭaka record, bearing a date in Śaka era 380 (AD 458). This really provides the sheet-anchor for the study of the Vākāṭaka chronology. The political stability of the Vākāṭakas during his time is evident from his hold over Ajanta and Wasim, which have yielded his inscriptions. The last known ruler of this branch, Harisheṇa, son and successor of Devasena, is known mainly from inscriptions. The Vākāṭaka hold over Ajanta region is recognizable from his two inscriptions from Ajanta. His earliest record, dated in his third regnal year, is a recent discovery from Thalner in Dhule district, Mahārashtra. That he occupied some areas in the western parts of Mahārashtra also is suggested by this record. The cave inscription in Ajanta credits him with conquests over wide areas in the Deccan: Kuntala (the region of Vanavasi in south western Karnataka, under the Kadambas), Avantī (the area around Ujjayinī in western Madhya Pradesh), Kaliṅga (Puri-Ganjam area of Orissa), Kośala (south Kośala comprising the Raipur-Bilaspur-Sambalpur areas), Trikūṭa (probably referring to the Traikūṭaka kings in ancient Aparanta or Konkan area including Nasik), Lāṭa (Nausari-Broach region in western Gujarat) and Andhra (the deltas of the rivers Godavari and Kṛishṇa in Andhra Pradesh). It is difficult to accept this hyperbolic account in its literal sense and the epigraphic account of his victories is more in conformity with the ideal of widespread conquests (*digvijaya*) than with the descriptions of actual military successes. His military sucess against the Kuntala king, the Traikūṭaka who held both Nasik and Ujjayinī, and Kośala may not however be entirely ruled out. A contemporary to Narendrasena and Pṛithvīsheṇa II of the Nandīvardhana branch, he seems to have ruled in the last quarter of the fifth century AD. He is the last known ruler of the family.

The Deccan also witnessed a number of smaller and less significant kingdoms. The Vākāṭaka rule over ancient Vidarbha or modern Berar in the central Deccan was terminated by the Nalas, who claimed descent from the epic hero Nala. Inscriptional evidence may also suggest the Nalas' rule over Koraput and Bastar areas in the bordering regions of present Chhattisgarh and Orissa. But their political career seems to have been cut short either by the Pāṇḍuvaṁśis of Kośala or the rising power of the Chālukyas of the Deccan. The Amraoti region in Mahārashtra, an integral part of the erstwhile Vākāṭaka realm, came under the occupation the Bhojas (hence called Bhojakatakarājya). A branch of this house however moved southwards to the Goa region where their capital Chandrapura was located.

A ruling house more significant than both the Nalas and the Bhojas was that of the Traikūṭakas, already figuring in the Ajanta inscription as an enemy of the Vākāṭakas. They were the rulers of Aparānta, embracing an area from Kanheri to Surat along the western coast. The Kalachuris who occupied parts of the western Deccan from the Traikūṭakas were also a power to reckon with. That they too were in firm command over the whole of Malwa is borne out by the epithet Vaidisa (associated with Vidiśā in eastern Malwa) and their hold

over Ujjayinī. Their inscription from Nasik clearly indicates their possession of this area. The rise to political prominence was mainly due to the military successes of Krishṇarāja, a further expansion of their power to the west is visible from the control of Broach (ancient Bhṛīgukaccha) at the mouth of the Narmada in Gujarat. They used a new era, the Traikūṭaka-Kalachuri era of AD 248. Prior to their reign, inscriptions from Gujarat bore the Gupta era, reminiscent of the rule of the Guptas in the past. The replacement of the Gupta era with that of the Traikūṭaka-Kalachuri in the Kalachuri records leaves little room for doubt about their authority over coastal Gujarat. Their growing power must have emboldened them to wage war (in alliance with the Ābhirās) against the Kadambas of coastal Karnataka, as is mentioned in a Kadamba inscription. The pattern of political rivalry involving powers of western Deccan, Malwa, and Karnataka would leave significant marks on the contours of political history of early medieval Deccan.

The most significant area in the eastern Deccan were the valleys and the deltas of the Godavari and the Kṛishṇa. The present Guntur region was briefly occupied by the Ananda kings. But the more important territory of Veṅgi (to the north of Masulipatnam) was the stronghold of the Sālaṅkāyana kings, one of whom (Hastivarman) had already figured in the list of twelve defeated rulers in the Allahabad *praśasti*. It was however more because of the pressures of the early Pallavas of Andhra Pradesh than the Gupta inroad that the Sālaṅkāyanas ultimately succumbed. The Veṅgi country from 500 to nearly 640 was dominated by the Vishṇukuṇḍins. Though there has been protracted debates about the genealogy and chronology of the Vishṇukuṇḍins, it is more or less certain that Vikramendravarman (AD 500) laid the foundation of their power. Further consolidation of their power can be noted during the time of the most formidable king, Mādhavavarman I Janāśraya (AD 535–85). His performance of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice is a pointer to the increasing power of the Vishṇukuṇḍins in the affairs of the eastern Deccan.

The contiguous territory of Kaliṅga was divided among a few powers. The more prominent of them was the Eastern Gangas with their headquarters at Kaliṅganagara, identified with modern Mukhalingam in the Ganjam district, Orissa. A second political centre of the Eastern Gangas emerged at Dantapura in the Chicacole district. That Veṅgi was territorially related to this region is clearly borne out by the description which stated that Trikalinga was adjacent to the forest area of Veṅgi. The territory of south Kośala witnessed the continuity of the Gupta era (but not of course of the Gupta rule) right up to 282, i.e. AD 601–602 in official records; politically this area was controlled for some time by the Sarabhapuriyas. Their existence was put to an end by the Pāṇḍuvaṁśis who had their seats of power in south Kośala and Mekala (i.e. the central Vindhyan region).

A more continuous political history is seen in the further south with the rise of the early Pallavas. The earliest Pallava rulers are known from

their copper-plate records, written in Prakrit language, assignable to a period from *c.* AD 250 to 350. Two prominent political personalities of the Pallava house were Śivaskandavarman and Vishṇugopa. Prakrit charters of Śivaskandavarman underlines the rise of the Pallavas over substantial territories watered by the rivers Kṛishṇa and the south Pennar and also over the Bellary district, Karnataka. The early Pallavas then seems to have moved to the Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam area with the stronghold at Kāñchīpuram. Vishṇugopa, a prominent early Pallava king contemporary to and defeated by Samudragupta, had his base at Kāñchī. The later Sanskrit charters refer to sixteen Pallava rulers, but a few of them were entitled *yuvamahārājas*, i.e heir apparents. These *yuvamahārājas* are unlikely to have ascended the throne. But the Pallavas were already well-established in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam thereby preparing for the shape of things to come from seventh century AD onwards.

The far south in the first three centuries of the Christian era witnessed the arrival of various powers, the most important of which were the Cholas in Uraiyur, the Pāṇḍyas in Madurai (the two located respectively in the Kaveri delta and the Vaigai valley of Tamil Nadu) and the Cheras in western Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Though the early history of these areas are known from the Tamil Sangam texts, the classical accounts and recent field-archaeological data, the scenario of the period from fourth to the sixth century AD is unknown. The standard literary description of the far south relates to the invasion of the Kalabhras, a people of uncertain origin, who are said to have brought about chaos and confusion in the Tamil area. It is only towards the close of the sixth century AD that the Pallavas are said to have freed their core area from the Kalabhra occupation.

The southern regions of Karnataka saw the emergence of the western Gangas under Kongunivarman and Mādhava I (AD 350–400) with their stronghold around Kolar. The capital was later shifted from Kolar to Talkad. The Gangas too appear to have been aware of the advantages of dynastic marriages as they established such relations with the Kadambas. The political importance of the Gangas increased considerably during the long rule of Durvinīta (AD 540–600).

Another power, Kadamba, was gradually making its presence felt in the Karnataka region. The Kadamba inscriptions inform us that the dynasty was founded by a brāhmaṇa, named Mayūraśarman. Originally a student of the Vedas at Kāñchī, the Pallava capital, Mayūraśarman is said to have come to a fierce quarrel with a secret agent of the Pallavas (*Pallavasaṁstha*). He decided to take up arms, leaving his Vedic studies, on account of his humiliation in the hands of the Pallava spy. The ensuing conflict saw his victory over the Pallava frontier guards (*antapālas*) and his capture of the forest region up to Sriparvata (Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh). His position was subsequently recognized by the Pallavas and Mayūraśarman agreed to serve as a vassal. The later Chandravalli inscription—the historicity of which is not above question—credits him with extensive conquests over the Ābhirā,

Traikūṭa, Pallava, Pariyātrika, Śakasthāna, Puṇāṭa, etc. That the founder of the dynasty soon overthrew his allegiance to the Pallavas is borne out by the claim of his performing eighteen *aśvamedha* or horse sacrifices. The number is of course overstated, as a Kadamba inscription specifically records only one horse sacrifice performed by him. Such performance of *aśvamedha* sacrifices is considered fit for independent dynasts. Generally (but not unanimously) assigned to the period AD 340–70, Mayūraśarman appears to have established a powerful ruling line in the Deccan, taking advantage of the political confusions in the wake of Samudragupta's south Indian campaign. With the change of their position from a brāhmaṇa to a ruling lineage, the successors of Mayūraśarman preferred the dynastic name-ending varman to the original sarman. The Kadambas like the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas realized the importance of dynastic marriages in order to improve their political and diplomatic positions. This is particularly seen during the time of

Map 6.1: The Subcontinent during AD *c.*300–600

Kakutsthavarman (430–450) who contracted such alliances with the Guptas and other ruling houses. The last quarter of the fifth century AD is marked by the rise of a collateral branch of the main line of the Kadambas and the relations between the two branches were not cordial or peaceful. Around the late fifth and early sixth centuries AD, the younger branch of the Kadamba house suffered defeat in the hand of the elder branch. However, the younger branch reversed their political situation by inflicting such a defeat on the elder branch that the elder branch virtually went out of existence after AD 547. The end of the elder line of the Kadambas was also hastened by the rise of their vassal, Pulakeśin I of the Chālukya family, to political prominence in his stronghold over Badami, near modern Bijapur in Karnataka. The younger branch of the Kadambas, founded by Krishnavarman (AD 475–485), continued to rule sometimes as independent rulers and occasionally by accepting the suzerainty of the Pallavas of Kāñchī, almost up to the first decade of (be seventh century AD. They finally succumbed to the superior might of the Chālukyas of Badami, the most formidable power in the Deccan in the seventh and the first half of the eighth century AD.

V

Polity and Political Processes

The aforementioned survey of existing political powers and interrelations among such power definitely speaks of the multiplicity of political entities during the 300 years. Even the superior political position of the Gupta empire did not lead to the establishment of a paramount political power in the subcontinent. Scholars like Kosambi, Sharma and Shrimali have discerned elements of disintegration, albeit in their incipient form, in the absence of a paramount or predominant political power. Such an argument has met with considerable contestation because the multiplicity of powers—mostly kingdoms—indicates the spread of monarchical polity over nearly the whole of the subcontinent. In other words, the formation of monarchical state polity began to appear more frequently and regularly during the period under review. This significant situation calls for a closer scrutiny.

The spurt of monarchical powers can be located not merely in what Subbarow calls areas of attractions, like the Ganga valley or in the deltas of the Godavari and the Krishṇa, but also in remoter and fringe zones or in many areas of isolation. Interestingly enough, the Deccan which experienced the formation of state and urban societies later than that in northern India, firmly came under the grip of the monarchical state system during the 300 years under discussion.

Despite the long-drawn struggle between the Magadhan monarchy and the non-monarchical Lichchhavīs leading to the defeat of the latter in the fifth century BC, the Lichchhavis somehow managed to survive in the region

around Vaiśālī. That is why they appeared prominently as a non-monarchical clan during the initial phase of the Gupta period. Marriage alliance between the Gupta and Lichchhavīs ultimately resulted in the incorporation of the Lichchhavī territory in north Bihar into the growing Gupta dominion. By the first quarter of the fifth century AD any semblance of the non-monarchical polity in that area had vanished. The imperial Gupta authority was firmly established in this territory with the creation of a provincial administrative unit and a headquarter under a Gupta prince. The Gupta seals from the Vaiśālī excavations provide indisputable evidence of the provincial authority at Tīrabhuktī and other suobordinate administrative officers under him. The reference to nine 'tribal groups' in the Allahabad *praśasti* clearly indicates their presence in the greater portions of the tribal belt of central India. Though these were not directly conquered and incorporated into the Gupta realm by Samudragupta, they ceased to figure as non-monarchical groups since the time of Chandragupta II. The Sanakānīkas, enlisted in the Allahabad pillar inscription, no longer remained a *gaṇarājya/gaṇasaṁgha;* instead a Sanakānīka *mahārāja* figured as a vassal of Chandragupta II (Udayagiri inscription). The Sanakānīkas must have transformed into a monarchical set up by the time Chandragupta II had come to rule.

Similarly the Daśapura area (present Mandasore in Rajasthan) was marked by the presence of the non-monarchical Mālavas for long, till the time of Samudragupta. Following the recognition of their tributary status during Samudragupta's time, this area saw the emergence of two branches of the Aulikara ruling house one group acknowledging the Gupta suzerainty and the other remaining independent. The emergence of the Aulikara dynasty signals the end of protracted history of the non-monarchical Mālava *gaṇa.* In the passage of the transformation of a non-monarchical clan into a monarchical polity, the rulers of the incipient states are often found to have assumed rather vague non-political titles like *nṛipati,* or *narapati* (meaning lord over men). Subsequent rulers of that family distinguished themselves from their predecessors by the political title of *mahārāja.* This probably indicates the gradual crystallization of a state structure and the resultant complex polity.

A case in this point may be seen in the reference to the *pratyanta-nṛipatis* (frontier chief) in the Allahabad *praśasti.* Absence of the names and individual political status of these tributaries in the frontier regions of the Gupta empire strongly suggests that they had been more chieftains than full-fledged monarchs. Samataṭa, one such incipient chieftaincy in the fourth century AD, definitely experienced a monarchical set up, following the Gupta model at the turn at the sixth century (Vainyagupta's Gunaighar CP; GE 188, AD 507). A similar process of penetration of the monarchical state structure is also seen in Kāmarūpa in upper Assam, where a local dynasty made its presence felt since the second half of the sixth century AD. The Āṭavika or the forest tract in the Baghelkhand area figures in the Aśokan

edicts and also in the Allahabad inscription—neither of which suggests the formation of a complex state society there. The penetration of the Guptas in this forest tract, first by military advances and then by having established vassal powers like the Parivrājakas and the Uchchakalpas, paved the way for the emergence of state structure. This area explicitly figures as the kingdom of Ḍābhala (near Jabbalpur in Madhya Pradesh) located within the eighteen forest-chiefdoms (*ashṭādaśāṭavirājyābhyantara*) in two land grants (AD 529–30 and 533–34) respectively of Samkshobha and Sarvanatha of the local Uchchakalpa house. A new supra-village tier of administration namely the *peṭha* and the presence of high ranking functionaries like the *amātya* (a minister?), *sandhivigrahika* (officer in charge of war and peace), *dūtaka* (messenger) and *lekhaka* (royal scribe) at the time of granting lands point to the prevalence of typical features of a monarchical administration in an area where forest chieftaincies continued to exist. The local administrative set up seems to have been drawn from the existing system in the Gupta realm. The pre-state Āṭavika society—with their known existence at least since the time of Aśoka—terminates with the penetration of the Gupta monarchical polity. This is a process different from and more complex than the mere annexation of the area by a monarchical power. One recalls that the Maurya occupation of this zone did not bring about any systemic transformation in the polity.

If the formation of the monarchical state structure in areas previously marked by the prevalence of pre-state societies speaks of the advent of a more complex society, then two other points should also be considered. Military conquests by powerful kings were not the sole engine for the transformation of pre-state polities into state societies. In Indian conditions, the availability and mobilization of resources, crucially important for the emergence and consolidation of the state society, could be effectively achieved by the expansion of agriculture. The creation of *agrahāras* or revenue-free settlements in favour of religious donees holds an important key to our understanding. There are many known cases of creation of such sedentary settlements in hitherto uncultivated, uninhabited forest or marshy tracts. The advent of the agricultural society in Indian conditions almost invariably coincides with the appearance and gradual hardening of the *varṇa-jāti* system. The monarchical system by championing the Brahmanical norms, attempted some integration in a newly emerging state society that was marked by increasing inequality in access to resources, status and power. The Parivrājaka rulers in the Āṭavika area boasted of having upheld and maintained the *varṇa* order. Two remote ancestors of Yaśodharman are eulogized for similar achievements in the context of the initial phase of the Aulikara rule in Malwa.

The other type of integration involved in the passages from pre-state to state polity was the gradual incorporation of the autochthonous cults or religious symbols into Brahmanical belief systems. New dynasts often

continued to offer worship to autochthonous deities. As Hermann Kulke points out, in ancient Orissa (Ranpur region) around fifth/sixth centuries royal patronage in the form of grants of land was provided for Ambikā Maṇināgeśvarī. She was certainly a serpent goddess of pre-Brahmanical associations. Though her icon is the same as that of Chāmuṇḍā, she is still worshipped in the form of an unhewn round stone (*chhatapāthara*), which must have been the original cult image of Maṇināgeśvarī. Inscriptions of the Eastern Gangas of Orissa mention the foundation of the kingdom by a legendary hero Kamarnava. A worshipper of Gokarṇasvāmī, Kāmārṇava was bestowed with the grace (*prasāda*) of the deity and as result was endowed with all the symbols of kingship (*sāmrājyachinha*). By divine grace he also killed the Sabara chief (*śabarāditya*) and conquered Kaliṅga. Such references to divine grace must have been a strategy to seek legitimation of the rule of a king at the early stages of the emergence of a monarchical state. The same urge for legitimation by a new political power is also seen while tracing royal genealogies to mythical heroes or the lineages of epic fame. Put differently, one discerns an attempt here to claim status by rulers having no known pedigree. This may explain why such dynasties as the Nalas, Pāṇḍuvaṁśīs, Somavaṁśīs and Sūryavaṁśīs in central India and western Kaliṅga, sought their descent from epic heroes. The above discussions may underline the political importance of the period under review. It not only marked the sway of formidable powers in the Ganga valley and central India, but also witnessed a major dissolution of non-monarchical polities on the one hand and the spread of the monarchical state society on other.

VI

The study of management of the affairs of the monarchical state cannot be completed without a close look at the power and position of the king since he was the pivotal figure of the administrative system. The very exalted position of the ruler is clearly expressed by the grand title, *mahārājadhirājā*, borne customarily by almost all the independent rulers except the Vākāṭakas. The Vākāṭakas seem to have been content with the title *mahārāja* or *dharmmamahārāja*, which was usually assumed by vassals and not by independent sovereigns. This however does not suggest by any means that the Vākāṭakas had a subordinate political position under some suzerain authority. The more powerful title *samrāṭ* was used by the Vākāṭakas only once. This is in marked contrast to the practice of the Gupta rulers to bear very ambitious and grandiose titles like *paramabhaṭṭaraka, rājādhirājā*, etc. Personal epithets of the Gupta rulers, for example *vyāghraparākrama, simhavikrama, vikramāditya, parākramāṅka, kramāditya*, etc were meant to impress upon the might and right of the Gupta emperors. The urge for claiming political superiority is clearly seen in the performance of

the elaborate and lavish royal sacrifices, especially *aśvamedha* by the the Guptas and their contemporaries. Though some Gupta emperors glorified themselves with the restoration of the performance of such sacrifices held in abeyance over a long period (*chirotsanna*), many post-Mauryan powers had distinguished themselves by arranging such royal sacrifices.

A distinct feature of the Gupta monarchical system was the regular use of the concept of the divinity of the ruler. Thus Samudragupta was considered as an equal Kuvera, Varuṇa, Indra and Yama (*dhanadavaruṇedrāntakasama*), as a being beyond comprehension (*achintyapurusha*) and as a deity residing in the terrestrial world (*lokadhāmnadeva*). His comparison with divinities may indicate the functional resemblance between the earthly ruler and different deities associated with their distinctive types of action. This would closely correspond to functinal divinity, according to Spellman. Chandragupta II issued some of his coins with the representation of the Chakrapurusha (the personification of Vishṇu's Sudarśanachakra) on the reverse—which, according to the *Ahirbudhnysamhitā*—was identical with Vishṇu himself. This idea of the Pāñcharātra Bhagavatism was utilized by the Gupta ruler to claim his supra-human position. This can further be illustrated by the peacock-type coins of Kumāragupta I. Kumāragupta, though a devout Vaish nava (*Paramabhāgavata*), seems to have gradually switched his affiliation more to Kārttikeya or Kumāra. While the coin type mentioned here shows Kārttikeya riding on his mount peacock on the reverse, the obverse depicts Kumāragupta feeding a peacock. The identity of names of Kārttikeya (Kumāra) and the Gupta emperor (Kumāra) is also unmistakable.

Despite the growing power of the monarchy, successions to the throne were not always peaceful, as there are instances of the transgression of the law of primogeniture. This could have led to feuds over dynastic succession or founding a parallel branch. The Guptas, seemingly aware of this problem, tried to obviate it by selecting, on several occasions, the successor during the life-time of the reigning king. The heir designate (*yuvarāja* or *yuvamahārāja*), distinct from other princes (*kumāra*), was sometimes entrusted with the administration of important provinces. To what extent the queen enjoyed political prominence is difficult to ascertain. Her important role is illustrated at least once by the regency of the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatiguptā. Kumāradevī, the queen of Chandragupta I, must have enjoyed an influential position which is evident from the display of her figure in the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of coin. The prestigious position of the chief queen of the Guptas is indicated by the designation *mahādevī* in official Gupta genealogies. But whether this speaks of her political position or it was intended to underline the unflawed dynastic lineage and succession of a claimant to the throne it cannot be decided.

The actual burden of administration and executive functions was borne by a large number of functionaries, generally designated by three terms

amātya, mantrī and *sachiva*. These three terms were often coterminous and interchangeable, and generally stood for high-ranking functionaries and ministers. It is however not certain if ministers or a council of ministers were a regular feature of the administrative systems of different dynasties. Theoretical treatises (e.g. the *Kātyāyanasmṛiti*) often favour the appointment of brāhmaṇas to the position of *amātyas*. Specific appointments of brāhmaṇa *amātyas* were made by Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I. A significant feature in the administrative system is the tendency to appoint high-ranking officers on a hereditary basis. Thus a *sachiva* of Chandragupta II was appointed on such considerations (*anvayaprāptasāchivya*). Śikharasvāmīn and Pṛithvīsheṇa, father and son, served Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta I respectively. Similarly, Parṇadatta and his son Chakrapālita served as provincial authorities of Surāshtra during Skandagupta's reign.

A perusal of inscriptions of various ruling powers reveals a large number of designations which surely outnumbered functionaries of previous periods. The *pratihāra* was the palace guard. The army, definitely a very major department, had various units headed by different chiefs and commanders. Though the *Kāmandakīya Nītisāra* prescribes that the armed forces should comprise *ratha* (chariot), *padātika* (infantry), *aśva* (cavalry) and *hasti* (elephant), the use of chariots in warfare had become rather infrequent by this time. The *daṇḍanāyaka* could have been either a military commander or a judicial officer. The cavalry and the elephant corps were under the charges of the *aśvapati* and the *pīlupati*. The *senāpati* or the military commander appears quite frequently in the Vākāṭaka records, but more as a local administrator than as military leader. Intense war-like activities and diplomatic manoeuvers probably necessitated the creation of new designation of high rank—*sandhivigrahika* (i.e. officer-in-charge of war and peace; in other words, entrusted with affairs of other realms), not seen hitherto before. Administration of justice was probably in charge of the *daṇḍapaśika*. Closely associated with his functions were probably those of the *chauroddharaṇika* (realizer of stolen items). Regular and irregular troops were known as *chāṭa-bhāṭa* who seem to have performed the functions of local policing. The administrative system of this time shows increasing tendencies in hierarchization of offices, indicated by the use of the prefixes *mahā* and *sarva* to the official designations. Thus stood in ascending order, the *daṇḍanāyaka, mahādaṇḍanāyaka, sarvadaṇḍanāyaka* and *mahāsarvadaṇḍanāyaka*. Similar gradations must have also existed between the *sandhivigrahika* and *mahāsandhivigrahika, pīlupati* and *mahāpīlupati, pratihāra* and *mahāpratihāra*. There are also known cases of one person holding various offices. For instances Harisheṇa, the court poet of Samudragupta, functioned as a *kumāramātya, sandhivigrahika* and *mahādaṇḍanāyaka*. Whether he was entrusted with these assignments simultaneously or at different times cannot be ascertained.

VII

Tiers of Administrations

Epigraphic records throw more interesting light on the regional and local levels of administration. The practice of dividing a large empire into a number of regional units with respective headquarters goes back to the days of the Mauryas. This system of having multiple layers of administration continued with some modifications by the post-Mauryan rulers. The commonest term to denote a large administrative zone during the period of the present study was *bhukti*. This term gained wide currency in the Gupta realm and also in the kingdoms of the erstwhile vassals of the Guptas. The earliest known use of this administrative term is seen in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. The well-known *bhuktis* of the Gupta empire were Tirabhukti, Nāgarabhukti, Magadhabhukti and Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. Another more or less synonymous term was *deśa*, literally meaning a territory. The Vākāṭaka records used the alternative term *rājya* to denote the same. The Gupta regional authorities were generally called, at least in the middle Ganga valley, *uparika* who were directly appointed by the Gupta emperor. The *deśa* type of units, mostly seen in western India, were entrusted to the *goptā*. From the period of Budhagupta, the *uparika* began to figure in the official records as the *uparikamahārāja*. The suffix *mahārāja* undoubtly suggests his increased importance. Whether his growing importance was due to the gradual weakening of the Gupta political control cannot be ascertained. The province-like units in the Vākāṭaka realm appear to have been managed by the *senāpatis* or military commanders. They could have been entrusted with both civil and military responsibilities. A significant feature in the locality-level administration was the appearance of the *sāmanta*. The *sāmanta*, originally denoting a neighbouring ruler in the *Arthaśāstra*, began to emerge as a vassal, serving a overlord. One such *sāmanta*—Vijayasena—became powerful enough to be known as *mahāsāmanta* under Vainyagupta (AD 507) and probably enjoyed control over a large area in the south-eastern-most part of Bengal.

The territorial-cum-administrative unit below the *bhukti*, or *deśa* was generally known as *vishaya* equivalent to a locality, close to the size of a district. The best known and the most continuous evidence of the *vishaya* or district-level administrative organization comes from Bengal, both during the Gupta rule and also in the immediately post-Gupta times. The same administrative nomenclature, i.e. *vishaya*, was also present in the area under the Parivrājaka rulers of central India and in Valabhī in western India. This may indicate some kind of homogeneity in the arrangement of the locality-level administrative divisions over the area of the Gupta rule. Even after the eclipse of the Guptas, the system introduced by them was continued by their erstwhile vassals and subordinates. The district-like administrative

division was, however, known in the Vākāṭaka territories as *paṭṭas* which often were prefixed with the names of cardinal directions (e.g. *utttarapaṭṭa* or *paśchimapaṭṭa*). In several records from the Deccan the administrative division was known as *āhāra*, standing for a district. This term first appeared in the Aśokan edicts and became regular in the Deccan since the rule of the Sātavāhanas, a fact which highlights the continuity in its usage.

Though the term *vishaya* was commonly used to denote a district in the period under discussion, inscriptions do highlight regional variations in the administration of the *vishaya*. For this, attention may be turned to records from Bengal during the fifth and sixth centuries AD. The *vishaya* was entrusted to the district administrator (*vishayapati*) who was appointed by the *uparika*. Five copper plates from Damodarpur in northern part of Bangladesh (dating from AD 443/44 to 543/44) mention such *vishayapatis*, who had their office at the district headquarters (*adhishṭhānādhikaraṇa*) at Koṭivarsha (modern Bangarh, South Dinajpur district, West Bengal, itself an important and excavated urban site). Associated with him were the *nagarasreshṭhi* (chief merchant of the town), *sārthavāha* (chief caravan merchant), *prathamakulika* (chief artisan) and *prathamākāyastha* (chief scribe). This is a unique situation in the sense that except the chief scribe, none of the other associates of the *vishayapati* were government functionaries. They were private individuals and representatives of locally important groups; they obviously belonged to an elite group. The Guptas thus initiated a system which would allow the incorporation of non-officials as representatives of locally important groups in the district board. The exact functions of these people in the district office are not clearly stated, but they were important enough to be informed at the time of application for the sale or gift of landed properties by the intended purchaser or donor. This was, however, not an inflexible pattern. In several other records from ancient north Bengal (Puṇḍravardhanabhukti) a somewhat different pattern is seen. Instead of the chief merchant, the caravan trader and the chief scribe, appeared two other categories of representatives of the important social groups at rural levels, viz., the *kuṭumbin* and the *mahattara*. Both the terms meant well-to-do agriculturists. However, detailed studies of the long lists of the *kuṭumbins* and *mahattaras* in a few Gupta copper plates by B.D. Chattopadhyaya suggest that the *mahattaras* enjoyed greater social status than the *kuṭumbins*. These two categories of rural representatives not only were addressed at the time of applications for land transactions, but they oversaw (*pratyaveksha*) the proper demarcation of plots when such transactions were complete. Below the *vishaya* in Bengal stood the *vīthi*, which too had an office (*adhikaraṇa*).

That the *vīthi*, like the larger *vishaya*, also had the system of incorporating non-officials in the administration of the locality is clearly shown by the presence of the *vīthi-kulika* or the representative of the artisan community at the *vīthi* level. The *vīthi* was probably an administrative tier over several villages, which were therefore integrated into the local level of

the politico-administrative structure. Another important body was the *ashṭakulādhikaraṇa*, also called the *grāmashṭakulādhikaraṇa*, known since AD 432/33 in the context of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. The exact connotation of the term has been hotly debated by large number of scholars. It has been interpreted, perhaps literally, that it was a board of representatives of the eight leading families of the village. Alternatively, the term is also taken to mean local-level officers. In the former sense, the term speaks of the presence of non-officials in the management of the affairs of the locality and in the latter sense as administrative personnels. B.D. Chattopadhyaya's insightful probings into the context of the records suggest that this too was associated with non-governmental personages. He ably establishes that the *ashṭakulādhikaraṇa* was not universally and uniformly present at each and every village in Bengal under the Guptas. The logical inference would be to view them as an organization, standing above individual villages and consisting of locally important people. That the members of this body were distinct from but associated with other notable rural eminent groups like the *kuṭumbins*, *mahattaras* and the brāhmaṇas has also been noticed in the copper plates. The *ashṭakulādhikaraṇa* as a supra-local body thus seems to have at once provided interconnections in the network with villages under it and also maintained linkages with the upper tiers of the local political organization. It is indeed a remarkable innovation and experiment by the Guptas, which allowed the interplay of local aspirations, the participation of non-officials at local-level administration and at the same time ensured linkages between the apex political authority and the base through a number of administrative tiers. It must be pointed out that this type of arrangements are seen only in Bengal, though occasional references to the *vishaya-mahattaras* are also known in inscriptions from the Tamil area.

The further subdivisions of the district are also present in the records of the Vākāṭakas, the Parivrājakas and the Maitrakas of Valabhī; but no evidence of popular participation at the local-level administration is available therein. Some place-names in the Vākāṭaka records end with *sthāna* (e.g. Rāmagiristhāna and Bennāṭasthāna). As these as appear as issuing centres of the administrative records, these are likely to have been locality-level centres. This may have some correspondence to the administrative term *sthalī* in the Maitraka records from western India, *sthalī* denoting a supra-village administrative tier in these records. Another term which demands our attention in this context is *peṭha*, figuring in some inscriptions of the Parivrājakas in Beghelkhand and also in the Maitraka charters. Thus, a Parivrājaka record of the early sixth century AD mentions Maṇināgapeṭha within which there were at least three villages, Opānigrāma, Vyāghrapallikā and Kāchārapallikā. At least in one Maitraka inscription it figures as an area within a *sthalī*, suggesting that the *peṭha*, standing above individual villages, was occasionally itself included within another supra-local unit, namely the *sthalī*. Similar administrative units above the village

were also known as *pathaka* (identifiable with *peṭha*?) and *bhūmi* in western India in the immediate post-Gupta times. The lowest and the basic unit of administration was of course the *grāma* or the village. The village headman or the *grāmika* often appears in the copper plate charters. It is not clear if he was appointed by the superior authorities at the *vishaya* or *vīthi* or *peṭha* level. There is a distinct possibility that the *grāmika* enjoyed his prominent position in the village life both by popular consent of the villagers and also by the virtue of his being appointed by the superior politico-administrative authorities at the supra-local and/or district level. The exact connotations of these terms in their respective regional contexts may not be defined as yet, but these do definitely point to the urge of the apex political authorities to establish contacts with and control on different levels of local and supra-local administrative units. This tendency can further be linked up with the spread of the state society over many areas. An explanation of the practice to associate representatives of various interest groups—at urban and rural levels alike—with the politico-administrative machinery of the locality may be found in this sort of development.

VIII

Economy and Society: Agriculture and Land System

This section proposes to examine the salient features in economic and social life of the subcontinent. Needless to emphasize, the very basis of the material life in Indian conditions continues to be agriculture, a feature of the Indian economic life over millennia. The survey of economic life may, therefore, begin by taking account of the crops produced during this period. The most important crop was of course paddy (*dhānya*). Kālidāsa was well aware of diverse variety of rice produced; for example, *śāli, nīvāra, kalama, śyāmaka*, etc., *śāli* being the best variety. While the poet considered the Ganga delta to be particularly suitable for the cultivation of *śāli* variety of rice, a recently discovered Vākāṭaka record indicates the cultivation of rice in the vicinity of Achalapura (Ellichpur, Amraoti district, Mahārashtra) in the middle of the fifth century AD. This area, along with the Bhandara district, is known even today to be the rice bowl of Mahārashtra. The diversity and growth of rice cultivation must have accompanied the wider use of transplantation agriculture. This method, appearing for the first time in the middle Ganga valley around the sixth century BC became established enough to be used as a metaphor in Kālidāsa's literary creations. The same poet also mentions sugarcane plantations, especially those of Pauṇḍraka (grown in north Bengal). This is an indication of the cultivation/plantation of what is nowadays known as a cash crop. Similar ancient cash crops in the *Amarakośa* are cotton, oilseed, indigo and mustard seeds (the description of a field as yielding mustard, *sarshapayānaka*, in a copper plate of late sixth century AD

from Bengal). Amarasiṁha informs us that the far south was famous for the cultivation of areca and betel nuts—a feature typical of this area, and the plantation of spices like pepper and cardamom. The availability of these spices, especially pepper, in the Malabar area has been known since the early centuries of the Christian era. The Konkan coast appears to have continued the regular plantation of coconut.

Diverse types of crops produced in this era suggests mature knowledge of agriculture and availability of different types of soil, conducive to their cultivation. The *Amarakośa* enlists twelve types of soil: *urvara* (fertile), *ushara* (dry), *maru* (desiccated), *aprahata* (untilled), *sadbala* (grassy land), *paṅkila* (covered with mud), *jalaprāyamanupam* (land located near a source of water), *kachchha* (marshy), *śarkarā, sarkati, nadīmatṛika* (well watered by rivers) and *devamātrika* (area well fed by rain). These fairly comprehensive types of soil, however, do not exactly match the information gleaned from land grants. In this context, the most valuable information comes from more than a dozen of copper plates (fifth and sixth centuries AD) from various parts of ancient Bengal, thanks to the studies by R.G Basak, B.C. Sen, Niharranjan Ray and S.K. Maity. These documents clearly differentiate the cultivated area (*kshetra/vāpakshetra*) from the habitational plots (*vāstu*) and the forest (*araṇya*). A fallow plot in these records is generally called *khila,* sometimes further qualified and clarified as *aprahata* (never tilled before), *ādyastamba* (covered with original shrubs and bushes, i.e. never cleared before), *aprada* (unyielding) and *apratikara/utpratikara/śūnyapratikara* (all three expressions meaning that the plot did not produce any revenue). The term *khilakshetra* has been interpreted as an arable plot, temporarily kept fallow. A recently discovered Vākāṭaka charter of the mid-fifth century mentions a low lying plot as *gartta-sabhā.*

Copper plates also throw important lights on systems of land measurement. The officer called *pramātri* in the Maitraka charters was entrusted with the measurement of land, a significant function associated with the system of assessment of land revenue by the politico-administrative authority. No such officer explicitly figured in the records from Bengal where local leading personalities oversaw such functions. In these plates from Bengal, the size of plots is expressed in terms of *āḍhavāpa, droṇavāpa, kulyavāpa* and *pāṭaka* (only once mentioned), which were different units of measuring the plot. It is difficult to suggest the exact correlations of these measurements to known modern units, mainly due to the paucity of data and also for the local variations. Two alternative tables, following D.C. Sircar and S.K. Maity may be presented (calculations in brackets are by Sircar): 1 *droṇavāpa* = 4.5-6 *bighas* (or 16-20 *bighas*); 1 *kulyavāpa* = 38-48 *bighas* (or 128-160 *bighas*) and 1 *pāṭaka* = 190-240 *bighas* (or 640-800 *bighas*). It is more or less agreed that *pāṭaka,* though known only from one record, was the highest unit of land measurement. Eight *dronavāpas* made a *kulyavāpa* and five *kulyavāpas* were equal to a *pāṭaka;* in other words the ratio between *pāṭaka* and *dro*

navāpa was 1 : 40. But the more significant point is the suffix *vāpa* figuring in these terms. The term *vāpa* being derived from root *vāp* (i.e. to sow) it is unmistakably connected to the sowing of seeds in a field. When connected to a term denoting measurement of a field, it surely suggests the system of measuring a plot's size in terms of the area of capacity of the seeds sown. On the other hand, the same grants also refer to the simultaneous use of two rods at the time of demarcating a plot when finally transferred to a donee. The exact meaning, measurement and purpose of these double rods or nalas (variously mentioned as 8 × 9 *nalas* or *aṣhṭakanavakanalābhyām*; 6 × 9 *nalas* or *shaḍkanavakanalābhyām* and 9 × 9 *nalas* or *navakanavakanalābhyām*) have been debated, but not conclusively proved. However these *nalas* must have been used for linear measurement of the plot, while the measurement by the *vāpa* system referred to the area of capacity of the same.

The Vākāṭakas used a different unit, *nivarttana* which was well known in the Deccan since the first century AD. The term *pādāvartta,* suggested to be the same as modern foot, was prevalent in the Maitraka realm as a unit of land measurement. These terms of land measurement of course speak of considerable diversities in the system over disparate regions. But there were at least occasional attempts at standardization of such systems at a regional level. Thus, one notes the steady use of the *nala* and *vāpa* units in Bengal and the conscious introduction of a royal measure (*rājāmanika māna* or *rājanyamāna*) in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions. These could have been done with a view to ensuring a systematic assessment of the realizable land revenue.

The copper plates from Bengal are unique in that they provide data on the price of plots, in addition to the information about the types and systems of measurement of plots. In the region around ancient Kotivarsha within Pundravardhanabhuktī a plot of fallow, uncultivated and unyielding variety fetched the price of three dinaras (Gupta gold coins) per *kulyavāpa.* This price appears to have remained stable from AD 443/44 to AD 543/544, i.e. for a century. In other areas of the same *bhuktī,* the same type of plot fetched a lower price, two *dīnāras.* The reason of this variation in prices is not known. On the other hand, cultivated plots in Vanga (Dhaka-Vikrampur-Faridpur regions of Bangladesh) fethed a higher price, four *dīnāras* per *kulyavāpa,* during the second half of the sixth century AD. The price of the plot in Vanga was higher probably because it was an arable one. The pioneering studies by R.G. Basak and B.C. Sen, Niharranjan Ray and in more recent times, by B.M. Morrison and K.M. Shrimali has helped a lot in understanding the land measurement systems.

This type of exhaustive information on agrarian life was only irregularly available in inscriptions before the fifth century AD. The principal reason for this is the introduction of a new feature in socio-economic life during this period, called *agrahāra.* This stands for the donation or creation of revenue free plot(s) or even the entire village in favour of a religious donee or a group of donees or a religious institution (a Brahmanical temple, a Buddhist *vihāra* or

a Jaina monastery) by issuing a copper plate charter under royal instruction or approval. During the previous periods, patronage and donations to the Buddhist and Jaina establishments came mostly from individual donors or a group of donors, and only infrequently from political powers. Though the beginning of land grants for religious purposes goes back to the first century AD in the Deccan, *agrahāra* became a really regular and palpable institution from the fifth century AD onwards.

The copper plates from Bengal provide the bulk of data about the procedure of land transfer to a donee—individual or institutional. More or less six stages are seen in the process of land transfer in Bengal. The first section pertains to a reference to the reigning Gupta emperor, the regionl administrator (*uparika*) in Puṇḍravardhanabhuktī under him and finally the district authority appointed by the *uparika*. The following section in the record contains an application from an intending purchaser of land to the district-council, specifying the location, type, size and price of the said plot. The application is then ascertained and approved by the record keeper(s) or *pustapāla(s)*. The next step is the actual payment of the price of land by the purchaser who then donates the purchased plot to a religious donee. The donee thus receives a perpetual (*akshayanīvī*) and revenue-free grant of land. This is followed by the demarcation of the transferred plot by *nalas* or measuring rods discussed above in the presence of the leading men of the village, so that arable plots of other villagers are not disturbed (*svakarshaṇāvirodhī*) by this transfer. The boundary marks of the donated plot are in general not precisely stated, though the use of charcoal marks (*tushāṅgāra*) and more permanent boundary pillars (*kīlaka*) occasionally figure in the records. The charter finally ends with benedictory and imprecatory verses to laud gifts of land, to honour the grant perpetually and to denounce severely the unlawful appropriation of donated lands. The uniqueness of these charters from Bengal is that these are mostly sale-cum-gift deeds. In other areas of the subcontinent a plot of land or the entire village was donated to the individual donee(s) or a religious establishment directly by royal proclamation. There is only a solitary case of such a gift of land by royal order in Bengal. This discussion amply shows that land could be transferred at least for the purpose of religious donations. This, in its turn, and especially the instances of purchase of plots, leave little room for doubt about the prevalence of the individual ownership of the soil. As the grantees on most occasions were religious personages, the brāhmaṇas naturally became prominent land-holders. A sixth century AD copper plate from ancient Samataṭa area also shows that non-brāhmaṇa villagers—the carpenter (*varddhaki*)and the mechanic (*vilāla*)—too did own land.

The size of the plot held by grantees varied considerably. In the Vākāṭaka realm it ranged from a plot as meagre as twenty *nivartanas* to an area as large as 8000 *nivartanas*. In one instance a large area covering 2000 *nivartanas* was donated to only four brāhmaṇas. The Vākāṭakas mostly donated land

or villages to a group of brāhmaṇas. While the transfer of a plot implied full ownership of the donee, the grant of a village did not lead to the transfer of ownership rights to the donee. It resulted in the transfer of a number of revenues, normally payable to the ruler by villagers, to the donee(s). The Vākāṭaka grants are replete with references to many regular taxes and also irregular cesses to be transferred to the donee who was also entitled to forced labour (*vishṭī*) and enjoyment of fines from ten customary offences (*daśāparādha*). An appreciable increase of the prestige, status and material conditions of donees—mostly brāhmaṇas—is not dificult to imagine. Apart from enjoying ownership rights of soil, the brāhmaṇa donee was hardly expected to have been a cultivator himself. The granted area may have been actually tilled by agriculturists, who were not necessarily the owners of plots they ploughed. This is a more complex situation in the land system than that had prevailed earlier. The *Arthaśāstra* speaks of tax-paying cultivators (*karada*) and the ruler. The Dharmaśāstras of our period enlist three tiers, *mahīpati* (the king), *svāmī* (landowner) and *karshaka* (cultivator), in the agrarian system. Not only the *karshaka* is differentiated from the owner, but the *svāmī* assumes the position of landed intermediaries. The position of the grantee is suggested to have further strengthened by his enjoying revenues and cesses by royal order. Many of the land grants lay down that regular and irregular troops must not enter the *agrahāra* (*chāṭabhaṭāprāveśya*). Kosambi, Sharma, Jha, Yadava and Shrimali argue that in view of the prohibition of the entry of troops and police forces, the maintenance of the local law and order situation, including the trial of customary offence and the collection of fines from the miscreants was also transferred to the donee. Seen from this light, the donee was endowed not only with land rights, but also with some vital administrative and judicial rights. The next logical step is to discern the signs of corrosion of some political and economic prerogatives of the political authority and the consequent emergence of a situation comparable to the emergence of kingdoms within a kingdom in the feudal formation in western Europe. The above formulation associated with the perception of Indian feudalism suggests that the beginning of the *agrahāra* system initiated the process of the formation of the self-sufficient, closed and orthodox village society and economy. The landgrants are seen to have produced regressive effects on the early Indian economy and society. The regular creation of revenue-free land endowments, according to the proponents of Indian feudalism, resulted in the ruralization of the material life, which during the early historical times was marked by a vibrant, lively and urban socio-economic milieu.

It must be, however, pointed out that many *agrahāras*, were created in hitherto non-arable and fallow (including forest) tracts. The donees in such cases had to ensure the cultivation of the endowed area for their sustenance. This certainly speaks of the possibility of the expansion of agricultural settlements in areas, which had rarely experienced such sedentary

settlements before the fourth century AD. A close examination of the Vākāṭaka records by Shrimali points out that most of the villages figuring in the pre-420 AD records were located in areas with altitudes ranging from 300 to 600 metre. Of the 20 grants of the post-420 times, as many as 11 endowments were made in areas with altitude less than 300 metre, while the rest were located in areas above 300 metre from the sea level. The clear concentration of villages in the Wardha area and the Wainganga valley was unknown before AD 300. In Bengal, most of the transferred plots were uncultivated and fallow, which were under royal authority (early Indian theoretical treatises upheld royal rights over non-arable, unfilled areas). Their sale brought cash to the treasury and the fallow areas were eventually made fit for cultivation. The *pustapāla* or record-keeper, therefore, routinely certified that the sale of such fallow tracts, bereft of any revenue, did not cause any harm to the economic interest of the ruler (*evaṁvidhotpratikara-khilakshetravikkraye na kaśchit rājārthavirodha*). It will also be incorrect to consider villages as stereotypical and undifferentiated. Detailed studies of the boundary demarcations in the copper plates of Bengal by Chattopadhyaya illustrate that villages were neither uniform in pattern, nor in size, nor in orientation. Some villages were distinct by their cluster-like formation, indicated by names of rural settlements like Palāśavṛinda. Our previous discussions on the *ashṭakulādhikaraṇa* may logically suggest that those areas which had such supra-village organizations were different from ordinary villages. The frequent occurrence of the term *prāveśya* as a suffix to several villages in the Bengal land grants definitely shows that the villages were accessible to neighbouring areas through various local and supra-local administrative tiers.

In the light of these counter arguments, it will be difficult to agree to the view that the creation of *agrahāras* resulted in the overall impoverishment of the economy. The expansion of rural agrarian settlements could have hardly been possible in the Indian situation without efficient management of hydraulic resources. Ancient Bengal, an area favoured by rainfall and rivers alike (*nadīmātṛika* and *devamātṛika*), was famous for the profusion of natural hydraulic endowments (in Kālidāsa's famous words: *prāchī prachuraṁ payasi*). In such an area, there would be a relatively lesser need for artificial irrigation. Copper plates of our period highlight the abundance of tanks and ponds (*taḍāga* and *pushkariṇī*), marshy areas and ditches (*jolā, hajjika* and *khāta*) and embankments along rivers (*āli, bṛihadāli*). Similar tanks are reported from various parts of the subcontinent. Donation of tanks by individuals was a highly meritorious act ensuring public welfare (*ishṭāpūrtta*). There are also known instances of excavation of large reservoirs under royal patronage. To Pṛithvīsheṇa II of the Nandīvardhana branch of the Vākāṭakas goes the credit of the excavation of such a large hydraulic project, called Pṛithvīsamudra. It was certainly named after the reigning king, and the suffix *samudra* may indicate its impressive size—or at least the author

of the inscription intended to leave an impression like that. The Kadamba ruler Kakutsthavarman is similarly praised for building a large tank. The excavation of tanks probably met the needs of local-level irrigation.

The construction and maintenance of supra-local irrigation projects, requiring utilization of riverine water and its efficient distribution over large areas were technologically, organizationally and of course financially much more complex operations. Not many instances of these type appear in our records. The most celebrated example is that of the *setu* (irrigation project) called Sudarśana situated in Kathiawad. This famous reservoir was built during the time of Chandragupta Maurya in the late fourth century BC, developed further by Aśoka and then thoroughly repaired by Śaka Mahākshatrapa Rudradāman I (AD 150) following severe damages to the dam due to a terrible storm. During Skandagupta's reign, this *setu* was once again damaged and the regional administrators of Saurāshṭra repaired the same. Inscriptions thus provide an eloquent testimony to this supra-local irrigation project, which was in use from late fourth century BC to at least AD 466–67. Thanks to the researches by R.N. Mehta, the archaeological traces of this large irrigation project have been found in the vicinity of Girnar (ancient Girinagara) in Kathiawad. A.M. Shastri has drawn our attention to the Ramtek inscription (of the period of the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatiguptā) which records the excavation of a tank named Sudarśana that was donated to a temple. The name Sudarśana is likely to have been borrowed from its more illustrious counterpart in Kathiawad which had already been conquered by Prabhāvatiguptā's father Chandragupta II. Such a possibility gains ground by the christening of another hydraulic project in the Vākāṭaka realm as Sudarśana. The Hisse-Borala inscription of AD 458 mentions the construction of Sudarśana lake somewhere in the vicinity of modern Wasim, Akola district in Mahārashtra by someone named Svāmilladeva, the *āj̃ñākāra* of the Vākāṭaka king Devasena (of the Vatsagulma branch). The record also informs us about a *karmopadeshṭṛi* (supervisor of the construction work) named Bappa.

IX

Crafts

Attention now may be focussed to the non-agrarian sector of the economy. Large varieties of crafts had already played an active role in the economy during the early historical times. This continues during the period under discussion. The *Amarakośa* gives us an exhaustive list of crafts. A distinctive feature of craft activities is the growth in metal-based industries, especially iron. The most famous example of iron-working is certainly the inscribed iron pillar at Mehrauli in Delhi, which has remained rust free since the fifth century AD. Epigraphic references to the *karmakāra* and the *lohākāra* speak

of the presence of blacksmiths. A settlement named Lohānagara, figuring in a Vākāṭaka record, must have been so called after the residence of a large number of blacksmiths there. This tendency to localize of a particular craft at a rural or urban settlement has been known since the beginning of the early historical period. Villages were called Suvarṇakāraka or Kāṁsyakāraka, which suggests that the habitats were so named after goldsmiths and braziers. Place names like Ishṭakapalli and Lavaṇatailika, known from the Vākāṭaka inscriptions, indicate the presence of brick manufacturers, salt-makers and oil millers. The regular production of salt is further indicated in several epigraphic records, which exempted the donees from paying a levy on salt-making (*alavaṇakhātaka*) at the time of a land grant.

The craft of the potter (*kumbhakāra*) was an inseparable component of the daily life. The profuse number of pottery yielded by Rajghat, Ahicchatra and Bhita shows this to be the craft for mass consumption. An inscription from western India dated AD 592 shows that the *kumbhakāra* was subjected to levies in kind (his wares). The carpenter (*sūtradhdra* or *varddhaki*) also appears in inscriptions. One of the traditionally famous industries must have been the textile industry. The large variety of textiles known from literature and also from sculptural representations bear out the flourishing state of this craft. An outstanding instance of the textile industry is furnished by the Mandasore inscription of AD 436 and AD 473, particularly after its fresh translation and study by Basham. It speaks of an organization of silk weavers, originally settled in Gujarat (Lāṭadeśa) but who subsequently migrated to Daśapura or modern Mandasore. The silk weavers must have catered to the needs of the more affluent sections of the society. Closely connected to the textile industry was the craft of the dyer (*chimpaka*). The use of indigo is clearly attested in contemporary texts. The charter of 592, mentioned before, not only refers to indigo production, but also to the imposition of a levy on indigo vats (*nīlaḍumphaka*), at least in the context of western Gujarat. That. woolen garments were produced is indicated indirectly by a reference to an officer in charge of *ūrṇasthāna* or wool producing centre in central deltaic Bengal in the second half of the sixth century AD. A craft oriented towards the production of luxury items was that of the ivory-makers, whose excellence is evident from the excavated specimens found in Bhita. Literary texts and inscriptions throw some light on the distillers' industries. The distiller (*kallāra*) is found to have been subjected to tax in an inscription of AD 592 from western India. Two professions outside the realm of crafts production, may here be taken into consideration: the scribe (*kāyastha*) and the physician (*vaidya*).

We have already noted that professions and occupations in early India tended to combine into guild-like professional groups, called *śreṇis* or *nigamas*. The flourishing conditions of these bodies during the early historical times are known clearly from inscriptions and the early Dharmaśāstras. These

features continued during the period AD 300-600 also. The importance of guild-like occupational groups can be appreciated by the use of their official seals (especially those from Vaiśālī). While the *kulika nigama* was surely an organization of artisans (the term *prathama kulika* or chief artisan in the Bengal charters), the *śreshṭhī-sārthavāha-kulika nigama* may be interpreted as an umbrella organization, embracing respective bodies of merchants, caravan traders and artisans. The expression *prathama kāyastha* mentioned in many records from Bengal speaks of a headman of the organization of scribes. A potter's body (*kulārika śreṇī*) is mentioned in a fourth century AD inscription from Nasik. The existence of an oil millers' organization (*tailika śreṇī*) at ancient Indrapura (modern Indore, Bulandshahr district, Uttar Pradesh) is proved by a Gupta record of AD 466. The silk-weaving guild and its migration from Gujarat to Mandasore have already been mentioned. Why the members of this *śreṇī* migrated to such a distant place is not clear from the record. The important point is, since their arrival at Daśapura, some members stuck to their original profession and were prosperous enough to construct a sun temple. But several other members changed their occupations to become archers, story tellers, astrologers, etc. according to Mandasore record. While the record throws very significant light on both the spatial and occupational mobility of a group of craftsmen, it also suggests some difficulties in the compactness and cohesion among members, indispensable factors of the strength of an occupational organization. The Smriti texts of this time, however, give no indication of any crisis in the *śreṇī* life. On the other hand, there is a greater stress on the compactness of the guild in these texts. The recommendation for having a *madhyastha* or umpire and *kāryachintaka* or executive officer in sastric texts, in addition to the headman of the group, impresses upon us that the growth of activities of the professional body necessitated such new positions. The customs of the *śreṇī* were recognized by these treatises to have been more or less at par with laws of the land. Epigraphic data prove that guilds continued to receive perpetual deposits of cash from individuals and paid annual interests, which were generally used for specific religious and/or welfare purposes.

X

Trade

A discussion on trade and commerce at this stage may be in order. The very word *kraya-vikraya* in the sense of commercial transactions was used in the *Amarakośa*. The same text makes a distinction between an extremely rich merchant (*śreṣṭhī*) and a caravan trader (*sārthavāha*). These two types of merchants enjoyed a prominent position in the Gupta copper plates of north Bengal and also in the Gupta seals from Vaiśālī. These epigraphic records

also hint that different types of merchants had their respective *śreṇī*-like professional organizations as the representatives of which the *nagaraśreṣṭhī* and the *sārthavāha* were inducted into the district board in north Bengal.

Three copper plates from Sanjeli in Gujarat, dated in regnal years 3, 6 and 19 of Hūṇa king Toramāna (*c.* AD 500–20) throw considerable lights on trade and traders in western India in early sixth century AD. In AD 503 there assembled a number of merchants at Vadrapālī, the administrative headquarters of Śivabhāgapuravishaya, to offer voluntary cesses on certain commodities in favour of the Vaishṇava deity Jayasvāmī, whose temple was caused to have been constructed by the queen mother Viradhyika, i.e. the mother of Mahārāja Mātṛidāsa I, a feudatory of Toramāna. The list of traders consists of both local (*vāstavya*) merchants and the non-local ones who came from elsewhere in all directions (*chāturdiśyābhyāgatakavaideśya*). The record states that both the local merchants and non-local ones belonged to a mercantile body named *vaṇiggrāma*. Their names and the places where they hailed from figure in the record.

1. Gomika of Daśapura (Mandasore)
2. Pitṛiyaśa Chirāyusha of Kānyakubja (Kannauj in the Ganga-Yamuna doab)
3. Gdusuyebhassam of Ujjayinī (Ujjain in western Malwa)
4. Droṇasoma Bhakkala of Varunodari
5. Bhannitīya Dhruvabhakshaṇa Agniśarmma of Mahishahradaka
6. Bhakkura of Prachakāśa (=Prakāśa on the Tapi)
7. Rudradatta from Ganyatārā
8. Bharaṇa Bhaṭṭiśa Śarma from Priyajñiarayasa
9. Kalayottikabhaṭṭi of Sangaḍhyaka
10. Datta Gujjara of Rivasulavāṇijaka
11. Bhaṭṭi Mahāttara
12. Svāmika Maheśvara Mallaka
13. Koṭṭadeva of Sadgama

These merchants met at the house (*grihavāstu*) of another merchant (*vaṇijaka*). The merchants who are mentioned without any reference to their location may safely be assumed to have been local (*vāstavya*) traders at Vadrapālī. Sashṭhi's residence would certainly make him a local merchant at Vadrapālī, a point further strengthened by his making the gift of his own house (*svadīyagṛihavāstu*) in favour of a Vishṇu temple (*paramadevatābhāgavatāyatana*), the donation being recorded in the charter of AD 506. The local merchants are also given the epithet *pottalikaputtrāḥ*. The term *pottalika* stands for a packet or bundle. The suffix *puttrāḥ* would probably denote a small packet or bundle. The local dealers at Vadrapālī therefore appear to have been petty traders engaged in small scale retailing. The inscription certainly impresses upon the convergence of

merchants from Daśapura, Kannauj and Ujjayinī and from various parts of Gujarat at Vadrapālī which therefore appears to have emerged as a nodal point in the overland supra-local trade network. The name of the merchant Gdusuyebhassam, hailing from Ujjayinī, strongly suggests that he was a non-Indian. No less significant will be the observation on the suffix on the name *śarman* of at least two merchants, Bhannitīya Dhruvabhākshana Agniśarmmā and Bharaṇa Bhaṭṭiśa Śarma. The name ending śarman/śarma is typically that of a brāhmaṇa and should therefore speak of the brāhmaṇas' participating in commerce, a profession normally not sanctioned by the sastric injunctions. Even more significant point is that these merchants are categorically described as belonging to *vaṇiggrāma* or a professional body of merchants. The term *grāma* does not connote here a village, but, as Kosambi shows, stands for a collection or group of persons following a common profession. That the term *vaṇiggrāma* denoted a professional body of merchants of different areas and dealing in different commodities was first driven home by D.D. Kosambi on the basis of a second century BC donative record from Karle in Mahārashtra and the more elaborate and famous charter of Vishṇusheṇa from western India, dated AD 592. The importance of the charter of the third regnal year of *mahārājadhirājā* Toramāna is that it indicates the active role of this mercantile organization in western India even prior to the famous record of AD 592. In fact, the data in the inscription of AD 503 suggest the shape of things to come in the next nine decades in the history of trade and mercantile organizations in western India.

Let us now focus on the commodities transacted at Vadrapālī. Transactions in molasses, grains, salt and cotton are explicitly stated. What demands our attention here is the image of trade in daily necessities, probably in bulk. The use of the words *bhāṇḍa* and *bharaka*, respectively meaning bales and weight, would strengthen the possibility of transaction of staples in bulk. Another term *setinaka* also figures in the context of levying self-imposed cesses by merchants on grain and salt. The term *setinaka* is explained as a measure of weight equal to two handfuls. Grains reached the exchange centre at Vadrapālī by cartloads, as the expression *dhanyaśakaṭa* would bear it out. The use of the donkey as a beast of burden for transporting bulk items is demonstrated by the expression *gardabhabharaka*. The frequent references to coin terms like *rupinaka* or a silver coin and *viṁśopaka/vimśopanikīs* (a copper coin equal to 1/20th of the value of a silver coin) should be duly taken into consideration. These brighten the possibilities of monetary transactions during trading activities at Vadrapālī. It may also point to the prevalence of imposing cess on exchangeable commodities in cash along with levies in kind. In AD 592 a local ruler of Kathiawad, issued a charter to settle a number of merchants (*āchārasthitipatra*) near Lohāṭagrāma, located close to the coast. These merchants were members of *vaṇiggrāma*.

Vishṇusheṇa in his charter gave various concessions—including remissions from revenue—to these merchants, obviously to attract them

to his kingdom. Descriptions of shops or *vipaṇīs* are available in Kālidāsa's works. Even liquor shops figure therein. Shops were sometimes arranged on both sides of the road and hence the expression *āpaṇamārga* by Kālidāsa.

Movements of merchants and merchandise appear to have been facilitated by a number of arterial overland routes. The Chinese pilgrim Faxian who travelled in India from *c.* AD 399 to 414 speaks highly of the lack of restrictions on movements from one region to another. He also was impressed by the adequate facilities and security of overland journeys in the then north India. Some idea of the communications between north and south India by overland route may be formed by studying the campaigns of Samudragupta, who must have followed well-established routes to reach south Indian territories from his base in the middle Ganga valley. A major feature of the movement of commodities and merchants may have been riverine, particularly in the middle Ganga valley and the lower Gangetic areas. Inscriptions from Bengal occasionally refer to boat-parking stations (*naudaṇḍaka* or *naubandhaka*) in the deltaic portions where rivers must have provided a regular means of transport. An epigraphic reference to a shipbuilding harbour (*nāvātakṣheṇī*) in a sixth century AD copper plate from the Faridpur area in Bangladesh is therefore hardly surprising. The interesting point is these boat-parking stations or the ship-building area were prominent enough in ancient Bengal to be referred to as identifiable landmarks in the local landscape.

One can hardly overlook the importance of the two long littorals, dotted with numerous harbours for coastal and overseas communications within the subcontinent and also beyond. It is true that the very prominent position India enjoyed during the heydays of trade with the Roman empire was on the wane. This could have had some adverse effects on the economic conditions during the Gupta times. India's external trade in the western sectors of the Indian Ocean to some extent improved with the rise of the Byzantine power in Constantinople in the sixth century AD. Sea-borne contacts between India and Byzantine areas from the sixth century AD onwards were made more through the Persian Gulf rather than the Red Sea. The Sassanids of Iran also maintained lively interests in overseas trade with India and were eager to establish some control over movements in the Gulf. This resulted in the rivalries between the Byzantine and the Sassanid empires, but their eagerness to establish trade links with India could have considerably benefitted the subcontinent. The western sea-board of India particularly derived commercial advantages in this changing context. The importance of the Konkan harbours like Kalliena (Kalyan near Mumbai) and Sibor (Chaul to the south of Mumbai) figures in the *Christian Topography* of the Syrian Christian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes (late sixth century AD). The port of Kalliena had been in a decaying state since the second half of the second century AD, but the revival of the Persian Gulf trade must have contributed to its renewed significance. More important than the Konkan coast was the

Malabar littorals in further south. The discovery of Byzantine coins in the region around Coimbatore irrefutably shows the continutiy of sea-borne trade between India and the western Indian Ocean. The Gupta conquest of Gujarat and Kathiawad could have been prompted by the prospect of gain from trade with the Persian Gulf.

There is a common belief that the decline of the Roman trade with India led to a major shrinkage of long-distance maritime trade over a considerable period of time. Even if one admits that the overseas trade of India in the Persian Gulf did not match the volume and splendour of the same in the early centuries AD, the somewhat lesser commerce in the western Indian Ocean was largely compensated with a growing intercourse between India and South-east Asia through the Bay of Bengal. The eastern coast seems to have occupied a prominent position. In the Tamil area the outstanding port was certainly Kāverīpaṭṭinam in the Kaveri delta. The two Tamil epics—the *Śilāppadikāram* and the *Maṇimekalai*—portray brisk trade at this port, which had numerous foreign merchants in their specific quarters, settlements of artisans' shops, a wharf and even a lighthouse. Further north along the east coast was situated the famous port of Tāmralipta identified with present Tamluk in the Midnapur district, West Bengal. This port seems to have been the chief commercial outlet for the landlocked middle Ganga valley and the north-eastern regions of the subcontinent. The extensive hinterland of Tāmralipta was one of the factors behind the rise of this port to great heights. Faxian, on his way back to China, boarded a merchant vessel from this port to reach Sri Lanka, wherefrom he boarded another ship to Java. Bengal's overseas contacts with southeast Asia is epigraphically further corroborated by the presence of a master mariner (*mahānāvika*), Buddhagupta, in the Malay peninsula. He was a native of Raktamṛittikā located in the Murshidabad area of West Bengal. It is also clear from a perusal of literary and archaeological sources that Sri Lanka assumed a special position in the overseas trade between the east and west, largely due to its nearly central position in the Indian Ocean. This explains why Cosmas paid so much attention to this island in his *Christian Topography*.

The prevalent trade network is also doubtless shown by the large number of coins, and especially the superb gold and silver coins of the Guptas. Several hoards of the Gupta gold coins cannot but impress upon us the prosperous conditions of the realm, not only by their high gold content, but also their superb artistic execution. From the days of Skandagupta, the weight standard of the Gupta gold coins was raised from 124 grains to 144 grains. But as there was regular debasement of the gold coinage from about the last quarter of the fifth century AD, the numismatic evidence thus would speak of economic difficulties in the empire, notwithstanding the increase in the weight of coins. This is also clearly borne out by the post-450 AD debased Gupta gold coins found in the Kalighat hoard. Attention has also been drawn to the lesser use of copper coins than that seen in the early historical times,

when even the non-monarchical clans minted copper currencies. As copper coins were mainly used for daily transactions, their fewer number has led the proponents of Indian feudalism to infer that the relevance of coins to the overall economy declined. The gradual decay of the money economy appears to have strengthened an 'enclosed' and 'self-sufficient' village economy that had it roots in the *agrahāra* system. They have also pointed to the non-availability of any minted currency in the Vākāṭaka realm and to the solitary reference to a merchant in the entire range of the Vākāṭaka inscriptions. Though the Vākāṭakas did not issue any coin, the Śaka kshatrapas in western India and the Vishṇukuṇḍins in the Veṅgi country definitely did so. The complexities of the monetary history of this age are seen in Faxian's statement on the use of cowrie shells. A more elaborate discussion on the currency systems and its bearing on the economy will be made later in the following chapter.

The agrarian and the non-agrarian sectors of the economy surveyed above had definite revenue-yeilding potentials, though no statistical enquiry of the revenue history of this period is possible due to lack of materials. But copper plate charters, giving list of remissions from taxes provide a reliable guide for understanding the diversity of the sources of revenue. As agriculture was the very basis of the economy it was naturally also the most important source of revenue. The principal tax was *bhāga* or the share of produce. The records generally do not specify the rate of this share; but the traditional rate was one-sixth, which explains the royal epithet, the receiver of the sixth portion. This possibility is further strengthened by the notion of the king's right to enjoy one-sixth of merit accruing out of land donation. It is difficult to specify the connotations of two other common revenue terms *kara* and *uparikara*, though it has been suggested to be the same as the principal and subsidiary tax. The tax called *udraṅga*, collected by the *audrangika*, is often taken to denote a tax on permanent subjects. Revenue terms like *dhanya* (in western India) and *hālikakāra* (in central India) must have meant imposts on agriculturists. While the land tax was realized most probably in kind, the tax in cash was called *hiraṇya*, which may have been realized from the non-agrarian sectors of the economy. That diverse artisanal productions came under the purview of taxes is clearly evident from the charter of Vishnushena (AD 592; for the relevant reference to artisans see the section on crafts and industries). The practice of imposing a levy on salt production continued in this period. The commercial sector yielded tolls and customs or *śulka;* the *śaulkika* or the officer-in-charge of the collection of *śulka* figures in several inscriptions. Epigraphic materials strongly suggest that agricultural taxes were numerically superior to those from crafts and industries.

A feature of the revenue system of this period was the growing practice of the imposition of forced labour or *vishṭi*. It was indeed an extra-economic coercion. The term *sarvavishṭi* in a Vākāṭaka inscription surely indicates the ramifications of the demand of involuntary labour. This must have been

a terrible burden on the poorer sections of people, especially in the rural areas. Vasantasenā in his *Kāmasūtra* mentions that the village landlord could force the wife of a peasant to render various services like threshing crops and filling up his granary. This and the evidence of *vishṭi* demonstrate the coercive nature of imposing levies by regular and irregular methods. It has to be admitted that copper plates acquaint us with more revenue terms than hitherto known before. This may logically lead us to assume that the burden of taxation was on the increase. The fiscal burden must have risen with the practice of imposing many extra-legal imposts on the rural folk (mainly known from the Vākāṭaka records), e.g. on milk, honey, flowers, fuel, hide, obligatory provision of bed and seat, etc. Such fiscal pressures without doubt impoverished the condition of the peasantry.

XI

Social Conditions

Traditionally, the institution of dividing the society into four *varṇas* and one's life into four *āśramas* or stages (*brahmacharya, gārhasthya, vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*) take centre-stage in the discussions in normative treatises. The Dharmaśāstras laid great emphasis on these two institutions—complementary to each other—as the very plank of social organization. Though the sastric view is to generally bracket *varṇa* and *āśrama* on equal footing as the major foundations of the Indian society, theoreticians of the late ancient times seem to have paid somewhat lesser attention to the institution of *chaturāśrama*. The idea of four *purushārthas* (or goals in a man's life, namely, *dharma, artha, kāma* and *moksha*) to be achieved in life marked by four graduated stages or *āśramas* is not entirely absent in our texts. But the lawgivers were apparently more interested in the complexities of social life than in the culture of renunciation (*sannyāsa*), the final stage of life as the preparation for emancipation (*moksha*). It may be possible that the emphasis on the renunciation of the world in Buddhism and Jainism brought about a reaction in the Brahmanical orthodox ideals, which now upheld the stage of the householder and family life (*gārhasthya*) as the pivot of the *āśrama* system. This was the stage which was principally devoted to production of material wealth and also reproduction. In such circumstances it is the *varṇa-jāti* system, inextricabley interwined with the institution of marriage, that finds the maximum attention of the theoreticians. Considerable emphases are given on the birth, heredity of professions, taboos on intermarriage, on inter-dining and on change of callings and the consciousness of rank in the sastric and Puranic traditions. This orthodox view is further strengthened by the desire to preserve the social inequality on the justification of inherent differences among human beings in quality and performance (*guṇa* and *karma*). This strict compartmentalization is considerably modified

by the śāstrakāras themselves, by devising the notions of *jātis* which are innumerable.

The brāhmaṇa was given the topmost position in the multi-layered *varṇa-jāti* system. The priestly community, ideally speaking, had six functions: *yajana* (offering sacrifice), *yājaṇa* (officiating at the sacrifice for others), *adhyayana* (studying), *adhyāpana* (teaching), *dāna* (making charity) and *pratigraha* (receiving gifts). They should possess knowledge about the Universe (*Brahmā-dhāraṇa*) and duty to the society (*niyama-dhāraṇa*). Inscriptions occasionally confirm the practice of these high qualities of the brahman who is sometimes described as engaged in penance (*tapas*), self-study (*svādhyāya*), conversant in *sūtra*, the commentaries (*bhāshya*) and teaching (*pravachana*). Their sage-like standing (*viprarshi*), steadfastness in their prescribed occupations (*svakarmābhirata*), and their performance of Vedic sacrifices (*kratu-yājī*) have also formed parts of epigraphic eulogies. The epigraphic references to *gotras* and *pravaras* of the brāhmaṇas (24 *gotra* names are known from these records) would further point to subdivisions within this *varṇa*.

As has been discussed above, the brāhmaṇa's material conditions improved immensely as the recipient of *agrahāras*. Such brāhmaṇas have been labeled as *agrahārins* in charters. This may suggest that the brāhmaṇa was associated with agrarian life as an owner of land or a landed intermediary, though not as a direct tiller of the soil. People with typical brāhmaṇa name endings like *śarman, bhaṭṭa, deva*, etc. figure frequently in the list of *mahattaras* and *kuṭumbins* in land grants. Such a situation probably influenced the strict orthodox view to tacitly approve of the brāhmaṇa's taking up agriculture and even trade, though temporarily only during a calamity or distress (*āpad*). The classic example of the brāhmaṇa's preference for rulership and adminstration to his priestly functions is the transformation of the Kadambas from a Vedic brahman family to a ruling house. In central India, brāhmaṇa Indravishṇu and Varāhavishṇu faithfully discharged the functions of their *varṇa*, but their son became a *rājā*, followed by his son Mātṛivishṇu who became a local governor in eastern Malwa in early sixth century. Chārudatta, the hero of the famous drama *Mṛichchhakaṭikam*, was a *sārthavāha* in spite of being a brāhmaṇa and enjoyed considerable prestige in society. The text does not in anyway indicate that he took recourse to trade in the wake of a distress. No less interesting is the account of brāhmaṇa robbers as *kirātas* in the Vindhyan forest tracts, according to the *Daśakumāracharita* of Daṇḍin. All these may speak of greater fluidity in the social norms than suggested by the sastric dicta. At least on one occasion the brāhmaṇa grantees were warned by a Vākāṭaka king that their grants could be abrogated if they conspired against the ruler. This shows that the position of the priestly community could be checked and overpowered by the ruler, whose favour was essential for the sustenance of the brāhmaṇa.

Theoretically, the second position in the *varṇa* society was occupied by the kshatriyas. But the kshatriya origin was hardly a deciding factor for the acquisition of the ruling power, as is well illustrated by a number of political powers of this time. It is in fact difficult to clearly identify a distinct kshatriya *varṇa* through descent; but several ruling houses of little pedigree indirectly aspired for the kshatriya status by seeking ancestry and descent from the epic kshatriya heroes. That the kshatriyas did take to non-kshatriya occupations is proved by the epigraphic reference to two *kshatriya-vaṇiks* or merchants of kshatriya origin in AD 466. Such transgressions probably did not lead to any major social problem since the religious donation by the two kshatriya merchants to a sun temple was accepted without any qualm.

It is also difficult to find out a specific vaiśya *varṇa*, theoretically assigned the third position in the four-fold *varṇa* scheme. The *śāstras* generally enjoin upon them to study, perform sacrifices, offer charity and to engage in cattle rearing, agriculture and trade. As the major wealth-producing section in the varna-oriented society, the vaiśyas were in a position to donate handsomely for charity. Despite the wealth of the vaiśyas, theoretical texts generally did not accord them appropriate status and prestige; the trader—often equated with the vaiśya—was branded as an open thief (*prakāśya taskara*).

The śūdra have invariably been assigned the lowest position in the legal literature, which burdens them with numerous disabilities. A śūdra has been systematically denied any Vedic study, an *upanayana* ceremony and the chanting of Vedic hymns during marriage. The ideas of sharp *varna* inequality influenced judicial matters and financial considerations. The śūdra was therefore to be awarded the harshest punishment for committing the same offence for which the brāhmaṇas would receive a much milder punishment. The rate of interest on loans taken by the śūdra was also the highest. The traditional duty of the śūdra was to render services to the three groups.

Two social groups in rural areas deserve special mention. These are the *kuṭumbikas* and the *mahattaras*, figuring in the land grants from Bengal. We have already identified these two as well-to-do agriculturists. Persons with typical brāhmaṇa name-endings like *bhaṭṭa, śarman* and *deva* are found in the list of such *kuṭumbins* and *mahattatas*. Thus, both brāhmaṇas and non-brāhmaṇas could be included in these two rural categories. Their important position in the rural setting is evident from the fact that they were addressed in the application for land transfer, their welfare was enquired by the local administration and their consent was sought at the time of granting the land.

At the lowest rung of the society can be found the *antyajas*—burdened by the *śāstras* with the most inferior origin. They are uniformly viewed in the sastric prescriptions as offsprings of *pratiloma* unions (between higher *varṇa* female and lower *varṇa* male), severely reprobated by the law

givers. The usual tendency was to assign to them what were considered unclean and impure occupations. The worst hit of this social set up was the chandala, described as the offspring of the worst form of *pratiloma* marriage, i.e. between a brāhmaṇa female and a śūdra male. The theoreticians recommended for them a sub-human means of livelihood and existence. They were assigned the occupations of undertakers and/or executioners, their habitat was located outside the limits of the city or village and their clothes were procured from corpses. Faxian narrated that the chandalas lived outside human habitats and had to beat drams when they entered the cities/villages to make people aware of their presence, which amounted to pollution and hence, needed to be avoided to all costs.

XII

A major plank on which the *jāti-varṇa* society could operate was the institution of marriage. The ideal was the marriage within the varna (*savarṇa*) and outside the *gotra* (*gotrāntara*), endowing traditional marriage in India with the features of both endogamy and exogamy. But inter-caste marriages were well-known in the form of the approved *anuloma* and the disfavoured *pratiloma* types. The theoreticians' views are not unanimous on the merit of the offspring of the *pratiloma* types as legal heirs to the paternal property. While some recognize their right to inherit ancestral property, Bṛihaśpati firmly denies any such right to the children of *pratiloma* unions. Such variety of views may speak of differences of opinions, if not contradictions among law-givers, but may also suggest growing rigours and orthodoxy. Even Vatsyayana denounces *anuloma* marriages as deplorable as the union with harlots. Most of the theoretical texts mention the eight forms of marriage: *brāhma, daiva, dṛśha, prajāpatya, asura, gāndharva, rākshasa* and *paiśācha*, following the standard set in the *Manusmṛiti*. The first four forms are usually lauded as righteous (*dharmya*) marriages bearing pure offsprings, because these required strict observation of the *jāti-varṇa* regulations and parental authority and approval in marriage. The rest are looked down upon as unrighteous marriages since these required little parental approval. Vatsyayana, however, offers some interesting departures from the norm. Of the *dharmya* marriages, he rates *prajāpatya* as the best since this form accommodates *savarṇa, anuloma* and even *pratiloma* unions. But this celebrated authority on erotics hailed *gāndharva* (marriage by courtship) as the best of all, since it was based on mutual love and understanding of the partners and devoid of negotiations. He also finds *paiśācha* as nothing short of rape or enjoyment of a woman, and considers it as a more preferable form than the *rākshasa*, since the former was free from the element of violence involved in *rākshasa*. This is a major contrast to the almost universal denouncement of the *paiśācha* as the eighth and the worst form of marriage. The emphasis on *savarṇa* unions notwithstanding, there are several historical

instances that state quite the contrary. Matrimonial relations between the brāhmaṇa Vākāṭakas and non-brāhmaṇa Guptas, and between the Guptas and the brāhmaṇa Kadambas cannot escape our attention. Prabhāvatiguptā neither changed her maiden title nor her maiden *gotra* after her marriage and during her regency. The Ramtek inscription of the Vākāṭaka queen Prabhāvatiguptā's time offers an interesting information. Ghatotkachagupta, son of Chandragupta II and also a brother of the Vākāṭaka queen, married (*pāṇigrāhaṇamchakāra*) his niece (*bhāgineyī*) who was considered as the Lakshmī of the palace. Here is an instance of marriage between the maternal uncle and his niece (sister's daughter). Such a marriage is quite unusual in north India, but was prevalent in the south; in fact, the *Bṛihaspatismṛti* approves of such a union on the basis of its being a local custom in Dakshiṇāpatha. The north Indian Guptas thus followed a peninsular matrimonial custom, though the exact purpose of such a marriage is not clear.

Marriage was integrally related to the position of women. Ever since the later Vedic times (*c*.1000/800 BC) there can be discerned a strong tendency to consider marriage as the single most important event in a woman's life, which was oriented towards the management of the household and bearing progenies. Moreover, she was hailed as the mother of male children and hence, treated as producer of producers. This view is also current in the sastric treatises of our times. There is little doubt that such an attitude towards women rarely allowed an honourable position for her. The śāstras left little scope of any formal training, far from the sacred Vedic one during her maidenhood at her parent home. At best, she was trained in domestic chores, or in an affluent background she learnt some performing arts at the most. A contrast to this general attitude may be seen in the reference to female teachers (*upadhyāyā/upadhyāyī*) in the *Amarakośa*, which could imply some scope of Vedic studies by women. It is hardly surprising that the theoretical treatises, championing orthodox Brahmanical values, would repeatedly encourage marriage of girls at a pre-puberty stage. Child marriage of girls was proposed viś-a-viś a grown up male—the ideal difference of age between the bride and the bridegroom, according to the *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, should be three times. This was to ensure dominance of the husband over the wife and also to deprive her of any of scope of choice for life partners. Vasantasenā, however, is less orthodox in this context and considers a gap of two years as the ideal age difference between the conjugal partners. On his authority, it appears that a girl could be married before and also after attaining her puberty. That the sastric dictation was not always heeded, is indicated by the repeated descriptions of heroines in creative literature as fully grown-up women before their marriage. Śakuntalā, for instance, in her pre-marital days had already become fit for enjoyment (*upabhogakshamā*)—an epithet having relevance only to a grown-up woman. Here too, the epithet emphasizes her sexual attractions and charms to the hero of the drama.

The bride was transferred (*sampradāna*) from one male guardian (father) to another (husband), which projects her as a transferable being.

Moreover, she was handed over not merely to the husband, but to his family too (*kulāya strī pradīyate*). As a wife, she was expected to be totally devoted to her husband (*pativratā*), whom she was ideally to follow like a shadow (*chhāyaivānugatā*). This unquestioned loyalty to the husband, her unequal position in relation to her husband and the hardship of her life as a hallmark of an ideal wife are also strongly upheld in the *Kāmasūtra*. Romila Thapar shows the major transformation that took place in the portrayal of Śakuntalā from the *Mahābhārata* to Kālidāsa. In the former, she is a spirited woman, keeping with the tradition of the heroic women in an epic tale. The story catered to the tastes of audience not only confined to the court. It was possible for Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata* story to forcefully counter and challenge the king openly. In Kālidāsa's drama, which had the refined elite of the court as its the audience, Śakuntalā appears meek and submissive in comparison to the one in the *Mahābhārata*. The name Śakuntalā remained unaltered, but Kālidāsa, drawing from the *Mahābhārata* story, transforms her into the ideal wife of the sastric norms.

Śūdraka offered a bold departure from the social norm by describing Vasantasenā, the courtesan heroine of his drama *Mrichhakaṭikam*, as fit to wear the ceremonial attire of a wife (*vadhu*). But even Śūdraka chose to keep Dhutā, the wife of Chārudatta, in dim background and did not at all describe her plight when Chārudatta ignored her to marry Vasantasenā. Shonaleeka Kaul's recent study exposes the sharp contradiction in the attitudes towards the courtesan (*gaṇika*) and the wife (*kulastrī*). The *gaṇika* (courtesan par excellence) was clearly distinct from the *veśyā* (ordinary courtesan). Literate, culturally accomplished and a performing artiste, the *gaṇika* regularly appears in classical Sanskrit *kāvyas* as mixing freely with men and going outdoors to attend various social gatherings of the *nāgarakas*. She is almost a female counterpart of the refined city-bred man (*nāgaraka*) of Vatsyayana's *Kāmasūtra*. The wife had little opportunity and exposure to literacy and was invariably expected to be meek and submissive. If the life of *nāgaraka* was one of refined enjoyment—often outside his household—his wife's life revolved entirely around domestic chores, duties and responsibilities; the hallmark of being the *kulastrī* was her confinement to the household. When she had to go out of the household to offer worship at a temple for the welfare of her husband and family, she had to be invariably escorted by a male relative.

XIII

Cultural Scenario: A Survey of Literature

The three centuries under review have loomed large in historiography for its remarkable cultural life: creativity in literary productions, religious life,

practices and thoughts and visual arts. In terms of cultural achievements, the period was certainly one of great efflorescence. There is a strong historiographical trend to mark these three centuries as a phase of Brahamanical 'revival'. This consideration stems largely from the fact that Sanskrit emerged as the most important language of the elite groups, including the language of the court. This is especially evident from the rapid spread of Sanskrit as a court language—preferred for writing royal/administrative documents—replacing the previous use of Prakrit. Sanskrit became the language of the refined (*mārga*), fit for the tongue of the royalty, the brāhmaṇa and the high-ranking functionaries. Both in the technical treatises on drama and in the actual cases of creative dramas, Prakrit became earmarked as the *deśī* (local) language to be spoken by women and social groups held in low esteem in the *varṇa-jāti* order. The period also is notable for the growing prominence of Brahmanical cults over greater parts of India.

According to many scholars, the composition of the *Mahābhārata* took its final shape around AD 400, when it became a text containing a 100,000 slokas (*śatasāhasrīsaṁhita*). With this, the great epic transformed from a hero story (or a collection of hero stories) almost to a śāstra, as substatianl didactic sections were added to earlier hero stories. Sanskrit became the principal vehicle for the *kavya* literature, which included not only poems, but prose compositions and dramas too. Ornate Sanskrit court literature, eulogizing a ruler (*praśasti*), first surfaced in the form of the composition by Harisheṇa praising Samudragupta in the early fourth century AD. The Harisheṇa *praśasti* is both in verse and prose. The style became quite regular to eulogize not only powerful Gupta rulers like Skandagupta, but also for for relatively less prominent political figures like Bandhuvarman, Prakāśadharman and Yaśodharman.

In the history of creative Sanskrit literature, the most celebrated figure is indeed Kālidāsa, whose personal details and date are matters of sustained scholarly controversy. His immortal creations include lyrical poems like the *Meghadūtam*, the *Ritusaṁhāra*, the *Raghuvaṁśam* and the *Kumārasambhavam* and great plays like the *Abhijñānaśakuntalam*, the *Mālavikāgnimitram* and the *Vikramorvaśīya*. Usually hailed as the greatest dramatist of early India, Kālidāsa drew upon historical events as the theme of *Mālavikāgnimitram* would illustrate. (*Mālavikāgnimitram* hero Agnimitra—grandson of Pushyamitra Suṅga). Scholars have viewed that his descriptions of the *digvijaya* of Raghu probably was influenced by Samudragupta's great military feats. He stands unsurpassed in the use of similies, metaphors and the descriptions of love, seasons and nature, especially the spring and the monsoons. As a playwright, Śūdraka has been widely appreciated for his *Mrichchhakaṭikam*, an excellent example of a *prakaraṇa* where the dramatist creates the story by drawing upon events of worldly life. Noted for the author's awareness of social and political matters, the *Mrichchhakaṭikam* revolves round the theme of love between a poor brāhmaṇa Chārudatta

and Vasantasenā, the premier courtesan of Ujjayinī. Equally prominent were the plays by Bhāsa: *Madhyamavyayoga, Dūta Ghatotkacha, Dūtavakya, Bālacharita* and *Chārudatta*. That Bhasa regularly drew upon stories from the *Mahābhārata* for his plays is beyond any doubt.

Sanskrit continued to be the language for composing Dharmaśāstra texts like the *Brihaspatismriti*, the *Nāradasmriti* and the *Katyayanasmriti*. The treatise on polity, *Kāmandakīyanītisāra* (essence of politics or *Niti* by Kāmandaka) also belongs to this age. The text is in fact a summary of the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* and does not show much originality of thought. That technical literature also flourished, is perhaps best illustrated by the *Nāmaliṅgānuśāsana* (also known as the *Amarakośa*) by Amarasimha, a celebrated lexicographer, and the famous text on erotics the *Kāmasūtram* of Vātsyāyana. The *Nāmaliṅgānuśāsana* provided a standard model of writing lexicons, influencing many lexicographers of subsequent centuries. In the field of philosophical literature, the dominant feature was to compose tracts to engage in debates and refute the rival's opinion(s). The case in point are the additions to the *Yogasūtras, Brahmasūtras* and the *Nyāyasūtras* with a view to contesting Buddhist and Jaina views.

The age was indeed a landmark in the fields of mathematics and astronomy. Āryabhaṭa, the celebrated mathematician and the author of the *Āryabhaṭiya* belongs to this epoch. To him has also been attributed the *Āryabhaṭiyasiddhānta* which is however known only from later references. It is difficult to ascertain whether he was a resident of Kusumapura (Pāṭaliputra) or hailed from Aśmaka, located in the Godavari valley in peninsular India. Though his view that planets moved around the earth in circular epicycles is erroneous, he must be credited for the earliest known scientific explanation of eclipses: the moon either came between the sun and the earth, or the moon came within the earth's shadow. He was also the first to establish that the earth rotates on its axis and he gave an accurate calculation of the length of the year, i.e. 365.2586805 days. Another contribution of this mathematician was the invention of the number zero, which paved way for the decimal system. This idea in later times reached the Arabic-speaking intellectual world from where it eventually went to Europe. In the late sixth century AD probably existed Brahmagupta, another great mathematician, particularly known for his *Brahmasiddhānta*. S.R. Sarma's studies have brought to light how Brahmagupta not only was an outstanding astronomer and mathematician, but also a master in describing instruments for astronomical calculations.

Along with Sanskrit, epic texts were composed in Tamil in South India. The best known examples are the two Tamil epics, the *Śilāppadikāram* (the Song of the Anklet) and the *Maṇimekalai* (the Jewel Belt), authored respectively by Ilango Adigal and Sattanar. Consisting of 30 cantos and divided into three books, the *Śilāppadikāram* revolves around the lives of Kovalan, son a rich merchant, and his wife Kannaki, who lived in the famous

city of Puhar (Kaverīpaṭṭinam in the Kaveri delta). Kovalan once deserted his wife because he fell in love with a courtesan, Mādhavī; but he eventually returned to his wife, who accepted him. The reunited couple then moved to Madurai in the Pāṇḍya country to earn some money. There Kovalan was wrongly accused of stealing a pair of anklets of the queen, though he actually went to sale the silver anklet of his wife. He was executed for a crime which he did not commit and it devastated Kannaki. She first proved the innocence of her husband and then out of anger, tore off her left breast and died after burning down the entire city of Madurai. The couple became reunited in heaven and in earth, she began to be worshipped as the ideal wife.

The *Maṇimekalai* also has 30 cantos. A prince Udayakumāra falls in love with Maṇimekalai—a married woman. Maṇimekalai turns down the love of Udayakumāra as she wants to renounce the world and become a Buddhist nun. She runs away to Madurai in order to escape from Udayakumāra. In Madurai she asumes the form of Kāyā-Chaṇḍikai—a married woman—and engages herself in distributing food amongst the poor with the help of a magic alms-bowl. Udayakumāra follows her to Madurai. One day, the husband of the actual Kāyā-Chaṇḍikai sees Maṇimekalai with Udayakumāra in her disguised form. He mistakes it for Udayakumāra's liaison with his wife Kāyā-Chaṇḍikai and in rage, kills the prince. Maṇimekalai is put to prison by the Pāṇḍyan king and she undergoes many ordeals in order to prove her innocence. The Pāṇḍyan queen eventually gets convinced of Maṇimekalai's innocence and insists on releasing her from the prison. Maṇimekalai gets freed and she finally leaves Madurai. She goes to Kāñchī, where a famine had broken out. She dedicates herself to the service of the famine-stricken poor in Kāñchī and ultimately becomes a Buddhist nun.

Religions

No discussion of the cultural life of this period can be complete without a survey of the religious situation. Perhaps the most significant development was the growing popularity of sectarian devotional (bhakti) cults, which had deep impacts on Vaishnavism, Saivism, goddess cults and other Brahmanical cults. Though Vedic sacrifices were not unknown, these involved complex and long-lasting rituals, often within the capacity of the political elites to perform; the appeal of the performance beyond orthodox brahmans and royal household seems to have been lessening during this period. The following of the *jñāna-mārga* did not take its roots among people in general, largely because of its abstract nature. On the other hand, the idea of personal devotion, expressed through worship (*pūjā*), to a personal deity, which often was propitiated in the form of a distinct divine image (*pratimā/archā*), had an inherent appeal to the individual devotee cutting across sectarian differences. A salient feature of bhakti is the complete surrender of the devotee to one's preferred divinity to the extent of the ultimate denial

of the self of the devotee. The devotee receives the divine grace (*prasāda*) as and when the devotee takes the final refuge (*śaraṇam*) to the deity. The ultimate identity between the devotee and the divinity paves the way for the emancipation of the devotee. The popularity of bhakti must have increased manifold with the composition of the *Purāṇas*, belonging both to the Vaishṇava and the Śaiva sects. To each such devotional sect, its principal deity was thus the supreme god or goddess. Thus to a Śaiva, Śiva was superior to all deities and the ultimate divine being; similarly, Vishṇu would supercede all other deities for a Vaishṇava.

This situation would pave the way for sectarian contestations for pre-eminence; it would simultaneously also underline the absence of a single greatest deity. In other words, the bhakti cults recognized the possibility of multiple supreme gods and goddesses, thereby accommodating plurality of religious experiences within Brahmanical cults and precluding the position of a single overarching supreme deity. It is from this point of view that Kṛishṇa enjoined upon Arjuna, according to the *Śrīmadbhāgavatagītā*, to take complete refuge only in him (*māmekaṁ śaraṇamvrājā*) by leaving all other religious beliefs (*sarvadharma parityajya*). The text also left behind the highly influential teaching that one should ideally act in a completely detatched manner without considering the fruits of the actions, as one has a right to appropriate work but not to the fruits arising out of the endeavour.

The popularity of Vaishanavism took a major stride during this period. One major factor was the sustained patronage from some of the contemporary powers. The Guptas were ardent worshippers of Vishṇu. This is demonstrated by their standard dynastic epithet *Paramabhāgavata* and the regular depiction of the *garuḍadhvaja*. An image of Vishṇu as *śāraṅgin* (or the wielder of the bow or horn, *a*) is said to have been installed according to the Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta. Inscriptions also tell us that two different subordinate ruling families, serving the Hūṇa overlord Tormāna respectively in Eran and in Gujarat, were devout worshippers of Vishṇu. Inscriptions recording donations to temples of Vishṇu and Kṛishṇa have come from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. A few early Pallava and Ganga rulers of South India called themselves the devotees/worshippers of Vāsudeva Kṛishṇa. Another salient feature of Vishṇu worship was the growing poularity of the incarnations (*avatāra*) of Vishṇu, usually ten in number, though the list of ten *avatāras* is not an invariant one. The most popular of the incarnations of Vishṇu in textual and visual materials are Varāha (Boar), Narasiṁha (Man-Lion), Vāmana (Dwarf) and Vāsudeva Kṛishṇa. The well-known Daśāvatāra temple of this period bears the mark of propitiation of different incarnations of Vishṇu. Particualrly important was the representation of Varāha, rescuing the earth goddess. This often had a political message because many Vaishṇava rulers projected themselves as rescuers of the earth or their realms like the Boar incarnation. The Gupta period records of north Bengal

inform us of the worship of Kokāmu-khasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin, both referring to the Boar incarnation of Vishṇu. A large number of Vishṇu images of this period show the deity in a standing (*sthānaka*) posture, with the deity holding a conch-shell (*śaṅkha*), discus (*chakra*), mace (*gadā*) and lotus flower (*padma*) in his four hands; he is adorned with a *vanamālā* and accompanied by Lakshmī or Śrī as his consort. Vishṇu images usually depict his mount Garuḍa also.

If the Guptas were devout Vaishanva rulers, the Vākāṭakas were worshippers of Śiva; so were the Maitraka rulers of Valabhī in western India, the Maukharīs of Kānyakubja and the Pushyabhūtis of Sthaṇviśvara. Such rulers often assumed the epithet, *Paramamāheśvara* (ardent devotee of Maheśvara or Śiva). Śiva was represented both in the phallic (*liṅgam*) or in anthropomorphic form, sometimes in the form of a *mukhaliṅgam* (i.e a lingam with the face of Śiva depicted on it). The profusion of Śaiva icons in Mathurā points to the popularity of Śiva worship at this city in Ganga-Yamuna doab; interestingly enough, Mathurā is also celebrated centre of the Kṛishṇa Vāsudeva cult. Śiva in his benign form was often worshipped as Umā-Maheśvara, where Śiva was accompanied by his consort, Umā. A seal found from the excavations at Bhita perhaps yields the earliest traces of the iconic representation of Śiva in *ardhanārīśvara* (half male, half female) form. Upinder Singh has argued for the prevalence of the Pāśupata Śaiva sect in Orissa by demonstrating the presence of the figures of Lākuliśa in the earliest temples of Orissa.

Lākuliśa (literally meaning the god with a club) is generally accepted as either the founder of the Śaiva Pāśupata sect or the first teacher (*ācharya*) of the sect. He belonged to the early part of the third century AD. He was born in Kāyāvarohana (modern Karvan in Gujarat). In the images, Lākuliśa is usually depicted with a club in his hand and surrounded by animals.

The period under survey witnessed the regular worship of Sūrya, the sun god. Inscriptions of the time of Kumāragupta and Skandagupta amply bear this out in the context of both the Ganga-Yamuna doab and western India. There is a scholarly consensus that the worship of the sun god came to India from Iran and/or the Indo-Iranian borderland. The *Bṛihatsaṁhitā* of Varāhaṁihira lays down that the icon of sun god should be given the attire of the north-western quarter. Extant images of Sūrya show him as riding a chariot driven by seven horses, symbolizing the seven days of the week. The Sūrya image has a distinctive iconographic feature: he wears a pair of boots.

Among the numerous goddesses, Mahishamarddinī—the goddess on her lion mount killing the buffalo-demon—was the most revered deity. The *Devīmāhātmyam* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* eulogizes her as the primaeval mother and the foremost among goddesses. She was variously known as Durgā, Narāyanī, Ambikā and Vindhyavāsinī. She was propitiated as the consort of Śiva which is why she was worshipped also as Umā and Śivānī. In her fierce and destructive appearance, she figures as Kālī

(Destroyer), Karālī (Terrible), Bhīmā (Frightening) and Chaṇḍī/Chāmuṇḍā (Wrathful).

There is a wrong notion that the flourishing condition of different Brahmanical sects signalled the gradual fading of Budhhism and Jainism during this period. It is impossible to miss that the Chinese pilgrim Faxian came to India to visit major Buddhist sacred centres. He did note the popularity of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India and the currency of Hīnayāna Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Faxian also noted the prevalence of Hīnayānists in Gandhāra, Kannauj and Kauśāmbī. Contemporary sources inform us of the importance of Buddhist centres like Sarnath, Nalanda, Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, Ajanta and Ellora. At Ellora, the co-existence of Buddhist and Jaina shrines, flourishing under the Vākāṭaka rule, is unmistakable. It is significant to note that the ideas of bhakti exerted some influence on Buddhist practices, especially with the rites of worship. For both the monk and the laity, the worship of the Buddha Amitabha (of infinite radiance) gained ground. Among the Bodhisattvas pre-eminent were Maitreya (kind one), Avalokiteśvara (embodiment of compassion) and Mañjuśrī (associated with wisdom). Avalokiteśvara often appeals in royal dresses and holds a lotus bud in his hand (hence the epithet, *padmapāṇi*). The distinctive mark of the iconography of Mañjuśrī is the depiction of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* which he holds; he also often appears with a sword of wisdom, symbolizing his act of tearing down delusion. That Buddhism made its presence felt in South India is amply borne out by the Maṇimekalai. Maṇimekalai was conversant with different philosophies: Vedic, Vaishṇava, Śaiva, Ājīvika, Śaṁkhya and Lokāyata, but was ultimately convinced of the superiority of Buddha's teachings and eventually joined the Saṁgha. The fact that Buddhism spread to the easternmost part of the Ganga delta is evident from a reference to the Avaivarttikas, a Mahāyāna sect, in an inscription from the Comilla region in present Bangladesh (AD 507–08). The long presence of Vaishṇava and Śaiva rulers like the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas did not deter Buddhism and Buddhist institutions. This is evident from the fact that Nalanda received patronage from the Gupta rulers and that Ajanta and Ellora flourished during the Vākāṭaka period. There is little doubt that Buddhist monasteries flourished at Nāgārjunakonda and Kāñchīpuram which were within the realms of non-Buddhist rulers. Among leading Buddhist thinkers of this period Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (late fourth/early fifth century) must be mentioned for their contribution to the Yogachara philosophy. The other prominent Buddhist school of philosophy, the Mādhyamikā school, was enriched by Buddhpālita and Bhāvaviveka, both dated to the sixth century AD. In the northernmost extremes of the subcontinent Kashmir was noted as a seat of the Hinyanist Sarvāstivādī sect, to which belonged a great Buddhist thinker Kumārajīva (AD 343–413) whose life is known from Chinese sources, though not always free from legends. His father Kumārayāna, a Kashmiri Buddhist scholar, went to Kucha, located in the northern Silk Road and

married a local princess Jiva. Their son Kumārajīva had his education in Kashmir under the Sarvastivādin Bandhudatta. He later went to Kashgarh where he subsequently became a Mahāyanist scholar. He eventually returned to Kucha, after becoming a formidable scholar. The latter part of his life was mostly spent in the Changan monastery in China, where he was engaged in the Chinese translation of important Buddhist texts.

Jainism too did not lag behind. In north India, Mathurā was certainly a major centre of Jainism, as is borne out by a large number of Jaina images from this place belonging to this period. N.N. Bhattacharyya and A.K. Chatterjee's engagements with the history of Jainism show that the Śvetāmbara Jainas, under the leadership of Devarshi, took the initiative of compiling Jaina

Plate 6.4: Dhamek Stupa, Sarnath

canonical text at a major congregation held at Valabhī in western India in the sixth century AD. In eastern India, ancient Bengal was well acquainted with Jainism. While Gupta inscriptions point out the presence of Jainas in north Bengal (Puṇḍravardhana), Jaina textual sources mention three locality-based Jaina sects in ancient Bengal: Puṇḍravardhanīyā (from Puṇḍravardhana), Koṭivarshīya (from Koṭivarsha or Bangarh in Dinajpur area of West Bengal) and Tāmraliptaka (from Tāmralipta or Tamluk in the southern part of West Bengal). The Kadamabas of peninsular India were patrons of Jainism. The fact that Jainism flourished in the far south, figures pominently in the Tamil epic, *Śilāppadikāram*. This closely corresponds to the Jaina tradition that at Madurai, four Jaina preceptors—Meghanandī, Jinasena, Simha and Deva, founded a Drāviḍa Saṁgha.

Art and Architecture

Closely related to religious activities were the matchless creations in visual arts, in architecture, sculpture and painting. We have little evidence of secular structures; all extant architectural remains are connected with religious activities. The same holds true for sculptures and paintings, which had inseparable links with contemporary religious experiences and practices. In the field of architecture, one notes the continuity of the construction of *stūpas* and rock-cut *chaityas* on the one hand, and the beginning of structural temple-building on the other. One of the premier examples of *stūpa* architecture is the famous Dhamek *stūpa* at Sarnth. The Dhamek *stūpa* is an imposing structure, about 34 m. in height and 28.3 m. in diameter, located within the remains of the excavated monastic complex at Sarnath and visually dominating the landscape. The lower portion of the *stūpa* is made of stone, while the upper portions reveal brick work, which possibly had a stone encasing in its original form. Exquisitely carved stones make the lower portions visually appealing; the carvings consist of geometric floral designs, human figures and representations of birds. In order to enhance the height of its basically hemispherical dome, the architect(s) provided the *stūpa* with a very large and heightened base. On top of the base was placed the *aṇḍa* or the hemispherical dome, which however was given the structure and shape of an upturned 'U'. This gave the structure an elongated and heightened appearance without disturbing the mandatory semi-circular shape of the superstructure in a major way. The *aṇḍa* however, resembles more a drum than a hemispherical dome. When it was in its complete form there must have been a few umbrella-shaped structures (*chhatrāvalī*) atop the *aṇḍa* to further accentuate its height. The same practice is visible in the construction of the *stūpa* for worship within the *chaitya* hall at Ajanta. Here the *stūpa* stands at the end of the rectangular and apsidal back of the *chaitya* hall. Even within the compact space available here, the *stūpa* stands

on a double-base, over which rises the perfectly round dome or *aṇḍa*. On top of the dome were erected three more umbrellas attached to the rod of the umbrella (*chhatrayashṭi*). The parasole rises almost up to the barrel-vaulted roof; the receding size of each of the upper-tier umbrella gives a sense of elongating the structure, assuming a conical shape. In keeping with the overall tall composition of the *stūpa* here, the artist carved a pillared niche at the front of the dome that contained a tall and slim figure of the standing Buddha, which must have been venerated. The intention here is to give an impression of a lightened structure of the *stūpa*, the semi-circular shape of which was, to some extent, modified to an overall tall, elongated piece of architecture.

Rock-cut architecture in the form of *vihāras* and *chaityas* reached a high watermark at Ajanta. Carved out of the live rocks of the Sahyadri, Ajanta stood at an isolated place overlooking the Waghora river. Out of total 28 caves at Ajanta, five belong to the earlier Sātavāhana phase, while as many as 23 were carved out during the Vākāṭaka time. The Vākāṭaka association is evident from its inscriptions at Ajanta. Cave number 19 and 26 are *chaityas*, the rest are *vihāras*. These two caves have been dated to fifth and sixth centuries AD and are adorned with very rich sculptures and decorations, both inside and outside. Cave number 19 is a rectangular hall with a rounded apse at the rear. It has a central section and two flanking aisle sections. It has got a barrel-vaulted roof, supported by superbly carved pillars. At the end of the hall stands the *stūpa* with the figure of a standing Buddha (already discussed above). There is also a path for circumambulation. Typical of the *chaitya*, it has the horse-shoe shaped window, through which sun-rays light up the interior. The *chaitya* facade is elaborately sculpted with figures of the Buddha and other attendant figures, mostly connected with Mahāyāna Buddhism. Cave number 26 is of the same ground plan, but with richer decoration than cave 19. The *vihāras* too are known for their exquisite carvings. The *vihāra* has a pillared porch and three entrance doors through which the visitor reaches the pillared hall. The hall leads to an antechamber after which comes the shrine room. The provision of a shrine room was a new element of the *vihāra* architecture, not encountered hitherto before. Monastic cells, a distinctive feature of the *vihāra*, were arranged on two sides of the central hall, and in few cases, at the front of the hall too. Cave number 1 is, according to Spink, 'the most sumptuous rock-cut *vihāra* ever made in India'.

The period marks the initial phase of building structural temples (*āyatana/devāyatana*) made of stone or brick. The ideas of monumental temple architecture of the period from AD 600 to AD 1300 were planted during these three hundred years, in north and south India. The earliest structural temples were at Sanchi and Tigawa. These consisted of a simple square structure with a pillared porch in front. The exterior walls are without any decoration and projection; therefore, these walls are plain,

simple and elegant. The pillared porch probably functioned as the meeting place or resting place of the visitors. The square structure would provide the nucleus of the more elaborate and complex structural temples of later times when the square hall would be the sanctum cella (*garbhagriha*), wherein the deity would be enshrined—in other words, the most significant part of the temple.

Significant developments in architectural style are noticeable in the Vishnu temple at Deogarh. As usual, the sanctum cella is square; on all four

Plate 6.5: Brick Temple Bhitar Gaon

sides of the sanctum cella are attached four rectangular areas with four pillars in each rectangular area. So the ground plan around the sanctum cella assumes the form of a dice-board. The entire temple area has an enclosure wall all around. Staircases have been provided on all the four sides to reach up to the temple. The staircases lie on common axes with the four-pillared rectangular area. This gives the entire plan some resemblance with a cross shape. Another interesting feature of the temple wall was that unlike at Sanchi and Tigawa it was not left flat, but divided into projections. The projections facilitated the interplay of light and shade that enhanced the aesthetic appeal of the wall, especially when the projections allowed installation of sculptures that visually enriched the otherwise flat exterior outer wall. That brick too was a building material for religious shrine, is evident from the temple at Bhitargaon, where projections were used in the temple wall. The Bhitargaon brick temple has a curvilinear tower as its superstructure; this was known as *śikhara* and was indeed the most significant feature of the evolved north Indian (*nāgara*) temple architecture style. The presence of a *śikhara*-like superstructure is also noticed in the Durgā temple at Aihole. Here the temple ground plan is not a square, but it is an apsidal back temple, rectangular in plan. Attached to the sanctum cella was a spacious hall for congregation. The apsidal back temple seems to have been influenced by the features of the apsidal back *chaityas*, current in contemporary western Deccan. But adding a *śikhara*-like superstructure on this apsidal-back rectangular shrine was distinctly an innovation.

Another variation in temple-building is seen in the far south, in the realm of the Pallavas. The temples at Mahābalipuram are examples of earliest structural temples in the Tamil area. But unlike the temples in north India, these are monolithic shrines, celebrated in local traditions as *rathas*, named after the five Pandava brothers and Draupadī, their common wife. One such a structure resembles a hut; in the second it has a rectangular hall with a superstructure resembling an upturned boat. The largest of the temples, the Dharmarājaratha, consists of a square sanctum cella and a distinctively Dravida style superstructure. The superstructure, known as *vimāna*, is not a curvilinear tower that is common in the north. It is instead a pyramidal structure formed by placing horizontal tiers of receding size one above another . At the top of the *vimāna* stands a large well-fashioned boulder, called *stūpikā*. The *vimāna* supersturcutre is imposing and impressive, but its emphatic feature is horizontality, distinct from the preference for verticality seen in the north Indian curvilinear *śikhara*. All these features mature in the subsequent famous south Indian temples of the Drāviḍa style.

Let us now discuss the sculptures of this period. Most sculptures have religious significance; these were meant for propitiation by the devotee. Apart from the aesthetic appeal, the images were fashioned by existing and standardized iconographic norms that draw upon the meditative visualization (*dhyāna*) of the divinity. The sculptor strives to translate

this visualization into a distinct form. As we have mentioned before, the profusion of making images had a direct bearing on the growing popularity of sectarian devotion (bhakti) cults. Creation of divine images certainly followed established iconographic norms, which catered to the sectarian needs. But beyond sectarian guidelines, the artist was also driven by some common stylistic denominators. Irrespective of sectarian diversities, the artist invariably depicted all male and female deities with the exuberant form of their youthful bodies. The flowing rhythm of the body contour of these sculptures has rarely been surpassed. The same holds true for the superb delineation of the soft pliability and plastic treatment of the form. The massiveness of form, the use of large bulging eyes confronting the onlooker, the overall worldly appeal of the form—typical features of the sculptures of the preceding Śaka-Kushāṇa phase—are absent and carefully avoided in this period. The artist instead demonstrates a clear preference to depict a soft pliable body without heightening the mundane, sensuous appeal, which are replaced with suggestiveness. The classic examples of this trend are visible in the celebrated compositions of the Buddha figures at Sarnath and Ajanta, and in the Śiva-Maheśa figure at the Elephanta island.

The Sarnath Buddha is a seated posture, created in high relief. The chiselled modeling of the face and torso of the Buddha, shown in full bloom of youth, is startlingly free from any angular treatment. The artist gives only the faintest indication of the attire of the Buddha, almost in a suggestive, veiled manner. The statue depicts the Lord seated in a still posture on a lotus pedestal; physical form exudes at once grace and features of a disciplined life. The firmly held lips indicate the resolve of the Master, The delicately poised fingers, which are in the *Dharmachakrapravartana/Vyākhyāna mudrā* (Budhha delivering sermon), impress upon the viewer a sense of subtle gesture—the only trace of movement in the statue. Imparting a subtle sense of movement in an otherwise static and still composition is a fantastic achievement on the part of the sculptor. Similar hint of movement in another standing image of the Buddha is given by a slight bend in one of the knees, suggesting thereby a forward step of the figure. But the artist's singular masterstroke lies in the treatment of the half-closed eyes, suggesting the concentration of vision at the tip of the nose. The artist succeeds in rendering the supra-mundane appeal to an anthropomorphic form, an artistic feat considered as the attainment of the unattainable. Cave number 26 at Ajanta has yielded a large (about 22 feet in length) reclining figure of the Buddha, depicting the scene of his passing away (*mahāparinirvāṇa*), accompanied by several figures of mourners. Simple yet elegant, the sculpture has ably brought out the serenity and peace of the Buddha figure even in death.

Another stone sculpture, the figure of Vishnu's boar incarnation (*varāha avatāra*) from Vidiśā near Bhopal, impresses us with the massiveness of its composition, which was also endowed with the customary plastic treatment

Plate 6.6: The Buddha Preaching, Sarnath

and the flowing linear rhythm. The relatively smaller figure of the earth goddess, being rescued by the boar, is no less elegant with rounded shoulders, heavy bosoms, a thin attenuated waist, broad hips and bent knees. Perhaps the most astounding piece of Brahmanical image is the colossal Śiva-Maheśa figure at the Elephanta island. About 5 m. in height, this sculpture in high relief shows three faces of Śiva. According to some scholars, the intended implication of the figure is to depict the five-faced (*pañchānana*) image of Śiva, following the iconography prescribed in the *Vishnudharmottarapurāṇa*. Of the three faces, the central and the right faces show the deity in benign form, while the third one depicts his fierce aspect. According to Stella

Plate 6.7: Trimurti Shiv Mahesa, Elephant Caves

Kramrisch, three faces can be identified with the Sadyojâta, Aghora and Vamadeva aspects of the god.

The soft pliable body form and flowing contour of the outline of the composition was not limited to the fashioning of stone sculpture, is amply visible in the superb terracotta pieces of the period. Two such pieces from Ahichhatra show Ganga and Yumuna standing on their respective mounts. The crocodile (*makara*) and tortoise (*kachchhapa*). In full bloom of their youth, the two figures exude the charm of the female from dressed in thin diaphanous attires, suggestively delineated in the form of parallel wavy line of drapery. Both the figures hold pitchers in their hands and are flanked by female attendant figures. Mention should be made here of the terracotta sculpture which shows the crossing of raging waves of the Yamuna by Vāsudeva with baby Krishna in a basket held on his head.

B.N. Mukherjee has recently drawn our attention to the numismatic art of the Gupta rulers. The central point of his argument is that coins of this period were endowed with considereable aesthetic appeal when artists carved out figures of rulers (on the obverse) and deities (on the reverse). The same parameters of plastic modelling and unbroken linear rhythm—a hallmark of sculptures of this time—were closely followed by artists on the compact and relatively circumscribed space of a coin. This will be evident in the elegant representations of Samudragupta playing a musical instrument,

Plate 6.8: Jâtaka Scene, Ajanta Painting

Chandragupta II slaying a lion, Kumâragupta feeding a peacock and the figure of Kârttikeya riding a peacock.

The caves of Ajanta are replete with the masterpieces of the painters of this age. The beauty and grace of the floral world are a major component of the paintings at Ajanta. Many paintings were created on the basis of well-known Jâtaka tales. Individual figures, especially female ones, and scenes of crowd cannot but capture the onlooker's appreciation. The depiction of the standing Avalokite svara holding a lotus (*Padmapâṇi*) is a marvel to watch. The tall figure of the Bodhisattva image is a statement of elegant simplicity. Shown in double flexion (*dvibhaṅga*), the young and pliable body form is permeated with grace; the limitless compassion of the Bodhisattva for the suffering world is the principal theme of the painting. The linear contour of the lotus stalk held by him has a harmonious association with the overall composition. The masterstroke of the artist lies in the depiction of the pair of eye brows in a single wavy line of the brush. A salient feature of the painting style at Ajanta is that all figures seem as if they come out from the background wall surface, leaving thereby an impression of the third dimension of depth and perspective. All figures are shown as if looking outwards and towards their onlookers, and never shown as looking inwards towards their background. Following Kramrisch, this style may be said to have been endowed with a 'direction of forthcoming'.

Plate 6.9: Chaitya hall with a stūpa, Karle

XVII

Threshold Times

The broad survey we have attempted here presents the salient features of the age in terms of the subcontinent as a whole. At the same time attempts have been made to highlight regional diversities since a pan-Indian mould is non-existent. In other words, we have tried to do justice to the developments in various regions without reducing or vailiditing our observations only in terms of the ideals and practices of the Ganga valley, the very cradle of Brahmanical culture. The importance of the Ganga valley in Indian history cannot be diminished, but the complexities of the subcontinental features are too numerous and glaring to be fitted into the straightjacket of the Ganga valley norms. One cannot appreciate the complexities in socio-economic and political life by merely citing normative texts. The strict sastric codes, apparently immutable and invariant, contain many fluidities in itself, which helped to accommodate, perhaps in garbed appearances and grudging tones,

practices that were at variance from the precepts. This is also driven home by the epigraphic and other literary data, which strongly suggest that social norms laid down in the legal treatises—particularly those of caste, marriage and occupations—were not insurmountable. Our discussions underline that neither society nor politics was stagnant and repetitive. That is why a unilinear and uniform development of socio-political situation in the vast arena of the subcontinent is impossible to represent.

The creation of large territorial realms, the overall stable situation during the three hundred years, the masterly achievements in artistic and literary expressions, vigorous and multiple belief systems, Faxian's praise of the flourishing material milieu of the country, and the luxurious and refined life style of the *nāgaraka* in the *Kāmasūtra* were the factors that inspired a large number of nationalist historians to construct the existence of a 'golden age' during this period of three hundred years. This historiographical stance left deep impressions on subsequent historians. Only during the last five decades a new genre of historians have piled up definite data that the period was far from being an unmixed blessing. The presence of downcast communities like the *chaṇḍāla*, the *anātha* (orphan), the *ātura* (afflicted), the *dīna* (poor) and the *kṛipaṇa* (miserly) barely justifies the label of a golden age to a society supposed to have experienced a paragon of virtues. The favourable impression of Faxian about the lenient taxation does not stand scrutiny in the face of the growing number of revenue terms in official records. The condition of the ordinary peasant could hardly have been enviable as he was burdened not merely with various taxes, but also with extra-legal exactions like the *vishṭi*. The creation of the image of the golden age was very much prompted by the urge to find parallels to occidental situations. It is impossible to deny that the major fruits of the flourishing material life and cultural creativities were meant for the enjoyment of the affluent and the powerful, while the common folk got only the trickle of it at the most. The questioning and the exploding of the myth of the 'golden age' is, therefore, a perfectly valid exercise and assertion. Kosambi rightly pointed out that 'far from the Guptas reviving nationalism, it was nationalism that revived the Guptas'. This point has been further stressed in the recent past that at least a part of the achievements of the age was as insignificant as tinsel. If the label 'golden age' represents one extreme of the historical judgement, the last one is to be situated at the other end of the pole. One needs to remember that while the Roman empire and China were both being ravaged by nomadic depredations, contemporary South Asia showed admirable socio-political and cultural integration, though not bereft of social discriminations and sectarian contestations. Civilization, not to be labelled after some precious metals, flowered meaningfully in South Asia as compared to the troubled times in East Asia and Eurasia during these three centuries. It is also impossible to turn a blind eye to the initiation of the *agrahāra* system in this age, which paved the way for remarkable expansion

of sedentary settlements and the spread of the state society. All these left their imprints for significant local and regional formations in the ensuing early medieval period. It is perhaps on these considerations that Romila Thapar recently has modified her evaluations of this age; in a publication vof early 1960s, she discussed the age in a chapter 'Towards the Classical Pattern' and then in the 1990s, she considered some of the achievements as 'tinsel', but in a magisterial survey of early India in 2002, she considered the age as 'threshold times'. This is a clear marker of the importance of this period in historiography, which is not static but is being continuously reviewed and re-shaped by historians.

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CHAPTER 7

Realms and Regions: Profiles of Economy, Society and Culture

(C. AD 600–1300)

Preliminary Remarks

This chapter presents an overview of significant changes that took place in the subcontinent from AD 600 to AD 1300. These changes render a distinct quality to the seven centuries under review, marking out the period from earlier periods in Indian history, especially the immediately preceding three centuries: AD 300–600. Stark changes did not suddenly become visible from AD 600 onwards; in fact, noticeable shifts in polity, economy and society can be located in different regions of the subcontinent spanning over a century from AD 550–650. The concluding remarks about situation during the AD 300–600 phase hinted at the possibilities of such changes, though in their incipient forms, that led Romila Thapar to designate those three centuries as 'threshold times'. Several distinctive features in socio-economic, cultural and political life appear to have taken concrete shapes during the succeeding centuries (AD 600–1300). This is the ground of arguing by a large number of historians to designate an early medieval phase in the Indian history. This 'early medieval' phase is, therefore, perceived as a period of transition from the ancient to the medieval times. This period is thus, different from the ancient period, but is incorporated within 'early India' up to AD 1300; most historians prefer to place the medieval period in Indian history after AD 1300. Ascertaining the chronological horizons of the early medieval phase has been a subject of big debates, bringing out various shades of preferences and stances of historians. The nomenclature 'early medieval' is also neither standardized nor a uniformly accepted one, though it has gained considerable currency as a valid chronological segment for historical enquiries. Alternative periodic labels such as late classical, post-Gupta, proto-medieval and even medieval also figure in the discussions on these seven centuries. Historians of south India generally tend to avoid the term early medieval or medieval; Nilakantha Sastri, T.V. Mahalingam and A. Appadorai are cases in point. Of

late, some historians, on South Indian society and polity have been applying the labels, early medieval (by Kesavan Veluthat) and medieval (by Burton Stein and Daud Ali). Some historians, on the other hand, have questioned the wisdom and practice of applying the uniform tripartite division of historical time into ancient, medieval and modern, over any region in the world, especially to non-European contexts. The sharp difference of perceptions among scholars on the early medieval situations have indeed enriched Indian historiography and generated significant debates. There is, however, a major agreement among historians of different genres on: (1) the early medieval situation in Indian history cannot be appreciated in terms of dynastic shifts alone; (2) political, socio-economic and various cultural aspects (including belief systems) have to be looked at in an integrated way and not exclusively. Our overview of the early medieval scenario will take particular note of these two positions. The survey would pay attention to the chronological span of seven centuries, starting from AD 600.

I

Politics and Powers

Political situation became more complex with the passing away of the Guptas in the north and the demise of the Vākāṭakas in the Deccan. A number of ruling houses, originally vassals under the Guptas, became independent in different areas of north India. The Deccan and the far south too witnessed a multiplicity of powers. In fact, the political history of the subcontinent during AD 600–1300 saw multiplicity of powers, which were rooted to their respective regions. The hallmark of politics of this period lies in the emergence and development of local and regional powers. Needless to emphasize that the powers had unequal strength, striking power and potentials; some of these definitely attained the features of a formidable power (the 'regional imperial kingdom', according to Kulke), while many did not achieve similar political prominence and had a lackluster existence. The profusion of powers is well matched by the manifold increase in the epigraphic materials—mostly copper plates—eulogizing the political might of their issuing authorities. Moreover, several regional and local chronicles and eulogistic biographies of rulers also were composed. This definitely encouraged a thorough and painstaking study of a very large number of early medieval dynasties. But the over-dependence on inscriptional and eulogistic literature often encouraged historians to accept stereotyped claims of far-flung conquests by various rulers to be valid and to present them as great imperial powers of supra-regional character. The conventional narrative of the political history of this period is replete with exaggerated careers and achievements of numerous heroes based on the eulogies—an account that rarely offers an intelligible understanding of the political processes and activities. The bulk of the

narratives of endemic dynastic warfare, succession of rulers and rise and fall of ruling houses may sometimes confuse the student of the political history of this period. In order to avoid this, the following pages would mainly deal with the development of regional powers and patterns of interactions among them, without attempting a strict chronological sequence of events leading to the rise and fall of the dynasties. The political narrative and chronology of events stand largely on the evidence of inscriptions, a large number of them being copper plate charters which record grants of landed property. Most of the inscriptions carry dates either in easily identifiable eras (for example, Śaka era and Vikrama era) or regnal years of rulers (for example, the system followed by the Pālas of eastern India and the Cholas of south India). Royal inscriptions usually begin with a *praśasti*-like eulogy of the entire ruling house, and specially of the reigning king during whose reign the inscription was issued. These *praśastis* are often stereotyped, projecting the ruler as a universal (*chakravarti/sārvabhauma*) monarch on the basis of his victories of all four quarters (*digvijaya*). Historians generally do not accept the exuberance of political eulogy of rulers, but assess the formidability of the ruler/dynasty in terms of the specific issuing centres of the record/political centres, the findspots of the records and the areas of property transfers. The last point is crucial because the ruler could grant landed property only in areas which were under his jurisdiction. To this sometimes are added the evidence of local/regional chronicles, especially if the region did not yield a substantial body of epigraphic evidence. The famous *Rājatarangiṇī* by Kalhaṇa is a case in point for the study of the dynastic/political history of Kashmir. The life accounts (*charitas*) of powerful rulers, often composed by court-poets following the traditions of ornate court-poetry, also help us in studying the political situations of the given period. Three premier examples of this are the *Harshacharita* by Bānabhaṭṭa, *Vikramāṅkadevacharita* by Bilhana and the *Rāmacharitam* by Sandhyākaranandin, respectively for the reigns of Harshavardhana, Vikramāditya VI of the Western Chālukya family and Rāmapāla of the Pāla dynasty.

North India

At the turn of the seventh century AD, north India did not have any power to match the prowess of the Gupta empire. While Magadha and also possibly Malwa came under the Later Guptas (distinct from the imperial Guptas), the growing political importance of the Ganga-Yamuna doab was evident with the rise of the Maukharīs of Kannauj. In the upper Ganga valley, the Pushyabhūtis (also called Pushpabhūtis) came into prominence. The Maitrakas had already made their presence felt in western India, including Gujarat and western Malwa. In eastern India, Bengal emerged for the first time as a power to reckon with under Śaśāṅka of Gauḍa who seems to have begun his political career as a powerful vassal (*mahasāmanta*) of the Later Guptas of Magadha.

Like Bengal, the Upper Brahmaputra valley was brought into limelight by the Varmans. A significant feature of political activities lies in the shift of the political citadel of north India from Pāṭaliputra to Kannauj in the doab. There was also noticeable rivalries between the powers respectively in Kannauj and Magadha (the Maukharī-Later Gupta struggle). Political alliances resulted in the formation of two rival groups: the Pushyabhūti and the Maukharī on the one hand and the combination of the Gauḍa king and the Later Gupta ruler on the other. The emergence of Harshavardhana (AD 606–47) and Śaśāṅka (AD 600–619 or 637) to well-known political enmities followed soon.

Harsha, though a Pushyabhūti ruler of Thanesvar to begin with, is best known as a powerful political personality ruling from Kānyakubja or Kannauj, originally the seat of power of the Maukharīs with whom the Pushyabhūtis had contracted a marriage alliance. A political turmoil in the Maukharī kingdom which had resulted in the attack by Devagupta of Malwa aided by the Gauḍa king Śaśāṅka, led to the ultimate arrival of Harsha. He became the master of the Ganga-Yamuna doab possibly by usurping power in Kannauj. This was, according to Sircar, the beginning of the Gauḍa-Kānyakubja struggle. The reliance of many political historians on the *Harshacharita* of Bānabhaṭṭa and the *Ta Tang Hsi yu Chi* of the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang (travelling in India from AD 629 to AD 645), both patronized by Harsha, led to the celebration of the Kannauj ruler as the master of the whole of north India, as the last great 'Hindu' empire builder in the post-Gupta times. This was further strengthened by the epithet of Harsha as the lord of the entire Uttarāpatha or north India (*sakalottarāpathanātha*), accorded to him in the inscription of the Chālukyas of the Deccan. A careful examination of all evidences, however, leaves little room for doubt that it was a grossly exaggerated claim.

As R.C. Majumdar pointed out, the authority of Kannauj was unable to penetrate into eastern India till the end of the independent existence of Śaśāṅka at least up to AD 619, if not AD 637, the year when Śaśāṅka is said to have died. Epigraphic records amply bear the fact that the political power of Gauḍa was not only firmly entrenched in Magadha and major parts of ancient Bengal, but expanded as far as the Ganjam district in present Orissa, where ruled the Śailodbhava king as Śaśāṅka's subordinate. Gauḍa faced hostilities from the doab and also from the Kāmarūpa king Bhāskaravarman, who allied with Harsha against their common enemy Śaśāṅka. In spite of this, Gauḍa emerged as the most formidable power in eastern India and successfully expanded its territorial possessions outside the geographical limits of ancient Bengal. The other hyperbolic literary claims of Harsha's subduing areas like Nepāla and Sindhu (lower Indus Valley) cannot be corroborated by epigraphic evidence. It is, however, clear from the *Harshacharita* that Harsha had the ambition to reach the Malwa area and thence to Lāṭa (southern Gujarat) and Gurjara (Gujarat and Kathiawad areas). This was cut short by the decisive defeat inflicted upon him by Pulakeśin II, the most formidable

ruler in the Deccan, a fact not only mentioned in Pulakeśin's/Aihole *praśasti* but also by Xuan Zang himself. It is only during the very final phase of Harsha's rule (AD 641–47) that the power of Kannauj overran the middle and the lower Ganga valley and spread up to Kaṅgoda in Orissa. The expansion was of course facilitated by the deaths of both Harsha's staunch adversaries, Śaśāṅka and Pulakeśin II. But the military and political supremacy of Kannauj over greater parts of the Ganga valley was short-lived, as Harsha's successors are not known to have consolidated or augmented the power achieved by him at the final phase of his reign. Bengal, which had emerged as a notable regional power in the north Indian politics during the first four decades of the seventh century AD, sharply declined due to internal problems and repeated incursions from various parts of India, and sank to utter political turmoil for nearly a century.

The vicissitudes of political formations in the Deccan and South India at this juncture are equally interesting. The late sixth century AD in the history of Deccan is marked by the arrival of a potential regional power in the form of the Chālukyas of Badami (around Bijapur in north-eastern part of Karnataka). Their rise to power put an end to the existence of the Kalachuris with this dynasty's stronghold over Malwa and western Deccan. The arrival of Pulakeśin II (AD 610–42), the greatest ruler of this house, brought about significant changes in the politics of trans-Vindhyan India. The Chālukyas became the most formidable power in western and central Deccan, established a viceregal house in southern Gujarat and also in Veṅgi (deltaic areas of the Kṛishṇa and the Godavari), which were placed under Pulakeśin II's brothers. These two acts led to the subsequent emergence of two separate Chālukya houses in southern Gujarat and the Eastern Chālukya kingdom in Veṅgi, the latter maintaining its political existence right up to AD 1070. It is not difficult to appreciate that powers situated in the Ganga-Yamuna doab and the Deccan showed unmistakable interests in occupying and controlling Malwa, because the region stood as a corridor, linking north India and the Deccan and also provided passages to the Gujarat coast. Herein lay the seeds of the political rivalry between the two formidable powers in north India and the Deccan. Pulakeśin II's renowned victory over Harsha, poetically represented in the Aihole *praśasti* of AD 634, gave the Chālukyas a firm footing in southern Gujarat and adjoining regions. The Chālukya interests in the affairs of the western Indian seaboard are evident from Pulakeśin's conquest of Puri or the Elephanta island off present Mumbai. This has some linkage with his control over the Konkan coast, though the Chālukyas were never a power of the coast. Pulakeśin's diplomatic relations with the Sassanid ruler Khusru II (mentioned by Al Tabari) could have been prompted by the prospects of maritime trade with the Persian Gulf area in which the Sassanids showed definite material interests.

The rise of the Chālukyas as a regional power in the Deccan was closely matched by the growing power of the Pallavas in the Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam area

(around Kāñchīpuram and Mahābalipuram) in the seventh century AD. Though the Pallavas had appeared in the political scene of south India much before the Chālukyas, it is from the seventh century AD that they made their political presence felt as a significant regional power after eclipsing the Pāṇḍyas of Madurai in the Vaigai valley and the Cheras of Kerala. In the increasingly complex political situation, there were continual struggles among the Pallavas, the Pāṇḍyas and the Cheras with the island of Simhala occasionally joining the fray, though this did not diminish the position of the Pallavas as the pre-eminent power in the far south.

But the more significant pattern of rivalries emerged in the protracted struggle between the Chālukyas and the Pallavas nearly for a century. It began with the offensive launched by Chālukya Pulakeśin II against Pallava Mahendravarman I (AD 600–30) who was defeated. A second Chālukya campaign in AD 641–42 was repulsed by Pallava Narasiṁhavarman, who then retaliated by defeating and killing Pulakeśin II and by capturing the Chālukya capital Vatāpi or Badami (hence his title *Vātāpikoṇḍa*, i.e. the captor of Badami). The serious political setback suffered by the Chālukyas was restored by Vikramāditya I (AD 655–81) who then made successful inroads into the Pallava realm. This pattern went on unabated during the reigns of succeeding generations of rulers of both the houses. The significant point is that neither side showed the tendency to expand territorially at the cost of the traditional enemy. Nilakantha Sastri rightly suggested that the river Tungabhadra stood, as it were, as the unwritten boundary between the two hostile powers, respectively to the north and the south of the river. Their main intention seems to have been to ensure firm control over the strategically important Raichur doab. The century-long struggle probably exhausted the Chālukyas, which finally fell in AD 754, though the Pallavas continued to rule in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam for at least another 100 years. The Chālukya-Pallava struggle set a pattern in the political history of peninsular India: hostilities between the powers to the north and to the south of the Tungabhadra would be a regular and recurrent feature, without resulting in long-term annexation of territories during the early medieval times. This will be seen in the succeeding Pallava-Rāshṭrakūṭa, Rāshṭrakūṭa-Choḷa and Choḷa-Western (or Later) Chālukya estrangements. This pattern of rivalries among regional powers cut across dynastic changes and upheavals. Nilakantha Sastri in his classic overview of the political situation highlighted the ceaseless contestations between two or more dominant regional powers.

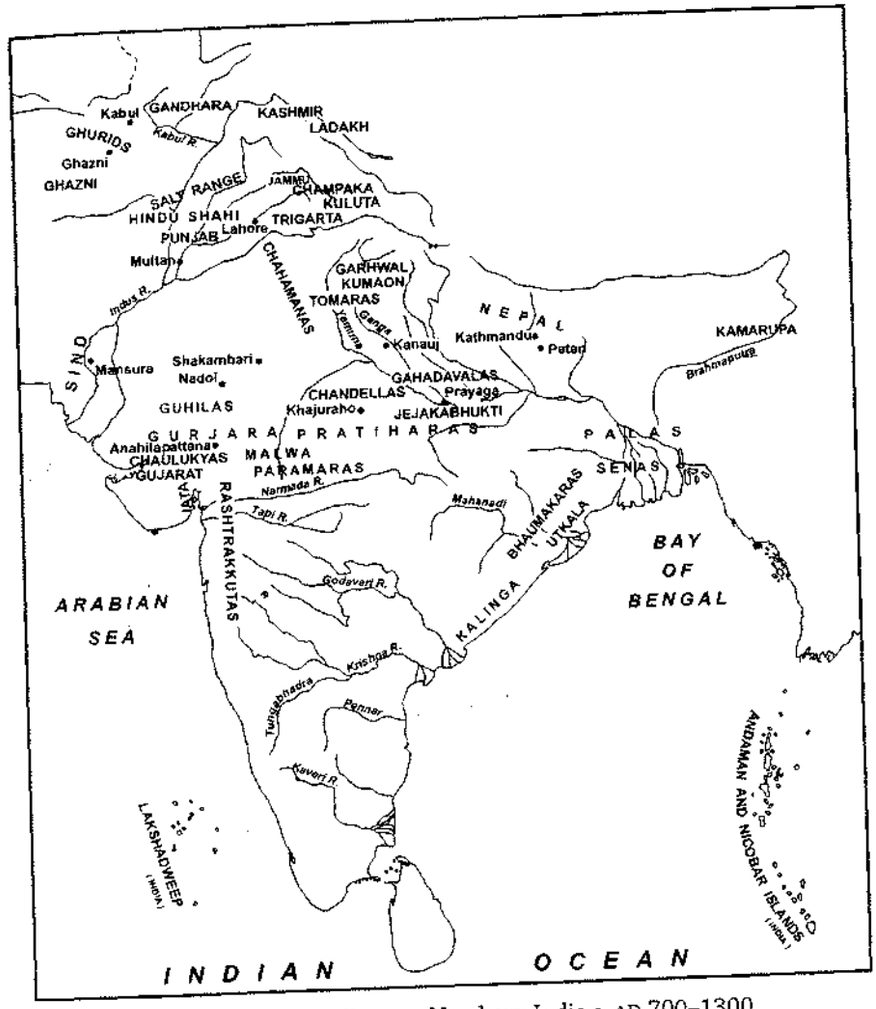
There were several new regional powers in various parts of northern India also and not necessarily always in the Ganga valley-the heartland of north Indian politics. One of the new powers to come into limelight was Kashmir in the far north, the connected political accounts of which are known with greater certainty from AD eighth century onwards, largely on the basis of Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī*. The credit of transforming Kashmir into a regional kingdom goes to Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa (AD 724–60), the outstanding ruler

of the Kārkoṭa family. Lalitāditya is known for achieving political control over Kashmir in general and the Vitastā valley in particular, the very core area of his power. His widespread conquests into the Ganga-Yamuna doab and also against the Gauḍa king are mentioned by Kalhaṇa, though the acquisition of the conquered areas did not necessarily materialize. The Kashmirian king's urge to penetrate into the north Indian plains was countered by Yaśovarman of Kannauj. Celebrated for his military exploits (as far east as the Lauhitya or the Brahmaputra), the eulogy of Yaśovarman figures in Vākpatirāja's *Gauḍavaho*. The rise of these two ambitious regional kingdoms inevitably led to mutual hostilities in which, according to Kalhaṇa, Kashmir enjoyed greater success. But military exploits were rather short-lived without leading to a political consolidation. Yaśovarmans' rise and exit are often compared to those of a meteor, and Kashmir after Lalitāditya succumbed to dynastic feuds.

The contemporary western fringes of the subcontinent were marked by the Arab conquest of Sind in the early part of the eighth century AD. The Arab invasion of the lower Indus valley, known largely from the *Chachnama* and the accounts of al Baladhuri (both later sources), signalled the first political advent of Islam in India. But this was sot followed by sweeping conquests farther into the interior, as was seen in wide areas later contemporary West Asia, northwest Africa and Spain. The Arab invasion of Sind could have been considerably prompted by gains from plunder and also capturing the commercially important lower Indus valley with its leading port of Debal (Daibul in the Arab sources and possibly same as the excavated site of Banbhore, Pakistan). Though in the nationalist and traditional historiographies of India the Arab invasion of Sind is generally perceived as an advent of political troubles for Indian powers, this hardly had an impact in the overall political fabric of the subcontinent.

II

The Gurjara-Pratihāras, also known as the Pratihāras, were one of the leading political powers of early medieval north India. Several houses of the Gurjaras—generally though to have a non-indigenous origin, but gradually absorbed into the Indian society—gained visibility in the western part of northern India around the seventh century. One of the early Gurjara chiefs had already distinguished himself by opposing Harshavardhana. By the early eighth century AD, one of the Gurjara branches became powerful enough to establish their seat of power in Ujjayinī, a major urban and political centre in western Malwa. This provided the very base of their power wherefrom they expanded their authority to Kannauj in the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The second half of the eighth century ushered in two more very formidable powers in the political scene, viz., the Pālas with their base in Bihar and in major areas



Map 7.1: Political Powers: Northern India *c.* AD 700–1300

of Bengal and the Rāshṭrakūṭas in the Deccan. while the Pāla rule is said to have ended terrible political confusion verging on anarchy (*matsyanyaya* or the Law of fishes) in Bengal, the Rāshṭrakūṭas began their political career as vassals of the Chālukyas of Badami and ultimately overthrew their overlords to assume independence in AD 754. Though the Rāshṭrakūṭas acquired political power by dislodging the Chālukyas, they seem to have inherited and carried further with much greater intensity some of the principal political traits and attitudes of their erstwhile suzerain. This is evident in their definite interests and also considerable success in establishing a viceregal house in southern Gujarat. The Malwa plateau, which had a role to play in

the Harsha-Pulakeśin clash in the seventh century AD once again loomed large in the Rāshṭrakūṭa scheme of things. The Rāshṭrakūṭas wrested away Ujjayinī from the Gurjaras, performed a sumptuous royal sacrifice there and reduced the defeated Gurjara king to the position of a door-keeper (*pratihāra*). The Gurjaras from now on were called Gurjara-Pratihāras or Pratihāras and became the foremost adversary of the new Deccan power. It is difficult to miss that the Rāshṭrakūṭa-Pratihāra rivalry had its roots in their contention over the occupation of Malwa. As the Gurjaras occupied Kannauj, the Rāshṭrakūṭas extended their hostilities into the north Indian plains and into the Ganga-Yamuna doab region. This was an important feature in the political history of early medieval times as the Rāshṭrakūṭas with their power base in the Deccan showed definite inclinations for the first time to involve in north Indian politics. Further complexities arose when the Pālas from their seat of power in eastern Bihar and northern Bengal also launched campaigns in the doab. This was the starting point of what has been described in textbooks as the Tripartite Struggle among three outstanding powers, the Gurjara-Pratihāras, the Pālas and the Rāshṭrakūṭas.

The first round of confrontations took place among Pratihāra Vatsarāja (AD 778–94). Dharmapāla (AD 775–805) of the Pāla dynasty and Dhruva (AD 780–93) of the Rāshṭrakūṭa kingdom. The Rāshṭrakūṭas proved militarily superior to both their adversaries, particularly Vatsarāja who perished. The Rāshṭrakūṭas did not annex any north Indian areas even after their resounding victories and returned to the Deccan. Dharmapāla recovered his position and held an extravagant assembly at Mahodaya or Kannauj to proclaim himself the master thereof. He is said to have deposed the local chief Indrāyudha, a subordinate under the Pratihāras, and placed his own protege Chakrāyudha in Kannauj. This led to the second round of confrontation between the Pratihāra Nāgabhaṭa II (AD 794–833) and Dharmapāla, resulting in the defeat of Dharmapāla once again. But the Pratihāra success was cut short by the mightiest of the Rāshṭrakūṭa kings, Govinda III (AD 793-814), who also defeated the Pāla adversary. While the Pratihāra king was routed, the Pālas seem to have suffered less at least politically, since the Rāshṭrakūṭas once again returned to the Deccan, leaving the Pālas in a relatively less afflicted situation. The Pālas seem to have taken advantage of this situation because the next ruler Devapāla (AD 810–47) claims to have defeated the depleted Gurjaras under Rāmabhadra (AD 833–36).

R.C. Majumdar's view that the Pālas power declined after the reign of Devapāla was earlier critiqued by Sircar on the basis of a study of Pāla inscriptions. A recently discovered inscription of a new and unknown Pāla king, Mahendrapāla (AD 847–62)—son and immediate successor of Devapāla—clearly demonstrates that he ably retained the Pāla stronghold in eastern India at least for the next fifteen years. Previously no such ruler of Pāla lineage was known and inscriptions of Mahendrapāla from Bihar and Bengal were usually ascribed to Mahendrapāla of the Pratihāra family. This had led to the perception of the Pratihāra occupation of some parts of the Pāla territory. With the identity of Mahendrapāla established as a Pāla king, his inscriptions would suggest a reign of at least fifteen years from AD 847-862. He was followed by his younger brother Śūrapāla who seems to have ruled for at least twelve years (AD 862-74). Śūrapāla's inscription from Mirzapur suggests the incorporation of territories to the west of Vārāṇasī in the Pāla realm, which did not seem to have suffered any shrinkage of its area during the three decades, following the death of Devapāla. After this the Pālas seem to have withdrawn from the contestations over Kannauj. The triangular struggle became once again a bipartite issue between the Rāshṭrakūṭas and Pratihāras.

Majumdar's and Tripathi's portrayal of three outstanding powers engaged in protracted hostilities for the mastery over Kannauj has recently been reconsidered by historians. Sircar prefers to bring in the Ayudhas—the local rulers of Kānyakubja—in the said tripartite struggle, notwithstanding the situation that the Ayudha rulers sided either with the Pratihāras or the Pālas for maintaining their existence at Kānyakubja proper. From this angle, there were not three but four powers involved in the hostilities. It has also been suggested by Sircar that the Pāla involvement was in fact an extension or continuation of the tradition of Gauḍa-Kānyakubja rivalry, known since the second half of the sixth century AD, and continued later in the twelfth century AD in the form of clashes between the Senas of Bengal and the Gāhaḍhavālas of Kannauj. Considering the clear interests of both the Gurjara-Pratihāras and the Rāshṭrakūṭas in capturing and controlling the strategically vital Malwa region, it has also been inferred that the bone of contention really lay in that area and not in Kannauj. Therefore the importance of Kannauj was more symbolic than real and the period cannot be seen as the 'age of imperial Kannauj'. In this context, one may appreciate better the significance of the close political linkages of the Rāshṭrakūṭas with the Kalachuris of central India, whose control over the area around Kalanjara proved to be politically and militarily advantageous to the Rāshṭrakūṭas. There are also known instances of the Rāshṭrakūṭas occasionally entering into dynastic marriage alliances with the Pālas.

III

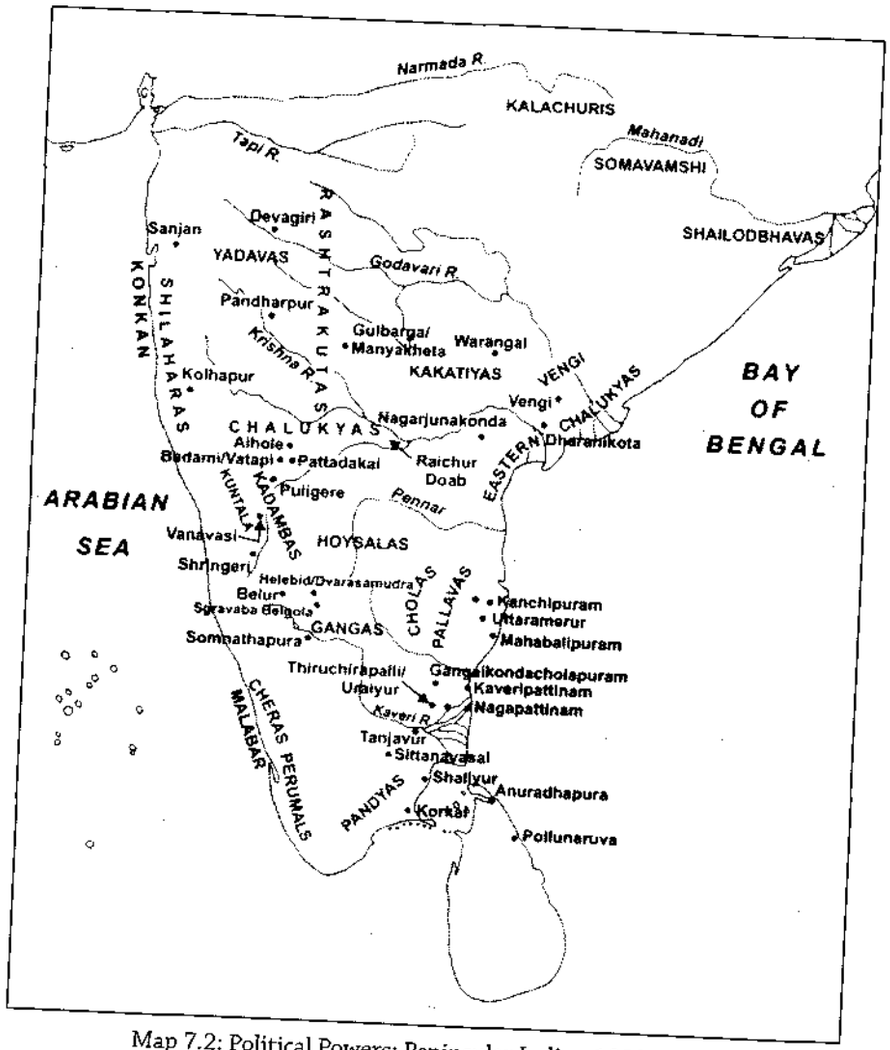
The end of the tenth century AD marked the rise of Ghazna in Afghanistan as an aggressive power, intent upon advancing towards north Indian plains through the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent. The intensity of Ghaznavid aggrandizement reached its peak during the time of Sultan Mahmud. From AD 1000, Mahmud started his series of invasions in India—almost an annual and a routine military exercise of invincible nature—that

would last for nearly three decades. Because of his repeated penetrations through the plains of the Punjab, the city of Multan had to bear the brunt of the Ghaznavid onslaughts in AD 1001, AD 1004, AD 1008 and AD 1010. The fall of Narayanapur (AD 1009) in Rajasthan indicated Mahmud's aspirations to advance into western India. Next year, the city of Thanesvar was the target; that suggested Mahmud's intentions to continue his raids in the doab in the future. The Salt Range areas in present Pakistan were conquered in AD 1013. Mahmud also swooped down upon Mathurā and devastated and routinely plundered this city. The combined resistance by Shāhī Trilochanapāla, Pratihāra Rajyapāla and Chandella Vidyādhara stood little chance before the Ghaznavid military machinery in AD 1020-21. Mahmud was now in a position to launch further campaigns in central India as his army relentlessly reduced the political and military opposition in the doab. This was followed by Mahmud's victory over Gwalior (AD 1021-22). The stage was now set for the most daring conquest of Somnath in Kathiawad in AD 1025-26. Mahmud's death in AD 1030 brought to an end the incessant raids in north India. There is absolutely no doubt that wide areas of north-western and western India were devastated and virtually raised to dust by the waves of Ghaznavid incursions. The Arab authors, mostly representing the orthodox Ulema account (often composed much later than the events), rarely hid their glorification of the wanton destruction, massacre, looting of immeasurable wealth and demolition of the religious shrines of the infidels (*kafirs*) during the Ghaznavid invasions. In the nationalist historiography, the invasions are projected to have shaken the very fabric of social and political life in the north-western parts, the doab and the western parts of the subcontinent. The Ghaznavid raids certainly hastened the downfall of the Pratihāra realm, which had already weakened itself by numerous wars with the Rāshṭrakūṭas and by its growing inability to keep its ambitious vassals under control. There has been an influential historigraphical stand that the Ghaznavid invasions signalled the beginning of the domination of Islam and the inevitable fading away of the Hindu polities. The raids of course depleted material and human resources over an extensive area but they did not transform the existing polity, as they were not oriented to achieve any permanency. There were many regions and kingdoms in eastern India and the Ganga valley, the powers of trans-Vindhyan India, which remained unaltered and unaffected by the military reversals of powers in the western and north-western theatres. Some scholars have criticised a few north Indian powers for their preference to fight among themselves for dynastic glories to offering an orchestrated resistance against the Islamic advance. This view is, to say the least, loaded with nationalistic sentiments and enthusiasm applied to an age which did not witness nationalism. It is impossible to miss that besides the Ghaznavid invasions, numerous wars went on unabated in different parts of the subcontinent. Such hostilities accompanied no less horrors than the Ghaznavid raids.

IV

Let us now look at the situation in the region beyond the Vindhyas. The Rāshṭrakūṭas, being the foremost power in the Deccan, had a definite orientation of their politico-military designs in their area and the far south. In spite of being the most powerful ruling house of the mainland, the Rāshṭrakūṭas appear to have maintained a steady interest in the affairs of the Konkan littoral since the very foundation of their independent rule by Dantidurga in AD 754. Epigraphic evidence suggests the acknowledgement of the Rāshṭrakūṭa suzerainty by the southern and the northern branches of the Śilāhāras of the Konkan coast. These sources leave little room for doubt that the Rāshṭrakūṭas actually removed the Śilāhāras in and around the present Thana district where they appointed Arabs (*tājjikas*) as local rulers from the late ninth century AD to the end of the dynasty in AD 973. This strikingly matches with the Arab accounts of the Balhara rulers (Balhara is the Arabicized form of Vallabharāja, the dynastic epithet of the Rāshṭrakūṭas), perceived by the Arab writers as more powerful than both Juzr (Gurjara-Pratihāras) and Dhaum (Dharmapāla and his successors of the Pāla dynasty). The Rāshṭrakūṭas show a sustained and systematic hostility to the Eastern Chālukya rulers of Veṅgi in the eastern Deccan. With this begins another dimension of the Deccan politics: a power in central and western part of the Deccan would maintain inimical relations with that in the eastern Deccan. Though the Rāshṭrakūṭas put an end to the Chālukyas of Badami, they continued the Chālukyan hostilities against the Pallavas of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, thereby keeping alive the struggle between the powers situated to the north and the south of the Tungabhadra river till their own downfall in AD 973.

To what extent eastern India was affected by Islamic inroads in the eleventh century AD is open to question. Though the Ghaznavid raided as far as Vārāṇasī under Gang (Gāṅgeyadeva of the Kalachuri house), the Pāla control over the grater parts of Bihar and Bengal during the reign of Mahipāla I (AD 977–1027) was not threatened by Ghaznavid invasions. The Pālas were affected more by internal problems within their realm. The third quarter of the eleventh century AD saw the loss of Varendrī in north Bengal on account of the occupation of this ancestral territory (*janakabhū*) of the Pālas by the rebellious Kaivartta chief Divyā and two generations of his successors. The loss and later recovery of Varendrī figures in the *Rāmacharita* by Sandhyākaranandin. Though Rāmapāla (AD 1077–1127), the last of the major Pāla kings, was finally able to put an end to the Kaivartta occupation in Varendrī and re-impose the Pāla rule there, he could perform the task only with the active support of a large number of vassals (*sāmantachakra*), whose influence must have waxed at the cost of the apex political authority. The Pāla rule was ultimately ended in AD 1161 by the Senas. Supposedly of Karnataka origin, they succeeded the Pālas as a major regional power in eastern India.



Map 7.2: Political Powers: Peninsular India *c.*1000–1300

Two major political figures, Vijayasena and his grandson Lakshmaṇasena, are credited with successful campaigns as far as Vārāṇasī, Prāgjyotisha (the upper Brahmaputra valley) and Kaliṅga, though not necessarily translating military victories into territorial annexations. The Sena inroad into Vārāṇasī must have been against the Gāhadhavālas of Kannauj and has been seen by Sircar as another manifestation of the well-known Gauḍa-Kānyakubja struggle. The incursion into Kaliṅga appears to have been at the cost of the powerful regional kingdom of Eastern Gangas. While the Gangas sometimes penetrated into south-west Bengal, the Sena ruler also took pride in calling himself the friend of Anantavarman Choḍagaṅga, the outstanding

ruler of Kaliṅga. The political relation between two contiguous formidable regional powers fluctuated between hostility and alliance.

The second half of the twelfth century AD saw the rise of the Turks in the political expansion of Islam in south Asia. If the numerous invasions of Mahmud of Ghazna were launched largely for looting and pillage, the Ghurid invasion under Muhammad Ghuri brought Islam as a political power into the subcontinent. The striking power of the Turkish cavalry, endowed with superior military technology, could not be countered by the north Indian rulers. The Chahamānas under the leadership of Prithvīrāja put brave resistance and nearly turned the table against the Turkish army. But the defeat of Pṛithvīrāja in the second battle of Tarain in AD 1192 paved way for the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate. The Turkish army successfully penetrated into the middle Ganga valley and removed the Sena rule from northern and western areas of Bengal in or before 1205 (as a commemorative gold medallion of al Hijra 601 records *Gauḍavijaye*), though the Senas continued to rule in eastern Bengal for several more decades. The establishment of the Turkish rule in Delhi and the adjoining regions of the doab is erroneously often taken to mark the termination of ancient and hence 'Hindu' India with the advent of medieval period under Muslim rule. We have pointed out that even in terms of the establishment of Islam as a political force, such a historiographical position is inaccurate. The spread of the power of the Delhi sultanate in north India was neither automatic nor immediate; moreover, the entire trans-Vindhyan region was outside the political jurisdiction of the Sultanate at this juncture.

V

The Deccan and the Far South

This brings us to an overview of the politics in the Deccan and south India and the key political powers thereof. The fall of the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas (AD 973), who really stole the limelight in the Deccan and south India, seems to have shifted the balance to the far south. The greatest political power in south India from the late tenth century AD onwards was certainly the Cholas with its principal stronghold in Cholamaṇḍalam (wherefrom is derived the modern expression Coromandel) in the Kaveri delta. The rise of the Cholas was facilitated by the waning prowess of the Pallavas in the middle of the ninth century AD. The emergence of the Cholas as the premier power of the far south was largely due to the major military exploits of Parāntaka I (AD 907-55) not only over Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, the erstwhile seat of the Pallava power, but also over the Tamraparni and the Vaigai valleys, the stronghold of the Pāṇḍyas of Madurai. This, however, brought the Cholas sharply against the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas who as the dominant power in the Deccan became the principal rival of the Cholas. The ensuing war at Takkolam (AD 949)

proved disastrous for the Cholas as Parāntaka suffered a crushing defeat in the hands of Kṛishṇa III (AD 939-65), the last great ruler of the Rāshṭrakū ta house, who occupied considerable areas in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. This is evident from the copper plates that Kṛishṇa III issued from the victorious camp (*jayaskandhāvāra*) at Meḍupaṭyam (Melpadi in North Arcot district, Tamilnāḍu).

This was not merely a military reversal because the political power of the Cholas was seriously threatened. It took nearly four decades for the Cholas to recover their position, with the beginning of the reign of Rājarāja I (AD 985–1014). The Chola ascendancy closely followed the demise of the Rāshṭrakūṭas around AD 974/75. The Cholas followed aggressive policy against the Pāṇḍyas and the Cheras in Kerala and subjugated them. The occupation of the Pāṇḍyan territory led to the formation of a seat of power at Madurai under a Chola governor—usually a prince of blood royal—with the epithet Chola-Pāṇḍya. This epithet highlights the importance accorded to the occupation of the Pāṇḍya realm by the Cholas.

The aggressive attitudes and designs of the Cholas intensified and became more pronounced during the time of the most powerful ruler of the family, Rājendra I (AD 1012–44). A salient feature of the Chola politics was their sustained hostilities against the major power in the Deccan, especially in the present day Karnataka. The Rāshṭrakūṭas were overthrown in AD 973 by Taila II of Western Chālukya house, originally a vassal under the Rāshṭrakūṭas. The Western Chālukyas inherited from their former suzerain two hostile political attitudes—one against the power to the south of the Tungabhadra, i.e. in the Tamil area now firmly under the Cholas; second, towards the Eastern Chālukya kingdom in Veṅgi in the eastern Deccan. The Cholas, on the other hand, steadily maintained friendly relation with the Eastern Chālukyas, further cemented by matrimonial alliances. In addition to the conflicts between the powers to the north and the south of the Tungabhadra, the other area of regular Chola-Western Chālukya contestation was Veṅgi. This was an added dimension to the rivalry between the powers of the Deccan and the far south known since the seventh century AD. Internal troubles within the Veṅgi realm, often in the shape of problems of succession to the Eastern Chālukya throne, resulted in the request for the Chola intervention in favour of one of the rival claimants to the throne, only to be countered by challenges from the Western Chālukya quarter. Epigraphic records of Rājarāja, Rājendra, Rājādhirāja (AD 1040–55), Vīrarājendra, Adhirājendra, and Kulottuṅga I (AD 1070–1120) are replete with references to resounding victories over their arch rival—the Western Chālukyas. Tall claims were similarly made on the Chālukya side by Satyāśraya (AD 997–1008), Jayasiṃha (AD 1015–42), Someśvara I (AD 1042–68), and Vikramāditya VI (AD 1076–1126). In spite of the inevitable swings in the military successes none really managed to occupy the opponent's territories for a long time and thus both parties, despite major military achievements,

remained rooted to their respective regions without becoming a paramount political power over the peninsula. The Western Chālukyas initially had their political citadel at Mānyakheṭa (modern Malkhed), wherefrom they had ousted their erstwhile overlord, the Rashtraku tas. But the assault on Mānyakheṭa by Rājendra I resulted in the desertion of the capital and the making of a new one at Kalyani, which is why the Western Chālukyas are also known as the Kalyani Chālukyas.

The frequent interventions of the Cholas into the affairs in Veṅgi, without directly incorporating the area into the its realm, had significant bearing on the politico-military designs on the part of the Cholas. Their attempt to expand superiority and influence over Veṅgi was countered by the rulers of contiguous Kaliṅga, besides the usual challenges from the western Deccan. Rājendra I's intervention in the succession problems in Veṅgi (AD 1022) spilled over the area of eastern Deccan. Challenges from the neighbouring Śakkarakoṭṭam (Chitrakūṭa), Masūnideśa and Oḍḍavishaya (Oḍra or southern Kaliṅga) led to the military penetration of the Cholas into Kaliṅga from Veṅgi. Emboldened by this success, the Chola army proceeded farther north: Taṇḍabutti (Danton area in Medinipur, West Bengal), the southern and the northern portions of Lāḍha or Rāḍha (areas in Bengal to the west of the Bhagirathi) and finally Vaṅgāladeśa (south-eastern Bengal). This was a daring raid that spread from the Kaveri delta to the central sector of the Ganga delta, all along the entire length of the eastern coast. No territorial annexations followed and the object of the raid, according to the Chola inscriptions, was to bring the sacred water of the Ganga for purifying the Gangaikondacholapuram temple. This was for commemorating the capture of the Ganga or Gangetic areas by Rājendra Chola who assumed the epithet, *Gaṅgaikoṇḍa*.

But by far, the most spectacular aspect of the Chola politics was their definite orientation towards the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean. The Cho las are well-known for their sustained naval policy from the days of Rājarāja to Kulottuṅga I, a rare feature in early Indian polity and politics. Rājarāja initiated the process by sending fleets to Ilam or Sri Lanka, the northern part of which came under the Chola rule. Towards the end of his reign, he is credited with the conquest of 12,000 islands in the open sea, usually identified with the Maldive islands, by a successful maritime operation. The Chola fleet became stronger during Rājendra I's time when the entire island of Ilam was conquered, its earlier capital Anuradhapura sacked and replaced with a new capital Polonnaruwa and the incorporation of Ilam as a *maṇḍalam* (province) within the Chola realm wascomplete. This was followed by the most daring of all Chola raids, the Kaḍāram campaign in AD 1025–26 when no less than twelve areas in South-East Asia were conquered by the Chola fleet. The Kaḍāram campaign was successful against Śrīvijaya (Palembang in Sumatra), Pannai (Ponnani in the east coast of Sumatra), Malaiyur (on the northern shore of the Singapore Strait), Maiyuraḍiṅgam (central part

the Malay peninsula, Ilaṅgaśoka) (south of Kedah in the Malay peninsula), Māpappāllam (Talaing country in lower Burma), Meviliṅgbaṅgam (not properly identified), Valaippaṅḍuru (not properly identified), Talaiṭṭak-kollam (Takua-pa in Thailand), Maḍamaliṅgam (west coast of the Malay peninsula), Mānakkāvaram (Nicobar islands) and Kaḍāram (Kedah on the west coast of the Malay peninsula). Though the conquered areas were not annexed to the Chola empire, the campaign certainly speaks of the power of the Chola fleet at its zenith. The Chola maritime exercises continued to be directed in the post-Rājendra phase mostly against Sri Lanka, where Vijayabāhu led a long-drawn resistance against the Chola rule. He ultimately succeeded in the ouster of the Cholas from the island in 1070 that coincided with Kulottuṅga I's accession to the throne. There are some references in the *Kaliṅgāttuppārāni* of Jayaṅgondar to Kulottuṅga's launching maritime ventures in South-east Asia, but these are not corroborated by specific epigraphic materials. However, the Chola aggressive attitudes towards the sea are not seen after the end of Kulottuṅga's reign in AD 1120.

Kulottuṅga's reign has a special position in the history of the Cholas. Originally an Eastern Chālukya king with the name Rājendra II (after the celebrated homonymous Chola ruler), he ascended the Chola throne under the new name, Kulottuṅga in AD 1070 by virtue of marriage alliances with the Cholas. There is a distinct possibility of his usurping the Chola throne though official Chola records presented this as a normal and regular succession. Recent studies by Kulke may indicate that Kulottuṅga made conscious attempts to legitimize his unusual accession by retaining his original Eastern Chālukya identity (Chālukharāyana), using religion and associating his name with the sacred centres in the Chola heartland (for example, Chidambaram). His reign paved the way for the amalgamation of Veṅgi with the Chola territory, but it was short-lived. Soon after the end of the reign of Kulottuṅga (AD 1120), the contemporary Western Chālukya king Vikramāditya VI (AD 1076–1126) conquered and captured Veṅgi, wherefrom the Cholas lost their foothold. The long-drawn design of a western Deccan power to spread to the deltas of the Godavari and the Kṛishṇa was thus realized by Vikramāditya VI.

Peninsular India witnessed a power struggle between these two outstanding powers for a long time, but the second half of the twelfth century AD marked a period of troubles for both the Cholas and the Western Chālukyas. The Cholas maintained their political presence in the far south but were now challenged by the rise of the Pāṇḍyas in Madurai, who dominated the political scene of the far South from the middle of the thirteenth century AD onwards. The Western Chālukya throne was usurped by Kalachuri Bijjala in AD 1161 and Chālukyas ultimately faded away by the turn of the century. The Chālukya superiority over Maharashtra and Karnataka was being increasingly challenged by two major vassal powers—the Hoysalas of Dorasamudra in southern Karnataka and the Yādavas of Devagiri in Maharashtra. The thirteenth century saw these two powers' rise

as two powerful regional kingdoms locked in hostilities against each other. While the Hoysalas, by virtue of their strategic southern locations continued with the earlier tadition of Chola-Chālukya rivalry against the fading Chola power, the Yādavas were involved in continual clashes with Malwa under the Pāramāras. The eastern Deccan in the thirteenth century AD saw the emergence of the Kākatīyas to political prominence with their principal political centre at Warangal, to the north-east of present Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. The politics of the Deccan was dominated by these three powers thoughout the thirteenth century AD. All three succumbed almost simultaneously in the early fourteenth century AD to the first successful military penetration of the Delhi Sultanate, which also crushed the Pāṇḍyas of Madurai.

VI

Polity and Political Processes

The above survey of early medieval powers, though brief, sketchy and rapid, would give an impression that early medieval political conditions can hardly be judged in terms of paramount powers. On the other hand, the traditional narrative of political history of India mostly looks for the presence of an empire, or at best, a handful of powers as supra-regional political entities subjugating the less powerful ones on a long-term basis. As the early medieval period in Indian history is not marked by the presence of such paramount powers, it is commonly viewed as a deviation from the standard of polity and political activities, the standard of course being the imperial/centralized polity. The frame of reference for judging a political power in traditional historiography lies in the expectation of the widespread territorial base of a political power remaining intact over several centuries. Any deviation from this static norm is perceived in terms of crisis(es) for the centralized monarchical political order and the steady displacement of the forces of unity by centrifugal tendencies. The absence of a paramount power corresponds to political uncertainties, which would be characterized by the advent of centrifugal elements. B.D. Chattopadhyaya underlines that the study of political history and polity from the above-mentioned standpoint highlights dynastic enmities and harps on the oscillation between the centralized polity and political instability as the recurrent and principal theme of political history.

VII

Perception of Feudal Polity

The multiplicity of regional powers and the absence of a paramount power of pan-Indian stature has been explained since the 1950s by a large number

of Marxist historians as manifestations of changes in the overall socio-economic milieu and political processes. Without merely narrating the dynastic feuds, the Marxist scholars have suggested that the emergence of numerous regional powers was in fact an expression of changes in the structures of polity due to the feudal social formation. This distinguished the polity of early medieval India from the situation prevailing in the pre—600 AD days. Kosambi perceived this new formation to have developed in two stages: (1) feudalism from the above, that represented the primary phase in which he discerned direct relationship between an overlord and his tributary and autonomous vassals—without the presence of landed intermediaries; (2) the more complex, later and second stage of feudalism from below in which rural landowners between the ruler and the peasantry assumed the role of powerful intermediaries and gradually disintegrated the political fabric. This view of a two-stage development of Indian feudalism, spanning from the fourth to the seventeenth century AD has however been criticized by several Marxist historians as well.

The classic Marxist formulation of Indian feudalism by Sharma takes a close look at the period from AD 300 to AD 1200 with three distinct phases: (1) beginning AD 300–600; (2) development AD 600–1000; and (3) simultaneous climax and cracks in the system AD 1000–1200. Sharma links up the understanding of the feudal political set up with the changing socio-economic and cultural situations in the early medieval times. The Puranic narration of the weakening of political authority, non-observation of the *varṇāśramadharma*, the disobedience on the part of the śūdras and also Dharma (righteousness) being reduced to a one-legged bull in the Kali age—the worst or the four traditional *yugas* in Indian ideas—are taken to have represented a deep-seated social crisis around fourth century AD when the major Purāṇas took their final shape. The political fallout of the crisis is seen in the inability of rulers to exercise their coercive authority (*daṇḍa*) and to collect resources by revenue measures. The political authority therefore had to take recourse to the issuance of landgrants to religious donees—largely brāhmaṇas—who were not only endowed with landed wealth, but also with administrative and judicial rights. This resulted in the transformation of the donee ultimately into a local power. With the worsening of the financial conditions and the dwindling availability of minted metallic currency, it became difficult to pay state officials in cash and they had to be alternatively paid in assignments of sizable territories. There, thus, emerged secular grantees, subsequent to the religious grantees. This, according to Sharma and Yadava, severely corroded the political, administrative and judicial prerogatives of the ruling authority. Epigraphic evidence (eighth century AD) has been cited to show how three merchant brothers rendered *avalagana/avalagaka* (demand for resources) on behalf of villagers around present Hazaribagh in Bihar to the king, who then made the merchants his local vassals.

The hallmark of early medieval polity is noted in the *sāmanta* system. The term *sāmanta* originally denoted a neighbouring king in the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra*. The earliest connotation of *sāmanta* in the assumed sense of a vassal occurs in the *Buddhacharita* of Aśvaghoṣa (first century AD). The *Bṛihāspatismriti* recommends payment to *sāmantas* in land assignments for their rendering military and other service to the ruler. Seven grades of *sāmantas* figure in the *Harshacharita*. The *Mānasollasa* (twelfth century AD) lays down various type of gifts (*dāna*) to ministers who were equivalent to vassals (*sāmantanāyakaḥ*): (1) *deśya:* grant of principality, (2) *grāmaja:* grant of village, and (3) *pratipattika:* grant of enjoyment of various local resources. These textual data have been placed vis-à-vis the regular references to *sāmantas, mahāsāmanta, rāṇakas, rājāputras, rautas* in land grants in the sense of feudal lords. That Rāmapāla of the Pāla dynasty had to win over a large number of *sāmantas* with gifts of land and other wealth prior to his war to recover Varendrī has been pointed out on the basis of the *Rāmacharita*. Historians have drawn our attention to instances of the enjoyment of *bhoga* (assignments of fiefs) in the Gurjara-Pratihāra grants. This has further been coupled with the references to the practice of assigning 84 villages to a holder (*chaturāmśikas*) which began in the Gurjara-Pratihāra times and consolidated later in the *chaurasia* system. The *Rājatarangiṇī* vividly describes the machinations of the *ḍāmara, ekāṅga* and *tantrin* groups, generally equated with feudal lords, who became the kingmakers in early medieval Kashmir and reduced the ruler to a puppet. The *Rājatarangiṇī* enjoins that the ruler should extract as much resources as possible from peasants, leaving with them the bare minimum resources for their livelihood, or otherwise an ordinary peasant, according to Kalhaṇa, would soon become rich and transform himself into a *ḍāmara*. The menace of *ḍāmaras* became so rampant that Kashmir was parceled out among competing *ḍāmaras* over different parts of the kingdom; the ruler was virtually a mere figurehead. Kalhaṇa commented that in this spectacle of multiplicity of rulers (*bhūrirājāke*), there was rampant confusion and chaos (*arājāka*), severely affecting all affairs of the state (*samastavyavahāra*).

The *Aparājitaprchhā* enlists the following type of officers and vassals in a descending order in terms of the number of villages granted to them as *vṛitti, bhoga, dhruvavṛitti*, etc. (service grants):

Mahāmaṇḍaleśvara	1,00,000	villages
Maṇḍaleśvara	50,000	villages
Mahāsāmanta	20,000	villages
Sāmanta	10,000	villages
Laghusāmanta	5,000	villages
Chaturāmśikas	1,000	villages

There were also officers holding grants of 50, 20, 3, 2 and even 1 village(s). The evidence of the growing number of *sāmantas* and their influence in

early medieval polity is seen as both a cause and an effect of the decay of centralized political power. During the 'heydays of feudal polity', the army was viewed as reduced to small police garrisons and the apex political authority was dependent on the mercy of virtually autonomous military officials. Thus, the portrayal of feudal polity by Sharma, Yadava and Jha is symptomatic of the absence of a paramount power and synonymous with political fragmentation. The rise of the *sāmantas* and the parcellization of sovereignty could take place because of the dismemberment of the centralized political structure of the pre-feudal days. Forces of centripetality are suggested to have returned to the political scene with the foundation of the Delhi Sultanate by late twelfth and early thirteenth century AD. This signalled the end of the early medieval polity in the historiography of Indian feudalism to be succeeded by a different political structure.

VIII

It is true that the construction of feudal polity, which holds the key to the understanding of the distinctive feature of early medieval polity, is primarily based on data pertaining to north India. A major trait of the early medieval south Indian polity is seen during the Pallava and the Chola times. The profusion of epigraphic materials in south India cannot but impress upon us that local self-units of administration, composed of elected representatives at rural and locality levels for a specific tenure, made their presence felt in the political life within the monarchical framework. There were *sabhās* in the *brahmadeya* (predominantly brāhmaṇa) villages, *urs* in the *non-brahmadeya* areas and *nagrams* as the body of merchants. The general tendency in a monarchical set up is to undermine the vitality of local self bodies and to wipe out their existence; this is a pattern seen in the case of north India. The nationalist historiography since the 1920s has highlighted the composition and activities of south Indian village assemblies to emphasize the familiarity of early Indians with democratic principles and popular representations, much before the advent of the Western democratic norms and the ideas of constitutional monarchy. Nilakantha Sastri showered praises on the indigenous capacity to integrate two utterly dissimilar systems: the Chola monarchy almost paralleling the Byzantine monarchy with a centralized bureaucracy in harmonious coexistence with the local self-government at villages, the basic unit of administration.

IX

Segmentary Polity

The above image of a harmonious combination of monarchical rule and popular representations in terms of the South Indian situation has been

challenged by Stein. He is also sharply critical of the application of the European model of feudalism on the south Indian polity. His alternative model of polity, that of the segmentary state, seeks to lay bare the insufficiency of the feudal model as a tool to explain the prevailing polity in south India; he simultaneously refutes the notion of a centralized state system and a bureaucratic set up, particularly in the Chola times. The idea of the segmentary polity, inspired by the anthropological studies of the African Alur society, locates the elements of the segmentary polity since the Pallava times and finds its uninterrupted presence till the arrival of the colonial rule in south India.

Stein's segmentary state system is associated with the 'medieval', and not the 'early medieval' period of south Indian history. With the intention of providing an alternative to both the ideas of centralized and feudal polity, the proponents of the segmentary model have emphasized upon the: (1) polarity between the centralized monarchy and elected local self bodies; and (2) the alliance between the brāhmaṇas and peasants to their mutual advantages. The real foci of power are suggested to have been the locality level centres or *nāḍus*. The crucial point is to view the *nāḍu* as a peasant macro region, to recognize it as ethnically coherent (restricted marriage and kinship network) and as the prime unit of social and agrarian organization. The numerical study of *nāḍus* convinced the proponents of the segmentary model that the Chola monarch had few bureaucratic control and exercised little authority over revenue claim and resource mobilization. These two vital areas of statecraft were firmly in the hands of the *nāḍu* organization. The *nāḍus* are suggested to have been distributed over three distinct zones: (1) central/core region—Cholamandalam and Jayangoṇḍacholamaṇḍalam; (2) intermediate region—Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam; and (3) peripheral area—Kongumaṇḍalam and Gangavadi. The Chola monarchs are thought to have enjoyed only limited territorial sovereignty, which petered out as it moved from the core to the periphery. The element of centrality existed only in the core area, even where the presence of quasi-autonomous foci of administration was tolerated by the Cholas. The management of the peripheral areas was marked by the pyramidal repetition of the administrative structures and functions in the core region. The absence of an organized bureaucracy forced the Chola monarch to fall back on ritually-organized sovereignty, in which the position of the ruler was to be legitimized and validated by the *brāhmaṇa* priest(s). The construction of massive temples, often named after the reigning Chola king, is therefore interpreted not as a visible marker of the stupendous power of the Chola rule, but as a sign of his political uncertainties to be contained by ritual expressions. The next step in the characterization of the segmentary state is that there was no political integration in the Chola realm in which the peripheral zone offered, at the most, only shifting allegiance. The Chola army is perceived not as a unified and well-organized unit, but as an assemblage of disparate elements often

resembling militias. The data on the supply of armed men during campaigns by various professional guild-like groups, especially by merchants' bodies, to the Cholas have been presented as a sign of the loose composition of the Chola army. In their attempts to keep these disparate units integrated, the Cholas had to engage them in incessant warfare. As the Cholas are considered to have had little say on the realization of revenues, the Cholas turned to systematic plunder during their campaigns. The descriptions of plunder by the Cholas in Sri Lanka, in South-East Asia and against the Western Châlukyas led Spencer to conclude that in the prevailing segmentary set up, the Cholas regarded wars as resource-gathering and integrating activities.

X

Integrative Polity

The two dominant historiographical standpoints—feudal polity and the segmentary state—follow two clearly dissimilar approaches and methodologies, each critical of the other. However, these two models also show a striking consonance in their perception of early medieval polity. Both the models highlight the traits of disintegration, fragmentation and segmentation as opposed to an integrated state structure by largely relying on the same evidence, viz., landgrants. The availability of landgrants for this period, especially in large numbers in south India, naturally called for rigorous analyses by both genres of scholars. On the other hand, statistical enquiry into the *agrahāra, devadāna* and *brahmadeya* types of grants in the Tamil areas alone have effectively proved that these grant areas were in the minority in relation to the available total land in the Tamil area. The *non-brahmadeya, non-agrahāra* and other non-grant tracts in the Tamil area and beyond it must have outnumbered the total granted area during a given period. At present, it is impossible to ascertain whether the material and political milieu in the non-grant areas was the same as or differed from the conditions in the *agrahāra* zones. Hence it would be hazardous to label the politico-administrative set up as feudal or dismembered on the basis of land grants alone and any such formulation cannot but remain open to question.

The chronology of landgrants is another irritant. The unimpeachable epigraphic evidence of secular landgrants, suggested to have held crucial clues to the formation of the feudal polity, cannot be pushed prior to AD 1000. But several centuries before AD 1000, the typical signs of the disintegrated polity are said to have already set in. Secular service grants have therefore been rightly discerned by Chattopadhyaya as a facet and not as a precondition of the overall pattern of political dominance. It will also be difficult to ignore the absence of any contractual element between the king and vassals—a feature generally associated with feudal formations—in the vast corpus of epigraphic literature. If feudal polity is suggested to have ushered in political

fragmentation and decentralization, then one must also search for a previous unified and centralized political structure. The image of such a centralized political structure is generally sought in the formation of the Mauryan state. This may pose a further teaser in view of the wide chronological gap between the fall of the centralized Mauryan state in the early part of the second century BC and the emergence of the feudal tendencies in the sixth century AD. The intervening period of nearly six to eight centuries is not known to have been associated with catastrophe or disorder, which one expects to encounter at the collapse of a centralized power. Moreover, our discussions in chapter IV have shown that recent scholars has strongly questioned the unitary and/or monolithic characterization of the Maurya state. Chattopadhyaya has in fact diagnosed in the chronology of Indian feudalism an implicit search for drawing a parallel to the Roman empire, the breakdown of which is taken to denote the end of the classical West and the onset of medieval feudal Europe. These points, countering the presence of elements of political disintegration as a result of feudal formation, therefore, cannot be brushed aside.

The notion of a segmentary state typified by the Chola realm, has also evoked serious challenges. The very central idea of the formulation, i.e. the voluntary brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance at the *nāḍu* or locality-level considerably assisted by the bhakti ideology, is considered to be an extremely hazardous assumption due to the absence of any known historical parallels. In the Indian context, the peasant is known to have been exploited by the brāhmaṇa-kshatriya combination; it is not clear how the relationship between the priestly and the peasant communities changed into one of the voluntary alliance from the tenth century AD onwards. The suggested absence of a bureaucracy under the Cholas and hence their inability to intervene in the affairs of the local self bodies has been effectively controverted by the role of the important state officers (for examples *adikāri, puravuvāri,* etc.) at the locality-level centres, evident from the statistical enquiry into the Chola records. As Champākalakshmī shows, people working in the *nāḍu* administration or influential in the *nāḍu* were frequently conferred with important titles like *brahmarāyān, pallavarāyān, muveṇḍavelam,* etc., by the central authority. This certainly speaks of close interactions between the apex political authority and the locality-level centre, the exclusivity of which cannot then be taken for granted. The creation of *valanāḍu*—larger than the *nāḍu* but smaller than a *maṇḍalam*—by Rājarāja and Kulottuṅga I respectively in Cholamaṇḍalam and Jayangoṇḍacholamaṇḍalam is an unmistakable indicator of the administrative innovations and hence direct interventions by the Chola central authority. The land surveys undertaken during the times of Rājarāja and Kulottuṅga I have to be judged in terms of the Chola intentions to control the affairs of the *nāḍu*. This is particularly seen, according to Champākalakshmī, in the grant of revenue in favour of the Bṛihadīśvara temple under Rājarāja's instructions. Arrangements were made to grant precise and stipulated amount of revenue from villages scattered

throughout the empire (as far as Sri Lanka) to the Bṛihadīśvara temple. This strongly repudiates the perception of the lack of a bureaucratic machinery, meager resources and insufficient resource mobilization under the Cholas. The next logical step would be to doubt the undue emphasis given on plunder as the primary moving force behind the Chola aggressive (including maritime) operations, which were suggested to be merely resource-gathering activities of this ruling power. One has also to keep in mind that the concept of segmentary polity/society was formulated by Southall on the basis of his anthropological work on the Alur society. The Alur society was a relatively simpler 'tribal' society that had little in common with the sharply statified agrarian sedentary society in south India during the Chola age.

XI

The foregoing discussions may highlight the lacunae in viewing early medieval polity in the light of fragmentation, decentralization and segmentation. On the other hand, the survey of the period from AD 300 to AD 600 suggested the slow spread of a more complex state society into areas marked by relatively simpler pre-state polities. The growing number of regional and local powers embracing virtually the entire subcontinent may better be judged in terms of steady expansion of the monarchical state system and the emergence of multiple foci of power, rather than as an outcome of the breakdown of a centralized power. The rapid increase of landgrants in the early middle ages were actually instrumental in clearing hitherto uncultivable and unsettled areas into sedentary agrarian settlements. This, in its turn, would provide the vital resource base to the emergent local and regional polities, firmly rooted to their respective local/regional resource bases. Interestingly enough, the non-governmental representatives at the locality-level (*vishaya*) in the fifth-sixth century AD Bengal are conspicuous by their absence in the early medieval times and are replaced by numerous royal functionaries in the charters since the eighth century AD. This may signal the growth and consolidation of the bureaucratic control in the early medieval period. Morrison demonstrates that while the welfare and the consent of villagers or at least those of the leading men of the village had been sought at the time of landgrants in the fifth-sixth century Bengal, the early medieval records pronounced royal orders of land grants (*samādiśayati*) upon the villagers. Such changes in phraseology were consciously aimed at politico-administrative integration and do not indicate parcellization of sovereignty.

The spread of the agricultural and state society was also intertwined with the expansion of the *varṇa-jāti* system into the simpler tribal societies, resulting in the proliferation of caste groups and absorption of these groups into the *jāti* system. One of the points of attraction to the *jāti* system must have been the relatively greater economic security of the caste society. Chattopadhyaya argues that the integration of the pre-state polities and of

tribes at the same time into the state structure and the *jāti* system gained a further momentum on account of the simultaneous absorption of tribal/folk cults into the established Brahmanical pantheon (sometimes expressed in terms of cult appropriation). Brahmanical rituals, especially those related to the establishment of a temple and upholding of the sectarian bhakti cult(s), play a positive role in this socio-political transformation. Rituals in fact strengthened the ongoing process of formation of local/regional powers and not weakened or subverted the political structures. The creation of brāhmaṇa settlements in a conquered territory by transporting them from the victor's core area ensured the presence of an influential loyal element in a new country.

A classic case in this point is the Jagannātha cult in early medieval Kaliṅga. Sustained researches on this cult by Kulke and his colleagues have discerned the tribal characters in the aniconic features of the deity and the associated divinities. The name of the deity was changed from Nīlamādhava (suggesting Vaishṇava affiliation) to Purushottama (the Supreme Being) and Jagannātha (Lord of the World), indicating the growing orientations of the cult to temporal affairs. The monumental Jagannātha temple at Puri (in Orissa) was constructed by Anaṅgabhīma of the Ganga dynasty (AD 1136), who styled himself as a son of Rudra-Śiva. Moreover, this claim of divine descent ensured the incorporation and integration of two premier regional deities of Orissa—Durgā-Virāja of Jajpur and Rudra-Śiva of Bhuvaneswar—into the central Jagannātha cult. The centrality of the cult was used to project the preponderant centrality of its patron too, i.e. the Ganga monarch. The next step was to declare the *ishṭadevatā* (one's auspicious deity) Jagannātha as the *rāshṭradevatā* (state deity). Kaliṅga was proclaimed as being ruled by the deity himself, with the Orissa king functioning as his deputy (*rauta*), earthly representative (*pratinidhi*) and the prime servitor (*ādisevaka*). In this development of the near total identity between the king and the deity, between the sacred and temporal domains, came the further royal proclamation that disobedience to the earthly representative of the deity (i.e. the king) would amount to treason (*droha*) against Jagannātha himself.

The large number of regional powers, in the light of these debates and issues, may reasonably be seen as the outcome of the spread of the state society, the availability of local resource base, the absorption and accommodation of the relatively simpler tribal society into *jāti-varṇa* system and the continual absorption of tribal cults into established Brahmanical pantheon. All these speak of the possibilities of local-level formations in socio-economic, political and cultural life. The image of a political crisis, disorder and instability in the political processes, because of the rampaṅcy of the factors of disintegration, fragmentation and segmentation, seems to fade in the light of the recent appraisal of the elements of 'integrative polity' active in the political life in early medieval India.

XII

Early Medieval Economy

The Agrarian Scenario

The discussion on the nature and tendencies of polity and political processes in early medieval times laid stress on the emergence of regional powers as the distinctive mark of political developments. Like the study of polity, our present enquiry into the economic situation during the early medieval times draws considerably on landgrants. Numerically superior to other type of sources, landgrants itself are indicators of the changing socio-economic and political processes from AD 600. The rise in the number of landgrants at a brisk pace over disparate areas since AD 600 indicates, in the opinion of a large number of Marxist historians, a substantial change in the material milieu from that existing in the days prior to this century. These changes led to the formulation of Indian feudalism, according to many of these historians. The major significance of this formulation is that it views feudalism not merely as a politico-administrative system, but something that witnessed appreciable changes in socio-economic life. The historiography of feudal social formations in early medieval India ably demonstrates the elements of change in early Indian material life.

The regular creation of *agrahāras* in favour of religious personages and establishments (Buddhist *vihāras*, Jaina *vasāḍis* and Brahmanical *mathas* and temples)—a process initiating from the fourth-fifth centuries AD—bestowed the donees with distinct material advantages. The donee(s), whether individual, collective or institutional, emerged as major landholders. Nalanda, the famous Buddhist *vihāra* and educational institute in present Bihar, figures prominently in the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Ijing (in India from AD 675 to AD 695). He had documented that the monastery received no less than 209 villages for the maintenance of the establishment. To this were further added five more villages during the time of the Pāla ruler Devapāla, who granted these villages at the request of Balaputradva, the ruler of Yavadvīpa (Java). The Buddhist establishment with its jurisdiction over as many as 214 villages is therefore viewed as a landholder. That individual brāhmaṇas too could enjoy extensive holdings is clearly illustrated by the grant of as much as 339½ *unmānas* (a particular unit of land measurement) of land in favour of Halāyudhaśarman, a leading religio-scholarly figure in Bengal under the later Senas. Many grants were made in the Pratihāra realm but interestingly enough, only to individual brāhmaṇas and not to a group of donees or a religious establishment. The Rāshṭrakūṭa kings took considerable pride in their inscriptions for having created numerous *agrahāras* and also renewed older grants. In the Tamil areas, two types of grant are encountered:

(1) *kāniyātchi* or the right to possess land or village, mostly associated with *brahmadeya* endowments; and (2) the right to enjoyment of revenue from a land or village, generally found in the instances of *devadānas* or endowments to temples.

The widespread practice of issuing landgrants created a distinct class of landholders, who would not normally cultivate the soil themselves. The priestly community did not engage in actual tilling of the land that was granted to them. The granted area could also have been too large or scattered to be tilled by the donee himself (for example, in the case of Halayudha's land holding). This assumes a special significance in the interpretative model of Indian feudalism. There has been epigraphic injunction to the donee to cultivate the donated plot or to get it cultivated (*kṛishyata karshayata vā*), to do the work himself or get it done (*kuryāt kārayet vā*), to enjoy it himself or get it enjoyed. The profusion of the use of causative verbs in the grant has led to the belief that there emerged a distinct group of workers employed by the donees for the utilization of lands granted to them. An inscription from Bengal (AD 675) speaks of the enjoyer of the land (*bhujyamānaka*) who is clearly distinguished from the actual tiller (*kṛishyamānaka*). Owing to this sharp distinction between the two categories in the land system, it is likely that the actual tiller of the soil did not own any land. The inscription also seems to have distinguished the enjoyer of the land (*bhujyamānaka*) from Mitravali, an owner whose name figures in the record in the sixth case-ending (*Mitrāvalyāḥ*), thereby suggesting the ownership of a plot. This seventh century AD inscription speaks of a complex land system in eastern Bengal, consisting of at least three distinct tiers—the owner, the enjoyer and the tiller of the soil (*kṛishyamānaka*). It has already been suggested on the basis of the Dharmaśāstra norms that the donee (*svāmī*) under such circumstances, would assume the position of landed intermediaries between the ruler (*mahāpati*) and the tiller (*karshaka*).

According to Sharma's classic study of Indian feudalism, the donee enjoyed the transfer of many local resources of considerable importance besides receiving the grant of land: e.g. with low areas (*satala*), high areas (*soddeśa*), marshy areas (*sajalasthala*), dry areas and ditches (*sagarttoshara*), with mango, mahua, jackfruit, coconut, betel, fishes and tortoise (*sāmramadhuka, sāmrapanasa, saguvākanārikela, samatsya-sakachchhapa*). Occasionally, the state's right to levy cess on salt production (*salavaṇa*) was also transferred to the donee. In many charters of the Pālas and Pratihāras, the boundary demarcations of the granted plot(s)/area are only vaguely described as extending up to the grasslands and pasture grounds at the outskirts of the village (*svasīmātṛiṇayutigocharaparyanta*). This has led to the argument that the imprecise boundary markings would prove advantageous to the donee, who could verily extend the area of cultivation and his authority beyond the actual limits of the granted area. The large number of instances of

revenue transfers are likely to have impoverished the treasury as the ruler relinquished the rights over revenue. That is why such grants were made according to the custom and principle of transferring unyielding type of plots (*bhūmichchhidranyāya*), which no longer generated any revenue for the ruler. The next step in the construction of the feudal economy is that such transfer of resources and revenue resulted in the transformation of royal rights over land into private individual rights. This further corroded the economic prerogatives of the state authority. Kosambi pointed out that prior to the granting of land, many resources of the village were generally enjoyed and utilized by the entire community; the granting of the land ensured the mastery of the donee(s) over these resources. Kosambi saw in this process the conversion of the communal property into feudal property.

The growth of individual landholdings seems to have received a further impetus in the sastric recognition of the divisibility of joint-family holdings in the early middle ages. Epigraphic data have been utilized by Karashima to throw light on the changing character of landholding in the lower Kaveri valley under the Cholas. During the ninth and tenth century AD the *brahmadeya* grants indicated the prevalence of individual holdings, while the *non-brahmadeya* villages with its *ur* assembly as a local body provided a contrast by their strong notions of community-holding of the land. Ten out of the eleven grants of this period leave a strong impression that the *ur* as a whole participated in land transactions. The monetary gains from such transactions too were utilized by the *ur* assembly for the development of the locality and did not contribute to the financial gain of an individual. The later phase of the Chola rule however, yields fifteen records of transaction in land involving individuals (including kshatriyas or *irāchukulavaras*), even in the *ur* areas, which seems to have experienced private holding of land under changing circumstances. Karashima has cited epigraphic evidence to show that steps were recommended to check widespread purchase and sale of land in *ur* areas. The above discussions suggest the rise of new, wealthy and powerful landholding groups, either as owners or enjoyers of the soil, to the crucial position of an intermediate between the ruler and the actual tiller of the soil and hence, ruthlessly exploiting both.

The emergence of landed intermediaries is diagnosed as a typical symptom of the Indian feudal economy. While their role is hardly considered beneficiary to the economic and political interest of the ruler, their growing strength seriously impoverished the peasant. Textual references prior to AD 600 gave synonyms to peasants as *gahapati, kutumbika, mahattara*, etc., impressing upon the possibility of landholding by peasants themselves. According to B.N.S. Yadava, the early medieval texts seem to have been less familiar with these terms and better acquainted with epithets like *hālakara, hālika, karshaka, krishivalajana*—all related to his function as a ploughman. This change in epithets is thought to have reflected the impoverished status

of a tiller of the soil, especially in relation to the grantee who owned or enjoyed the landed property. The advent of the *arddhika* (share-cropper as a social group in early medieval Deccan) is taken as an indicator of the worsening plight of the ordinary peasant. Acute poverty of cultivators (*krishivalajanāḥ*) and the distressed economic condition of peasants (*dhanojjita*) is potrayed in *Padmapurāṇa*. The poverty of peasants stands in sharp contrast to the flourishing state of the landlords (*akshiṇadhanasampanna*).

The *Skandapurāṇa*, typical of the Puranic texts, made the pseudo forecast that kings of the Kali age would oppress tillers (*bhūpālāḥ pīḍayishyanti karshakān*). This oppression could easily take the shape of unbearable fiscal burdens imposed on peasants by both the ruler and the landlord. This possibility gains ground in the light of the frequent use of the term *pīḍā* (literally, oppression, affliction or disease) as a synonym of revenue in the copper plates. On several occasions, the copper plates enlist the different heads of revenue (*bhāga, bhoga, kara, hiraṇya, samastapratyāya* etc.) transferred to the donee. At the end of such a list, frequently figures the term *ādi* or *ādikam*, meaning etcetera. Sharma draws a logical inference that this further empowered the donee, or in other words, the landed intermediary, to appropriate resources from unspecified and extra-legal sources from the peasant. The imposition of *vishṭi* or forced labour, figuring in inscriptions since the fifth-sixth centuries, becomes increasingly regular in early middle ages. It tends to replace, according to the proponents of Indian feudalism, the institution of slavery, with forced labour as the principal form of exacting involuntary labour demanded by the donee(s) from the peasant. In the *Rājatarangiṇī*, king Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa is said to have strongly recommended the appropriation of all surplus from the peasant, leaving the barest minimum for the latter's subsistence. This extortionate measure ensured, as Kalhaṇa narrated, that the peasant could never accumulate enough resources to transform himself into a *ḍāmara* or feudal lord in the future. D.D. Kosambi situated this statement in the light of the improved irrigation and crop production in the Vitastā valley; but in this very prosperity, he also found the origins of the feudal economy in Kashmir, hardly beneficial to peasants. The frequent descriptions of the peasant as *baddhahala* (tied to the plough) and *āśritahālika* (dependent peasant) led scholars to infer that he was imposed with further restrictions by the landlord. Sharma and Yadava have provided us with the image of the immobility of the peasant. The debarring of the peasant to renounce the world by the *śāstras* is seen as another impediment to his movements and to his chance to run away from the harsh realities of abject poverty. Readings into various early medieval texts by B.N.S. Yadava impress upon the deteriorating condition of peasants. The *Sārāvalī* presents an image of the subordinate position of the peasant (*preshyakrishibala*). Jinasenasuri lays down in his *Kathakośaprakaraṇa* (eleventh century AD) that the status of the peasant

was marginally better than the *antyajas* (the lowest social groups) and the *karus* (artisans). Dhanapāla's lexicon, the *Paiyā-lacchi-nāmamālā* explains *kasaya* (*kṛishaka*) and *hāliya* (*halaka*) as *pāmara* (mean/wicked). Amarakīrtti (AD 1218) wrote about the *paradasattana* (i.e. *paradāsatva* or subjected condition) of the *hālika* or the tiller. Peasants could however, flee the lands of an extremely extortionate lord as their last resort, as has been narrated in the *Subhāshitaratnakosha*. Though this is a telling commentary on the severe conditions of cultivators, they were not tied to the land like the serfs in European feudal society. As serfdom, an attribute of feudal social formation, was unlikely to have been present in early medieval India, the alternative perception of a subject or dependent peasantry (the epithets like *baddhahala* and *āśritahālika*) looms large in the framework of Indian feudalism.

These scholars have cited literary accounts of peasant protests and uprisings, although these rarely resulted in the realization of the peasants' aims. The organization of the *karshakas* into a *śreṇī* or guild-like organization and their valiant resistance to intermediaries with inadequate wooden weapons (*kāshṭhāmayam śāstram*) have been highlighted. The *Yaśastilakacampu* of Somadevasuri, remarkable for the author's awareness of the situation in the Deccan under the Rāshṭrakūṭas, portrays the breakdown of the peasant's patience, and eventually to the outbreak of an armed uprising against the oppression of landlords. The armed resistance, however, was abortive and the cultivators met with death.

The historiography of Indian feudalism has exhaustively dealt with the capture of Varendrī in north Bengal by the Kaivartta chief Divya; it temporarily eclipsed the Pāla rule there. Scholars assumed that the Kaivarttas belonged to cultivator caste and this has led to Sharma's hypothesis of a successful peasant rebellion in early medieval Bengal. The point has been contested on the grounds that the only available evidence (the *Rāmacharitam* of Sandhyākaranandi) did not conclusively prove that Divya captured power in Varendrī as the accepted representative and leader of the discontent Kaivartta group. The *Rāmacharitam*, on the other hand, may offer the reading that Divya actually captured power by taking advantage of the waning authority of the Pālas in north Bengal. Sharma has presented also epigraphic data, mainly from the far south, on the discontent among peasants following grants of lands to temples and priests. Occasional violent protests against indiscriminate grants of land by rulers and/or their vassals are not unheard of. It is significant to note that a ninth century AD grant from south India warns people in general not to create any trouble (*upadrava*) to the donee, as disobedience amounts to treason (*mahādroha*). Loss of old registrars and deeds regarding grants of land and subsequent resistance to *brāhmaṇa* donees by the non-*brāhmaṇa* population in village have been recorded in the inscriptions of fifth, sixth and eleventh regnal years of Rājarāja III.

The arguments presented in the formation of the feudal milieu highlight that the large number of grants enjoyed by landed intermediaries—exploiting both the ruler and the peasant—resulted in the emergence of the self-sufficient, enclosed village community. The economy thriving on land grant was solely dependent on agriculture; the non-agrarian sectors of the economy dwindled in a conspicuous manner. The rapid ruralization of the material milieu is explained by Kosambi, Sharma, Yadava, Jha and Shrimali in terms of the signs of decline in craft, commerce and urban centres. Such impressions of the languishing non-agrarian economy were culled from literary and archaeological sources. We propose to take up this explanation at this juncture.

The changing conditions led to the decline of commerce between the Roman empire and the subcontinent in the middle of the third century AD, seriously affecting the long-distance trade of India. Sharma and Yadava suggest that India's long-distance commerce, especially maritime trade, once again revived around AD 1000. The period from fifth to the tenth century AD ,therefore, is presented as a phase of dwindling commerce. Though this perception of the decline of India's trade does not state it explicitly, it is often implied that the revival of India's trade, especially long-distance commerce, was largely due to the vigorous role of the Arab merchant in the post AD 1000 scenario.

The reason for the languishing trade and long-distance commerce can be located in the growing lack of minted metallic currency in early medieval times, particularly from AD 600 to AD 1000. The vibrant money economy during the early centuries of the Christian era was replaced by cowry shells as the principal medium of exchange. The repeated references to *kapardakas* or cowryshells in copper plates and the occasional discovery of the same in archaeological contexts have further encouraged the view that this in fact was the principal medium of exchange. It has been argued that cowry shells were restrictive of long-distance transactions, which required high quality coinage of precious metals. The money economy was ,therefore, in a serious crisis and minted metallic pieces lost their relevance in the context of a slump in trade. The outstanding powers like the Rāshṭrakūṭas, the Pālas and the Senas are not known to have issued any coin. Coins of some other areas and other dynasties are known but the proponents of Indian feudalism attach little economic significance to these species, as their metallic contents and purity were not beyond doubt. Such coins of dubious value and authenticity were hardly fit to be used in long-distance trade. This is next tagged to the shortage in the availability of coins, which forced political authorities to issue landgrants in lieu of cash payments, facilitating ruralization of the material milieu, but distinctly detrimental to commerce and urbanism. Sifting through the voluminous Puranic literature and many local chronicles, Nandi and Sharma have presented data on the declining role of the vaiśyas

as merchants. They would be reduced to artisans (*karmopajīvin*), grinder or thresher of paddy (*taṇḍulakārin*) and oil miller (*tailakāra*), as Yadava gleans from the Puranic data. The slump in trade and the decline in the position of merchants are seen as both a cause and effect of the self-sufficient, enclosed and stagnant village economy.

The image of dwindling commerce was followed up by the strong suggestion of an overall decay in urban centres. Early historical cities, which reached their most prosperous phase during the early centuries of the Christian era, experienced a downward slide with the languishing trade—specially long-distance foreign trade- and the resultant fall in the use of metallic medium of exchange. The Hūṇas adversely affected the highways of overland trade connecting northern India with the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent and Western and Central Asia. An early impression of the decay of towns in the Ganga valley has been discerned in Xuan Zang's account of their distressed and deserted conditions. Moreover, the description of towns transforming into villages (*nayarāni gāmabhuyāni hohinti*) in indigenous literary texts has been taken into consideration. Recent studies have coupled literary data with archaeological information on the widespread utilization of reused bricks in urban areas and signs of desertion of cities from the beginning of the seventh century AD. This has convinced Sharma that the process of de-urbanization first set in in the Ganga valley and then spanned across the entire subcontinent. Cities and towns are at best seen as politico-military headquarters (*jayaskandhāvāras*) or as pilgrim centres (*tīrthas*), thereby suggesting that the importance of urban areas as centres of crafts and commerce had become a thing of the past. Sharma sums up the chief features of the feudal economy:

1. The emergence of religious and then secular landed intermediaries as a result of landgrants which converted royal and communal rights on land into private holding;
2. The presence of a subject peasantry bearing the burdens of numerous legal and extra-legal levies, including *vishṭi* or forced labour, which led to several peasant resistance and rebellions;
3. Conversion of the revenue resources of the state into religious benefices;
4. Slump in crafts, commerce and urban decay resulting in stagnant and enclosed village economy, buttressed by the virtual disappearance of coins and their replacement by cowry shells.

The above propositions bear a strong suggestion about the mutual incompatibilities between the vibrant money economy of the pre-feudal days and the stagnant landgrant economy of the early middle ages. Monetary and urban anaemia have been diagnosed to hold crucial clues to the economy, marked by sufferings and crises. The critical situation became better during the period from AD 1000 to AD 1200, which saw simultaneous climax and cracks in the feudal socio-economic set up.

XIII

The formulation of Indian feudalism has indeed been a major landmark in Indian historiography. It seeks to identify the elements of change in Indian socio-economic and political conditions and also attempts to explain such changes. It, thus, presents a strong critique to the much cherished notion of the millennial changelessness of the Indian society. This significant historiographical shift has, however, not gone unchallenged both on empirical and conceptual grounds. The debate has suggested alternative methods and perspectives of the study of early medieval India.

Sircar effectively questioned whether the transfer of revenue to the donee by royal charter would at all amount to the corrosion of the ruler's economic prerogatives. The numerous instance of *karaśāsanas*, especially from early medieval Orissa, suggest the king's retaining his right to collect levies even from granted areas. The perpetual relinquishing of royal power over granted areas (at least theoretically) can be questioned on the basis of administrative interventions into the conditions of the previous grant. Instances of such interventions in favour of a *devadāsī* (female dancer attached to a temple) can be traced to the history of Rajasthan. In view of the brāhmaṇa's known dependence on material support (landgrants) from the ruler, it may be logically posited that the ruler's position possibly was strengthened by creating a loyal group of recipients of royal favour. Kulke demonstrated how the *sasani* (grant-holding) brāhmaṇas became a major support-group for the ruler in Orissa. A major critique to the idea of Indian feudalism lies in the absence of contractual elements in landgrants either between the ruler and his vassals or between the landlord and the 'subject peasantry'. The absence of this trait—one of the features of feudal society, economy and polity—in so many documents have been taken to negate the prevalence of any feudal element in the Indian scenario. Critiquing Sharma, Mukhia concluded that the peasant's control over the production process remained intact and was not jeopardized with the issuing of landgrants. A thorough study of epigraphic evidence has led Sircar to conclude that the granting of revenue transfer need not be interpreted as detrimental to the economic interests of the king, since the person or the vassal or the administrative officer requesting for such a concession was to pay to the royal treasury a lumpsum amount beforehand. Seen from this point of view, the disastrous consequences of issuing landgrants have been doubted. This has further been followed up by piling data to show that:

1. There were no dismemberment of polity and the emperor exercised his superiority over his subordinates; and
2. No decline in the economy can be related to the issue of landgrants. The Marxist historians have been criticized for their inability to distinguish landlordism and tenancy in ancient India from feudalism. Sircar strongly

upheld this position and contested the formulation of Indian feudal polity and economy.

XIV

Agrarian Expansion and Hydraulic Resources

One cannot deny that large number of landgrants were made in hitherto uncultivated areas. When such grants were made in non-arable forest tracts in Samatata and Śrīhatta, these were invariably meant for expansion of agriculture in AD 675, with a view to clearing this forest tract and thereby transforming it into a sedentary settlement. Similar grants were made in the same area in the eighth and early tenth century AD. The grant made in AD 930 led to the settlement of 6,000 *brāhmaṇas* and also an impressive number of craftsmen and other service groups; the brāhmaṇas met the requirement of the religious establishment and priests thereof. The Pallavas in south India are also known to have followed a similar policy of granting land for the expansion of cultivation. The period from AD 600 to AD 1200 is unmistakably marked by cultivation of diverse type of crops. Sanskrit manuals on agriculture like the *Kṛishiparāśara*, the *Kṛishisūkti*, etc. indicate a growing agricultural sector. It is not surprising that agriculture is hailed in early medieval texts as the occupation par excellence and harbinger of bliss (*tasya khalu saṁsārasukhaṁ yasya kṛishiḥ*). The possibilities of agrarian expansion by issuing landgrants seem to have encouraged a highly favourable attitude to agriculture.

Rich epigraphic data are available on the expansion of agriculture in the hitherto untilled and fallow areas in early medieval Karnataka, thanks to Nandi's study, who argues for the growth in the agrarian economy, though within the 'feudal' set up. In the sixth century AD Goa under the Kadamba rulers, a grant of land enabled a brāhmaṇa to clear a forest tract and make it fit for ploughing (*araṇyakarshaṇa*) with the help of agricultural labourers. It is also interesting to find in this record a reference to the transformation of a coastal (*kachchha*) tract into paddy fields by damming sea-water, Goa being located in the coastal tract. Another instance of forest clearance by the issuance of copperplate charters is furnished by an inscription of AD 762 from Goribidnur taluk. In AD 904, a Taittirīya brāhmaṇa, living in a settlement of Ahichchhatra brāhmaṇas in the Nanjangad taluk, caused to construct a huge irrigation tank, which was fed by three streams emerging from a nearby forest. The improved irrigation facilities must have led to agrarian expansion, increased the output of crops and therefore resulted in the growth of population (*janodaya*). In peninsular India, the sluice-weir device in tank irrigation seems to have considerably boosted crop production. There are instances of growing preference for canal-feeding of irrigation

tanks with the help of nearby streams/ rivulets to the previous dependence on rain-fed irrigation canals. This proved conducive to the conversion of virgin tracts into cultivable and settled areas that supported agricultural population. This reduced the dependence of peasants on annual rainfall for filling the tanks. The changes brought about by the expansion of agriculture and improved production of crops is evident from the literary references to *kaṅgu* (foxtail millet). *Kaṅgu* was described in the *Ashṭāngahṛidaya-saṁgraha* (seventh century AD) as an inferior grain (*kudhānya*) along with *śyāmaka* and *kodrava*. About five centuries later, the *Mānasollāsa* praises the same *kangu* as fit for royal diet and hails it as an excellent grain (*sutaṇḍula*).

Non-indigenous authors, especially the Arab geographers, were much impressed by the flourishing agricultural conditions in early medieval times and the diversity of crops. Paddy was undoubtedly the most important crop. Some villages in south-eastern Bengal with *boraka* name-endings were probably so called for the cultivation of *boro* variety of paddy. The *Śūnyapurāṇa* enlists fifty types of paddy in early medieval Bengal, which was also particularly famous for sugar-cane plantations. Puṇḍra or north Bengal being well-known for quality sugar-cane, the term *pauṇḍra* (grown in *Puṇḍra*) became a synonym for sugar-cane. There was expansion of the plantations of coconut, betel and areca nuts, betel leaf and cotton, especially in the littoral tracts and the Deccan. Indigo plantation, closely allied to the textile production, seems to have been well established in Gujarat. The far south figures very prominently in the account of foreigners as an area rich in spices; the most frequently-mentioned spice was the pepper from Malabar. Some improvements in the cultivation of oil seeds may logically be inferred in the light of increased number of references to oil-presses (*ghānaka*) and oilmen (*tailika*). Inscriptions also record availability of green vegetables (*śakavārttāku*) as exchangeable commodities.

The traditional use of ox-drawn plough continued. The use of the large plough (*bṛihadhala*) may logically indicate some improvements in the technology and manufacturing of ploughs. The early medieval period had good knowledge about the mechanism of pounding and husking grain with *udukhala*. The *Deśīnāmamālā* of Hemachandra, significantly enough, enlists several synonyms of Sanskrit *udukhala* in *deśī*; the *deśī* vocabulary was the forerunner of many modern regional vernaculars in India. This once again underlines the spread of agriculture in different regions of the subcontinent. In some areas, like the Kalachuri realm in Ḍāhala (present-day region around Jabalpur), known for its relative isolation, the regular use of *khala* or *udukhala* resulted in the imposition of a new levy (*khalabhikshā*). This may be an indicator to the generative aspects of some of the new elements in the agrarian life during the early middle ages.

XV

The spread of agrarian settlements would have hardly been possible without adequate irrigation facilities. Existing sources portray the preponderance of small-scale or local-level irrigation projects. Though the sastric norms uphold royal rights over-irrigation works (*setu*) and hence his prerogative to levy a cess on water, actual evidence to this direction is missing. It is only in the Gāhaḍhavāla records that the practice of imposing a water cess (*jalakara*) is clearly mentioned. There are, however, some instances of administrative patronage to launch and maintain large-scale or supra-local irrigation projects. The most outstanding example comes from Kashmir, where Suyya, during the reign of Avantīvarman, succeeded in diverting the course of the Vitastā. This resulted not only in the prevention of the annual flooding of the Vitastā, but also caused a much greater agricultural output, leading to an appreciable fall in the price of paddy. Many rulers of early medieval times are credited with the construction of large reservoirs, which could have served the needs of a sizable area. On many occasions, such reservoirs were called *sāgara, samudra, vāridhi,* etc. and named after the reigning king or the ruling dynasty. This is a practice particularly noticed in the Deccan and south India. King Rāmapāla is praised in the *Rāmacharita* for excavating a number of large tanks in Varendrī. The text gives an impression that such a step was consciously taken to improve upon the distressed economy of Varendrī after he had recovered it from the rebellious Kaivartta chiefs. These data on the rulers' effort to provide irrigational facilities in early medieval India need not straight forward suggest the prevalence of hydraulic society and/or oriental despotism. The instances of individual and group initiatives in launching and maintaining irrigation projects far outnumber those of royal/administrative efforts. The concept of oriental despotism highlights an unchanging society and polity in India. This concept does not have either empirical validity or theoretical soundness.

Moreover, such a position is clearly negated by the numerous instances of non-official or non-government initiatives and participations in launching and maintaining local-level irrigation works. These works outnumbered the above references to royal interests in hydraulic projects. The variation in irrigation devices and the diversity in the dependence on irrigation are linked up with ecological difference in disparate regions of the subcontinent. Needless to emphasize that there would be a greater need for irrigation in areas with relatively more pronounced aridity. This assumes a special significance in the light of wide variations in annual precipitation in different regions of the subcontinent.

In early medieval Bengal, there were plenty of natural resources of water enriched by monsoon rains (*devamātṛika*) and riverine sources (*nadimātṛika*), ditch (*khāta*), channels (*kulyā* and *praṇālī*) and wells (*kūpa*). In more or less contemporary Rajasthan, an area well-known for its aridity and desert-

like conditions, *kūpa* and *taḍāga* were more numerous. Early medieval inscriptions from Rajasthan contain significant information about the use of water wheels or *araghaṭṭas,* also called *ghaṭīyantras* as a regular device to procure irrigational water. A tenth century AD sculpture from Rajasthan portrays the vertical rotary motion of the wheel, to which were attached small buckets or pots. These pots would go round with the turning of the wheel and fetch up water from below. The sculpture also depicts the employment of workers (comparable expression *araghaṭṭīyanara*) for turning the wheel and fetching water. The use of the water wheel (*araghaṭṭa*), evident from visual representation and textual references, has led some scholars to infer that the Persian wheel was not an importation to India and was in fact, an indigenous device. This has been effectively countered by Habib, who points to the vital absence of a gearing mechanism, a salient feature of the medieval Persian wheel, in the Indian *araghaṭṭa* or *ghaṭīyantra* of early medieval times. This gearing mechanism was integrated to two wheels, one with a horizontal and the other with a vertical rotary movement, that helped transfer the primary horizontal rotation of the first wheel into the vertical rotation of the second wheel to which were attached pots or buckets carrying water. The Persian wheel evidently had a more complex and advanced mechanism, in which animal power could be easily employed to rotate the first wheel in preference to the human labour. Mukhia cites literary evidence for a three-stage development of this irrigation device from a simpler water-wheel to the complex Persian wheel. It should be pointed out here that one of the lexical meanings of the word *araghaṭṭa* is a deep well and some scholars would favour the identification of the *araghaṭṭa* in early medieval Rajasthan with a deep well and not with a water wheel. Despite the scholarly variance on the meanings, mechanisms and nature of *araghaṭṭas,* there is little doubt that their regular use in early medieval Rajasthan led to growth and diversification of the agricultural yields. Attention may also be focused here on the use of *dhikus* or *dhinkus* (wells) as local-level irrigation projects, which will be evident from early medieval inscriptions in Rajasthan.

In Gujarat too, early medieval inscriptions and textual materials are replete with references to *vāpi* or *vāvi.* While the term *vāpi* has been known for a long time in Sanskrit literature as any reservoir, in the early medieval context they connoted step wells, excavated to a great depth to tap the ground water. The term *vāpi* being derived from the root *vāp* (to sow), it is logical to assume that the *vāpis* provided water for cultivation.

The introduction of the *vāpi* in early medieval Gujarat has a close correspondence to the overall growth and diversification of crops in Karnataka, an area with uncertain precipitation. Irrigation was largely provided there by tanks (*kere or gere* in epigraphic records), which were established and maintained as local-level sources of precious water by individual and group initiatives and only rarely by the ruling authority. The tanks were so excavated as to form the pattern of a chain from the higher to

the lower levels. The excess water of the tank at a higher level could thereby seep into the lower one and so on and thus irrigate a considerable area.

The most graphic acount of the management of local hydraulic resources comes from the early medieval Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam and Cholamaṇḍalam in the Tamil area. Epigraphic evidence leave little room for doubt about the importance attached to the maintenance of tanks and irrigation channels/canals, their periodic desilting and repair and the allocation of the financial resources for these works with minute details, all looked after by the annually elected representatives of the tank committee (*erivāriyam*) under the local self assembly (*sabhā*) in *brahmadeya* villages. This system has, however, no parallel in other regions of the subcontinent. James Heitzman's elaborate and incisive analysis of Chola inscriptions offers an interesting image. In what is modern Kumbakonam and Tiruchhirappali areas canals and channels were numerically far superior to other irrigation devices, as high as 84 per cent to 85 per cent, while tanks had a share of 7 per cent. There was also a noticeable spurt in canals in the twelfth century, implying thereby that resources were put in canal-building in that locality. In the Tiruturaippadi area, canals (79 per cent) certainly outnumbered tanks (15 per cent). The area around Pudukottai was familiar with tanks to a higher percentage (38 per cent), while irrigation channels had a share of 49 per cent. What is significant from Heitzman's studies is the local-level diversities in the preference for irrigation devices; the preference for a particular type of irrigation method was based on the respective ecological features of these localities. His study also reveals that the use of sluice was very limited (4.7 per cent) in comparison to the use of tanks and canal irrigation methods. The Deccan and the far south, without any rivers of glacial origin, had to depend entirely on the annual rainfall which was not uniform. This has a special bearing on the predominantly rice-eating diet in south India, requiring greater amount of water for irrigating paddy fields. Irrigational water therefore looms large as a precious natural endowment in peninsular regions. In the Deccan and the far south, local-level irrigation arrangements were traditionally associated with immense significance in the records.

The overall impression amid regional diversities is one of general improvement in irrigational facilities. This can hardly be dissociated from the growth and diversification of crops, a point to be elaborated in a subsequent section on early medieval trade. Hydraulic projects frequently appear in the operative portions of landgrants as identifiable landmarks of a donated plot or village. This certainly speaks of the growing importance of hydraulic projects in the associated rural landscapes. To this may be added the regular injunction in the law books to maintain irrigation work with great care and to inflict severe punishment on those who damage irrigation works. A close perusal of the epigraphic evidence would also suggest that the social status of individuals and/or groups, launching and patronizing the excavation and maintenance of *vāpi, kūpa, taḍāga,* etc., considerably enhanced as a result

of such meritorious acts of public welfare (*purta*). The participation in such *purtta* works helped them in gaining eminence as elites in the local society.

XVI

Crafts and Artisanal Organizations

The improvement in agriculture and the expansion of sedentary settlements resulted in the cultivation of many important cash crops which in turn created favourable conditions for the development of several agro-based crafts and industries. The sugar-making industry seems to have proliferated, as will be evident from the regular references to sugar presses (*pīḍanayantra* or *ikshupīḍanayantra*) and to the making of sugar candy and molasses. In the Chinese and Arabic accounts, Malwa prominently figures as a major area of sugar-making and it is from here that the products were sent to the Gujarat coast as an item of maritime trade.

The traditional fame of Indian textile seems to have continued unabated. Though earlier famous centres like Kauśāmbī and Mathurā appear to have receded into the background, new centres of textile production are recorded in the *Mānasollāsa* (twelfth century AD), e.g. Mūlasthāna (Multan), Anahilapāṭaka (is Gujarat), Vaṅga (eastern Bengal) and Nāgapaṭṭana (in the Chola realm). The mention of *oraṅgītantra* in an inscription from Assam would suggest, according to B.P. Mazumdar, the spread of the weaving industry in this region. The very word *kāpaḍa* in the sense of cloth appears in a twelfth century-inscription from Mangrol in Gujarat. The textile products of early medieval Bengal are invariably hailed as of superb quality in the Arabic, Persian, Chinese texts and also praised by Marco Polo.

The impact of the regular production of edible oil seeds is clearly seen in the increasing number of epigraphic and textual references to oil-making. The oil-press is sometimes called *audra,* but the more common term is *ghānaka.* The realistic description of the circular rotation of the *ghānaka* and also its use as a simile in religious texts emphatically underline its importance in the material life. The *ghānaka* is not frequently seen in sources prior to the eighth century AD and may hence be treated as a new introduction to the crafts sector of the economy. The growing importance of the *ghānaka* in the socio-economic life of early medieval India is further illustrated by glorifying the gifts of oil-presses as meritorious an act as the donation of a tank or a well. An eleventh century AD inscription from Konkan severely denounces a damager of *ghānaka* in the imprecatory verses of the record. In view of the above discussions, it is hardly surprising that oilmen (*tailikas*) would frequently figure in early medieval documents.

The early medieval period is also noted for the much greater and more regular use of metal implements, particularly iron ones. This surely brought in increased utilization of iron for making agricultural tools, including

ploughshares. The expertise of Indian craftsmen is amply borne out by the iron beams in the Gundichabari (the palace of Lord Jagannātha's maternal aunt) in Puri. The ability of the blacksmith to manufacture different varieties of iron in Karnataka, which was also exported to Aden, is proved by letters of Jewish merchants of eleventh and twelfth century AD. The innumerable copper plates of course speaks of the artisans' mastery over the metal. The proficiency of artisans in bronze work is best illustrated by the large number of bronze images, especially from south India. A bronze factory owned by Abraham Yishu, a Jew by birth, was situated in Manjrur (Mangalore) and figured prominently in the twelfth century AD letters of Jewish merchants. The repeated references to the excellence of swords from Aṅga (eastern Bihar) in Arabic accounts would imply that the attention of these foreign authors were drawn towards the swords, quantity or the quality or both.

There is mention of large number of craftsmen and diverse professional groups in early medieval Śrīhaṭṭa (modern Sylhet in Bangladesh) in an inscription of AD 930. They include blacksmith (*karmakara*), leatherworker (*charmmakāra*), brazier (*kāṁsyakāra*), carpenter (*sūtradhāra/rathakāra*), architect (*sthapati*), washerman (*rajaka*), florist or garland maker (*mālākāra*), barber (*nāpita*), astrologer (*gaṇaka*), scribe (*kāyastha*), physician (*vaidya*), servant (*karmmakara*), maid servant (*chetika*), players of various types of drums (*ḍhakkāvādaka, kāhalika, ḍrāgḍika*) and conch-shell blower (*śaṅkhavādaka*). This impressive list of crafts and professions highlights their prevalence in early tenth century Śrīhaṭṭa, where settlement had been created in the seventh and eighth century AD by clearing forest (*araṇya*) and marshy areas (*jalāṭavibhūkhaṇḍa*). Agrarian expansion by issuing landgrants therefore does not stifle the potentials of proliferation of crafts, professions, and contrary to the perceptions of Indian feudalism, provide definite scope for crafts to develop. One cannot lose sight of the fact that the above list of craftsmen and professionals figured in the context of establishing a brahmanical *maṭha* type institution (*brahmapura*), which was said to have been planned (*parikalpya*) by king Śrīchandra (AD 925–75) after whom the establishment was named Chandrapura.

Vijaya Ramaswamy's sustained engagements with researches on textile production in south India have enriched our understanding of this craft. She has examined inscriptions for generating elaborate data on weaving and weavers. Weavers in early medieval south India prominently figure in inscriptions as *saliyar* and *kaikkolar*. What is striking is that these craftsmen combined weaving with professional soldiery. Like many other craftsmen, they too formed guild-like professional organizations, such as *samaya-paṭṭagara, saliya samayaṅgal* and *seniya paṭṭagara*. While the term *seni* is probably the same as Sanskrit *śreṇī* (professional organization), *samaya* is a technical expression denoting a compact or agreement. The

cohesiveness of the weavers' body, one of the key factors in the success of the organization, is writ large in these terms. These weavers, obviously on account of their being resourceful, appear in several inscriptions as donors to temples making gifts of cash, livestock and shares of cloth (produced by them). At a temple in Kāñchīpuram, the Choḷa king Uttamachoḷa deposited money with a particular group of weavers to facilitate the performance of a festival. It is likely that the expenses towards the celebration of the festival would have come from the interest accruing from the principal deposited with the weavers' group. The event speaks of, on one hand, the close linkages of the weavers with both the king and the temple, and on the other, it points to the trust reposed on the professional body by the ruler and the temple as well.

The craftsmen continued to associate with professional organizations like *śreṇī* or *gosṭhī* (generally translated as guilds) under the leadership of a master craftsman (or the headman of a guild) in the early medieval north India. This is evident from the study of both legal literature and epigraphic materials. But some new features associated with craft-wise combinations were gradually emerging from about the tenth century AD. There was a marked fall in the number of perpetual endowments in cash, deposited to guilds, which in earlier times had acted as banks and paid specified interests to the beneficiary. Such perpetual deposits had previously provided crafts-guilds with vital financial resources. The gradual lack of such monetary deposits may be interpreted as an indicator of the less prominent role enjoyed by these professional bodies in early medieval times. It is interesting to note the presence of 20 headmen of oilmen (*tailika mahattaras*), 14 headmen of garland-makers or florists (*mālākāras*) and many leaders of the professional organization for each craft group. The multiplicity of headmen within a particular craft is a sign of the loosening of the compactness and the absence of cohesion among the practitioners of the same craft and profession. This certainly goes against the very spirit of harmony and cooperation, which used to hold together the guild-like groups. The multiplicity of headmen logically implies the existence of competitive tendencies within the same profession. The lessening of monetary deposits to these organizations and the decreasing cohesiveness of *śreṇīs* suggest their gradual fading away as important economic organizations. In this context, one may also note the definite tendency of law-givers to consider occupational *śreṇīs* as *jātis* or castes of inferior social status. This is also echoed by the accounts of Al Biruni, noted for his minute observations of early medieval Indian society. The guilds with their thrust on hereditary and specialized occupation appear to have been more and more oriented towards family organizations. Once this tendency set in with the claim for social exclusivity closely following it, the process of the ossification of guilds into numerous endogamous and hierarchical *jātis* was inevitable.

XVII

Commerce and Media of Exchange

The foregoing discussions on agriculture and crafts and industries may not impress upon us the image of an economy afflicted by crises resulting from the issuance of landgrants and the rise of a closed rural society. This section proposes to take a close look at commercial activities and its place in the non-agricultural sector of the economy.

It is true that landgrants, which provide us with the bulk of information, was concerned with the agrarian sector. But painstaking and insightful studies of the meager and marginal notices on commercial life in copper plates and other inscriptions would acquaint us with different type of merchants and various levels of market places over greater parts of the subcontinent during the six centuries in question. Recent studies of early medieval trade emphasize on the inapplicability of blanket terms like 'merchant' and 'trade centre'. At one end of the wide range of exchange centres stood rural market places, generally called *haṭṭa* or *haṭṭika*. They appear to have closely corresponded to *aḍḍas* in the eastern Deccan and *santhes* in the western and central parts of the Deccan. Despite their difference in names, all these probably shared the common feature of being held on certain day(s) of the week or in other words their periodicity. They probably enjoyed direct links with the rural hinterland, which supplied exchangeable agricultural and crafts products. It must be pointed out that in certain early medieval records, *haṭṭas* appeared as market places within urban areas (the mention of a *haṭṭa* in the *pūrva* or eastern quarter of the urban centre or *pattana* at Siyadoni). The same element of periodicity is also inseparably associated with the fair or *yatra*, which appears to have been held at a specific season or during a particular festival. On the other hand, these must have stood larger market places including ports, capitals and major urban centres.

The early medieval commercial scene witnessed the advent of *maṇḍapikās* (literally, a covered pavilion) in northern and western India. Inscriptions distributed over Kangra, Gwalior, Pehoa, Bharatpur, Jabalpur and with a definite concentration in Gujarat and Rajasthan, eloquently speak of brisk commerce at *maṇḍapikās*, corresponding to modern *mandis* in more or less the same regions. One cannot miss the fact that the epigraphic evidence showing *maṇḍapikās* as active centres of trade belongs to the period from AD 750 to AD 1000, which is projected as a period particularly lacking in trade, according to the concept of Indian feudalism. The brisk trade at *maṇḍapikās* is even better seen in inscriptions after AD 1000, when feudal elements are said to have attained its peak. The range of commodities transacted at *maṇḍapikās* is equally impressive, where staples and luxuries alike were available. A very significant feature is the availability of different type of agricultural products from neighbouring and distant areas at *maṇḍapikās*.

The *mandis* of modern times are also known principally as centres of grain trade. At the early eleventh century AD *maṇḍapikā* at Bilhari near Jabalpur converged betel/areca nut (*pugaphala*), black pepper (*marīcha*) and elephants side-by-side with agrarian items like green vegetables (*śakavārttāku*). The impression that emerges is the role of *maṇḍapikā* as a linkage between the rural exchange network and trade in urban areas. In fact, some of the *maṇḍapikās* became important and distinctive enough to be called *mahā-maṇḍapikās* (indicating their impressive size) and *pattanamaṇḍapikās* (i.e. with urban dimension or located in an urban space). No less important is the fact that several records, especially from Rajasthan and Gujarat, inform us of cess/duty imposed by political authorities and also voluntarily by mercantile groups (in the latter case, collected levies were bestowed in favour of a deity or a religious establishment) at *maṇḍapikās*. This resulted in the marking of some of the existing *maṇḍapikās* as *śulkamaṇḍapikās*, i.e. *maṇḍapikās* where tolls and customs (*śulka*) could be collected. Under such circumstances, there would be a strong likelihood of recognizing the significance of *maṇḍapikās* by administrative authorities. This is indicated not only by the presence of important officials during prominent socio-cultural events at *maṇḍapikās*, but also by the reference to the creation of an administrative department concerning *maṇḍapikās* (*maṇḍapikākāraṇa*) in the *Lekhapaddhati*.

Both epigraphic and literary data indicate the advent of a new type of market centre in the Decan, viz., *peṇṭhā*, variously called *peṇṭhāsthāna*, *piṇṭhā*, *peṁṭa*, etc. The *peṇṭhā* (probably a hyper-Sanskritised form of *petha*), according to the *Yaśastilakachampu* by Somadevasuri, was divided into many well-laid out chambers (*vibhaktānekāpavarakārachanāśalinī*); it had also large storage areas for merchandise (*mahābhāṇḍavāhinī*) and was provided with drinking places (*prapā*), feeding house (*sattra*), assembly hall with seats (*sabhāsanātha*) and streets or shop (*vīthī*). Merchants from different areas flocked here (*nānādiśopasarpanayujāṁ vaṇijām*). Covering an area of a couple of miles (*gorutpramāṇā*), the *peṇṭhā* was marked by *ditches* (*kulyaḥ*), rampart (*vapra*), fortification (*prākāra*) and a moat (*parikhā*). The text highlights the impressive size of the *peṇṭhā*, where excellent items were stored in boxes, which were watched over by adequate number of guards (*bhāṇḍandārambhodbhaṭabharīra-peṭakapaksharakshasāram*). The most important point here is its commercial character; the *peṇṭhā* is described as a *puṭabhedinī*, a technical expression denoting a place where boxes of merchandise were unsealed. It would therefore refer to a stockade with warehousing facility. Spaces in the *peṇṭhā* were let out to merchants for storage, display and sale of their commodities against the payment of tolls, shares and rent at a moderate rate (*prasāntasulkabhāgahāravyavahāramachikarat*).

Somadevasuri, who also wrote a treatise on polity—*Nītivākyāmṛita*—speaks of *piṇṭhā*, obviously the same as *peṇṭhā*, as a centre of trade which was also toll-collecting centre (*śulkasthāna*). The *peṇṭhā/piṇṭhā* as a centre of trade closely corresponds to modern *peth* in Mahārashtra, Karnataka

and Andhra Pradesh. In fact, the term *peṭh* as a locality-level administrative centre figures in a sixth century AD inscription from Bundelkhand and in a seventh century AD inscription from Satara distinct, Mahārashtra. The *peṭha/peṇṭhā/piṇṭhā* seems to have been a trade centre larger than an *aḍḍa* (*haṭṭa or* rural-level market places) and *santhe* (weekly fair), but smaller than a sizeable urban centre (*pura/pattana*). The *peṇṭhā* continued to exist as a middle category centre of trade in the Deccan in subsequent centuries (thirteenth–eighteenth centuries AD). Like the *maṇḍapikās* in north India, the *peṇṭhā* (*peṭh*) in the Deccan was in a position to reach out both to rural hinterlands and large urban market areas.

That the early medieval *nagaram* in the Tamil area had a distinct commercial character, has been well-recognized. The study of as many as thirty-three *nagarams* in the Chola territories by Hall tends to suggest their close association with *nāḍus* or locality-level centres. Though Hall's conclusion that each *nāḍu* (with a number of villages under them) uniformly had a *nagaram* has been questioned by Chattopadhyaya, the inter-*nāḍu* and intra-*nāḍu* contacts of the *nagaram* have been more or less agreed upon. The close interaction between the *nagaram* as a locality-level mercantile centre and the *nanadesi* commercial body has also been impressed upon on the basis of the Chola inscriptions. Early medieval India, thus, witnessed three types of middle-tier commercial centres—*maṇḍapikā, peṇṭhā* and *nagaram*—rooted to their respective regions, the like of whjch had not been seen before. That they shared the common characteristics of providing linkages between the rural and urban market places cannot be overlooked.

The active presence of merchants of various types, including the *vaidehaka* (petty trader), *banjara* (hawker or pedlar), *sārthavāha* (caravan merchant), *sreshṭhin* (very rich merchant, often as an investor), *vaḍḍu-vyavahārī* (the senior merchant), and *nauvittaka* (ship-owning merchant, equivalent and synonymous with the *nakhuda* in Persian and Arabic sources) can hardly be missed in the light of early medieval inscriptions and literary texts (particularly the voluminous Jaina literature). Recent economic historiography shows the awareness of not treating merchants as a blanket type, but of the possibility of arranging them in an order of primacy. The importance of the extensive network of two south Indian commercial organizations, viz., the 500 *svāmīs* of Ayyavole (Aihole) and the Maṇigrāmam (derived from the term *vaṇiggrāma*) has also been effectively driven home by the researches of Appadurai, Abraham, Karashima and Subbarayalu. There are also interesting epigraphic data on the significant linkages of these bodies with the ruling group and also on their presence in Sri Lanka, lower Burma and maritime South-East Asia from the ninth to the twelfth–thirteenth centuries AD.

It is rather strange that the perception of Indian feudalism have taken relatively few notice of the consistent and profuse information on the remarkable expansion of the Indian Ocean trade from around the eighth

century AD, in which India's role and involvement can hardly be minimized. There are insurmountable difficulties to reconcile and account for the assumed decline in the volume of India's long-distance trade precisely at a time of the obvious growth in the Indian Ocean trade. The rise of Islam, with its distinct thrust on commerce and urbanity, undoubtedly provided a very major fillip to long-distance trade, particularly across the Indian Ocean, as Hourani and Chaudhuri stated.

The sea-borne Asian trade had well-known termini in the west and east, represented respectively by Siraf and Basra under the Seldjuk and Abbasid rule and al Fustat (old Cairo) under the Fatimid Caliphate (since AD 965) on the one hand, and the harbours of China on the other. The movement of ship in this expansive meritime space was largely and favourably controlled by the more or less predictable alterations of the monsoon wind. As the round trip between the western and the eastern termini of the Indian Ocean trade was virtually impossible under these circumstances in a single voyage, harbours on both the sea-boards of India reaped conspicuous advantage out of this 'segmented voyage' (K.N. Chaudhuri) as inevitable stopovers, transshipment points, besides participating in the exports and imports from the subcontinent. The western sea-board, having greater indentations, was naturally suitable to the growth of estuarine ports. There were a string of ports of outstanding importance on the west coast, starting from Debal in the Indus delta to the harbours on the Gujarat littorals like Somnath, Stambhaka (Khambaya/Kanbaya or combay), Sthānaka (Thana), Saṁyaṇa (Sindan of the Arabic texts or Sanjan), Śūrpāraka (Subara in Arabic geographical texts or Sopara), Chemūliya, called Saimur by the Arabs (Chaul to the south of Bombay), Chandrapura or Sindabur near Goa on the Konkan littorals and finally, the ports in Malabar, for example, Maṁgalapura or Manjrur (Mangalore), Fandarina or Pantalayani and Kulam mali or Quilon. Epigraphic evidence of unimpeachable nature throw light on the regular settlements of Sirafi, Baghdadi, Omani and Hormuzi merchants on the western coast. Sanskritization of Arabic names of these merchants corroborates their intimacy with the Indian situation. Jewish merchants were also present in Malabar in the early eleventh century AD. These merchants, labelled as 'India traders' by Goitein were involved in the brisk trade network with Aden and al Fustat.

The eastern littoral was naturally oriented towards movements of men and traffic in the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean, which was further linked up with the Java and the China Seas. The Coromandel coast thrived on Māmallapuram of the Pallava times and Nāgapaṭṭinam during the Chola rule as premier ports for overseas commerce. In the Andhra-Kaliṁga coast was situated Viśākhapaṭṭinam, known at least since AD 1068, which offers the unique example of being renamed after Kulottuṁga I as Kulottuṁgacholapaṭ-tinam. The sustained Chola interests in the long-distance seaborne trade is particularly evident from the three embassies sent by the Cholas to the Sung

emperors in China (AD 1014, AD 1033 and AD 1079). The close ties between the Chola realm and Śrīvijaya (Palembang) in South-East Asia are shown by the cultural patronage Of the Śrīvijaya king to a Buddhist monastery at Nagapaṭṭinam; such cultural interests appear to have been strongly backed by material gains from maritime trade. The likelihood of such an interpretation lies in the well-documented role of Śrīvijaya as an intermediary between south India and China. Recent researches by Karashima and Subbarayalu in the Chola attitude towards economic activities and particularly to mercantile groups would go to show the awareness of the Cholas of the importance of commerce. This, in its turn, would suggest that the Cholas undertook the maritime expeditions to South-east Asia not for short-term plunder motive, but with a long-range view of minimizing the role of Śrīvijaya as the intermediary between the Cholas and Sung China. Tansen Sen's analysis of the Sung sources demonstrates that the Chola rulers involved prominent Muslim Arab merchants in course of as many as three Chola missions to the Sung court in AD 1014, AD 1033 and AD 1070. It was this appreciation of the importance of trade on a long-term basis that prompted Kulottuṅga I to abolish tolls and customs (cf. his title *Śuṅganadavirttachola*), at a time when he consciously enhanced the status of the port of Viśākhapaṭṭānam.

The Bengal coast during the sixth and the seventh century AD was particularly famous for the port of Tamralipata, which seems to have decayed around eighth century AD. The adverse economic effect of Tamralipata was however, offset by the rise of another port of considerable importance to the east of the Meghna. This port generally called Samandar by Arab writers and Sudkawan by Ibn Battuta has been located near present Chittagong in Bangladesh. The Arab chronicles furnish evidence of the maritime voyages from Samandar to Uranshin (Orissa), Kanja (Kāñchīpuram) and Serendib or Silandib (Sri Lanka). The cultural linkages of eastern and southern India with both mainland and maritime South-East Asia could indirectly point to the commercial contracts among these areas.

India seems to have exported textiles of diverse type, aloe wood, teak (for shipbuilding), coconut coir, grains including rice, iron of various types (known from letters of Jewish merchants), spices both indigenous and those brought from South-East Asia. The list of imported items is dimly known; silk, wine, tin, precious metal like silver, gold and different spices appear to have been imported to India. Talking of expensive import items, attention must be paid to war horses, always a rarity in India and ,therefore, it was invariably imported. The major area of the supply of horses to India had been up to AD 600 the Central Asian steppes wherefrom, horses were sent overland to the northwestern borderlands. Nomadic depredations after AD 600 led to the increasing preference for sea-trade in horses to the previous overland transactions. The proliferation of regional powers and their protracted military designs appears to have caused a manifold increase in the demand for the best quality war horses from Arabia, Fers (Persia) and

Sham (Syria), which fetched enormous prices and were generally called *bahri* (sea-borne) horses. Marco Polo, providing insights into the overseas import of horses to India, accused the ruler at Tana (Thana in the Konkan coast) of conniving with local pirates for illegally procuring war horses from ships. Early medieval Bengal too become noted for trade in horses. The Pāla inscriptions from the eighth to twelfth century AD repeatedly describe the supply of the best quality horses from the northern quarters (Uttarāpatha). Bengal during the Sena rule seems to have received supply of horses from the mountainous north-eastern parts. Minhajuddin in his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* (thirteenth century AD) clearly mentions Lakhnauti (in north Bengal) and Nudia (in West Bengal) as two important horse-trading centres, many of which were brought by Arab merchants.

This rapid survey of inland and sea-borne trade during the early middle ages clearly conveys a message contrary to the perception of a languishing trade, which is viewed as a major ingredient of the feudal formation in India. There was neither any dearth of trade within the subcontinent nor any decay of India's role in the maritime commerce of the Indian Ocean. In fact, many of the facets in the Indian Ocean network of this period reached their fruition during the post-1300 days. It should be emphasized that the historiography of early medieval trade in India has often put an undue thrust on the transactions in high-value, small quantity, portable luxury items. Without negating the financial advantages arising out of trade in luxuries, it needs to be stressed that there is a growing body of evidence in favour of the more sustained and important, although less spectacular, trade in daily necessities. The early medieval period noted for remarkable expansion of agriculture which was closely associated with dealings in agricultural products, including grains—a feature that would gain greater visibility from the fourteenth century AD onwards. The marked tendency to confine the study of trade history to India's participation (or lack of it) in long-distance foreign trade requires rethinking and revision in the future economic historiography of early medieval India.

The problematic of the medium of exchange in this period has to be addressed at this juncture. The formulation of Indian feudalism has a major underpinning on the virtual absence of gold (and also silver) coins which, under worsening trade situations, were said to have made the way for cowry shells as the principal medium of exchange that was suitable merely for petty trade at local-level. There are grounds to accept the wide use of cowry shells (*kaparadaka*) and the lesser number of coins in precious metals minted by political powers in the period between AD 600 and AD 1000. One cannot, however, turn a blind eye to the specific information from early medieval Arab chronicles that cowry shells were in fact itself an item of long-distance maritime trade, being shipped from Maldives to Bengal. Bengal has been particularly marked for its dependence on cowry shells and hence cited as a typical area suffering from dwindling trade and endowed with other features

Plate 7.1: Gold coin of Kalachuri Gangeyadeva with the figure of seated Lakshmī (obv.)

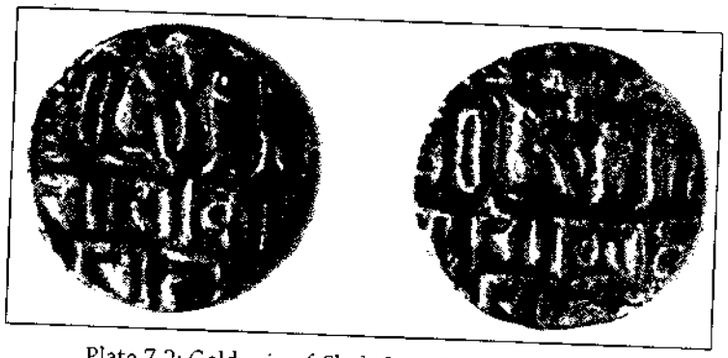


Plate 7.2: Gold coin of Chola King Rajendrachola

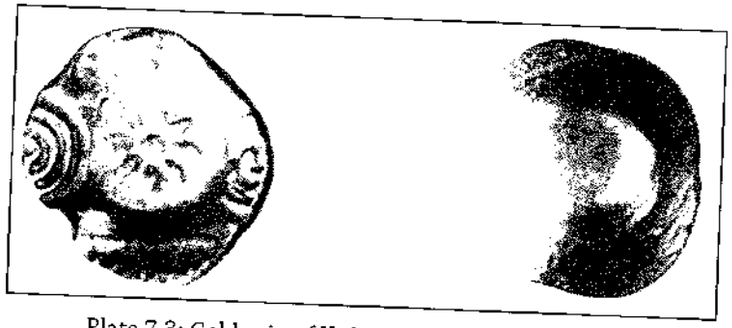


Plate 7.3: Gold coin of Yadava king Ramachandra

of feudal socio-political formation. The availability of cowry shells in an area like Bengal cannot staightway speak of a slump in trade, since Bengal exported rice to Maldives in exchange of cowry shells. Cowry shells (like trade in grains and rice) have alternatively been perceived as performing the role of ballast and small exchanges in the Indian Ocean maritime trade.

On the other hand, the south-easternmost parts of early medieval Bengal (Harikela and Paṭṭikera for example), as B.N. Mukherjee shows, were thoroughly acquainted with high quality silver currency of 57.6 grains (i.e. struck on the well-known metallic standard of *kārshāpaṇa, purāṇa* and *dramma*), marked by their uninterrupted minting and circulation from the seventh to thirteenth century AD. The same area has yielded Abbasid gold coin too. The above numismatic evidence has strongly challenged the suggested absence of metallic currency of precious metal in Bengal and by extension, in north India. B.N. Mukherjee has further pointed to the changes in the metrology, shape and execution of the Harikela coinage from ninth century AD onwards that complies with the reformed Arabic currency of the same time. This numismatic evidence sets at naught the proposed incompatibility between money-based economy and landgrant economy, both of which are reported from Bengal. Traditional arithmetic tables from Bengal indicates the exchangeability between a silver coin and cowry shells at the ratio of 1:1280. This further highlights the role of cowry shells as small exchange in realms without having a metallic currency of its own.

The minting of coins as a prerogative of the state power began in India with the Bactrian Greeks, followed continuously thereafter up to seventh century AD. The apparent lack of dynastic coinage in India from seventh to the end of the tenth century AD has been sought to be explained in terms of changed political attitude to coinage, which was not regarded as an expression of sovereignty till the foundation of the Sultanate. In the fresh assessment of numismatic evidence, the numerous occurrences of coin-terms in inscriptions even in areas without dynastic coinages cannot be brushed aside. Twelfth century AD inscriptions from Bengal and Orissa mention such a term, *chūrṇṇi*, in association with *kaparadaka* and *purāṇa*, in the context of assessment of the annual revenue in cash (*sāṁvatsarika hiraṇya*, abbreviated in the record as *sāṁhi*) from a village. The term stands for something powdered to dust or tiny pieces. Its mention along with other media of exchange may indicate that it too was a medium of exchange in gold or silver dust, equivalent to the prescribed weight standards of gold and silver coins. The disadvantages of dealing in coins of uncertain metallic purity and weight standard and/or transporting a huge number of cowry shells as a substitute to the metallic coin could be effectively minimized or countered by the alternative use of easily portable dust of precious metal of the same weight and value of the said coin. Mukherjee therefore argues for the use of a dust currency, located between the cowry shell—the basic medium of exchange—and a coin of precious metal. The possibilities of a complex three-tier currency system in eastern India have been extended to the overall north Indian situation on the basis of the Arabic accounts that report the use of gold dust in the kingdom of Juzr (i.e. the Gurjara-Pratihāra realm). To this must be added the recent in-depth enquiry into the various north India coin hoards belonging to the early medieval times. Deyell

demonstrates the fragility of the interpretative model of feudal economy; he also questions the ideas of the monetary anaemia, of a slump in trade and of self-sufficient closed village societies.

XVIII

The Urban Scenario: 'Third Urbanization'

The early medieval age in the historiography of Indian feudalism is said to have ushered in widespread decay of urban centres. Urban contraction, the logic and evidence of which have been presented in the preceding section, was apparently caused by rural expansion. The decay of urban centres is suggested to have resulted in ruralization. Thus the expansion of the rural economy appears as the cause and effect of de-urbanization. The key to this critical situation is located in the practice of granting lands favouring agrarian spread and growth. This brought an end to the second urbanization in Indian history. Marxist historiography, however, attaches greatest importance to the improved use of iron technology and agricultural development generating the vital agrarian surplus as the key factor for the rise of cities belonging to second urbanization in India (600 BC-AD 300). But the same genre of historical writings portray agrarian expansion of the early medieval period as the principal agent behind the disappearance of cities on a pan-Indian scale from AD 300-AD 1000. The decay of urban centres in the AD 600-AD 1000 phase is explained as an impact of the languishing long-distance trade. We have already pointed out that agrarian development and not trade—especially long-distance trade—is considered to be the principal factor in the burgeoning of urban centres in early historical times. Therefore, how can the assumed absence of trade be seen as a major causative factor in a nearly pan-Indian urban decay?

Such inconsistencies and contradictions have urged historians to re-examine the available evidence from literary, epigraphic and field archaeological materials. Since the numbers of early medieval archaeological sites are admittedly few, the field archaeological information is meager. While several leading urban sites show unmistakable archaeological proof of their downward slide, some other sites provided no signs of desertion. Excavations at Chirand, Vārāṇasī, Ahichhatra, Purana Quila in the Ganga valley and Ahar and Ujjayinī in Malwa point towards continuous and uninterrupted occupation during AD 700-AD 1200. Intelligent utilization of epigraphic materials establishes urban features of some new settlements (not known before AD 600) in north India even in pre-1000 period. Chattopadhyaya's analysis shows that the early medieval urban centre at Pṛithūdaka (Pehoa in Haryana) derived its material strength as a centre of horse trade (*ghoṭakayātrā*). The management of the urban space at Tattānandapura (Bulandshahar), labelled as a *purapattana* in epigraphic records of AD 867-907, is proved by the existence of *bṛihadrathyā* (high street), *kurathyā* (small road), *haṭṭamārga* (road leading to the market place), *pūrvahaṭṭapradeśa* (a market place in the eastern quarter of the urban area), *gṛiha* (residential house), *avasanika* (ordinary dwelling) and *aparasaraka* (house with balcony). Siyaduni, also labelled as a *pattana* where a *māṇḍapikā* stood, was another urban centre of prominence, marked by trade in essentials. It also served as a religio-cultural centre. The early medieval town of Gopādri (Gwalior) was known as a *koṭṭa*. The said suffix indicates the importance of the urban area as an administrative-cum-military headquarters. That certain areas in an overall rural context could sometimes assume features of a town is occasionally available in our sources. The presence of a *haṭṭika* (small rural market place) attached to Dhṛitipura (the suffix *pura* indicative of its urban nature) in early medieval Vanga under the Chandra kings is a case in point. Chattopadhyaya draws our attention to Naḍḍula (Nadole) in Rajasthan. Naḍḍula was one of the *grāmas* or villages among 12 such areas (*dvādaśgrāmīya Naḍḍulagrāma*). The central location of Naḍḍula viś-a-viś other rural centers turned it into a point of convergence for movements among the twelve villages. This resulted in the subsequent transformation of the rural settlement into a trade centre with a *māṇḍapikā*. There is a distinct likelihood that the *māṇḍapikā* at Naḍḍula derived its importance from its being a nodal point for the neighbouring rural surroundings and therefore it participated in the transactions of agricultural products. Naḍḍula eventually became an urban centre (*nāgara*). The significance of such a centre of trade at a nodal point did not escape the attention of the Chahamānas, the local political power, who made it their political citadel. That Veṇugrāma (Belgam) in Karnataka too emerged as an eminent point of convergence of merchants of various types and hailing from both neighbouring and distant areas with an impressive range of products—staples and luxuries—is recorded in an early thirteenth century inscription. There are clear proofs of Venugrāma combining features of a commercial and a religious centre.

In the far south the spurt of urban centres since ninth century coincides with the growing appeal of Vaishṇava and Śaiva sectarian devotional (bhakti) cults, the construction of monumental temples around sacred centres associated with these devotional cults and the increasing political power of the Choḷas. These temples usually dominated the urban landscape. The cases in point are Thanjavur, the capital of the Choḷas, and Gaṅgaikoṇḍa-choḷapuram, founded by Rājendra. Though Thanjavur had already existed prior to the rise of the Choḷas, its heydays began with the accession of Rājarāja I in late tenth century. According to Champākalakshmī, at the very centre of Thanjuvur stood the monumental temple, Bṛihadiśvara. Around the temple was located the quarter for the political and priestly classes, forming the uppermost crust of the elites and thus occupying the urban space closest to the shrine. After this came the residential area housing various urbane groups, including the residence of merchants. There were

also four markets (*aṇgāḍis*). Around the city lived farmers, herdsmen and artisans. The requirements of the temple rituals and services generated demands, and therefore transactional functions in milk, flowers, betel nuts and areaca nuts.

Thanks to the studies by Champākalakshmī, once again, one now is aware of the twin cities of the Choḷas: Kuḍāmukku-Pāliyārai, situated in the most fertile tracts in the Kaveri delta, the core area of the Choḷas. While Pāliyārai was the site of the palace, Kuḍāmukku functioned as the sacred centre having a number of temples. The twin cities were located on an important trade route and noted for its transactions in two bulk items, areca nuts and betel nuts. There was also a concentration of metal workers in the area. The rise of Kuḍāmukku-Pāliyārai, the twin cities of the Choḷas, to prominence has been attributed, according to Champākalakshmī, to:

1. its access to and linkages with the hinterland for the supply of local agrarian products
2. the importation of luxury items for the consumption of the elite groups
3. its role as a religious centre leading to temple establishments

It may, therefore, be reasonably argued that notwithstanding the decay of a number of prominent towns in India, especially in the Ganga valley, during AD 300-900, a general urban decay did not engulf the subcontinent as a whole. The diagnosis of urban anaemia leading to ruralization and peasantization may not serve as an all purpose key. Urban developments in early historical and early medieval times were not primarily conditioned by external trade. So the decline or otherwise of long-distance trade cannot be taken as the principal determinant of urban development and decay in Indian conditions. The greater the convergence of economic, political and cultural (including religious) activities at an urban centre, more eminent would be its position than cities with a predominantly single functional role. Urban centers of early medieval times, however, are seen not merely as a counterpoint to the feudal social formations, but also as possessing distinctiveness from cities belonging to the early historical phase. The second urbanization in Indian history (*c.* 600 BC-AD 300) had its epicentre in the Ganga valley (or more precisely in the middle Ganga valley) which acted as a platform for the development of secondary urban centers. In the early medieval period Chattopadhyaya does not find any such epicentre generating urban impulses to disparate regions. Urban centers from AD 600 onwards, on the other hand, appear to have been strongly oriented to their local roots and therefore may be judged in terms of their respective local developments and local formations. Such local formations were largely helped by agrarian expansion, generating resources for local or supra-local ruling groups. The mobilization of resources and the urge to procure exotic and luxury items by rulers would encourage movements of products, both

within the region and also beyond it. The growing popularity of sectarian bhakti cults was often expressed in the brisk temple-building activities and/or patronage to *maṭha* complexes. Both the temple and the *maṭha* are found to have provided excellent meeting grounds for ruling groups and mercantile communities. The combinations of these formations helped the emergence and development of early medieval urban centres which by their distinctiveness are situated by Chattopadhyaya in the third phase of urbanization in Indian history.

XIX

An Overview of the Early Medieval Society

Proliferation of Jātis

The two previous sections tried to appreciate the changing nature of the polity and economy in the subcontinent during the early medieval times. Politics and economic pursuits cannot be divorced from the social milieu. The following pages seek to present an overview of various social groups and the interrelation among them and some salient aspects of social life during AD 600–1200. The purpose of this exercise is to examine the distinctive features of social life in early medieval India; in other words, the intention is to judge the extent and manner in which early medieval society differed from the situation prior to AD 600. The futility of looking at pre-modern Indian society purely from the normative sastric view has been driven home in previous discussions and needs to be emphasized here once more. The regular and numerous variances from the sastric norms—cited with the help of creative literature, impressions of non-indigenous authors and epigraphic materials—and their gradual accommodation in the ways of life in disparate regions of the subcontinent cannot be lost sight of.

The impracticability of understanding early Indian society from a static and sastric point of view, rooted in the idea of perceiving the Vedic tradition as the fountainhead of all social norms in India, is clearly seen in the Puranic descriptions of the *Kali* age. The *Kali* age is uniformly regarded as the worst and the darkest of all the time cycles in the sacred texts because of the fall and disuse of many practices and traditions sanctioned by the Vedas. This led to the overwhelming influence of the epico-Puranic literature, replacing in many cases the authority of the Vedic tradition. The regulations in the *Smṛiti* or the *Dharmaśāstra* literature, steeped in Vedic tradition, are seen in many normative texts of the early middle ages as inapplicable and not intellible as they stopped meaning what they had originally stood for. The voluminous and celebrated commentaries on major *Smṛiti* texts and the impressive *Mīmāṁsā* (digest) texts offer fresh interpretations, modifications and occasionally substitutions of the sastric dicta in the light of the changing

situations in the early medieval times. Interpreting the *Smṛiti* laws by commentators and digest-makers is a clear pointer to their appreciation of the altering social milieu which did not operate merely on static sastric code. The tendency to provide fresh interpretations of old standpoints is seen as early as the seventh and eighth centuries AD when Māskarin composed his commentary on the *Gautama Dharmasūtra*. This is closely followed by Bhavasvāmīn's commentary on *Nāradīyamanusaṁhitā* and Bhāruchi's (also known as *Ṛiju Vimala*) *Vivaraṇa* on Manu. The unmistakable common point shared by these authors is that the formal sources of the *Dharmaśāstras* they were interpreting were not in fact the most important sources. The point has been followed up and elaborated in a more systematic way in Viśvarūpa's *Bālakṛidā* on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛiti*, the commentary by Medhātithi on *Manusmṛiti*, the *Dāyabhāga* of Jimūtavāhana and the *Mitāksharā* of Vijāñaneśvara on the *Yājñavalkyasmṛiti*. Thus, in the apparently invariant world of the normative codes of the treatises was recognized and allowed the scope of departures, deviations and hence changes from the precepts and established customs. The possibilities of social change and their interplay with the elements of continuity will be judged here particularly in terms of the *vama-jāti* structure and the position of women in early medieval times.

XX

Var_na-Jāti

Normative texts show that the notion of the society being divided into four *varṇas* continued in the perception of early medieval theorists. In spite of their clinging to the idea of the prevalence of only four social groups, it would be extremely difficult to subscribe to such a water-tight, inflexible and stereotypical sastric view. Our previous discussion have demonstrated the limitations of the appreciation of pre-modern Indian society merely in terms of the four *varṇas*. The *varṇas* were far outnumbered by ever proliferating *jātis*. The problems of understanding the social organization of early medieval times from the points of view of the unchanging *four-varṇa* model have been sometimes recognized by the then theorists themselves, tacitly or explicitly. This is seen in the attempt at presenting an image of the society divided into only two tiers: the *dvija* (literally twice-born, but actually denoting the brāhmaṇa) and *advija* (literally the non-twice born, but actually meaning the śūdra). This view at least theoretically omits the existence of the kshatriya and the vaiśya as significant social groups. Such a situation is particularly noticeable in early medieval Bengal and Tamil-speaking areas. The law givers of early medieval times were clearly aware of the rise in the number of *jātis*, a social phenomenon explained by them in terms of innumerable matrimonial combinations and permutations within the over-arching four-fold *varṇa* order. The *jāti* or more precisely *miśrajātis*,

according to the latest stratum of the Vedic literature, numbered eight in addition to the four *varṇas*. In the *Manusaṁhitā* the number had already shot up to 60. The *Vaijayantī* of the early medieval times enumerated sixty-four *jātis* (a figure also appearing in the famous Kashmiri chronicle, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*) with the following break up: the primeval 4 *varṇas* + 12 types of offspring of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages + 48 offshoots arising out of further combinations. The significant point here is the incorporation of the four *varṇas* into—and hence their identification with—the *jāti*.

The early *Dharmaśāstras* and occasionally the early Buddhist texts would describe the *brāhmaṇa* both as a *varṇa* and *jāti*. But the encapsulation of the fourfold *varṇa* division in the *jāti* structure impresses upon us the importance of the *jāti* system and not of the four *varṇa* model for understanding the nature of the early medieval society. The *Bṛihaddharmapurāṇa*, assignable to the early medieval times and associated with the situation in Bengal, speaks of thirty-six *jātis* of *advija* status. However, the number *oi jātis* is actually 41 in the text itself with 20 high (*uttamasaṁkara*) +12 intermediate (*madhyamasaṁkara*) + 9 low (*adhamasaṁkara*) groups. Outside and above these *advija jātis* stood various types of brāhmaṇas, further subdivided into various *gotras*. The number thirty-six is of course a traditional/stereotyped figure in early medieval Bengal; this is further supported by the name of a village as *Bṛihachchhattivannā* (i.e. where resided thirty-six major social groups) in an early medieval copper plate. Attention may be drawn to the description of the said thirty-six groups as *varṇas*, and this may account for the frequent interchangeability of the two terms, which had earlier stood for distinguishable social categories. The *Brahmavaivarttapurāṇa*, dated to fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, contain a list of one hundred *jātis* in medieval Bengal, highlighting thereby the rapid numerical increase of *jātis*. The Tamil areas in the far South is featured by the well-known *Valngai* 98 and *Idangai* 98 which have been seen not merely *jātis*, but as super caste organizations with their respective corporate badges and privileges and empowered with imposing sanctions on those flouting their pretensions. Romila Thapar rightly pointed out that the four *varṇa* model was at the most a theoretical or ideal one, while in the *jāti* one finds the functional category. That the sharp rise in the number of *jātis* in the early medieval times is to be appreciated in terms of the spread of sedentary settlements and brahmaniçal *varṇa* model in the erstwhile simpler lineage societies, of the crystallization of occupational groups into endogamous *jātis* and of the gradual absorption of the non-indigenous people into the Indian society has already been dealt with and need not be repeated here. The law-books and sacred texts did not present a uniform code. This should not be seen as a scenario for a society in decadences and degeneration. On the other hand, it speaks of enough scope of regional variations, relevant to respective local-level formations. The image of a changing society, responsive to the, then alterations in political, economic and cultural spheres, thus gains ground

and questions the representation of a static and stagnant society on the threshold of the 'medieval gloom'.

XXI

The most exalted position in the hierarchical *jāti-varṇa* society was of course enjoyed by the brāhmaṇa. In addition to his highest ritual status in the society, the brāhmaṇa as a lliterate person interpreting the Vedic, epico-Puranic and various sectarian bhakti textual traditions was naturally in a pre-eminent and advantageous position viś-a-viś the lower *jātis* whose number steadily proliferated. The immense importance of the brāhmaṇa as a priest can hardly be missed in the early medieval times witnessing greater importance of *pūjās* or worship of both extravagant and ordinary kinds than the previous Vedic sacrifices and of the unprecedented popularity of the performance of *vratas* and *prāyaśchittas*. This was definitely related to the growing use of astrology in political circles and by ordinary people alike; the dependence on the astrologer would certainly be encouraged by brāhmaṇas as it immensely benefited the priestly community. The brāhmaṇa regularly received perpetual endowments of revenue-free landed property from the ruling group (the brāhmaṇa as a major landholding community has been discussed above) and other material advantages in the form of *dakshiṇā* and *dāna* by people from all walks of life.

The spread of the state society and the rapid rise in the number of regional polities in early medieval India (see above) often necessitated the legitimation of the ruler or his ruling lineage, not always enjoying pedigree. This purpose was served by the priestly community by officiating over elaborate and lavish ritualistic *pūjās*, by championing the cause of a specific sectarian bhakti cult as a state cult and by inventing a prestigious lineage of the political master who was consequently linked up with a chain of ancestors reaching back to hoary antiquity. This may explain the stupendous importance of the position of *rājagurus* wielding enormous spiritual and temporal authority. Less powerful than the *rājagurus*, but still exerting immense influence in the socio-cultural life were the chiefs (*maṭhadhipatis*) of large brahmanical complexes where converged rulers and other prominent interest groups. In the third category may be placed the *sthānapatis* or the managers of temples which, beside obviously being sacred centres, maintained close linkages with secular activities of the community as a whole. The *maṭhas* and temples must have had a fair share of brāhmaṇas acting as specialists in various sciences and branches of education. One cannot of course overlook the large number of *agrahārins* (recipent of *agrahāras*). The usual descriptions of the brāhmaṇas hailing from Madhyadeśa (the perceived cradle land of brahmanical culture in the Ganga valley), repeatedly claiming their pedigree in accordance to their affiliations to a particular Vedic *saṁhitā* and migrating to disparate

areas, near and distant alike, are numerous enough to suggest the mobility of these people.

It would be difficult to present an image of an undifferentiated brāhmaṇa community. The increase in the number of brāhmaṇa *gotras, pravaras, vaṁaśas, pakshas, anvayas, gaṇas, gāmīs*, etc., refers to their distinctiveness according to their lineages, regions and Vedic affiliations. Initially the number of *gotras* ranged between four and eight in the *Aṣṭadhyāyī* of Pāṇini; by fourteenth century AD the number of *gotras* had risen to 500. No less than 200 *gotra* names are encountered in inscriptions alone, which took meticulous care to highlight the purity and pedigree of brāhmaṇas as recipients of landgrants. Nandi draws our attention to the Boya brāhmaṇas in the Deccan. The Boyas were a prominent non-Brahmanical community in the Nellore-Guntur region and identified with the Bedars of Kanarese origin. The Boyas emerged into prominence as a local power in the early medieval Deccan. This seems to have resulted in the greater importance of the non-brahmnical Boya priest, who is subsequently recognized at par with the Vedic priests. This might not have been an isolated or exceptional case. The rise of many local and supra-local monarchical powers in areas not associated previously with features of the state society could have transformed non-brahmanical priestly communities into brāhmaṇa priests with engineered *gotra* names and attending lineages.

It is in this light that certain special rights and prerogatives of the brāhmaṇa, appearing in the Purāṇas and law-books, may be taken up. The *Matsya Purāṇa*, for instance, exempts a brāhmaṇa from capital punishment. Medhātithi's commentary on Manu takes a step further in exempting an *ātatāyī* (desperado) brāhmaṇa from capital punishment and also by ruling out any scope of even imposing monetary fines on him. The *Skandapurāṇa* urges to endow the brāhmaṇa with gifts without enquiring into his qualifications. The position of the law-givers and other sacred texts is expectedly beset with contradictions. Vijñāneśvara's famous commentary on Yajñavalkya lays down that the special six-fold immunity for the brāhmaṇa would apply only to the most learned brāhmaṇas. The same authority does not uphold any special exemption of brāhmaṇas from punishments and he justifies the murder of an *ātatāyī* brāhmaṇa if the attacked person had no other options to save himself. The typical injunction of ever maintaining a careful distance—physical and cultural—from the *śūdra* is contradicted, compromised and diluted elsewhere by allowing the brāhmaṇa's food to be cooked by the śūdra during calamity or distress.

The sastric perception of a qualified and ideal brāhmaṇa sometimes finds a close resemblance with the portrayal of brāhmaṇas in inscriptions. An early medieval record from Karnataka hails the brāhmaṇa who practices *yāma* (restraint), *niyama* (observance), *svādhyāya* (Vedic study), *dhyāna* (meditation), *dhāraṇa* (concentration), *mauna* (silence), *anushṭhāna* (orthodox

rituls), *japa* (muttered prayers), *samādhi* (yogic trance) and *śīla* (conduct). A complete contrast to this image is also available in another inscription. This record of AD 1164 from the Gāhaḍhavāla kingdom in north India gives a vivid account of the greedy (*lampaṭa*) brāhmaṇas, who by bribing (*utkochaṁdattvā*) a royal officer, managed to obtain an illegal copper plate (*kutāmra*). The ruler, when he came to know of this fraud, punished the culprit officer, abrogated the grant and declared that these brāhmaṇas did not enjoy any grant of the land. It is also surprising to note the imposition of the death-duty by a Chola king upon the estates of a *brāhmaṇa*. The legal literature invariably views the brāhmaṇa's property as the 'poison of poisons', which under no circumstances, could be passed on to the king's hand. This is to drive home the point that the situation was far more complex and fluid than idealized in brahmanical legal literature and sacred texts that laid down rules from a particular point of view.

There are several instances in popular literature and inscriptions that the brāhmaṇas took up various non-brāhmaṇa professions, including that of merchants. An inscription from Karnataka (AD 918) informs us that each brāhmaṇa gave three *drammas* as charity on the occasion of a marriage, while a *śūdra* was required to give one *dramma* on the same occasion. In a Brahmapura (brāhmaṇa settlement) in Śrīhatta (Sylhet, Bangladesh), non-brāhmaṇas like *kāyastha, vaidya* and *gaṇaka* were each allotted plots of land of a larger size than the plots of some of the resident brāhmaṇas (AD 930). This is significant in that the size of the plot in a religious complex is expected to reflect the importance and influence of the holder of the plot in that establishment. In a *maṭha*-like brahmanical settlement, therefore, the brāhmaṇa did not always enjoy the largest plot of land. The ritual position of the brāhmaṇa did not always correspond to his actual and material position. It is also important to remember that not all members of the priestly community enjoyed material prosperity or patronage from the rich and the powerful. Inscriptional images, though sometimes stereotyped, offer occasional pictures of the bewilderment of the rustic, poor and non-sophisticated brāhmaṇa experiencing the urban pomp and pleasure, especially around the royal court.

Theoretically, the brāhmaṇa is supposed to have the most intimate linkage with the kshatriya. The early medieval period in Indian history, albeit abounding in ruling houses, did not invariably witness a conspicuous kshatriya *varṇa*. That a kshatriya origin was not a precondition for gaining and establishing ruling power is amply borne out by many historical instances of this period. There have been cases where the ruling authorities did not suppress their śūdra origin in their official records. A case in point is the Kākatīya dynasty of Warangal (in Andhra Pradesh from late twelfth to early fourteenth century AD). On the other hand, one can find a distinct tendency on the part of many new ruling lineages, without any apparent and established pedigree, to claim the Rajput status. In-depth studies of

the political processes of these Rajput lineages by Chattopadhyaya point their origins either to some non-indigenous communities or to some tribes. Political and social prominence was often claimed by rulers of newly-established ruling houses emulating the life-style of famous kshatriya heroes of the remote past; inventing their descents from the solar or the lunar races or some epic heroes; constructing monumental temples; enshrining therein deities associated with sectarian bhakti cults and by positing the centrality of a dynastic cult to impress upon the centrality of its chief devotee and patron, i.e. the ruler himself and his family. All these things appear to have resulted in the upward mobility of the members of such ruling lineages who regularly claimed to have been upholders of the brahmanical *varṇāśramadharma* and secured active ideological support from the loyal group of important brāhmaṇa donees. In view of the much sought after legitimation of the ruling authority, in which the importance of the priestly community can hardly be minimized, the assertive role of the ruling lineage has been questioned. Many scholars have emphasized on the ruler's dependence on the ritual support of the brāhmaṇa and on a sectarian bhakti cult; this has been presented as the evidence of the overall primacy of the spiritual authority over the temporal power. Even conceding the ruling lineage's seeking the spiritual authority of the priestly community, the latter, on the other hand, were often clearly supplicants of royal favour without which their sustenance would have surely been jeopardized. In fact on certain occasions the ruling power deliberately caused settlements of loyal brāhmaṇa groups to offset the potential aspirations of influential heads of *maṭhas* and temples belonging to Śaiva, Vaishṇava and Śākta affiliations. Usually local ruling lineages, often without any known pedigree, claimed kshatriya status and then contracted marriage alliances with established dynasties, which doubtless facilitated the enhancement of their power, prestige and status with backing from the priestly community. This avenue of possible upward social mobility, labelled as kshatriyazation (by Hermann Kulke) or Rajputization (by Surajit Sinha), proved advantageous to the ruling houses. In spite of the multiplicity of ruling houses with self-styled or bestowed kshatriya status, it would be difficult to argue in favour of the presence of the kshatriya *varṇa*, second only to the *brāhmaṇa*, according to the traditional four-vama scheme.

It is however, no less difficult to find an identifiable vaiśya *varṇa* than constructing the image of a cohesive kshatriya *varṇa*. The *Śruti* ideal of the vaiśya performing agriculture, cattle rearing and trade was given up in early medieval times as numerous occupational *jātis* took up multifarious crafts and professions without having to be subsumed within the vaiśya *varṇa*. If there were any vaiśyas, they became synonymous with the *vanij* or the merchant. There are some early medieval epigraphic documents that narrate about to the creation of settlements for trader by political authorities. Such a group of merchants were known as *vaṇiggrāma* (more prominent in south India as *maṇigrāmam*). Both local (*vāstavya*) and non-local/outsider

(*vaideśya*) merchants could have belonged to the *vaṇiggrāma* (the term *grāma* here denotes a body or group, and not a village). That local rulers occasionally invited a *vaṇiggrāma* community of merchants to settle in their realm is known from an inscription (*āchārasthitipatra*) of AD 592. There is also at least one known case of the creation of a *vaiśyagrahāra* or a revenue-free settlement for the vaiśyas in early medieval Orissa.

Theoretical treatises occasionally speak of the typical functions of a vaiśya. The commentary of Medhātithi on the *Manusaṁhitā* for example, lays down the following aspects of the vaiśya: he should be conversant with the region and the season suitable for fetching him higher price (and hence higher profit) in his dealings in gems, pearls, corals, metals (copper, iron and bronze), woven cloth, perfumes and condiments. His intimate knowledge of different kinds of soils conducive to various types of sowing—sparsely and thickly—and the resultant varieties in yield has also been underlined. The same text urges him to know the customs of different countries, the areas with profuse supply of grain and the problems of storing certain items for a long time. Here too, the vaiśya's functions are oriented to the image of a trader. There are many accounts of fabulously rich merchants establishing prestigious merchant lineages by narrating their enormous wealth. From these stories and legends the merchants' patronage is evident to religio-cultural activities (handsome donations to various projects for public welfare e.g. religious shrines and establishments, feeding houses and drinking places, resting places particularly at important *tīrthas*, etc.), which helped improve their status. That several merchant lineages like the Dhusrata, Dharkaṭa and Oswals enjoyed considerable eminence in early medieval western India has been demonstrated by Chattopadhayay on the basis of epigraphic evidence. Judging from the epigraphic and textual (non-sastric) sources, merchants do not appear to have sought their traditional affiliation to vaiśya *varṇa*. A salt dealer at the early medieval trade and urban centre of Siyadoni (in the Ganga-Yamuna doab) bears the label of a *nemakavaṇija* in a ninth century AD inscription. The said inscription has records of several donations made by the *nemakavaṇija* to religious establishments and also mentions that his father too was a *nemakavaṇija*. The record leaves a clear impression of the resources of the salt dealer otherwise substantial donations would have been impossible) and his following the hereditary profession. Towards the end of the record, the salt dealer is described as one belonging to the *nemakajāti* (i.e. the caste of the salt dealer). Thus, it is the *jāti* status rather than the theoretical *varṇa* status of a vaiśya that was eagerly sought for; the record brings to limelight the transformation of a trading family into *a jāti*, named after the commodity the family hereditarily dealt in.

Theoretical treatises that champion the cause of brahmanical social norms have an expected bias against the śūdra—the lowest of the four *varṇas*. These texts are once again replete with contradictory statements

that suggest growing complexities and variances in their assessment of the śūdra's position. An interesting departure from the previous definition of the *śūdra* attracts our attention—the śūdra stands for all non-brāhmaṇa groups in the perception of many early medieval texts. In other words, the term śūdra encapsulates all non-brāhmaṇa groups. The protracted and slow process of bracketing the vaiśya with the śūdra thus comes to a culmination. There has been a systematic attempt to pronounce greater disabilities on them. The *Parāśarasmṛiti* debars food from the hands of a śūdra and prohibits sharing his seat with the brāhmaṇa The touch of the śūdra and subsequently his sight are also considered to cause pollution to the brāhmaṇa who should ward off the impurity by *āchamana* (ceremonial sipping of the water). In the *Sūtras* and the early *Dharmaśāstras*, the śūdra had been enjoined upon to serve the three higher *varṇas*, for example, by washing the feet of brāhmaṇas and guests—serving the three upper *varṇas* or the *dvijas* was his only duty. The early medieval treatises often view the śūdra's touch as impure as that of the nishāda The same derogatory attitude is evident in the injunction of taking out the corpse of the śūdra (also that of the vaiśya) by a city-gate other than the one meant for the brāhmaṇa. Medhātithi emphatically rules out any possibility of emancipation for the śūdra This attitude is further expressed in the *Bṛihannāradīyapurāṇa* (assignable between AD 750 and AD 900):

> A man who bows down to the *liṅga* or image worshipped by a śūdra has no escape from sin seven by performing decades of thousand penances. Even in dire distress a twice-born man must not take to the profession of the śūdra.

This is however only one side of the picture. The emerging similarity between the vaiśya and the śūdra may suggest that agriculture, cattle rearing and artisanal activities, previously associated with the vaiśyas, now could be performed by the śūdra This implies, according to Sharma, that the śūdra in the early medieval times would not have been bound by the sastric dictum of merely serving the three higher *varṇas* (*dvijāti-śuśrushā*) as his sole source of sustenance. The expansion of sedentary settlements, especially in the hitherto non-arable tracts in the early middle ages, must have provided the śūdra with the scope to engage in agriculture. This was further facilitated by the vaisaya's identity with the *vaṇik*. It is not unlikely that under the strong influence of Jainism, the vaiśya's attachment to and interests in agriculture dwindled because ploughing the land was viewed to have resulted in killing many unseen and unknown lives. Theoretical treatises, despite their hostile attitude to the śūdra, began to approve the performance of *purttadharma* (patronage to works of public welfare and charity) by the śūdra. Such acts of charity could materialize if and when the śūdra had the necessary resources at his disposal. We have already hinted at the possibility of the opening of more occupational avenues for the śūdra in the early medieval period. Some

law-givers allowed the śūdra to perform various sacraments, from which he had earlier been debarred, though without the utterance of the Vedic *mantras*.

Two non-brāhmaṇa social groups, and hence theoretically placed in the śūdra category, demand our attention—the kāyasthas and vaidyas. The kāyastha, often synonymous with the term *karaṇa*, is known since the early historical times as the scribe or the clerk. The spurt of landgrants in the post-AD 600 period would explain the more regular and numerical references to the kāyastha in the copper plates. There is little evidence to show that the kayasatha prior to AD 900 assumed any *jāti*-like feature; it denoted a profession that could be taken up by different *varṇas* and social groups. Since AD 900 can be discerned a marked tendency to claim a distinct lineage on the part of the kāyastha (e.g. *valabhakāyasthavaṁśa*), as Chitrarekha Gupta argues. The descent from a leading *karaṇa* (*karaṇānāmagraṇī*) was sought to establish social eminence. The immense power and prestige of the *kāyastha/karaṇa* as an official scribe and also as a revenue officer were definite factors for his rise to eminence. Being a literate person in a society with little scope of literacy for the masses—largely dependent on oral traditions and verbal communications—generated position, power and prestige for the kāyastha. His access to the political and administrative circles of course enhanced his status. The kāyastha now was considered to be the most important non-brāhmaṇa group in eastern India and was second only to the brāhmaṇas. In an age which abounded in the issuance of royal copper plate charters, the kāyastha as the scribe or clerk was indispensable. As the scribe of important administrative documents, mostly land grants, he naturally had access to revenue records. The kāyastha, therefore, subsequently became a revenue official. It is only likely that there would be enough scope of misuse and fraud perpetrated by the kāyastha in league with landholders, rulers and local administrators. Their rapacious nature evoked Kalhaṇa to equate them with snakes (*kāyasthasarpāspadam*).

Let us now discuss the vaidya or physicians. As physicians, also called ambashthas, they were generally held in low esteem in law books. The hostile attitude to the vaidyas has sometimes been attributed to the superstitious and anti-science view in the brahmanical treatises. It may be possible that the close association of the physician with Buddhism and Buddhist monasteries probably made them further disagreeable in the brahmanical normative texts. The growing popularity of the brahmanical *matha* complexes in the early medieval times in a way facilitated the study and practice of medicine within sacred establishments. This is likely to have removed to some extent, the stigma associated with the vaidya's profession. There are well-known examples of medical centres (*ārogyaśālās*) within both Buddhist *vihāras* and brahmanical *maṭhas*. Medical treatises like *Aṣhṭāṅgahṛidya* of Vāgbhaṭa (seventh century AD) and Chakrapāṇidatta's *Śabdachandrikā* (eleventh century AD) belong to this age. The considerable growth in botanical

literature (*Vṛikshāyurveda*) and veterinary treatises especially on the taming and treatment of horses and elephants) must have paved the way for the enhanced esteem of the *vaidyas*. An inscription from Gaya Krishnadvarika temple talks about a veterinary physician of horses (*vājivaidya*) in the twelfth century AD.

A sizeable section of the population, engaged in the manual artisanal production and the rendering of a number of 'unclean' services, was undoubtedly at the receiving end in a brahmanical *varṇa-jāti* society. They are grouped under the *antyajas*, the lowest rung in the society, placed below the śūdras and hence defiled as the fifth *varṇa*. They include the rājaka, the charmmakāra, the naṭa, the buruta, the kaivartta, the Meda and the Bhilla (*saptaite chāntyajāḥ smṛitaḥ*). These were clearly menial castes about whom al Biruni was well aware; the law-books typically explain their origins out of *pratiloma* unions. The law-giver's idea was to relegate menial professional groups and some erstwhile tribal groups to the lowest position in the social ladder. Even lower than these *antyaja* groups were the chaṇḍāla, the hadi, the dom and the bhadatau.

It is in this context that untouchability—the most deplorable and the most inhuman aspect of caste society—has to be looked into. The *varṇa-jāti* system, which institutionalizes inequality, bares its entire range of social and cultural intolerance in the garb of untouchability. The notion and practice of untouchability is associated with the *antyaja* groups, particularly the chaṇḍāla. The practice of assigning the habitat outside the settled society in rural and urban areas for the chaṇḍāla had already been noted in the early fifty century by Faxian. The segregational attitude intensified to such an extent that it required a pond in the outskirts of Ekāgrahāra (modern Egra in Medinipur district, West Bengal) to be designated *chaṇḍālapushkariṇī* (i.e. a pond earmarked for the chaṇḍālas) in the first half of the seventh century AD. This goes on well with the subsequent injunctions in the *Mitākṣharā* and the *Aparārkaṭīka* on the purification of the well used by the chaṇḍāla. The word *aspṛiśya*, denoting an untouchable, appears for the first time in the law-book of Vishṇu. If the chaṇḍāla was the first and foremost to be included among the *antyaja-aspṛiśya* category, Katyayana brought in the Mlechchhas and the Pārasikas too. While the touch or sight of other *antyajas* and śūdras required ceremonial sipping of purificatory water (*ācḥamana*), the touch of any of these three *aspṛiśya* during a meal led to defilement and needed to be cleansed away, according to Atri, by bath. The *Mitākṣharā* and the *Aparārkaṭīkā* (both commentaries on the *Yajñavalkyasmṛiti*) stretched the injunctions further: purificatory bath had to be resorted to if the chaṇḍāla came even nearer than the length of a cow's tail.

Untouchability reached an unprecedented peak during the early middle ages in India. It was used as an effective weapon to ostracize the downtrodden and also the dissenter. R.S. Sharma, informs that the *Apararkatika* brands not only chaṇḍālas as *aspṛiśya*, but also applies the same epithet for the

Buddhists, the Jainas, Lokayatikas, *nastikas* and followers of Kapila, Śaivas and Śāktas. The notion and principle of ritual purity and impurity, which could be transmitted, among other things, by touch, food and water, had a dominant role to play in the development of untouchability. The *Laghu Āśvalāyanasmṛiti* (AD 700–900) enjoins that the brāhmaṇa was allowed to accept from anyone milk, sugarcane products and food cooked in oil, milk and clarified butter, but not the items mixed with water. In this injunction may be seen the formulation of the notions of what are nowadays known as *pukka* and *kachcha* food, as vehicles of ritual purity and impurity. By perpetuating ostracization and untouchability, the brahmanical society in fact turned a bulk of Indian population into impure 'outsiders'.

Outside and opposed to the settled society stood the *araṇya*, a space meant for the renouncer, the exiled, dangerous animals and their tamers and hunters. The forest or the *araṇya* is often depicted as the arena of nomadic, hunting-gathering groups belonging neither to the state society nor to the *jāti-varṇa* system. The *Kathâsaritsāgara* for instance, gives interesting portrayal of the Bhillas, Pulindas and Śabaras in the Vindhyan forest tracts. Clad in tiger skins and decorated with peacock-feathers and elephant-tusks, these forest-dwellers are portrayed as a counterpoint to the larger settled society. They are described as hunters and plunderers of carvanas. They consumed spirit and the flesh of deer. Their association with primitive belief systems is borne out by the account of their offering human sacrifices to Chaṇḍikā and Durgā (actually referring to goddess cults). They were outside the state society but were capable of providing the most loyal service to a state power. The last description may suggest their gradual acceptance and incorporation into the state society, a process which as has already been said, resulted in the remarkable spread of the monarchical and more complex state society in the early middle ages.

XXII

Women and Early Medieval Society

It is difficult to find an instance of an honourable position for women in a patriarchal society caught in a stiff *varṇa-jāti* order. There was little scope of a women's formal or vocational education, at least in the upper echelons of the society. The general attitude towards her education is best summed up by Harita. He declared that the *brahmavādinī* (women with Vedic knowledge and also a female composer of Vedic hymns) was now an obsolete category belonging to a different time cycle (*kalpa*); the ideal in the contemporary *Kali* age was that of the *sadyovadhu* (newly married wife). One cannot miss the growing emphasis of law-givers on lowering the age of the marriage for girls. Medhātithi was in favour of marrying her off at the *nagnikā* (i.e. pre-puberty) stage, though the image of an unmarried heroine in the full bloom

of her youth was still preferred in the creative literary texts. The sastric view championed the ideal of *savarṇa* marriage and deplored the *adharmya* (non-righteous,) type of marriages like *rākshasa* and *gāndharva*, as the latter two are considered to have yielded only impure progenies like the innumerable *antyaja* groups. Still, the instances of a brāhmaṇa marrying the daughter of a Savara chieftain, a courtesan marrying a fisherman and a kshatriya marrying a chaṇḍāla maiden (the last act was sinful enough to be atoned by feeding 18,000 brāhmaṇas) were not unknown in creative literature. Sircar informs that the *Nāgarakhaṇḍa* section of the *Skandapurāṇa* enumerates ten forms of marriages, which include the eight aforementioned ones and also two hitherto unknown and unheard forms: *prātibha* and *ghātana*. It is difficult to understand the precise and particular nature of these two forms of marriages. The *Nāgarakhaṇḍa* being possibly composed in western India, it can however be assumed that the two new form of marriages were prevalent in this region.

Marriage as an institution was generally viewed in the legal literature as indissoluble. The repeated use of the term *prabhu* (lord) to denote the husband may strongly underline the claim of the husband over the wife. The husband's right to lend his wife to strangers for prostitution and procreation are upheld in the theoretical treatises. The ambivalent and often contradictory positions that the *śāstras* took are evident in the recognition of the married couple's equal right to matrimonial property (*dampatyor madhyagaṁ dhanam*). Contrary to the idea of indissolubility of marriage, runs the sastric injunction on nullity and divorce, though under exceptional situations of the loss (*nashṭa*), death (*mṛita*), impotency (*klīva*) and renunciation (*pravrajita*) of the husband. But Narada and Parasara, who upheld such a provision, declared this as an exceptional way out applicable only during calamitous situations. The term *punarbhū*, denoting a remarried widow, continued to appear in legal treatises. Remarriage of widows appears to have been a problem with women of higher social groups; the lower *jātis* are unlikely to have observed any restriction on widow remarriage. In the upper strata of the society such a system could have resulted in the transference of family property to the family of the new husband and hence must have been reprobated by the theorists. An interesting feature is the growing sastric disfavour towards the practice of *niyoga, i.e.* the cohabitation of a sonless widow with her brother-in-law for the procreation of a male child. In view of growing complexities in property laws and recognition of the divisibility of joint family property, possibilities of inheriting the family property by the son of a *niyoga* union seemed to have further complicated the matter. The wife and the widow are generally granted little economic rights, except the *strīdhana*, in the lawbooks. But epigraphic evidence from south India shows the ability of the wife/widow to alienate property, even the property of a male owner without seeking consent of the near agnates of the latter. The *Smṛitichandrikā* recognizes women's right to inherit property

of her male relations. It also lays down that the widow, if chaste and sonless, could inherit the entire estate of her dead husband. The legal literature in general takes extremely reactionary views against the widow whose life is inflicted with disabilities and seen to be dependent on dominant male members belonging either to her natal family or the in-law's family.

The custom of *satī* or burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of the dead husband appears to have been mainly related to the kshatriya lineages. The *Kuṭṭanīmata* of Damodaragupta associates *satī* with virtuous women. The profusion of local powers and their endemic struggles could have encouraged this deplorable and heinous practice among ruling lineages. But the wide observance of this custom cutting across the *jāti-varṇa* structure is doubtful in the early medieval times.

A few individual women personalities, some belonging to ruling houses and a few associated with south Indian bhakti cults, have come to light after the painstaking querying by historians working on women's history in early India. Kumkum Roy finds an interesting continuity in the practice of cross-cousin marriage, a typical feature of peninsular society noticeable at least since the second century BC, well into the early middle ages. Although this custom gained visibility first in the inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Ikshvākus, its practice was well in vogue in the Rāshṭrakūṭa and the Chola realms. The entry of women into these matrimonial connections paved the way for their access to power at least on some occasions. Even though women of royal family were often pawns in matrimonial negotiations of their respective fathers and husbands, they were in a position, especially during a political vacuum, to exert their authority within the structure of polity. Significantly enough, women rulers are well known in early medieval times. Clear instances of this are available in Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarangiṇī*, viz., queens Sugandhā (ninth century AD) and Diddā (tenth century AD). Insightful readings into the *Rājatarangiṇī* by Kumkum Roy and Devika Rangachari suggest the ambivalent attitudes of Kalhaṇa to the women rulers of Kashmir. On the one hand, the concept of a female ruler was an irritant to Kalhaṇa's idea of rulership; therefore these Kashmiri queens are invariably depicted in the text as cruel, power-hungry, licentious and capable of entering into liaison with their ministers and subordinates in order to satisfy their lust for power. On the other hand, Kalhaṇa also portrays them as resourceful rulers and successful stateswoman. The two queens are also credited with founding cities and embellishing the cities and shrines as markers of their achievements. Rangachari questions whether the assessment of the status of women in early medieval times needs to be done chiefly on the benchmark of the victim syndrome. Roy draws our attention to Kalhaṇa's account of the royal court where the ḍombas and chaṇḍālas occupied position of prominence. In the *Rājatarangiṇī* there are also instances of royal marriages with ḍomba and chaṇḍāla women. Roy therefore argues for relative laxity of

patriarchal and orthodox *varṇa-jāti* norms. She takes the next logical step to suggest that the relatively less oppressive *varṇa-jāti* norms in early medieval Kashmir were instrumental to the rise of women to political prominence. Her analysis finds a close correlation to Suvira Jaiswal's view that greater the rigours of the *varṇa-jāti* norms, more pronounced would be the degradation of women.

The portroyal of Rudrāmādevī, the Kākatīya queen of the late thirteenth century in eastern Deccan, has been queried by Cynthia Talbott in historical sources. While standard works on Kākatīya political history described her reign more as an isolated and exotic event, Talbott offers incisive analysis of epigraphic texts. Rudrama, the daughter the greatest of the Kākatīya rulers—Gaṇapati—succeeded her father in AD 1262 and reigned for nearly twenty-seven years. The succession took place because of the absence of a male heir. In the event of the absence of a son of the reigning king, the previous practice was to pass on the throne to the next brother or the brother's son. However, Ganapati departed from this practice and made her a conjoint ruler with him, thereby preventing the possibilities of contestations of her succession. Upon becoming fully independent in AD 1262, she fought many wars and died in a battle. Though actually a queen, she is represented is the Kākatīya records as Rudradeva maharāja, that is, a male ruler. Her martial portrayal, parallel to any other heroic male ruler, is known from her epithet *rājya-gajakeśarī;* this goes well with the description that she wore male attire and led her soldiers in battles. Yet on the other hand, Rudrāma is delineated in contemporary sculptures as a woman riding on a lion. In terms of visual representation, she is thus more akin to the figure of goddess Durgā. In addition to being a powerful ruler, she was a married woman, her husband Vīrabhadra, being a rather insignificant and shadowy figure of the Eastern Chālukya family. She was also the mother two daughters. She did not leave behind any male heir and the throne passed on to her grandson Pratāparudradeva, the last king of the Kākatīya family. Talbott accounts for Rudrāmā's rise in terms of the relatively decentralized polity in thirteenth century AD Deccan that gave central importance to family and descent in the socio-political system. The question of unbroken family succession was of paramount importance and critical to ensure that a woman successor to the throne was congruent to the socio-political situation. Talbott further underlines the importance of the tradition of cross-cousin marriage and marriage between kin groups in peninsular India; this allowed to utilize the natal connections politically and socially even after the woman's marriage.

The portrayal of women in south India offers an image of special association with the bhakti tradition. The point has been illuminated by Vijaya Ramaswamy with reference to Andal, Akka Mahādevī and Karaikkal Ammaiyar. All the three women were intensely involved in the spiritual tradition of bhakti. The idea of complete submission and unquestioned

surrender of the devotee to the deity helped them to deviate from the orthodox norms and practices of a patriarchal society. Thus devotion to one's personal god paved the way for his/her deviance and that in turn, helped the devotee to defy many traditions of patriarchal society. Andal, the lone woman saint among twelve Vaishṇava Aḷvars of Bhāgavata movement, composed a series of songs—*Varṇanāmayiram*—in which she presented herself as being married to Vishṇu. Though she was a married lady, she perceived Vishṇu as her husband and married to none else. A specimen of her composition in English translation may be cited here:

The Brahmins earmark *havis* [sacrificial offering].
For the divine dwellers of the heavens
If it were to smell [polluted by a stray fox?
My white graceful breasts are meant
For the bearer of the conch and discus
O, Manmatha! Is it fair that one should
Even think of bestowing them on a mere mortal?

(Source: Ramaswamy)

Akka Mahādevi in Karnataka, though married, walked out naked of her marital home to pursue her spiritual path and attain salvation. For her the only Purusha or male was Śiva, who was the *paramātman*. She considered all creations, being illusion (*māyā*), were feminine. Her total devotion was the means of her defiance to the patriarchal norms. In her composition she pronounced:

On a frame of water, raising a roof of fire
Spreading the hailstones for the bridal bed
A husband without the head, married a wife without legs,
My parents gave to me an inseparable life
They married me to Lord Chenna Mallikarjuna

(Source: Ramaswamy)

Karaikkal Ammaiyar is said to have shed her feminity herself and turned herself into a skeleton. Her devotional songs of ecstasy are set in the backdrop of the cremation ground of Tiruvalangadu where corpses have been placed on funeral pyres. Ramaswamy sees in this act of her shedding femininity the shattering of gender boundaries, as the skeleton is devoid of any gender signification.

In this context, one should also take into account the temple women in south India. Known as *tevaratiyar* (devotee of god), *tevanar makal* (daughter of god) and *taliyilar or patiyiliar* (women of the temple), these women, however, were, according to Leslie Orr, not the same as the *devadāsī* and should not be considered as temple prostitutes. They figure particularly in

the records from Kāñchīpuram where their presence as donors is beyond any doubt. Their donations imply that they had access to resources, a part of which they transferred as gifts to temples. This would further suggest that they had some control over the resources of their households. The donations resulted in elevating their status: the temple women enjoyed the right to sing a certain part of the hymn before the deity and a special place close to the deity during ritual processions.

XXIII

New Features in Social Milieu

The early medieval period is well-known for considerable growth in the development of logic as a science, and this will be evident from the survey of the vast corpus of available literature. Consequently there was immense elaboration on the subject of establishing various types of proof which had a direct bearing on the institution of family and property. Once again, the agrarian spread and the development of the more complex state and the *jāti* society had definite impacts on legalities of family and property. In the commentary on the *Manusaṁhitā*, 18 offences have been enlisted, out of which ten are related to property and two to family. Similarly, the *Kātyāyanasmṛiti* in its list of ten major offences included five concerning property and two regarding family.

Offences could be met with, at least in the sastric traditions, by terrible retributions. A *dvija* taking up the profession of a śūdra could be branded as a chaṇḍāla or outcaste. One who did away with his own prescribed work and lived by that of others was admonished as a *pāshaṇḍa* or heretic. He who deviated from *āchāra* (usage), expected as per the dictates of his *āśrama*, was pronounced as a *patita* or fallen. The most dreaded punishment was the exclusion/expulsion of the culprit by some local bodies, including guild-like organizations. Such an offender was made known to be a traitor to the village (*grāmadrohī*), to the locality (*nāṭṭudrohī*), even a traitor to the king and finally, to a sectarian deity, be it Śiva, Vishṇu or some Śākta divinities. Objectionable habits could be brought to book by corporate abandonment of the wrong-doer. The infliction of excommunication could easily exert unbearable social pressure on the victim, for whom it was no less severe than a death sentence. It might be suggested that such notions of sins and the sinner (*pātaka*) had probably much less effect on the menial *jātis*, whose position was already ostracized.

The brahmanical society, stressing ceaselessly on strict codes, had in it some escape routes too. The sinner could be purified by expiations (*prāyaśchittas*), which greatly attracted the attention of law-givers. The purification of the wrong-doer could be performed under the guidance and

supervision of the priest, by the sinner's fasting, collecting alms, paying fines, drinking cow's urine, making pilgrimages and of course by propitiating the community (actually its eminent leaders) by lavishly spending on feasts. Such *prāyaśchittas* could lead to the issuance of certificates of one's fitness to be re-admitted to the community upon paying the priests *dakshiṇā* in cash. It is no wonder therefore that *prāyaśchittas* and *vratas* (vows) became almost synonymous in this age. If *prāyaśchittas* were meant for one's readmission to the community, *vratas* were performed with a view to achieving tangible benefits in the existing life. It is significant to note that *vratas* were meant for all *jātis* and women (including widows and prostitutes).

The social base of religious rituals associated with the performance of various early medieval *vratas* appears to have been much wider than that of the Vedic sacrifices of earlier days. Inseparably attached to the increasing emphasis on *prāyaśchittas* and *vratas* and the growth of sectarian bhakti cults was the growth of numerous *tīrthas* of varying importance all over the subcontinent. A large number among the known lists of 4,000 *tīrthas* and *sub-tīrthas* were associated with Tantric rituals and practices. These were, in their turn, transformed into centres of sectarian bhakti cult from their original position as seats of goddess cults. The performance of *prāyaśchittas* and *vratas* and visiting the places of pilgrimages were often determined by astrological calculations. The manifold increase in the reliance on astrology in almost every matter of social activity is another salient feature of early medieval social life. While there were *ganakas* or astrologers for prescribing auspicious moments for the performance of rites and rituals, the royal courts too boasted of the presence of *sāmvatsaras* or *mauhurttikas*, who would pronounce auspicious moments in the life of the royalty, ranging from launching an invasion to the birth of a prince. Various segments of the society—from the peasant to the prince and from the brāhmaṇa to the śūdra—took recourse to astrologers to anticipate the auspicious and the evil as well. Sharma has logically inferred that astrology provided an effective ideological cementing bond among the differentiated social strata. Under such situations, the growth of fatalism cannot be unexpected. Sukumārī Bhattacharjee finds that fatalism, which has its roots in the Ājīvika doctrine of destiny (*niyati*) since the sixth century BC, considerably grew in this period; it seems to have contained conflicts and social tensions.

The complexities of committing a sin, cleansing of the sin by *prāyaśchitta* and *vrata*, visiting *tīrthas* and finally ensuring re-admission into the community could be set aside at a single stroke if one renounced the world, i.e. by becoming a *sannyāsin*. This is the reason why Thapar considers renunciation as a counter-culture. Such a life did not demand any social obligation and was beyond the purview of restrictions and outlawry. But to what extent the *sannyāsin's* ways and outlooks were perceived as practicable alternatives is difficult to determine, as he was, after all, a marginal figure to the mainstream of social life.

XXIV

It is true that perceptions of a traditional Indian society are dominated by considerations of the caste system. This was undoubtedly an all-pervasive institution and no aspect of life was untouched by it. Several religious groups of this period were in fact known to be *jātis*. The Jainas considered themselves a *jāti*. The Lingayats, though strongly advocated inter-marriages among different *jātis*, themselves assumed the appearance of an endogamous caste group.

The European study on this institution is voluminous and tends to present it as a unique phenomenon, which sharply differentiated the traditional Indian society from its western counterpart. There has been a marked thrust in the European/Western understanding of the *varṇa-jāti* system on highlighting the greater importance of the community and group than of the individual as a typical feature of Indian social formations. The innumerable *jātis*, placed in strict hierarchical order, are thought to have precluded any notion of cohesion and homogeneity—major ingredients in the making of a state society and a national identity. Pre-modern India (including India of pre-1300) is therefore considered to have been incapable of experiencing a bureaucratic structure and political order, comparable to that in the Occident. The idea of relative purity and impurity is sought to be the principal force and the essence of sustenance of the hierarchical *varṇa-jāti* system. This hierarchical arrangement of the society was further strengthened enormously by religious principles, which endowed it with apparent inflexibility and perpetuity. It has been argued that in this hierarchical set up, the noncompetitive ranking system allowed little or no individual initiative and innovation. The *varṇa-jāti* structure, with the ritual hierarchy as its central idea, was projected to be essentially anti-individualistic. This has mainly been done with a view to contrast with the western world-view supposedly based on egalitarian values. Such formulations Slave been duly criticized as views stemming from the readings of and an excessive reliance on the brahmanical sastric norms. It would be a major folly to see in the *śāstras* a monolithic, immutable and repetitive structure.

One cannot turn a blind eye to the law-giver's conscious attempts in early medieval and medieval times to assume an identity and mutual referability among conflicting sources (*ekavākyatānyāya*). Beneath the apparent sastric inflexibility has been discerned the attempts of the *mīmāṁsākāras* to select one of the several alternatives from amongst the discordant authorities. The other well-known method was to use the word *'cha'* and, also) to facilitate the inclusion of additional items or points, obviously to the advantages of the *śāstrakāras*. Former *Smriti* regulations were occasionally set aside by these *śāstrakāras* on the ground of being obsolete in the *Kali* age and was replaced with *Smriti* laws of even dubious origin. The same authorities also fell back on a convenient *Smṛiti* rule that if a dharmic regulation was really disliked

by the public, it was *ipso facto* abrogated. These sastric specifications of the *viśesha-dharma* (i.e. one's special duties, often synonymous with *varṇāśrama-dharma*) or righteous conducts according to one's position in the *jāti* and *āśrama* order did not stand in the way of a number of ethical principles of universal nature (*sādhāraṇa-dharma*), which cut across social ranks. These speak of the immense possibilities of local and regional formations even in the framing of regulations for social life. There have also been major contributions to judge the traditional Indian society on several models and analytical frameworks of Western sociologists and anthropologists. While these are excellent research tools, many of these often uncritically accept the premise of the invariance and uphold the lack of any change in the pre-modern Indian society. It is difficult to disagree with the view that such models and frameworks have been developed systematically and most profitably by abstracting from historical changes, but are of little use for the study of long-term historical and socio-economic transformations. Many of these are examples of fine scholastic exercise without providing real understanding of the social changes and developments over periods.

There has been certain Western perceptions about the caste system which explain it as a special type of social hierarchy, and hierarchy is present in any human society. The Indian response (chiefly in the works of nationalist scholars like R.K. Mookerjee and R.C. Majumdar) to the Western view of caste system was constructed largely to emphasize upon the cooperation and peaceful coexistence among different groups at different levels and the relative absence of the elements of competition, friction and tension. Sustained injustice hurled at the lower social order by the higher *varṇas* and *jātis* were often brushed aside in the nationalist historiography of early Indian society. There were also attempts to justify several ignoble aspects of this system. Even when the evils of the *varṇa-jāti* system were acknowledged, a large number of nationalist scholars found no less evils in the advanced western society and in a way, glorified the *varṇa-jāti* system. Two major Indian ways of explaining the proliferations of *jātis* and the remarkable sustenance of the system are seen in the concepts of: (1) Hindu methods of tribal absorption (postulated by N.K. Bose) and (2) Sanskritization (formulated by M.N. Śrīnivas). Despite a number of critiques offered to these two standpoints, their influential role in sharpening present understanding of the system can hardly be missed.

XXV

It is impossible to ignore that the Indian society and politics were much more complex than as explained in terms of Brahmanical sastric norms. The distinct elements of change and movement in political and social life during the early medieval period needs to be studied by avoiding what B.D.

Chattopadhyaya terms 'epicentric' views. The changes, although often slow and imperceptible particularly from the Occidental point of view, must be situated in their local roots and seen as movements from within rather than as aberrations/deviations from the sastric norms. The futility of perceiving early medieval India as a phase plunging into darkness or steady decline has already been pointed out. The problems in the social and political life cannot also be grasped by merely citing the evidence of Islamic conquests since the eleventh century AD. There are many proofs of massacre and looting in the wake of Ghaznavid and Ghurid invasions. But such tragedies in social and cultural life were not typically associated with Islamic rulers invading India. Exactly when north India was facing Ghaznavid invasions, two powerful dynasties in the south—the Cholas and the Western Chālukyas—were also engaged in bitter hostilities. Though both these ruling houses were devout worshippers of Śiva, the commonalty of religion did not deter Rājarāja I from destroying brāhmaṇas' property, violating women, killing children in the Chālukya realm where the Chola devastations resulted in *jātināśa* (literally, breakdown of the caste order: the Hottur inscription of AD 1007). Nothing more terrible could have happened in the brahmanical social order than the breakdown of the caste system. Violence, looting and massacre in war was not peculiar to Islamic invaders who came to India. One remembers here that the Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicle considered the Chola army as blood-sucking *yakshas*, who devastated Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka.

There is no straightforward black or white image of any political power viś-a-viś the existing society and culture. The same Cholas, despite being ardent Śaivas, strongly patronized the famous Buddhist monastery, Chūḍāmiṇivihāra near Tanjore—the very core area of the Chola realm. The point that emerges is that any breakdown of the social, political and cultural order in traditional early India cannot be ascribed to the Ghaznavid and Ghorid invasions. Nor was there a violent and irreparable rupture in the past due to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Taking the cue from R.C. Majumdar and K.M. Munshi, many historians glorified the Gurjaras and other Rajput ruling houses for offering resistance to Muslim rulers. Masterly analyses of early medieval inscriptions and literary texts by B.D. Chattopadhyaya clearly establish that the Muslims were never viewed as the single enemy and a single target of these rulers, who fought many other contemporary rivals in the subcontinent. The construction of a homgenized Hindu and a Muslim entity is invalid, nor is it supported by empirical foundations. While there are known instances of contestations between different powers of India and Muslim rulers in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, there are no less data on the cooperation and coexistence in social and economic life since the arrival of Muslims as merchants, preachers and conquerors. The Rāshṭrakūṭa rulers (called Balharas) are praised in the Arab accounts for encouraging the settlements of Muslim merchants. The five Rāshṭrakūṭa

inscriptions from Chinchani, in fact, demonstrate how Muslim Arabs (*tajjikas*) were asked to be present as witnesses to grants of land to a *maṭha* in Sanjan (north of modern Mumbai); several of these Muslim merchants had their names Sanskritized in the records. The most striking testimony comes from Somnath, which is often—though wrongly—showcased as the emblem of blot and misery that Islam brought to India. In AD 1264, Somnath witnessed close ties between a Hormuzi merchant, *nakhuda* Nuruddin firuz and the local landowner Chhad a to such an extent that they were called righteous friends (*dharmabāndhava*). The relevant bilingual inscription records the active support of local eminent Hindus to construct a *mijigti* or mosque (*masjid*) at Somnath. The spirit of synthesis is best brought out by the same record AD 1264, which invoked Allah as Viśvarūpa (of Universal form), Śūnyarūpa (Formless or Aniconic) and Lakshyālakshya (One who can be seen and yet be invisible). Recent studies of the Sanskrit inscriptions of the Delhi Sultanate by Pushpa Prasad demonstrate the regular Sanskritization of Muslim rulers' names and the definite use of the term *gotra* to show the dynastic lineages of Sultans and of Muslim administrators appointed by them. The such cherished notion of an exalted position of women in general in early India and their gradual segregation, confinement and degradation chiefly as a result of Islamic inroads is fictitious, not backed by reliable evidence. The deliberate subordination of women by a predominantly patriarchal and patrilineal society can be seen operative in India since the later Vedic period.

The most notable feature in the socio-economic, political and cultural life during the period under review is the growth of distinct regional entities. This multiplicity, we have repeatedly argued, should not be perceived as symbols of socio-political confusions and degenerate ways of life. In-depth studies of the early medieval villages have raised serious doubts about the well-known characterization of Indian rural life as vegetative and stagnant. The very understanding of the village as an undifferentiated and homogenous category has come under challenge. Chattopadhyaya awakens us to the possibility of finding in the epigraphic literature different type of villages; contacts and communications at intra-village and inter-village levels; and the graded importance of different rural units in terms of their socio-economic and political positions. These findings have generated a different image, strong enough to set aside the long-accepted stereotypes of rural societies and rural settlements. This once again underlines the significance of the changing historical perspectives of local formations. The search for local formations in preference to static, invariant and unitary pattern is also consistent with a few over-arching and super-ordinate tendencies in the socio-economic, political and cultural life during the early medieval period, cutting across disparate regions and localities. Their roots were firmly embedded in the processes of: (1) continual agrarian expansion; (2) spread of the *varṇa-jāti* society; (3) incorporation and absorption of various rites, rituals and belief systems of the less hierarchized tribal groups into the growing sectarian bhakti cults; (4) the steady emergence of the more complex state society and polity.

XXVI

An Overview of the Cultural Scenario

The fascinating diversity and lively regional features, which marked out the polity, society and economy of the period under review from the preceding phases, made their presence felt in the cultural scenario during the period AD 600 to 1300. The subject itself is capable of filling up several books and volumes in view of the copious data and growing engagements of scholars in the field. This section does not set out on an ambitious scale of discussions taking into account the elaborate regional traditions, but merely offers an overview by highlighting the outstanding features in cultural life, along with the discussions on the multiplicity of cultural traditions in disparate areas of the subcontinent. We intend to focus on three principal facets of cultural life, viz., religious ideas and practices, literary creations and art activities. A point that needs an underlining is the unmistakable linkage among the three facets. Literary output was often, though not entirely, oriented to beliefs, philosophical concepts and religious observances. Religious feelings, sentiments and practices, to a very large extent found their expressions in the wonderful world of visual arts, especially architecture and sculpture. The common thread that passed through and held together the three principal facets of cultural life was bhakti or devotion to one's personal god/goddess. During the immediately preceding phase (*c.* AD 300–600) sectarian devotional cults emerged to reckoning. This trend in cultural life continued unabated during the next six or seven centuries and witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of sectarian bhakti cults, which profusely influenced literary output and visual arts. If this speaks of an over-arching subcontinental commonalty in cultural life, the development of sectarian devotional cults, languages and literatures and visual arts showed pronounced regional features and diversities. This is the time when many vernaculars became so regular that literary treatises acknowledged the distinctiveness of the regional vernacular (*deśi*) style from the classical genre of Sanskrit (*mārga*). This is visible not merely in literary texts, but also in epigraphic compositions. While Śaivism drew a vast number of devotees all over India, Kashmir Śaivism was distinct from Śaivism practiced in the Choi a realm in the far south. Similarly, structural temple styles were so much rooted to their respective regions that the north Indian (*Nāgara*) temples were clearly distinguishable from their south Indian (*Drāviḍa*) counterparts, with a third regional architectural style (*Vesara*) followed in parts of the Deccan (especially Karnataka).

XXVII

Religious Life

One may begin the survey by first taking up a discussion on religious life, thoughts and belief systems. A broad and generic feature of religious life is the tremendous growth and popularity of Brahmanical bhakti cults, along with the steady decline of Buddhism from its previous position of pre-eminence. The attractions to Jainism are noted mostly in western India and Karnataka in the Deccan. The seventh century speaks of the continued appeal of Buddhism in an all-India context, evident especially from the Chinese accounts of Xuan Zang (travels in India, AD 629–45) and Ijing (in India from AD 675–695). Xuan Zang however, did not fail to note that many erstwhile great Buddhist centres had already been past their best days, as he commented on the relatively fewer number of monks in several Buddhist establishments. One region where Buddhism continued to have enjoyed prominence was eastern India. This is evident from the accounts of the celebrated monastery at Nalanda made available to us by Xuan Zang and Ijing. There is little doubt that in addition to being a major Buddhist centre, Nalanda monastery was also an outstanding centre for learning. Xuan Zang informs us on the pre-eminence of the Yogācharā doctrine in Nalanda, which he studied during his five year stay at Nalanda. The archaeological remains of Nalanda also speak of the lively and multifarious activities at this monastic site. Ijing was aware of the importance of Nalanda and Bodhgaya and Tilodaka monastery which, according to him, accommodated a thousand monks. One of the important Buddhist monasteries was Raktamṛittikā *mahāvihāra* (Lo-to-mo-chi of Xuan Zang) that stood close to Karṇasuvarṇa, the capital of the well-known Gauḍa king Śaśāṅka. The ruins of this monastery have been found at Chiruti, close to Murshidabad in Bengal; the site was excavated by S.R. Das in 1960s. What Xuan Zang mentioned as Po-shi-po monastery, stands for the Vasavavihāra (Yasuvihāra) in northern Bengal (Puṇḍravardhana area). That Samataṭa in the easternmost part of the Bengal delta also had a few monasteries figures in his account. Remains of a monastery of an impressive size have been discovered by Debala Mitra at Ratnagiri in Orissa. Besides eastern India, Buddhism had a notable presence in the lower Indus region in far western India during the seventh and eighth centuries, as the author of the *Chachnama* (though a late text) narrates in the context of his account of the Arab invasion of Sindh.

From the middle of the eighth century, Buddhism began to fade out from different regions of the subcontinent, except the eastern part, which was due to the sustained support to Buddism by the Pāla rulers of Bengal and Bihar. In addition to Nalanda, a few more significant Buddhist monasteries were Odantapurī (near Nalanda), Vikramaśilā (remains at Antichak, Bihar) and Somapuri (remains at Paharpur, in northern part of Bangladesh). These

were centres of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Recent decades have brought to light the existence of a major monastic site of the Pāla times at Jagajjivanpur (Malda district, West Bengal). Known first from an inscription of the time of Mahendrapāla (*c.* AD 840–55), monks of the Mahāyanist Avaivarttika sect had a major presence in this monastery. Interestingly enough, the earliest known presence of this Mahāyāna sect comes from an early sixth century inscription from ancient Samataṭa (now in Bangladesh). Recent excavations at Jagajjivanpur (not yet complete) have already revealed the remains of this large monastery, thus, confirming what is known from the inscription. At Mahābodhi (present Bodhgaya) stood the great temple, commemorating the attainment of Enlightenment by the Buddha. Mahābodhi attracted Buddhist visitors from distant lands. Thus, came to Mahābodhi Viradhara, a resident of Nāgarahāra (Jalalabad, Afghanistan) who recorded his visit to the most sacred Buddhist centre in an elaborate *praśasti*-like inscription in the eighth century. At these monasteries, it is likely that the worship of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas were accompanied by complex rites and rituals. The Mahāyāna text, *Bodhicharyāvatāra* by Śāntideva (*c.* eighth century), lays down the principal rites to be observed during the worship following the Mahāyāna doctrine: bathing the image with scented water; ritual offering of food, flowers, fragrance, clothes and incense; the accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music during the ritual worship. The turn of the millennium ushered in a new element to the existing Mahāyāna practices, namely complex and esoteric Tantric ideas and practices. One major outcome of this was the growing visibility of female deities (particularly the worship of Tara in diverse forms) in both Tantric Buddhist texts and iconography. The growing influence of Tantric elements paved the way for the incorporation of complex rituals often oriented to sexual practices. The *Hevajratantra*, for instance, upholds that liberation from the illusory worldly existence and the cessation from the seemingly interminable cycle of birth, death and rebirth were possible by using and sublimating sexual energy. The eternal happiness of *nirvāṇa* was considered achievable and put on par with the bliss experienced during sexual union that ideally was not meant for the satisfaction of carnal demands nor for procreation. It is therefore not surprising that in the Buddhist iconography of this phase, a special significance was attached to the image delineating the union between the male and female principles, in the form of a coitus. Miranda Shaw's recent studies on women in Tantric Buddhism suggests that it offered possibilities of liberation of women in the non-exploitative, non-coercive and enlightening relationship propounded in Tantrism.

Two sects emerged as a result of the impacts of Tantrism on Buddhist ideas and practices: Vajrayāna and Mantrayana. One of the greatest figures of Vajrayāna Buddhism was Atiśa Dipaṁkara who belonged to the late phase of the Pāla rule in eastern India and associated with Vikramasila monastery. He is said to have been initially trained in Suvarṇadvīpa (maritime South-East

Asia) from where he eventually returned to Bengal. He continued the rich tradition of proselytization in Buddhist religion and was instrumental in the spread of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Tibet, where he breathed his last. During the last phase of its significant presence in Bengal, Buddhism witnessed the emergence of another sect, Sahajayāna that denounced the overwhelming role of elaborate rituals and the use of magical mantras. Saraha, one of the salient figures of Sahajayāna Buddhism, considered that it was possible to attain liberation and enlightenment by faithfully following the instruction of a true guru, while enjoying a worldly life.

It is true that by the late twelfth century, Buddhism was gradually fading out from its last stronghold in eastern India; only the easternmost part of the Bengal delta (Samataṭa-Harikela region) remained an isolated pocket of Buddhism. Buddhism's gradual disappearance from the land of its origin coincided with the rapid spread of brahmanical bhakti cults, which offered strong challenges to Buddhism. To this should be added the lessening royal support to Buddhism (the Pālas of Bengal being an exception to this general trend), which had earlier received sustained patronage from several ruling houses. The Turkish invasion of north India at the end of the twelfth century, during which Nalanda and other monasteries were destroyed, also contributed to the decline of Buddhism. No less significant was the factor that the vast transformation of Buddhism under the influence of elaborate rituals and Tantric practices eroded the distinctiveness of Buddhism from Brahmanical sects and cults. The Buddha was incorporated as one of the ten incarnations (*avatāras*) of Vishṇu. In contemporary philosophical debates, there was regular questioning of the emphasis on renunciation in Sramanic traditions. If this was considered too unrealistic for an ordinary person, monkhood was caricatured as an idle and comfortable way of life, allowing convenient escape from social obligations. Throughout its history, Buddhism emphasized on the liberation of individual and the monastic life for the renouncer. On the other hand, it hardly provided an alternative or counterpoint to the Brahmanical rites and rituals connected with the daily life or the way of life (for example, the rites of passage or *saṁskāras*) of an ordinary person who had not renounced the world.

The other premier Sramanic religion, Jainism, did not spread outside the subcontinent like Buddhism did, but it continued to exist—especially in western India and Karnataka—while Buddhism became relegated to background. In addition to the well-known presence of Jainism in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jainism made its presence felt in western areas of Bengal, Orissa and parts of Madhya Pradesh. It did receive significant support and patronage from a number of royal houses and rulers. Thus, there was sustained support to Jainism from the Chālukya rulers of Gujarat, notably by Kumārapāla, whose leanings to Jainism prominently figure in the works of the famous scholar Hemachandra. In northern and western Deccan, the Rāshṭrakūṭa rulers (particularly Amoghavarsha) were also patrons of

Jainism. Major support came from the mercantile community, especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The best case in point is the patronage offered by Vastupāla (and Tejapala), the memory of which is found in texts like the *Vastupālamāhātmyam* (belonging to the literary circles of Vastupāla). The two brothers are also known to have contributed enormously to the construction of the famous Jain temple at Mount Abu. It is interesting to note that there are a few cases of known patronage coming from royal officials, who were followers of Jainism. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this, was the donation from military officers who proclaimed their Jaina leanings. This was indeed a contradiction, since patronage came fom military officials where Jainism steadfastly upheld the fundamental tenet of non-violence (*ahiṁsā*). In Karnataka, principal centres of Jainism were located in Badami, the capital of the powerful Chālukya ruling house. Ravikīrtti, the composer of the famous Aihole *praśasti* of Chālukya Pulakeśi II, was a notable Jaina. In the southern part of Karnataka, Sravanabelgola steals the limelight as a major sacred centre of the Jainas. Both epigraphic texts and visual images inform us not only of the active presence of the Jaina community, but also of a long list of pontifical succession at this sacred centre. Sravanabelgola is of course best known for its colossal monolithic stone image (58 feet in height) of Gommaṭeśvara or Bahubalī, son of Ādinātha, the first Jaina Tīrthaṅkara. The image was created during 974–984 period when the Gangas were ruling over this area. One of the leading Jaina thinkers was Vidyānanda Akalaṅka who is credited with the composition of the philosophical text, *Tattvārtharājāvarttikā* (eighth century AD). Another notable Jaina intellectual was Haribhadra, who in his *Anekāntajayapatākā* refuted both Budhist and Brahmanical doctrines. That Jainism could not reject the Brahmanical *jāti-varṇa* system will be evident from the *Ādipurāṇa* of Jinasena, who favoured the exclusion of the *śūdra* from certain Jaina rituals and denied the *śūdra* the right to monkhood. Besides the two well-known principal sects of the Jainas, namely the Digambaras (literally sky clad who went naked) and the Śvetāmbaras (who wore a white cover), there was a third sect that emerged to prominence. This sect was known as Yāpanīyas. Less orthodox and less strict on doctrinal observances, the Yāpanīyas gained greater popularity than the Digambaras incertain regions. The more accommodative spirit and feature of the Yāpanīya sect is evident from their allowing nuns to tutor monks.

The most spectacular development in religious life, as we have briefly remarked before, was the spread and proliferation of several Brahmanical sects all over India, especially, Vaishnavism and Śaivism with their multiple sects. The rise of these sectarian bhakti (devotional) cults certainly led to the decrease in the appeal of Buddhism and Jainism. However, the most significant philosophical and intellectual challenge to the Sramanic religions was initiated by Śaṅkarāchārya (assigned to late eighth and early ninth centuries). One of the greatest minds in Indian history, Śaṅkara's life-history is known only in an imperfect manner, as there is little contemporary

account of him. Largely known from later hagiography, for instance, the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* by Mādhava (fourteenth century), Śaṅkara lived for only thirty-two years. The text narrates that Śaṅkara tirelessly travelled widely to different parts of India, meeting and often refuting other scholars, contestants and rivals all of whom eventually accepted the supreme mastery of Śaṅkara. The outstanding contribution of Śaṅkara lies in the formulation of Advaita Vedānta. Vedānta stands for the Upanishads, which stood as the end of the Vedic corpus, thereby suggesting that the very essence of the Vedic philosophy and spirituality lies in the Vedantic or Upanishadic philosophy. Śaṅkara is celebrated for his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* in the Upanishad. Śaṅkara could have drawn upon the commentary on the Upanishads by Gauḍapada in the seventh or eighth century. Śaṅkara propounded that the Upanishads provided way for the supreme knowledge (*jñāna*) which, according to him was superior to Vedic sacrifices (*kriyā/karma*). The supreme knowledge is the realization that Brahmān or the Universal Being is the ultimate and sole reality.

> The omniscient Lord of all is the originating cause of the world, even as clay, gold etc. are of pot, necklace etc. Of the world which has come into being, He is the cause of sustentation through being the ordainer, as a magician is of his magic. Of the world that has been manifested, He is the cause, again, of dissolution into Himself, even as the earth of is of fourfold beings. He alone is the Self of us all.
>
> (Śaṅkarāchārya, *Brahmasūtrabhāshya*, II.i. 1.
> tr. T.M.P. Mahādevan, *Śaṅkarāchārya*, p. 87).

This reality is unique, ultimate and singular and, therefore, in Śaṅkara's formulation non-dual (*Advaita*). The Ultimate Reality (*Brahmān*) is also something that cannot be qualified (*nirguṇa*), and so, stands for pure consciousness, which remains eternal and unchanging. The idea of plurality thus, is rejected as it amounts to illusion (*māyā*) that comes out of ignorance (*avidyā*).

> That which is supremely real is no-duality, through maya it appears as diverse, even as the plurality of moons on account of defective eyesight, or the rope appearing differently as snakes, water-streak etc., and not in reality, for the Self is partless ... Therefore the partless unborn reality can by no means become different .... The unborn non-dual Self becomes different only through maya, not in reality. Therefore, duality is not the supreme truth.
>
> (Śaṅkarāchārya, *Maṇḍukyakārikābhāshya*, III, 19;
> tr. T.M.P. Mahādevan, *Śaṅkarāchārya*, pp.89-90)

The Advaita Vedānta philosophy of Śaṅkara further proposes the identity and indivisibility between the Universal Being (*Brahmāṇ*) and the individual Self (*Ātman*). This realization is considered as the supreme knowledge, capable of liberating an individual from the miseries of rebirth. In later

hagiography Śaṅkara figures as the supposed founder of the Daśanāmī sect (*sampradaya*). He is also credited with the establishment of four or five *maṭhas* (religious establishments/complexes) in four cardinal directions of the country. Whether this really took place, or Śaṅkara's name and memory were evoked by later theorists to derive legitimacy, is difficult to ascertain.

Śaṅkarāchārya's ideas exerted enormous influence on subsequent thinkers, who in numerous *maṭhas* and educational establishments developed, elaborated and honed his formulations. There were, however, also challenges and contestations to Śaṅkara's formulations. The most serious critique to Śaṅkara's philosophy came from the eleventh century South Indian thinker, Rāmānuja. A Tamil brāhmaṇa, Rāmānuja imparted instructions at the famous Śrīrangam temple at Tiruchhirappalli (in modern Tamil Nadu). He is celebrated as the founder of the Śrī Vaishṇava movement. Rāmānuja challenged Śaṅkara's central philosophy that knowledge or the way of knowledge (*jñānamārga*) was the sole means of the liberation of the soul from rebirth. He proposed instead that knowledge (*jñāna*) was merely one of the means of this coveted liberation, the other option being one's taking recourse to devotion (bhakti), which too was capable of delivering individual liberation. In fact, Rāmānuja espoused the primacy of bhakti or devotion as a means of liberation. He considered that pure devotion required complete negation of one's Self as one, steadfast in the path of bhakti, would give oneself completely, unquestioningly and entirely to one's favourite deity. By doing so, the demarcation between divinity and devotee goes away, paving a way for the merger and identity between the individual soul and the Ultimate Being. Rāmānuja, therefore, not only contested the primacy of the path of knowledge, but also advocated that the path of devotion (bhakti) was more effective and reliable than the path of knowledge (*jñānamārga*). It is possible to discern in Rāmānuja's philosophy an amalgam of upanashidic tenets, brahmanical theology and elements of the bhakti movement.

A critique of Rāmānuja appeared in the ideas of the thirteenth century theologian Madhva. Himself a devout Vaishṇava, he seems to have attempted a synthesis of bhakti and Brahmanical theology. As the supreme deity Vishṇu, in his formulation, grants his grace to his devotees, who thereby were assured of the liberation of their souls. The supreme deity however, showers his grace only to those devotees with a pure soul. There is, therefore, a process of selection involved and this selection was not arbitrary—unlike the philosophy of Rāmānuja. Whereas Rāmānuja advocated for special privileges of higher castes in spiritual matters, Madhva was against excluding certain categories of śūdras from worshipping in temples. In fact, he stressed on the need for throwing open the temples to all śūdras, though he achieved limited success in this venture. What needs to be emphasized here is that these philosophical schools recognized their respective founders as historical personalities (Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva). Each sect (*sampradāya*) was considerably aware of the handing down of the philosophical tradition from

the founder to the succession of teachers and commentators of a particular school, thus highlighting historicity of each tradition.

These highly complex philosophical and theological debates, extremely significant landmarks in cultural history, drew upon Vedic Brahmanism, which was considered by these thinkers as pristine. But such intricate and abstract theological discussions were concerns of a small minority of profound thinkers. Far greater in popularity and practice than these on-going scholarly debates were devotional cults that found an excellent apparatus of expression and proliferation in the numerous Purāṇas. The emergence of devotional sects to prominence is datable around AD 300-600; the tendency not only continued, but consolidated during the next six centuries. The most prominent among the devotional sects were associated with Vaishnavism and Śaivism. Sacred centres of Vaishnavism and Śaivism were located in monumental temples and/or religious complexes (*maṭhas*), which in their turn were rooted to celebrated centres of pilgrimage. This was a new movement in religious life, different from the Vedic sacrificial cult, centred as it was on the offering of worship (*pūjā*, distinct from *yajña*) by a devotee or devotees to the personal divinity. The act of worship was open to a larger number *varṇa-jāti* groups, unlike the elaborate Vedic sacrifices, which were confined mostly to the elite groups. Sectarian bhakti cults had a wide social base and appeal, cutting across social barriers, and this explains the rapid spread of devotional cults. Mythologies associated with a particular deity, often with a strong local and regional base, began to find a space in the Purāṇas, which themselves had distinct sectarian and/or regional affiliations. Narratives of a particular devotional cult could be both oral and composed in a regional language. As the local cults got gradually incorporated into what may be called Puranic Hinduism, their respective narratives also formed part of the Sanskritic tradition and were pooled into the Puranic anthologies. Contributions by R. C. Hazra shows that the movement gained further momentum as many Upapurāṇas (subsidiary and/or minor Purāṇas) were composed with a view to incorporating local rituals and customs into established sectarian devotional cults. The process could hardly have been operational, but for the inherent flexibility facilitating accommodation of many non-Brahmanical elements into the mainstream Hindu cults.

Vaishnavism got a major fillip with the composition of the *Harivaṁśa* which was incorporated into the *Mahābhārata* as a supplement or an appendix (*khila*). It narrates the childhood and youth of Kṛishṇa as an incarnation of Vishṇu. The immense popularity of the concept of the ten incarnations (*avataras*) of Vishṇu continued unabated during this period. A new feature to the Vaishṇava iconography was the regular occurrence of the figures of Lakshmī, Bhūdevī and Śrīdevī as consorts of Vishṇu. Rādhā as the devoted beloved of Kṛishṇa seems to have first appeared in the *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva and the *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, both having a clear association with eastern India.

Śaivism was the other principal Brahmanical bhakti cult that had several sects with distinct regional features. Śaivism in Kashmir is marked by intense personal devotion to Śiva, who is lauded as the supreme god, identified with the Universal Being. In Kashmir one may discern in Śaivism the influence of monism and the non-dualist (Advaita) philosophy of Śaṅkara:

> Obeisance to the immovable Lord, subtler than even the ... mystic syllable OM, greater than even the cosmos and having the quality of being unqualified! ... Master, whatever the direction, there is no place where You are not; Time is Your form; grasped though You are in this manner, where and when could you be reached? Tell me!
>
> (Bhattanarāyaṇa, *Stavachintāmaṇi* 7.17.21, 38-40, 97; tr. V. Raghavan, *The Indian Heritage: An Anthology of Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 442-43)

Authoritative Śaiva Āgama texts were composed by Śaiva Siddhantas, especially in the Tamil-speaking areas in the far south, during the period c.AD 400 to AD 800. The Śaiva Āgama texts recognized the ways of knowledge (*jñāna*), Vedic rituals (*kriyā*) and sacred observances (*charyā*), but championed the cause of bhakti as the best means of attainment of liberation. In fact, it was considered true devotion to Śiva (*Śaiva*-bhakti) as superior to Vedic sacrifices.

A major Śaiva sect was the Lingayat or the Vīraśaivas, founded in the twelfth century by Bāsavanna in the Deccan. Bāsavanna was an apostate Jaina in Kalyani, the seat of power of the Later Chālukya dynasty. The sect he founded was called Lingayats since each member was to carry a miniature *lingam*. The Lingayat/Vīraśaiva sect sharply criticized the hypocrisy of Brahmanism and was consequently opposed by brāhmaṇas. As a result, the Vīraśaiva movement attracted a large number of followers from the lower order of society. The Lingayats later themselves became a caste. The Lingayats preferred burial to cremation as a funerary process; this too was a marker of their protest against orthodox brahmanism. The Lingayats also strongly advocated for the better status of women, yet barred women from becoming priests.

As several powerful ruling houses were ardent Śaivas (the Cholas for example), Śaivism received sustained patronage from these dynasties, mostly in the construction of massive structural temples of Śiva or grants of land in favour of Śaiva monasteries. The Pāla rulers of eastern India, who generally addressed themselves in their own official records as devout Buddhists (*paramasaugata*), made similar donations to Śaiva establishments. An inscription of the time of Nayapāla (eleventh century) speaks of an impressive temple of Śiva Vaidyanātha (Śiva as the master physician or healer) that was located possibly in the western part of Bengal. Similarly, a very large brāhmaṇa settlement (*Brahmapura*) in Śrīhaṭṭa (present-day Sylhet in Bangladesh) figures in an inscription of Śrichandra (AD 930) of

the Buddhist Chandra dynasty; in that *Brahampura* were located shrines of Yogeśvara and Mahākala, two well-known aspects of Śiva. The inscription also records the transfer of extensive landed property to the *maṭha* by king Śrīchandra.

There were also a few extremist sects in Śaivism—the Kāpālikas, the Kālāmukhas, Pāśupatas and Mattamayūrakas. As David Lorenzen shows, the Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas practised unusual rites and rituals, e.g. using the remains of cremated bodies, indulging in ritualized sexual intercourse, etc. For the Kālāmukhas, it was quite usual to eat food from a skull, smearing his body with the ashes of the creamted corpse, carrying a pot of wine and a club. All these were deliberate and visible exhibitions of the challenge to established social and cultural codes. The spectacles clearly underlined wilful deviations from accepted norms. Here one may find an attempt at registering a protest, which indeed would have attracted those who upheld nonconformity and demonstrated a definite disregard for minimal social and cultural obligations. The Pāśupata sect was quite active at the celebrated Śaiva sacred centre, Somanātha. Detailed studies of epigraphic texts, especially of AD 1264 and AD 1287, demonstrate that Somanātha continued to be a thriving Śaiva centre, in spite of suffering huge damages during the raids of Mahmud of Ghazna in AD 1025. The image of the Pāśupata *āchārya* in Somanātha, namely Tripurāntaka, clearly bears out the increasing influence of Tripurāntaka in the social and cultural life of Somanātha for at least a quarter of a century. The other Śaiva sect—Mattamayūrakas—is particularly known for the long lineages of teachers (*āchāryas*), who bore two typical suffixes, Śiva and Sambhu to their respective names. Their principal deity was the Lākulīśa form of Śiva. Inscriptions show that there were three prominent areas of concentration of the Mattamayūrakas, viz., northern Bengal under the Pālas, the region around Jabalpur (the realm of the Kalachuris) in Madhya Pradesh and eastern Deccan (in the Kākatīya kingdom). A large religious establishment, namely Golakīmaṭha in the Kākatīya realm, had an extremely influential chief, Visveśvarasambhu, who originally hailed from the Rādhā region of Bengal and was held in awe and esteem by the royal houses in the Kalachuri and Kākatīya realms as a royal preceptor.

Along with the two premier Matha-oriented religions, devotional sects also sprang around the worship of the sun-god, Sūrya and Gaṇeśa. Sun temples were built in Kashmir, at Osian in Rajasthan and at Konarak in Orissa, the last being the most famous of the monumental temples dedicated to Sūrya. Royal patronage to solar cult is recorded in sources. The elephant-headed deity Gaṇeśa could have originally been a totem, but in the period under review, he was seen as a son of Śiva and Pārvatī. He was thus connected with both Śaivism and Śāktism, the latter as the supreme deity. The popularity of Gaṇeśa worship can easily be judged in the light of numerous images of Gaṇeśa, made both of stone and metal. Gaṇeśa was seen and propitiated

at once as a malevolent and benevolent deity who presided over calamity (*vighnesa*) and also ensured cessation of hindrances (*vighnanasaka*).

Another unmistakable feature of religious beliefs and practices was the growing presence of Tantrism and Tantric practices. Tannic practices were occasionally observed independently; but in many cases, these infiltrated various brahmanical sects and became formalized. The most apparent case in this context is the increasing visibility of the cult of the goddess. The strong connections between Tantric ideas and practices and *Devī* worship are undeniable. Tantric beliefs and practices are also noted for assigning a prominent place and position of women in rituals. The great goddess (*Devī*) is held in supreme veneration in texts like *Devīmāhātmyam* which is of foundational importance to understand the significance of the Śākta cult. The *Devīmāhātmyam*, in the *Narāyaṇīstuti* section (praise to *Nārāyaṇī*), narrates various forms of the great goddess. The *Matsya Purāṇa* and the *Kurma Purāṇa* give us 108 and 1,000 names of the Devī. It appears that initially the *Devī* is venerated as an individual and independent deity. It was only in later Purāṇas that she began to be presented as a consort of an important male god, mostly Śiva. This process of what has been termed as spousification of the goddess was particularly operational in the Śaiva- Śākta cults. The Śākta cult strongly underlines the creative energy of Śāktī, which was essential to any action. In this way, the goddess worship can be considered as a marker of a challenge to patriarchy that strongly influenced the Brahmanical pantheon. The prominence of the Devī and/or the Mātṛikās in Brahmanical pantheon has a close linkage also with the increasing importance of Tantric ritual practices. Kunal Chakrabarti has made elaborate analysis of the Purāṇas in Bengal to understand the nature of Devī worship. In this region, according to him, there had been a strong tradition of autonomous goddess worship before the spread of Puranic bhakti cults, which, when these appeared in Bengal, had to encounter these autonomous goddess cults. The result was the gradual accommodation of these local Devī cults into the Brahmanical pantheon. The long process of accommodation gets reflected in these Purāṇas, which too had recognizable regional features; the other outcome was the primacy of goddess worship in Bengal, accorded in these Purāṇas in Bengal. Many centres of goddess worship would become prominent in subsequent times as *śaktapīṭhas*.

The spread of bhakti cults and the growing appeal of Brahmanical religions were not, however, free from contestations. There were sectarian contestations; contemporary sources also indicate similar contestations between different bhakti cults on one hand and Sramanic religions on the other. Kṛishṇamiśra's *Prabodhachandrodaya*, an allegorical drama, places before us the competitive attitude among rival sects and cults. A major dispute took place in northern Konkan between a Devī *maṭha* and its adjacent Vaishṇava shrine, possibly over the possession of a plot of land that lay between the two shrines. The situation became so complex that some of

the inmates associated with the Vaishṇava shrine took the extreme measure of fasting unto death. The dispute was eventually resolved. The problem and its resolution are the subject matter of a Rāshṭrakūṭa inscription of early tenth century. Similarly, in AD 930, one encounters a unique scenario in a brāhmaṇa settlement (*Brahmapura*) in Śrīhaṭṭa (modern Sylhet in Bangladesh) where land was granted by the local ruler Śrīchandra (AD 925–75) for the upkeep of, among other things, two religious establishments (*maṭhas*), earmarked respectively for people of Vaṅgāldeśa (*Vaṅgāladeśīya*) and those hailing from elsewhere (*Deśāntarīya*). What is striking here is that in the two separate *maṭhas* were propitiated identical divinities: Agni Vaiśvānara (fire god), Mahākala and Yogeśvara (both being two aspects of Śiva) and Jaiminī (the author of the *Pūrvamimāṁsā*, who was deified at some point of time). There must have occurred some tensions or disputes or sharp differences between the Vaṅgāladeśīyas and the Deśāntrīyas, resulting in the existence of two separate religious complexes housing identical deities. One cannot, however, ascertain what actually sparked off such a sharp division among devotees of identical divinities. Hermann Kulke demonstrates how in some parts of the Deccan Śaiva sects made disparaging comments about the Buddhists, Jainas and the followers of Sāṅkhya philosophy.

XXVIII

Languages and Literature

We may now take a look at languages and literary works of the period under review. The period marks the spread of Sanskrit throughout the subcontinent along with the emergence of a number of regional vernaculars. Sanskrit was indeed the language of the court and elites and its currency was confined to a handful of learned people. This was the preferred language for writing matters related to Brahmanical philosophy, religion, especially the Vedānta and the Mīmāṁsā texts (digests), and the normative texts and their commentaries. Significantly enough, Buddhist and Jaina centres of learning extensively used Sanskrit. The famous Jain polymath, Hemachandra, composed Sanskrit texts like *Dvayāśrayakāvya* and *Pariśishṭaparvan*. Sanskrit was the principal medium, at least in north India, for composing life stories (*charitas*) of prominent political personalities. The first text of this genre was Bānabhaṭṭa's *Harshacharita;* the tradition continued unabated in Sandhyakāranandin's *Rāmacharitam* and Bilhana's *Vikramāṅkadevacharitam*. The *Rāmacharitam* is a complex composition as each verse therein offers two meanings: one about Rāmachandra of Ayodhyā and the other regarding the life and achievements of Rāmapāla of the Pāla dynasty, the actual hero of this composition. Sanskrit was also the chief vehicle of writing north Indian inscriptions and the literary standard of the royal eulogy in epigraphic texts

usually followed that in the literary texts. The significant point here is the simultaneous use of both Sanskrit and a regional language in inscriptions. This is especially noticeable in landgrant charters where the royal eulogy and dynastic accounts were composed in Sanskrit, while the actual grant portion, the operative part of the record was written in a local vernacular. This may hint at the possibilities of bilingualism; the migrant Brahamanas could well have been bilinguals. That Prakrit could also be the vehicle of writing the kavya style life-stories of rulers is borne out by Vākpatirāja's *Gauḍavaho* that narrated the event of the killing of the Gauḍa king by the Kashmirian king.

The best example of the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition of chronicling the past belongs to this period in the form of Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarangiṇi*, which attempts at narrating the connected account of the past of Kashmir. It is particularly noted for its remarkable accuracy of recording events in Kashmir for the post-AD 700 period. Narrating the past of a royal house often took the shape of *vaṁśāvalīs*, especially related to a local or regional ruling house. A typical case in point is the *vaṁśāvalī* of the mountainous area of Chamba; it coincided with the advent of the monarchical state society in northern parts of the present Himachal Pradesh.

Sanskrit was also the principal vehicle for writing technical treatises. Considerable emphasis was given on the mastery of grammar. The study of grammar and etymology can be considered rational enquiries, which were pursued by both orthodox and heterodox schools. Most of the Buddhist monasteries were also noted for the study of grammar. Interestingly enough, in the large brāhmaṇa settlement in Śrīhatta (already mentioned above) there was provision for the maintenance of the teacher of Chāndravyakāraṇa, i.e. the study of the treatise on grammar written by the Buddhist grammarian Chandragomin. If the earliest of the lexicon was the *Nāmaliṅganuśāsana* by Amarasimha in the fifth-sixth century, it became a regular intellectual practice. Two famous instances of lexicons of this period is Halāyaudhaśarman's *Abhidhāna-chintāmaṇi* and Hemachandra's *Deśīnāmamālā*. The latter text explains and gives Sanskrit synonyms of a selection of western Indian vernacular vocabulary. Another notable feature of the literary activities is the availability of a number of technical treatises. If there were specific treatises on agriculture and plants, *Kṛishiparāśara* and *Vṛikshāyurveda* respectively, there were also major texts on medicine. The best illustrations of this are the *Ashtāṅgahridayasaṅgraha* by Vagbhata (seventh/eighth century) and the treatise by Chakrapāṇidatta in the eleventh century, both drawing upon and elaborating on the medical treatise by Charaka. It is likely that such technical treatises reflected tile cooperation and transactions between Sanskritists and professional specialists in their respective fields. To this genre also belonged the famous treatises on aesthetics and prosody, namely the *Dhvanyāloka* of Ānandavardhana and Abhinava-gupta's *Dhvanyāloka-lochana*. Ābhinavagupta was also the author of the celebrated

treatise on dramaturgy, *Abhinavabhārati*. The tradition continued, as will be evident from Sāgaranandin's *Nāṭakalakshanaratnakośa* (thirteenth century).

In addition to voluminous literary output in creative Sanskrit literature, Tamil, Telugu and Kanarese language gained considerable prominence for literary expressions. A few specimens may be in order here:

Even the lotus has its petals pale,
The moom has go its spot, and where is form
Of any kind without the slightest fault?
But thou will see no imperfection mar
Her shapely form. Great Brahmā made the flute.
And vina, parrots, koil and the children's bable,
And then he coped all sweetness with her voice:
But nought could he create to parallel
Her speech and one; and can he e'er succeed
If he should try ev'n now for all his life?

(*Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* V, 60,62,63: *source*: V.V.S. Aiyar, *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa, A Study*, Bombay, 1965, p. 54).

A specimen of Telugu poetry of the 11—12th century:

Brahmā ran to mount his swan and fell In fear trembling.....
Vishṇu escaped creeping...
To his white elephant Indra ran
And withhis thousand eyes like a peacock appeared
By hunters chased to the White Mount escaping
Yama like a coward fell across
His buffalo, while the ganas hooted.

(Nannicoda, *Kumārasambhavam*, tr. P.T. Raju, Telugu Literature, Bombay 1944, p. 94).

A sample of Kannada poetry (12-13th century)

Then Angada, heir to Kishkindha's wide soil,
Determines himself Rāvaṇa's penance t spoil
He mounts on Kishkindha, his elephant proud;
And round him his ape-bannered followers crowd.
He rides through the suburbs of Lankā's fair town
Admiring its beauty, its grove of renown.
He enters the place, goes alone to the fane;
With reverence he walks round Santīśvara's shrine,
And in loneliness worships the image divine.
When—sudden—he sees the giant Rāvaṇa there
Seated, still as some mountain, absorbed in his prayer!

(Nagachandra, *Rāmachandracharitapurāṇa*, tr., E.P. Rice, *Kanarese Literature*, 1921, p. 40)

XXIX

Art and Architecture

This section intends to provide an overview of the visual arts, especially architecture and sculpture. Sculptors usually gave the desired form to images, mostly divine, following the standardized iconographic norms which in its turn drew largely upon Puranic myths and legends associated with different divinities. A major source of iconographic prescriptions was the *Vishṇudharmottarapurāṇa*. Similarly technical treatises were written on architecture, e.g. the *Samarāṅgasūtradhara* and the *Mānasollāsa*, ascribed respectively to Bhoja and Someśvara III, both well known rulers. Another text on architecture was the *Manasdra*. For the art of painting, the artist's manual can be seen in the *Vishṇudharmottarapurāṇa* and in the *Chitralakshaṇa*. It is true that architecture and sculpture were the principal facets of the visual arts; paintings, though definitely not unknown, are far less numerous than sculptures of the early medieval times.

The two most significant aspects of architecture are the structural temples of this time (many of monumental size) and the gradual disappearance of the rock-cut architecture of the previous centuries. No less significant is the emergence and consolidation of distinct regional styles in temple architecture: the Nāgara style of temples in north India, the Drāviḍa style of temples in peninsular India and the Vesara (the term denotes mixture, i.e. an admixture of north and south Indian architectural styles) type of temples in Karnataka. The genesis of both the dominant temple architecture styles, the Nāgara and the Drāviḍa, can be traced to AD 600, which had already figured in our discussions in Chapter VI.

The north Indian Nāgara temple styles had at least two major sub-regional trends, one in Orissa and the other in central India (especially Khajuraho). The most important and sacred component of the temple was the *sanctum cella* (*grabhagṛiha*), which was invariably square in shape. This square *sanctum cella* had been a constant feature of the Nāgara temples right from the inception of the style since the 5/6th century. The exterior walls of the *sanctum cella*, initially left blank and flat, began to be provided with horizontal projections, which therefore allowed interplay of light and shade and depth and accentuation. This enormously enhanced the visual appeal of the exterior walls, which now accommodated a number of niches that housed numerous sculptures as decorative elements of the exterior walls. Such horizontal divisions in the exterior walls were known as *rathas* in technical treatises. If the temple wall had three such projections on each side it would be called a *triratha* temple, while a temple with five such projections on each of the exterior walls would be considered a *pañcharatha* temple. Temples with three and five projections on each of the exterior walls are regularly seen in Orissa; usually the *triratha* temple is earlier than the *pañcharatha* temple,

thus suggesting an evolution of the architectural style from relatively simple to more elaborate decorations. The exterior wall of the *sanctum cella* had also three or five vertical divisions (usually known as *aṅgas* in traditional *śilpa* treatises in Orissa), often represented by richly carved moldings. Thus the artists attempted a symmetrical treatment of both vertical and horizontal divisions on the exterior walls of the temple: if the temple wall had five horizontal divisions (*pañcharatha*), it would often have (but not uniformly) also five vertical divisions (*pañchanga*). The vertical divisions, at least in the Orissan terminology, were called after the lower part of the human body, like the feet (*pādabhāga/pābhāga*), the thigh (*jaṅghā*), etc. A further molding at the top of the wall of the *sanctum cella* served as the demarcator between the *sanctum cella* and its superstructure. The superstructure, known as the *śikhara*, is perhaps the most striking part of the temple. It should ideally rise steeply, giving a visual impression of its soaring into the sky, however, not in a straight line, but in a slightly tapering shape. The curvilinear tall tower therefore should, according to the traditional treatises on architecture, closely resemble the beak of a bird (*śukanāsa*). The emphasis is obviously on the verticality of the tower that ideally should dominate the entire landscape. What is significant is that the square shape of the ground plan of the temple is carried upwards into its elevation; so, the topmost part of the curvilinear tower (*śikhara*) remains square in its section. Similarly, the horizontal divisions on the walls of the *sanctum cella* are also carried up in the superstructure. If the *sanctum cella* had five horizontal divisions on its exterior walls, the curvilinear tower too would have five horizontal divisions (usually known in Orissan terminology as *pagas:* one central *paga*, flanked immediately by two subdivisions, called *anurāhāpagas*, and along the curvilinear contours of the tower two more divisions, called the *konikapagas*—thus totalling five horizontal subdivisions).

Atop the *śikhara* there should be several more architectural elements, which combine to constitute what is called the crowning element or *mastaka* (literally the head). Thus the metaphor of the human body is applied to the entire *sanctum cella*, right from the feet (*padabhāga/pābhāga*) to the head (*mastaka*), intermediated by the trunk or the curvilinear tower. Where the *śikhara* ends and the crowning section begins, the architectural member is called the neck or the *kaṇṭha*. In mature Orissan temples, one notices elegant figures of jumping lions at four corners around the neck portion. Above this member is placed a huge spherical stone, usually striated, known as the *āmalakaśilā*. In several temples, two such spherical stones are placed one above the other, with a view to accentuating the height and also the massiveness of the temple. The architectural element above the spheroid stone(s) is known as the skull (*khapari*), above which is placed a pitcher-like (*kalasa*) component. The final crowning element is the finial. Thus the *sanctum cella* with its square ground plan and a tall and tapering superstructure are imbued with the aesthetic appeal of accentuating height.

The evolution of the north Indian Nāgara temples not only demonstrates elaborations and complexity in the design of the *sanctum cella* and the superstructure, but also witnessed the addition of a few ancilliary structures. These structures were non-existent in the simple but elegant square temples at Sanchi and Tigawa in the fourth/fifth/sixth centuries. These temples merely had a square *sanctum cella* in the front of which stood a pillared porch serving as the resting place for pilgrims and worshippers. In the developed and mature forms of the later Nāgara temples, one comes across three separate structures. These three structures, though separate, were placed in the same linear alignment with the *sanctum cella*. Following Orissan terminology of temple architecture, these structures are called the *nāṭamaṇḍapa* (pillared pavilion for musical, theatrical performances in the temple precincts), *bhogamaṇḍapa* (pillared pavilion for distributing and partaking the sacred prasāda) and *jagamohana* (a massive hall as a vastly enlarged form of the original pillared porch before the main shrine). A passageway connected the *jagamohana* with the main shrine. The *nātamaṇḍapa*, *bhogamaṇḍapa* and the *jagamohana* had their exterior walls richly carved with sculptures, designs and moldings; the exterior walls on each side also had the usual projections to allow interplay of light and shade and accommodate sculptures. All these three structures had a common type of roofing, which was distinctly different from that of *sanctum cella*. The superstructure here consisted of three or four tiers of massive horizontal platforms, each upper tier an exact replica of the immediately lower tier but on a smaller scale. The use of the three or four receding tiers gave a clear thrust on horizontality in sharp but pleasant contrast to the soaring tower of the sanctum cella with a stress on verticality. The tier in Orissan terminology is called *pīdhā*. Therefore, the three ancilliary structures, and especially the *jagamohana* is termed *pīdhā deul;* the main shrine with its curvilinear superstructure is known as *rekha deul*. Like the *rekha deul*, the *pīdhā deul* too has in the topmost part of the superstructure the usual neck-like section, the spheroid stone, the skull-like part and the pitcher with the finial. Each succeeding structure was higher than each preceding structure, while the pinnacle is the tall and tapering tower above the *sanctum cella*. The intention of the architect was to give a visual effect of a range of mountains leading up to its highest peak, which in this case was the *śikhara* above the *sanctum cella*.

The outstanding example of this kind of temple architecture in Orissa are the Rajarani temple and the Lingarāja temple at Bhuvaneswar, dated respectively to the tenth and eleventh century. The inherent structural harmony along the four components in both the temples underlines the superb mastery of the Orissan architects. They represent the most mature and evolved form of the Nāgara style temples in Orissa, the beginning of which can be traced in the smaller, simpler, nevertheless elegant temples like Mukteswar and Parasuramesawar, also situated in Bhuvaneswar. There are interesting differences in the more minute details in Rajarani and Lingarāja

temples. While Lingrāja is a classic example of the typical *pañcharatha* and *pañchāṅga* temple, Rajarani has seven horizontal projections and seven vertical divisions—two features more frequently seen in the Nāgara temples of Khajuraho. The Rajarani temple is also distinctive by the use of miniature *śikhara* (*aṅgaśikhara*) adorning the entire curvilinear superstructure. As a result, the superstructure of Rajarani temple looks heavy and somewhat overburdened with decorations. The use of the *angaśikhara* as a decorative motif is only minimally used in Lingarāja temple *śikhara*, giving an impression of its being light in Structure and its elongated elegant appearance. The best specimen of the *jagamohana* is of course the famous structure at Konarak, built in the thirteenth century, Massive in size and composition, the *jagamohana*, in situ, is the only relic to impress the viewer of the monumentality of the main shrine, which is completely broken. The *jagamohana* at Konarak, with its five horizontal projections and matching five vertical divisions, is an imposing structure having three receding horizontal *pīdhās* that formed its superstructure. The Konarak sun temple, designed as the wheeled chariot of the sun-god, is an architectural marvel in terms of its stupendous size and its structural symmetry and harmony.

Many of these architectural features are also present in the group of temples at Khajuraho, built under the patronage of local Chandella rulers. Like the Orissa temples, these are also celebrated samples of Nāgara architecture with the main shrine and its three other ancilliary structures. But there are also some individual characteristics of the Khajuraho temples, typically manifested in the eleventh century Kandariya Mahādeo temple, the most famous shrine at Khajuraho. The Khajuraho temples mostly stand on a very large stone platform or podium, which is approached from the ground level by a flight of stairs. The actual temple then rises above a noticeably high plinth. These two structural elements were meant for furthering the height of the temple. Most temples being royal temples, the urge for increasing the elevation of the temple is a statement of the formidability of its royal patron. Like its Orissan counterparts, the Khajuraho Nāgara temple has the four structural components—the sanctum cella and the three other ancillary structures. The main shrine is connected with its immediately adjacent *jagamohana*-type structure with an open vestibule (*antarāla*), which is a new feature. The introduction of this element renders a sense of visual lightness to the huge temple. The most notable among the Khajuraho temples is Kandariya Mahādeo temple, a Śaiva shrine. A special feature is its sevenfold vertical and horizontal divisions in the exterior wall in the place of fivefold division, so common in Orissan temples. The soaring *śikhara* or the curvilinear tower above the *sanctum cella* has seven horizontal divisions. The *śikhara* is further embellished with the motif of miniature *śikharas*, leaving an impression of excessive decoration that seems to add to the volume of the tapering tower and somehow restricts the visual appeal of the accentuating height of the *śikhara*. The *paga*-like vertical bands, which

decorate the *śikhara* are extended beyond the *śikhara*. The entire temple resembles a range of mountain with the curvilinear tower representing its highest peak. Compared to the Orissan temples, the elegance and aesthetics of the soaring main shrine appears to have been compromised on account of the excessive sculptural embellishments.

We may now look at the salient features of the Drāviḍa or south Indian architectural style. The earliest Drāviḍa style architecture is visible in Mahābalipuram where during the Pallava period were constructed five different structures, popularly known as *rathas* named after the five Pāṇḍava brothers and Draupadī. The essentaial features of a Drāviḍa temple are visible in the Dharmarāja ratha. The main shrine has a square ground plan, above which rises the superstructure of some height. However, in contrast to the tall curvilinear tower in Nāgara style, the superstructure in Drāviḍa temples consists of a series of square horizontal platforms placed one above the other, with each upper tier being a smaller replica of the immediately lower tier. This arrangement of receding square tiers, placed one above the other, renders the superstructure with a pyramidal shape. This section is called the *vimāna*, which offers the same function as the *Śikhara* in north Indian temples. The *vimāna* is usually topped by a very large circular stone boulder called *stupikā*. While the Dharmarāja *ratha* goes back to the seventh century, the more famous and elegant Shore temple at Mahābalipuram was built during AD 700–728 period. It is so called because of its location to the proximity to the Bay of Bengal. Made of granite, it is the earliest of the important structural temples of Drāviḍa style. The shrine has the usual square *garbhagriha*, over which the superstructure rises in five storeys represented by the five receding tiers. The topmost portions of the superstructure are occupied by the large round boulder and above it, a finial, giving the visual effect of a tall pyramidal structure with a conical appearance. Each individual tier is provided with overhanging eaves, which provide dark shadow on to the temple walls. This is a Śaiva shrine which has also a similar, but smaller shrine in front. The smaller shrine appears to originally served the function of a porch, but subsequently turned into a shrine. One enters the twin shrines through a transverse barrel-vaulted gate which in south India was called the *gopuram*. Between the two Śaiva shrines also stands a small Vaishṇava temple, which was possibly built as a balancing act between two competing, if not rival, Brahmanical sects.

An amazing specimen of Drāviḍa temple architecture is the Kailāsa temple at Ellora. It was built in the eighth century under the patronage of the Rāshṭrakūṭa ruler Kṛishṇa I. The most outstanding feature of this stupendous temple is that unlike the two other Drāviḍa temples mentioned before, it is not a structural temple, but a rock-cut shrine, hewn out, as it was of live rock. Dug out of a basal cliff, it is the pinnacle of rock-cut architecture of India. It is a monolithic temple, since it was carved out of a single rock. The structure was in fact sculpted or scooped out of the rock not from below to

the top as is the usual method, but created by working down from the top of the rock to the surface level—itself an astounding engineering feat that was achieved by clearing an estimated amount of 200,000 tonnes of rock. One enters this temple through a two-storied gateway, which takes the visitor to an U-shaped courtyard. The courtyard is flanked by a columned arcade three storeys high. The arcade is punctuated by hugely sculpted panels. The shrine, supposed to be the abode of Śiva and hence called Kailāsa, has pillars, windows, inner and outer rooms and an enormous stone lingam in the *sanctum sanctorum*. Above the *garbhagriha* three receding tiers rise above the *vimāna* or the superstructure, topped by the customary *stupikā*. Here too the elevation of the superstructure dominates the surrounding. The temple is adorned with superb sculptures and obelisk like free-standing, independent pillars.

However, the most celebrated example of Drāviḍa temple style is the Brihadīśvara temple at Tanjore, built by the formidable Chola king Rājarāja. It is also called Rājarājeswara temple after its royal patron. It is a complete granite temple located at the centre of the town of Thanjavur. Built to underline the glory and majesty of its patron, the temple is noted for its grandeur, axial and symmetrical geometry. The entrance is through the customary *gopuram*, which is five-storey high and impresses the onlooker with a sense of awe. Crossing the gateway the visitor reaches a huge quadrangle which houses a sanctuary, a Nandi image, symbolizing the mount of Śiva, a pillared hall and a *maṇḍapa*. The inner *maṇḍapa* has the *sanctum sanctorum* or the *garbhagriha* wherein is enshrined the stone lingam. The *sanctum sanctorum* stands on a plinth and it is square in ground-plan. This is indeed the most sacred component of the entire temple complex and is believed to be the microcosm of the universe. Above the *sanctum cella* rises the superstructure in the form of a *vimāna* of breath-taking height that rises to 216 feet (or 66 metre). It consists of the usual receding horizontal tiers, which assume a pyramidal shape. The superstructure is hollow inside and retains the square shape of the ground-plan of the *garbha-griha* right up to the top. Above the superstructure rests the massive *stupikā* or the round stone boulder. Though it was earlier thought that the *stupikā* was monolithic, recent scholarship has doubted that. The temple complex has a wall all around it, but it was added later in the sixteenth century to the main temple area. As usual, the temple is superbly decorated with sculptures, especially the figures of Śiva in different forms. The classical form of the Drāviḍa style seen in Brihadiswara temple served as a model for several centuries, though after 1500 the temple gateway (*gopuram*) became the principal focus of the architect.

The last section of this discussion takes up a brief overview of the art of sculpture. One salient feature of early medieval sculpture is the predominant use of the sculpture as a decoration of the temple wall, whether in the Nāgara or the Drāviḍa temples. The exterior walls of the *sanctum cella* and

other ancilliary structures, with several projections, were ideally suitable for setting up sculptures. The richly carved exterior walls of the temple stood in sharp contrast to the bare interior of the temple. Another notable stylistic feature of the sculptures of this period is that majority of the images were relief sculptures. On many occasions these were executed in very high relief, giving an impression of the representation of the figure almost in the round. But sculptures in the round were numerically insignificant. A very large number of sculptures, being inseparable parts of temples, were created by strictly following iconographic prescriptions laid down in technical treatises. The image of the sun-god wearing a pair of boots, riding on a chariot drawn by seven horses and flanked by goddesses Ūshā and Pratyūshā, is a typical instance. There is little doubt that many Brahmanical images drew heavily upon myths and legends in the Purāṇas. The images of Śiva and Pārvatī, of the Ardhanarīśvara (half male, half female) form of Śiva, of Durgā as the slayer of the buffalo demon (Mahishāsuramardinī) and of Vishṇu in his eternal sleep (*anantaśāyin*) clearly illustrate this. The profusion of erotic images, adorning temple walls (e.g. in Khajuraho temples and at Konarak), is another characteristic of early medieval sculptures. Erotic elements could either have gained prominence on account of Tantric prescriptions or, as Devangana Desai argued, because of the influence of feudal culture in early medieval times. The images of gods and goddesses were invariably depicted in the full bloom of their youthful bodies; the male figure in general has broad shoulders, graceful limbs, a powerful chest and a slim waist. Female forms invariably highlight a fully rounded face, often with pronounced sensuousness, heavy and fully rounded breasts, an attenuated waist, deep set navel and broad hips. Images of this period are often shown in multiple flexions (*bhaṅgas*): two or three flexions (*dvibhanga/tribhanga*) are quite common; and, even many flexions are not unknown. This clearly speaks of the artist's predilections for imparting rapid movements in the images. The sculptor very much continues the two classical features of the sculptures of 300–600 phase, namely the preference for a plastic form and a flowing linear rhythm. But one cannot also miss that after the eleventh century, profuse number of sculptures were produced, but these also betrayed a monotonous and mechanical output according to iconographic norms with few innovations in form. In many specimens of post-1100 AD, the angular treatment of limbs, the broken line of the body contour, an almost triangular face with a sharply pointed chin and overburdening jewellery are plainly visible. Both stone and metal images (especially bronze) were used as media for sculpting and the same iconographic norms were followed in stone, as well bronze sculptures. Though the sculptural traditions were rooted to the classical features of the pre-AD 600 times, there were distinct regional features. Thus the tall, lithe and slim figures with a clear preference for linearism and dramatic movements and tightly packed compositions are typical features of south Indian sculptures. The figures of the Buddha and

Vishṇu, for example, with a high staella, and shown in remarkably high relief belongs to the eastern Indian tradition. The exuberance of the female form, with many flexions in the body, often looking at the mirror and/or plucking out a thorn from an upraised foot is a signature theme and style in north and central Indian style. There are also discernible individualities in the choice of materials. Thus the octo-alloy images are typically associated with eastern India, while the superb free-standing bronze figures bear the stamp of the south Indian artist.

Since it is not possible here to offer an elaborate study of all regional styles, descriptions of some outstanding pieces may be in order at this juncture. One may begin with an account of the celebrated and gigantic stone sculpture at Mahābalipuram. Made out of a single boulder, the scene depicts a fascinating world of flora and fauna, along with the figures of ascetics and the scene of a cascading stream. The scene is identified either with the legend of Bhagiratha's bringing the Ganga down from the matted locks of Śiva (*Gangāvataraṇa*) or Arjuna's penance, which is described in the *Mahābhārata* and also the theme of the drama, *Kirātārjunīyam*. Composed in high relief, it shows the flowing of the river along the banks in which one sees the unfolding of the world of ascetics, elephants and even monkeys. The vibrant world of rural domestic life is wonderfully captured in a scene that depicts the milking of a cow by a woman with the calf next to its mother.

The robustness of composition, the predilection for larger than life forms and the love for action are all throbbing with life in sculptures at Kailāsa temple (Ellora). An excellent example of this shows Rāvaṇa shaking the mount Kailāsa, the abode of Śiva and Pārvatī. The graceful poses of Śiva and Pārvatī, engrossed in a game of dice, at the same shrine also deserves our attention. The Kailāsa temple is renowned for portraying panels on the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme. The onlooker's eyes meet the compact panel depicting Jatayu's valiant but unsuccessful resistance to Rāvaṇa, who abducts Sītā. Another amazing composition is the scene of Hanumān crossing the scene. A simple, but incomparably elegant composition, it shows Hanumān soaring upwards in flight as he crosses the sea; the limbs and the tail of Hanumān are deliberately elongated and excellently fitted into an elongated rectangular space. The artist demonstrates his mastery over the medium, the form and the composition by leaving the entire panel blank without any decoration, save the figure of Hanumān in flight. The blank space below Hanumān symbolizes the sea.

In eastern India, especially in the Pāla-Sena realms, emerged a distinctive sculptural style combining the classical sculptural style with a regional idiom. Profuse number of images are known, some with inscribed labels, which help us arrive at a workable chronology of the stylistic evolution of this school of sculpture. A late Tibetan account by Lama Taranatha tells us about two master artists in the Pāla realm—Dhiman and Vitpalo. Buddhist monasteries, especially Nalanda, Vikramasila, Somapura and Mainamati,

were lively centres of sculptural art and had in them ateliors. Many images, whether of the Buddha or Vishṇu, are shown in a straight and erect posture without any flexion (*samapādasthānaka*), portrayed in high relief with a staela forming its background. While earlier images have a simple undecorated staela, later ones were placed in a very richly carved staela and the entire composition filled up with ancilliary figures including that of the donor of the image. The later icons had more pointed staela top. An interesting feature in eastern Indian sculpture is the preference for the octo-alloy as the medium for sculpting. The easternmost part of the Bengal delta was also familiar with bronze, as will be evident from the bronze figures from Jhewari (Bangladesh). Sculptures from eastern Bihar and (undivided) Bengal occasionally show the staela in the form of a *rekha* or *pīdhā* superstructure, giving thereby the visual effect that the image was emerging out of a shrine. The bulk of the staella having been hollowed, it also created an effect of the lightness of the composition. However, late eleventh century onwards, images began to have a rather angular treatment with break in the erstwhile flowing linear rhythm of the body contour. Over-ornamentation of both the image and the background staela possibly marks a mechanical outlook of images.

No overview of the visual art of the early medieval times can be complete without referring to the bronze sculptures in south India, belonging largely to the Choḷa times (ninth to thirteen century). Royal figures, images of Pārvatī were curved out in bronze. The outstanding image is however of Śiva Naṭarāja, the Lord of the Cosmic Dance. It is likely that many of these images were portable and carried outside the temple precincts during special religious ceremonies for public viewing. These figures, especially the figures of Natarāja, are all free-standing images, not executed in the form of relief sculptures. These were manufactured with the lost wax technique which, according to Sarada Śrīnivisan, could have originated in the Pallava times. Typical of the south Indian sculptural style and appeal, these images are noted for their superb linear rhythm. The limbs of the image are deliberately elongated and the image appears even lengthier because of a tall head-ornament (*mukuṭa*) placed on the head. The slender arms and legs, the thin waist, juxtaposed with powerful shoulders and rounded breasts, are elegantly modelled with an emphasis on movements, both languid and dramatic.

The Choḷa bronze par excellence is the figure of Naṭarāja, the stylistic and philosophical aspects of which have been studied in-depth by, among others, Coomaraswamy and Śivaramamurti. The Naṭarāja figure is usually four-armed, but in some images more arms are added. The image portrays the cosmic dance by the Lord of Dances and the legend is associated with Chidambaram, a great Śaiva centre in the Choḷa kingdom. Śiva dances in an aureole of flames; he performs this dance either in a benign or creative (*lāsya*) spirit or in a destructive (*tāṇḍava*) spirit. In fact, the *tāṇḍava* form symbolizes the destruction of a worn-out Universe, which is to be created

anew by Brahmā after the destruction by Śiva is over. In this way, the dance of destruction actually paves the way for a fresh and pristine creation. The dramatic movement of the Lord of Dance is evident in the unmatted looks of Śiva, fanning out in wavy horizontal lines on both sides. The rhythm of the dance is captured by one uplifted leg (usually the left leg, though on rare occasions the right leg is shown uplifted instead of the left), the right leg lightly rests on a dwarf figure. This dwarf figure (*apasmārapurusha*) represents ignorance, which Śiva tramples during his cosmic dance. A crescent moon adorns his head and he wears a serpent as his neck-ornament. His front or lower right arm comes straight down from the shoulder in an elegant diagonal line with fingers pointing downwards at his upraised left ankle. This arm should ideally resemble the trunk of an elephant, and that is why the pose of this arm is called the elephant-hand (*gaja-hasta*). The rear or the upper left arm holds fire. In the rear or upper right hand is visible a small drum (of the shape of an hour-glass) or *ḍamaru* (*ḍamaru-hasta*). The fire and the *damaru* respectively symbolize destruction and the Cosmic sound of creation; in other words, the Lord of Dance simultaneously performs both destruction and new creation. The lower or the front right hand is held in the gesture of giving assurance (*abhaya-mudrā*) to the pure and righteous from the evil. In spite of this immense and dramatic movement, the entire composition is a statement on balanced rhythm. This matches the stoic face of the deity who remains detached from his simultaneous acts of destruction and creation. The site of the dance, according to the legends, is Chidambaram, which is not only a great Śaiva centre, but also believed to be the very centre of the Universe; the very name of the place, Chidambaram, also suggests that the Universe resides in an individual's mind or consciousness (*chit*).

This broad survey of the polity, society, economy and cultural life for the period from AD 600 to AD 1200, underlines the point that the period under review need not be judged in the light of competing polities intent upon establishing north Indian/peninsular/ sub-continental hegemony. In other words, there is little relevance to seek mere continuities of the tension between regional aspirations and supra-regional aims. The proliferation of regional elements and traits in political, socio-economic and cultural life does not point to the breakdown of a centralized socio-political order and therefore a sign of crises in various facets of life. The very label of the period, early medieval, earlier conveyed the sense of a phase of relative gloom and problems, which somehow passed away from 1300 AD onwards. Our survey would like to strongly highlight that regional features and elements were not at all devoid of creative and generative aspects. Regional diversities and multiplicities also had a few sub-continental commonalties. Many features of socio-economic, political and cultural life that emerged during this period actually reached their mature form in the ensuing two centuries.

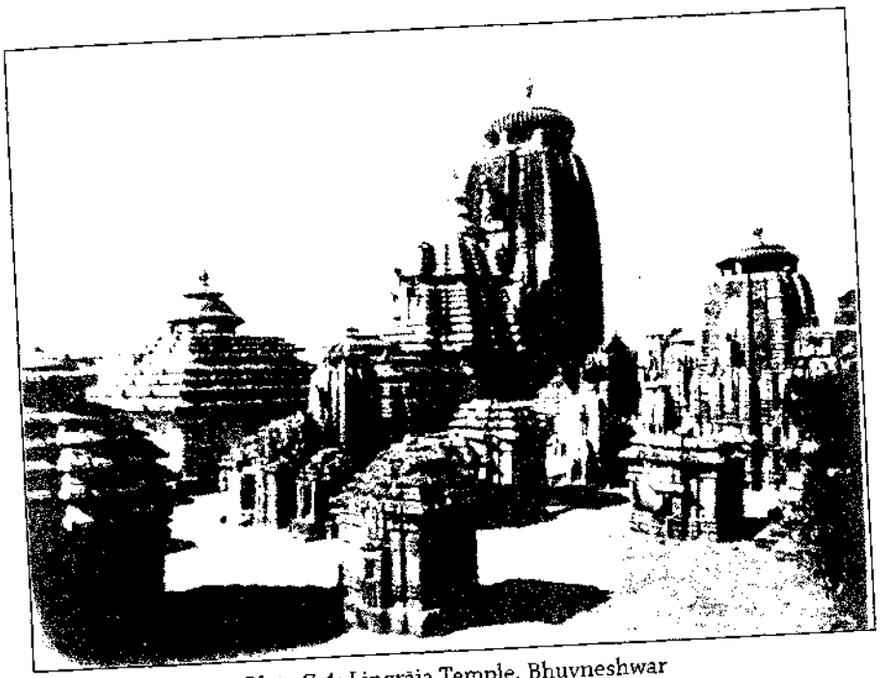


Plate 7.4: Lingrāja Temple, Bhuvneshwar

Plate 7.5: Sun Temple, Konark

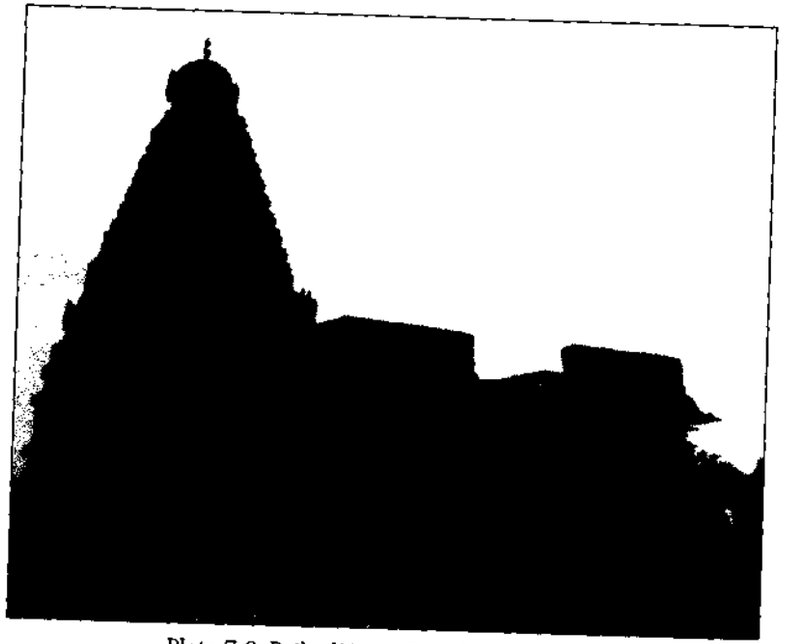
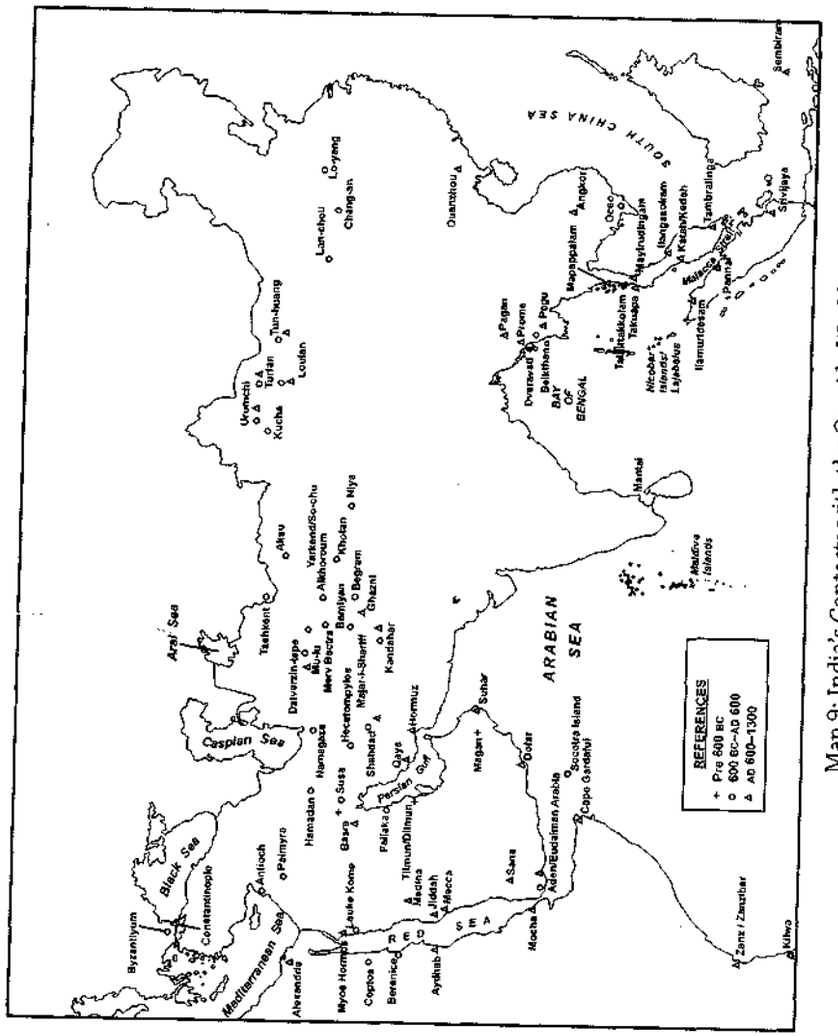


Plate 7.6: Bṛihadiśvara Temple, Thanjavur

Plate 7.7: Bronze figure of Naṭarāja of the Chola period, Thanjavur

Map 8: Centres of Trade/Exchange and Urban Centres of India



Map 9: India's Contacts with the Outside World

Map 10: Ports and Harbours of Early India

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APPENDIX I

The Kushāṇa Political History

The chronological label, post-Mauryan—including the history of the Kushāṇa power—refers to a phase of nearly five centuries in South Asian history (*c.*200 BC to AD 300). These five centuries are located between the fall of the Maurya power (*c.*185 BC) and the advent the Gupta realm (*c.*AD 320–550). In other words, the post-Mauryan phase in South Asian political history occupies a position intermediate between two premier political powers, the Mauryas and the Guptas.[1] Thus, the post-Mauryan figures in the collection of studies, entitled *Between the Empires*, as an interlude to the experiences of empires.[2] The political historiography of early India is dominated by the ardent search of 'empires' or paramount political power(s) which are regularly perceived to typify a centralized or unitary political entity, following the ideals of a universal rulership (*chakravarti/sārvabhauma*), celebrated in early Indian treatises on statecraft. This genre of historiography tends to portray the simultaneous presence of several powers as a period of political uncertainty, marked by decentralization, since the ideal or model polity is invariably the one of centripetality. The absence of a paramount political power, therefore, amounts to political instability—a deviation, as it were, from the standardized norm of a perceived imperial/centralized/paramount polity.[3] Recent historiography has exposed the futility of the searches for the oscillation between centralization and decentralization of polity in early India.[4]

This unmistakable complexity and dynamics of South Asian politics has been flattened out by Falk to a simplistic binary opposition of the forces of extroversion and introversion, compared with the 'tidal waves' (implying high tide and low tide respectively for extroversion and introversion) in the-then political history.[5] For Falk the Mauryas, the Śakas and the Kushāṇas represented the extrovert political tendencies, in sharp contrast to the Suṅgas, the Kāṇvas and the Sātavāhanas who, typical of indigenous powers, remained inward-looking and conservative. Falk's preference is obviously for the extroversion in politics, exemplified by powers like the Mauryas, the Śakas and the Kushāṇas who heavily drew upon 'Westernized/ Hellenistic'—and therefore, dynamic—political formations. The indigenous

powers, in his analysis, chose to be inspired by the orthodox and innate Brahmanical norms. His proposed binary opposition between extroversion and introversion thus argues that only the external stimuli (preferably from the 'West') were capable of infusing dynamism in an inherently invariant and static situation in mainland South Asia, including political developments there. This inaccurate approach implicitly revives the discarded colonial and imperialist historiography that invariably looked Westwards for any laudable aspect of early Indian history.[6] As expected, Falk's study and analysis ignore and obliterate the impressive body of literature on the process of state formation—both primary and secondary—in South Asia from 600 BCE to AD 300. The formation of the state society, closely connected with the second urbanization in the subcontinent, demonstrates the ongoing changes in political and material milieu. The political and material culture in the subcontinent absorbed several Hellenistic, West Asiatic and Central Asiatic traits. But the process did not alternate merely between a open and a closed door situation (Falk's extroversion and introversion). We shall come back to this discussion once again in the concluding section of our discussion.

The Kushāṇa realm was undoubtedly the outstanding political power 'between the empires'. One comes across three broad strands in the historiography of the Kushāṇas, especially in their political history. A large number of Indian historians, particularly up to 1950s, presented the Kushāṇas as one of the 'foreign' dynasties with a Central Asian background. Upon entering India, the Kushāṇas, like other foreign rulers, became a major north Indian power and eventually controlled considerable territories beyond the subcontinent, particularly parts of Chinese Central Asia. The Kushāṇa power waned, according to this historiography, on account of the decisive blow given to the Kushāṇas by a few non-monarchical powers of the Punjab.[7] The availability of diverse sources, especially Chinese accounts of the Han dynasty, on the other hand, began to demonstrate from the 1960s onwards that the Kushāṇas were a Central Asian nomadic group who captured Bactria in north-east Afghanistan. In this second category of Kushāṇa historiography Bactria appears as the very base and the springboard of the Kushāṇa power which expanded to northern India, some parts of Chinese Central Asia and also to the north of the river Oxus. The decline of the Kushāṇa power is attributed primarily to the loss of Bactria in the hands of the Sassanid power around mid-third century AD. In this historiography the overwhelming importance of Bactria looms large in the making of the Kushāṇa power. This genre of works on the Kushāṇas, however, pay considerable attention to the Kushāṇa control over north Indian plains without losing sight of the primacy of Bactria in the Kushāṇa history. It is here that the Kushāṇa association with South Asian history gains visibility.[8]

The bulk of writings of the Kushāṇa political history gives a pronounced thrust on determining the Kushāṇa chronology, particularly on the initial

year of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era in relation to the Christian/Common era. Learned and meticulous studies of the Kushāṇa sources, largely epigraphic, numismatic, art-historical and field-archaeological materials, have resulted in a rich and growing literature on this problem. This is an area of intense scholarly debates as experts have offered various and competing suggestions for locating the beginning of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era. There are three major views on this subject, as our discussions in a subsequent section will elaborate, that the said era began in AD 78 or 127 or 144 .[9]

While this is an engaging problem of the Kushāṇa history, the excessive thrust on determining the Kushāṇa genealogy and chronology has also resulted in the marginalization of other crucial issues in the Kushāṇa political history. A case in point is the inadequate attention to the possible political process(es) which led to the transformation of the Central Asian nomadic group Yuezhi into a sedentary, territorial power, eventually emerging as a mighty imperial entity.[10] The existing Kushāṇa historiography does take into account the ancient Chinese texts on the nomadic Yuezhi group, but only rarely the issue of the making of the Kushāṇa territorial polity is taken up. The study of this transformation of the nomadic Yuezhi group to a far-flung empire—but not categorized as a nomadic state like the Mongol empire of a much later period—is an academic exercise no less significant and exciting than dishing out the intricate details of Kushāṇa genealogy and chronology.

II

Overview of Sources of Kushāṇa History

The Kushāṇa studies have been constantly growing, thanks to the availability of diverse sources, though scattered and fragmentary, and also to the sustained contributions from many scholars on a truly international scale. The international collaboration in unraveling the past of the Kushāṇas is a distinctive feature of this historiography. One major source of the Kushāṇa studies is the Chinese textual evidence which remembered both the nomadic and territorial aspects of the Kushāṇa political history. Of great importance in this context are the Chinese chronicles of the Han dynasty, both Early and Later Han, of China.[11] The impressions of the Kushāṇa connection with the South Asian landmass are available in the account of the Tushāras or Tukhāras in Indian literature, particularly the Purāṇas.[12] The term Tukhāra, denoting the Kushāṇas, have a correspondence and resonance to the word Tocharoi which was the designation for the Kushāṇas in early Classical texts, for instance in the *Geographikon* of Strabo and the *Prologue* of Pompeius Trogus.[13] The long Kushāṇa occupation of Bactria, by removing the erstwhile Greek kingdom there, paved the way for designating the Kushāṇas as Bactrians in the *Book of the Laws of Countries* by Bardesanes of Edessa[14] and the *Prologue* of Pompei Trogus. There are a number of archaeological sites

marking the Kushāṇa presence or associated with the Kushāṇa rule, whether in the subcontinent or beyond it: like, Khalchayan in southern Uzbekistan,[15] Begram near Kabul in Afghanistan,[16] Taxila in Pakistan[17] and Mathura in India,[18] to name only the most prominent ones. There are also an impressive number of inscriptions issued by or issued during the reign of the Kushāṇa rulers. These inscriptions, including the image inscriptions, are either official issues by Kushāṇa rulers or mention Kushāṇa rulers, along with the names of their subordinate rulers and/or functionaries, or private records of donations mentioning the reigning Kushāṇa monarchs.[19] In addition to our understanding of the Kushāṇa political history, the system and nature of the Kushāṇa polity are to some extent lit up by these epigraphic records. The very find-spots of these inscriptions indicate the inclusion of these areas within the Kushāṇa realm and therefore offer evidence of the extent of Kushāṇa rule. Very large number of coins, mostly in gold and copper, inform us about the names, titles and portraits of Kushāṇa rulers for whom the issuing of coins was a marker of their independent sovereign position.[20] Though inscriptions and coins form the bed-rock of the evidence of Kushāṇa political history, different types of sources need to be studied in a combined method to offer a connected narrative of the Kushāṇa history.

III

The Nomadic Past of the Kushāṇas

There is little scholarly dispute about the nomadic past of the Kushāṇas prior to the second century BC. The chronicles of the Han dynasties in China were aware of the nomadic tribe named Yuezhi, who figures regularly in these texts along with the Xiongnu. It is from the Yuezhis that the Kushāṇas subsequently emerged, as our following narrative would show. These texts leave an impression that the Yuezhi and the Xiongnu lived close to the northern borders of China which had already been a sedentary, agrarian state-society in sharp contrast to the mobile nomadic groups active on the vast steppe lands of Central Asia. Xin ru Liu points out that the nomadic and the sedentary societies and polities often stood as contrastive categories, frequently engaging in conflictual encounters.[21] This is particularly seen in the breakdown of large agrarian polities in the wake of nomadic invasions, like that brought about by the warlike activities of the Huns (Xiongnu of the ancient Chinese texts) in the earlier times and those of the Mongols in the first half of the thirteenth century. It is in the context of viewing the Xiongnu as a persistent threat and irritant to the Chinese sedentary state society that the ancient Chinese accounts referred to the Xiongnu and other nomadic communities like the Sek (the Scythians, the Śakas of Indian literature) and the Yuezhi. These nomadic groups were intimately related to the vast steppe lands, dominating the Eurasian landscape and located to the north of the

agrarian ecological zone and lying between the mountains and the deserts. If the non-sedentary nature of the nomadic communities often brought them to hostilities against the settled agrarian societies and polities, the nomadic groups were inherently more mobile than sedentary communities. The nomads, traversing the steppes often on horses, were better suited to the use of the steppes as a zone of communication, and they regularly participated in communications and exchanges with other sedentary societies. Along with the transactions in trade goods these nomadic groups also participated in the exchange of ideas with rich historical consequences.

This helps us appreciate the fact that the ancient Chinese accounts recorded the animosity of the Xiongnus vis-à-vis the Chinese state during the rule of the Qin and the Han dynasties. The Xiongnus were intent upon extracting booties and loot from the Chinese rulers, but never interested in occupying the farming areas in the Chinese realms. Contrary to this tendency, the Yuezhis maintained peaceful relation with the Chinese polities, playing the role of merchants and suppliers of coveted items. Guan Zhong as early as 645 BC informed about the Yuezhis supplying jade stone to the Chinese rulers who felt a strong attachment to jade. The find of more than 750 jade items from the tomb of Shang Fuhao in Khotan in Xinjiang bears further testimonies to this. There is little evidence of the nomadic Yuehzhis maintaining any hostile relation with the Qin and Han rulers of China.

To locate the earliest habitat of the Yuezhis one has to take into consideration the Chinese textual evidence in conjunction with the accounts of the Tocharoi in the Greek texts and the Tushāras/Tukhāras of Indian sources. Pulleyblank demonstrated that Yuezhi, Tukhāra/ Tushāra and Kushāṇa referred to the different names of the same people who were mentioned earliest in the Chinese texts as the Yuezhis.[22] Chinese annals, narrating the scenario of the pre-seventh century BC, associated the Yuezhis with the Chinese frontier in Gansu where stood the famous garrison town of Dun huang, built around 111 BC. The Chinese envoy Zhang Qian, on the other hand, had already reported in 126 BC about the Yuezhi stronghold far to the west of Dunhuang. This led Liu to seek a different identification of Dunhuang. She points out that the Chinese annals spoke of the fame of the Yuezhis for supplying horses which clearly implies their association with the steppe regions. Liu proposes that the original connotation of Dunhuang takes us to the steppe area north of the Silk Road, in other words, to the pasture grounds north of the Tianshan mountains, which she proposes to identify with Qilian of the *Shiji*. The earliest territory associated with the Yuezhis, according to Liu, should be located around the modern oasis town of Turfan. In the place-name Turfan Liu further discerns the resonance of the Tuharans who are the same as the Tocharoi of the Greek sources and the Tukhāras of the Indian textual tradition. Liu also reads in the account of the Yuezhi conquest of Daxia or Bactria in Afghanistan the correspondence of the name Daxia with Tukhāra/Tuhara.[23]

Significantly enough, the term Tukhāra has a distinct phonetic affinity with Tocharian, a language of the centum group of the Indo-European family. Since the Greek accounts knew the Yuezhis of the Chinese annals as Tocharoi or Tocharians, there is a distinct possibility that the Yuezhi/Tocharians/Tukhāras had originally belonged to an ethnic stock who were speakers of an Indo-European language. Stunning reports of the discovery of mummies in the graves belonging to the second-first millennium BC from the northern side of the Tarim river basin may suggest, as Bivar argues, the physical remains of the early ancestors of the speakers of the Indo-European Tocharian language (or dialect). Their physical features are marked by tall stature, blond hair, flowing moustache and hairiness of the body. The Tocharian speaking Yuezhis, therefore, could have remained in the northern parts of the Central Asian steppe from where they continuously maintained peaceful interactions with the sedentary polity in China as suppliers of horses and jade.[24]

A perusal of the *Ch'ien Han-shu* suggests that the rise of the neighbouring and warlike nomadic community of the Xiongnus impacted the position of the Yuezhis in a significant manner. The Xiongnu chief Maddun heavily defeated the Yuezhis around *c.*176 BCE. This was followed by, as the *Shiji* records, another reversal of the Yuezhis in the hands of Jizhu, son and successor of Xiongnu leader Maddun; the ferocity of the Xiongnu attack is retained in the memory of the skull of the vanquished Yuezhi chief having been turned into a drinking cup for the new Xiongnu chief, Jizhu.[25] Compelled to move out from their original habitat following these disastrous clashes, the Yuezhis began a long westward migration which unleashed triggering effects on the widespread areas of Central Asia and Afghanistan. The Yuezhis came into conflicts with another Central Asian nomadic group, the Sai of the Chinese texts, identified with the Scythians of the Greek accounts and the Śakas of the Indian sources. According to the *Ch'ien Han-shu*, the Sai/Śaka-Scythians were ousted by the Yuezhis from their stronghold in the Lake Issykol area, sometime between 174 and 160 BC. The Sai ruling elite (*Sai-wang*), in their turn, moved southwards and entered the Karakorum areas to reach Jibin (or northern parts of Kashmir). The association of the Yuezhis with the Lake Issykol area was, however, short-lived as another nomadic group, the Wu-sun swooped down upon the Yuezhis, forcing the latter to migrate to farther west towards the plains of modern Kazakhastan which the migrating Yuezhis appear to have reached around 140 BC.[26] One has to keep in mind in this context that the Chinese annals recorded that actually the majority of the Yuezhis undertook the simultaneous and interconnected processes of involuntary migrations and voluntary invasions; a smaller group of the Yuezhis chose not to leave their original area of habitat/operations. This minority group was labeled in the Chinese evidence as the Little Yuezhis, distinct from the more adventurous and bigger group of the Yuezhis who came to be known as the Da Yuezhis or the Great Yuezhis.

The making of the Yuezhi history from now on is the account of the Da Yuezhis and their activities. The westward migrations of the Yuezhis from the Lake Issykol area resulted in their arrival in the plains of the Oxus and the Jaxartes where dominated another group of Scythians who were defeated by the Yuezhis. These Śakas then invaded the Greek kingdom of Bactria, embracing the north-eastern parts of modern Afghanistan and the adjoining parts of Uzbekistan. The Śaka inroads into Bactria led to the collapse of the Bactrian Greek kingdom, a point to which we shall return later. The Yuezhis were in the hot pursuit of the Śakas and they also reached Bactria. The Yuezhi conquests of the plains of the Oxus and the Jaxartes are well represented in the visual arts of Khalchayan in southern Uzbekistan where Pugochenkova's excavations recovered the remains of a Yuezhi palace.[27] Remarkable sculptures of the Tocharian princes and rulers show bobbed hair and slanting eyes, which are interpreted by Bivar as signs of Yuezhi marriage alliances with the Chinese.[28] There are several reliefs of battle scenes depicting in a grotesque manner the vanquished adversaries of the Yuezhis. There is also a scene of the seated figure of the Yuezhi chief, flanked by a standing prince who held a heavy cavalry armour. This scene seems to underline the importance of the cavalry in the military-political successes of the Yuezhis in Uzbekistan and adjoining areas.[29]

More momentous political developments unfolded in Bactria, adjoining southern Uzbekistan. Noted for the long presence of Greek rulers who became independent of the Seleucids to gain mastery over Bactria since 223 BC, the Bactrian Greek kingdom fell apart around 145 BC as a consequence of nomadic invasions thereupon. Writing around the close of the first century BC, Strabo remembered the collapse of the Bactrian Greek realm in the following manner:

> The best known of the Scythian nomads are those who took away Bactriana from the Greeks. I mean the Asioi, Pasianoi. Tokharoi and Śakarouloi, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Iaxartes river that adjoins that of the Śakai and the Sogdianoi and was occupied by the Śakai.[30]

The above impression of the demise of the Bactrian Greek kingdom is also corroborated by the archaeological traces of the end of the Greek city of Ali Khanoum on the southern bank of the Amu Darya (Oxus) around 145 BC.[31] Strabo's account includes in the generic ethnic entity Śakai or the Scythians, the Tocharoi. The Tocharoi are certainly the Tocharian speaking Yuezhis of the Chinese texts. The Yuezhi inroads into Bactrian Greek realm, contributing to the final eclipse of the protracted Greek rulers there, therefore, are a distinct possibility. One is not sure if the Tocharoi/Yuezhis were in any way responsible for the destruction of the Greek city of Ali Khanoum also. But Bactrain cemeteries, datable from the late second century BC to the end of first century BC, reveal the presence of different physical types and diverse funeral customs. These archaeological findings seem to go

along with Strabo's description of the variety of nomadic peoples invading Bactria, underlining considerable population movements.[32] Strabo's account also indicates the penetration of the Tocharians/Yuezhis into Bactria.

The Yuezhi advent in Bactria paved the way for major changes in the political history of the Yuezhis or the Da Yuezhis. The *Hou Han shu*, the annals of the Later Han dynasty, was aware of the Yuezhi conquest of Daxia or Bactria which, according to this account, was divided into five clans or chiefs (*hsi-hou* or *yabgus*). The five *hsi hous* were Hiu-mi, Shuang-mi, Kueishuang, Hi-tun and Tu-mi. To this should be coupled the report of the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian on the Da Yuezhis whose presence to the north of the Oxus river was noted by the Chinese envoy.[33] This may suggest that the Yuezhis at this stage controlled both Daxia and areas to the north of the Oxus, the occupation of the latter territory being evident also from the excavations at Khalchayan. Among the five *yabgus* the one named Kueishuang deserves our attention, since this term would subsequently give birth to the dynastic name Kushāṇa. The earliest known Kushāṇa ruler is Heraus or Heraeus whose existence is borne out by coins bearing his portrait, personal name and also his Kushāṇa (*Koshano*) affiliation.[34] The remarkable similarity between the Khalchayan portraits and the figure of Heraus on his coin deserves a special attention. This Yuezhi realm, as we have already stated, figured in Zhang Qian's report to the Han court. The *Shiji* underlines the importance of Daxia:

> The country is rich and fertile and there are few bandits. (It) has a large population, amounting to more than a million. Its capital is named the city of Lan-shi; there is a market (where all) kinds of articles are sold.[35]

Daxia or Bactria's prosperity finds a further mention in the report of Zhang Qian who noted the availability of bamboo sticks and cloth in Daxia where it came from Shen-du or the lower Indus valley.[36] This account hints at the commercial communications between the lower Indus valley and Bactria. Prior to the arrival of the nomadic groups, Bactria under the Greek rulers had already become famous for its agrarian resources and the availability of gold. The Yuezhi occupation of Daxia or Bactria evidently strengthened their military and political position, in addition to enriching the Yuezhis considerably. The capture of Bactria, noted for its agrarian resources, for the first time helped the sedentarization of the nomadic Yuezhis.

But it was a slow transition to a sedentary society. The major reason of the Chinese interests in the Yuezhis was to obtain the supply of horses for the cavalry of the steadily enlarging Chinese state. The Yuezhis seem to have been the chief supplier of horses, especially those from Dawan or Ferghana, close to Sogdiana. If one takes the cue from Liu, the very name Dawan is derived from Tukhāra/Tuhara or the Tocharian speakers, usually identified with the Yuezhis. Liu informs us of a Yuezhi chief, named Lou, who is said to have made a ten-fold profit by supplying horses to China and become very rich. The Yuezhis seem to have received from the Chinese, in exchange

of horses, another coveted item, namely the Chinese silk. The Yuezhis, according to Liu, were the initiator of the horse for silk transactions. The Yuezhi participation in the overland trade of horses with the Chinese empire points to the continuation of their nomadic associations and practices. As the vital supplier of the coveted war-animals to China the Yuezhis had to encounter the challenges from their traditional adversaries, the Xiongnu, who retained their nomadic way of life and continued raids on the Chinese empire for procuring booty. The Xiongnu thus stood as the common threat for both the fully sedentary Chinese state and also the Yuezhi realm, the latter in a crucial stage of transition from nomadic to sedentary life. A newly discovered site on the border fortress near Dunhuang has yielded Chinese documents recording the supply of food to the Yuezhi envoy. Moreover, wood slips from Niya (Chinese Central Asia) records the Yuezhi wish to receive a Han (Earlier Han) envoy and the Yuezhi complaint of being harassed by other people (Xiongnu?). Interestingly enough, it was the chief of Dawan (in Ferghana) who helped the Da Yuezhi envoy write the letter which is recorded in the wood slip from Niya. [37]

The eventual transformation of the Yuezhis to a sedentary polity took place at the time of the powerful ruler, K'iu-tsiu-k'io of the Chinese sources, identified with the Kushāṇa king Kujula Kadphises from his coins and inscriptions. To him belongs the credit of, on the testimony of the Chinese accounts, subjugating the four other Yuezhi *yabgus*.[38] The *Hou Han-shu* noted his conquest of Bu'ta which is usually identified with Bactra, the capital of Bactria, located near modern Majar-i-Shariff in Afghanistan. He also invaded Anxi (or the imperial Parthian ruler of Iran) and conquered Gao-fu or Kabul.[39] It is quite clear from this account that for the first time the Kushāṇa power, now firmly entrenched in Bactria, crossed the Hindukush and annexed the Kabul region to its growing realm. The *Hou Han-shu* noted that

> Gao-fu is a large country, (but its) people are weak and easily conquered. They excel in commerce and internally (privately) they are very wealthy. The (political) allegiance has never been constant; the three countries of Tienzhu, Jibin and Anxi have possessed of it when they are strong and lost it when they are weak.[40]

The above quote demonstrates that the Kabul region had been a bone of contention among the rulers of South Asia, northern Kashmir and the Parthians. It was an area coveted by the contending powers who seem to have been eyeing the region for its commercial significance. For the Kushāṇa ruler Gao-fu or Kabul would, therefore, be judged as a resourceful area, particularly in view of the sustained interests of the Kushāṇa/Yuezhis in long-distance trade along the Silk Road. Kujula is possibly the same as prince Kapa figuring in the Takht-i-Bahi inscription,[41] which may suggest that in the Taxila area the emergent Kushāṇa king served the Indo-Parthian ruler Gandophares as a subordinate prince. Kujula also minted coins, mostly

in copper, where bilingual legends in Greek (*Koshano-Kouzulo_Kadphizou*) and in Prakrit (*Kujula-kasasa* Kushāṇa-*yabugasa dhrama-thidaṣa:* Kharoshti script) were used.[42] The bilingual legends clearly point out that his coins were meant for circulation in areas both to the north and south of the Hindukush mountains. A hoard of his rare silver coins have been found from Taxila. If this speaks of his occupation of Taxila, that must have been brief, as the Indo-Parthian ruler Gandophares seems to have taken control over Taxila, advancing from Arachosia (Kandahar) through Drangiana. Kujula's copper coins were obviously borrowed from and modeled on the gold coins of the Roman emperor Augustus (31 BC—AD 14), as the figure of Kujula on the obverse of his coins bore remarkable affinity to the image of the Roman emperor.[43] The long reign of Kujula, who lived according to the Chinese texts for eighty years, seems to have derived economic advantages out of the Roman empire's trade with the East.

That the Kushāṇa occupation of Bactria and the areas to the north of the Oxus paid rich dividends in terms of the sedentarization of their polity is quite unmistakable. But the transformation of the Kushāṇas to a territorial polity did not preclude the possibilities of long-distance trade towards the consolidation of territorial state system. The immense riches of the Kushāṇa rulers and royalty are writ large from the Tilliya Tepe (Afghanistan) excavations yielding 20,000 gold pieces.[44] Ranging in date from first century BC to the first centuryAD , the excavations reveal fabulously rich tombs, numbering 6, of the Kushāṇa royalty, consisting of gold plates, vessels, buckles and small decorative pieces of clothing. Also available from the excavated tombs are bronze mirrors of Chinese workmanship and ivory carvings of Indian origin.[45] These exotic, precious objects, interred as grave goods, were clearly procured by the Kushāṇas through the burgeoning long-distance trade. The inherent commercial skills of the nomadic Yuezhis stood in good stead for consolidating the resource base of the Kushāṇa polity.

IV

Growing Kushāṇa Power: Kujula's Successors

In terms of tracing the genealogy of the Kushāṇas after Kujula the sources present obstacles and uncertainties. Though the widely accepted view is that V'ima Kadphises succeeded Kujula, this idea is now questioned. Bailey cited an early first century AD Kharoshti inscription from Odi recording the name of Sadashkana as Kujula's son.[46] As Sadashkana appeared with the title *devaputra* (son of god), the dynastic epithet of the Kushāṇas, it is difficult not to consider him as a Kushāṇa prince. It is, however, not clear from this record if Sadashkana did actually ascend the Kushāṇa throne after Kujula; if he at all did, it appears to have been for a very short duration. The inscription, dated in the 14th regnal year of Senavarman of Odi, son

of Adiyavarman (possibly a local ruler around Swat in Pakistan), seems to have given greater prominence to Senavarman than to the Kushāṇa prince. This naturally raises doubt about the actual political status of Sadashkana. The very important Rabatak inscription— discovered from the Puli Khumri area of Afghanistan— mentions one V'ima Taktu as the immediate son and successor of Kujula Kadphises, according to Sims-Williams and Cribb, who first edited and translated this record.[47] V'ima Kadphises also figures in the same record, but as succeeding V'ima Taktu and not Kujula directly. The reading of the name V'ima Taktu by Sims-Williams and Cribb has been challenged by Mukherjee;[48] Fussman[49] and MacDowall[50] also disagree with the reading of the name V'ima Taktu by Cribb on a unique copper coin with the *tamgha* of Soter Megas and Greek legend (obverse) naming OOHMO TAKTI or Ooemo Takti. This Ooemo Takti is sought to be identified by Cribb with the name V'ima Taktu in the Rabatak inscription. Cribb's reading of the name Vima Taktu finds a major critique from Fussman who thought that the reading was a conjectural restoration of a damaged inscription and coin. Mukherjee's subsequent editing and translation of the Rabatak record reads the name Sadashkana, whose name had first been read in the Odi inscription of Senavarman.[51] Mukherjee, therefore, seems to uphold Bailey's original suggestion of Sadashkana being the direct successor of Kujula Kadphises. In a subsequent and fresh examination of the Rabatak inscription Sims-Williams has opposed his critiques and retained the original reading of the name V'ima Taktu.[52] Mukherjee suggested that the throne-name of Sadaskana could have been V'ima Taktu. Put differently, Mukherjee considers Sadaskana and V'ima Taktu as identical ruler who had a very brief, if any at all, reign period.

Numismatically speaking the most important coin series following the death of Kujula belongs to a nameless king adorning the grand title in Greek, *Basileus basileon Soter Megas*, showing him as king of kings, the great saviour. Three Kharoshti inscriptions from the north-west, viz., Panjtar Stone inscription of year 122, Kalwan copper plate of the year 124 and the Taxila Silver Scroll inscription of the year 136 referring to the Azes era of 57 BC, belong to the period after the mid-first century AD.[53] These inscriptions do not name a Kushāṇa king, but introduce the ruler as a Kushāṇa, as the son of god (*devaputra*) and as the king of kings (*rājātirāja*). The unnamed Kushāṇa ruler in these records, evidently powerful and in control over the northwestern frontier of the subcontinent, seems to have been the same as the unnamed *Soter Megas* of the Kushāṇa coins. Cribb attempts to identify the *Soter Megas* of the Kushan coins with his V'ima Taktu by combining the *Soter Megas* of the post-Kujula Kushāṇa coins with (1) the name Ooemo Takti in one unique copper coin and (2) finally with the unnamed formidable Kushāṇa king of the three Kharoshti inscriptions of the north-west frontier areas, Cribb argues for the presence of a powerful Kushāṇa ruler as a successor of Kujula.[54] The certainty of the existence of one V'ima

Taktu is still not decided in view of the scholarly doubts on Cribb's reading and interpretation. That the Kushāṇas in the post-Kujula days had already established themselves in the north-western regions of the subcontinent is, however, beyond any dispute in view of the inscriptions referring to the anonymous but formidable Kushāṇa ruler who used both Greek and Prakrit (with Kharoshti script) languages.

In the light of the Rabatak inscription the third ruler of the Kushāṇa dynasty was V'ima Kadphises. The firm Kushāṇa hold over Afghanistan during his reign is evident from the Dasht-i-Nawur inscription, a tri-lingual record written in Bactrian, Pahlavi and in an as yet unidentified language/script.[55] Dated in the year 279 (of the Greek era of 174 BC?) the Kushāṇa association with Bactria and the regions around northern Afghanistan is writ large herein. V'ima figures in an inscription from Mat near Mathura as a son of the Kushāṇa family (*kushāṇaputra*). His control over Mathura in the Ganga-Yamuna doab is further evident from his image from Mathura showing him seated on the throne in full regalian fashion and wearing typical Central Asian attires—trousers, tunic, shoes and a belt.[56] In the light of the Chinese account he seems to have conquered in north India the country of Sa-chi or Saketa in the erstwhile Kosala *mahajanapada*. This is the first attempt on the part of Kushāṇas to penetrate into the expansive Ganga basin. His reign also marks the beginning of the protracted Kushāṇa political control over and association with Mathura.[57] The *Hou Han shu* informs us of his conquest of the Shen-du country, located close to the sea and watered by a large river of the same name. The Chinese name Shen-du is clearly derived from the Indian river Sindhu. The Shen-du country was named after the mighty river Sindhu or the Indus. As this country was said to have been situated close to the sea, which seems to have denoted the Arabian Sea, the area probably stands for the lower Indus country, including the Indus delta. The Kushāṇa ruler, as the *Hou Han shu* narrates, began to engage in commerce with the Da-chin (the Roman empire) after his conquest of Shen-du and became extremely rich thereafter.[58] We have already pointed out that Shen-du corresponded to the lower Indus valley, situated close to the Arabian Sea. The near contemporary Greek text, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (by an anonymous navigator/mariner), speaks of the commercial importance of the Indus delta in the maritime trade in the western Indian Ocean. At the middle (and the only navigable) of the seven channels of the Indus meeting the sea stood a flourishing port, Barbaricum, that briskly participated in the sea-borne trade with the eastern Mediterranean areas.[59] V'ima Kadphises must have been attracted by the possibility of economic gains out of the control of the lower Indus area and annexed it to the growing Kushāṇa realm. V'ima seems to have pushed into the lower Indus valley from the north-western frontier areas of the subcontinent. [60]

The Kushāṇa realm had already become a formidable territorial power, intent upon deriving economic gains out of controlling area and routes noted

for long-distance trade. The burgeoning economy of the Kushāṇa realm is best indicated by the minting of gold coins for the first time by V'ima Kadphises.[61] With this began the striking of gold coins in the subcontinent.

V

Kanishka and His Era

The maximum territorial expansion of the Kushan empire took place in the time of Kanishka I, the greatest and the most powerful Kushan monarch. The Rabatak inscription, mentioned above, was issued by him. It records the instructions and events of his very first regnal year and also up to his fifth or sixth regnal year.[62] The record clearly states that there was an unbroken line of dynastic succession from the days of Kujula to the accession of Kanishka. This removes all doubts whether there existed two separate groups of Kushāṇa rulers, namely the Kadphises group and the Kanishka group. The inscription also shows that Kanishka was the fourth, and not the third, ruler of the Kushāṇa house. Before studying the Kushāṇa expansion during Kanishka's reign, one needs to take up here perhaps the most controversial issue in the Kushāṇa political history: namely, determining the date of Kanishka's reign and the initial year of an era which was started by Kanishka I. Inscriptions demonstrate that Kanishka I ruled for 23 years. That Kanishka I established an era is best shown by the fact that his regnal reckoning was continued by his successors for at least a century, if not for an even longer period. The issue is not merely to identify an era named after Kanishka I and/or Kushāṇa, but to this is related the chronology of the Kushan rule. While the advent of the Kushāṇa/Yuezhi rule goes back to the first century BC, it is difficult to push the end of the Kushāṇa rule beyond mid-third century AD when the Sassanids of Iran ousted the Kushāṇas from Bactria and adjacent regions.[63] There is a strong belief, mostly among Indian historians, to identify the Kanishka/Kushāṇa era with the Śaka era of AD 78 . The Śaka era, obviously associated with the memory of a non-indigenous ruler(s), can logically be attached to the name of Kanishka I, the most powerful monarch among the non-indigenous ruling houses in early India.

The beginning of Kanishka I's reign in AD 78 implies that the Kujula's rule—supposedly a long one—should have begun in the second half of the first century BC. It is difficult to assign precise dates for the immediate successor of Kujula. If V'ima's gold coins were based on the gold coins of the Arsacid (Imperial Parthian) ruler Gotarzes I (AD 38–51), V'ima could have therefore belonged to the third quarter of the first century AD. The last quarters of the first century AD and the first year of the second century AD would witness the rule of Kanishka I (AD 78–101), since he is credited with founding the Śaka era of AD 78.[64] The immediately succeeding date in Kushāṇa inscriptions is the year 22 (of the Kanishka/Śaka era) which

records the name of one Vajheshko. This Vajheshko appears to have been identical with Vaskhushan figuring in inscription of the Kanishka era of 24 and 28 (AD 102–106). He is Vāsishka, proposed to be the immediate successor to Kanishka I. The next ruler is Huvishka, a very powerful and famous Kushāṇa monarch well represented in a large variety of coins and inscriptions. The dates recorded in his inscriptions range from year 28 to 60, indicating a long reign of over three decades, assignable—in terms of the Śaka/Kanishka era—from AD 106 to 138 . Another inscription bearing a date of year 41 (i.e. AD 119 as it is dated in the Śaka era of AD 78) refers to the ruler Kanishka. As Kanishka I's reign had already ended after his 23 years of reign, this Kanishka of the Ara inscription is later than and different from Kanishka I; he is hence labeled by a large number of Indian scholars as Kanishka II. No other record informs us about Kanishka II and it is difficult to accommodate a long reign for him. The next Kushāṇa king with definite regnal years, recorded in his inscriptions, is Vāsudeva whose known dates of reign range from years 64/67 to 98. If his reign is dated in Śaka/Kanishka era of AD78 , he ruled from AD 145 to 176 . Kushāṇa coins moreover reveal the names of another Kanishka, who is considered as Kanishka III. Similarly, Kushāṇa coins were issued by another Vāsudeva, later than and distinct from the homonymous ruler of an earlier period. He is therefore labeled as Vāsudeva II.[65] Vāsudeva II's name possibly figures in the Chinese texts as Po-t'iao whose existence is dated to c. AD 230. He seems to have been the last ruler of the Kushāṇa dynasty which had already become a thing of the past by c. AD 262 when the Naqsh-i-Rustam inscription recorded the victory of Sassanid Shahpur I over the Kushanshahr or the Kushāṇa realm.[66] This chronological and genealogical reconstruction, suggested by Mukherjee among other Indian scholars, thus assign nearly three centuries of political existence for the Kushāṇas. Mukherjee's decipherment of an inscription of the year or 140 or 170 (corresponding to AD 218 or 248)[67] suggests that it belonged to the reign of the last ruler, Vāsudeva II who is given the epithet *rājātirāja devaputra Shāhi*. As the Kushāṇa realm had become a thing of the past by AD 262 , the date of Shahpur I's record stated above, Mukherjee argues that the initial rule of Kanishka I could not be later than AD 92 (262 minus 170= 92).[68] In other words, he seems to reinforce his earlier position that the initial year of Kanishka's rule is to be assigned to the last quarter of the first century AD.

The alternative dating system was offered by Rosenfield[69] and Ghirshman[70] who argued for a date of AD 144 as the beginning of Kanishka's era. They mostly argued on epigraphic materials and inscribed images and tried to provide a chronological framework on the Kushāṇa art. The major problem in this case is to appropriately place the end of Vāsudeva I's reign which witnessed the elapse of the first century of the Kanishka era, beginning in AD 144 . This takes the end of Vāsudeva I's rule in AD 244 . There were a few

more Kushāṇa rulers known mostly from coins, but also from inscriptions and texts. To accommodate the reign-periods of these successors of Vāsudeva I one has to then stretch the political existence of the Kushāṇas far beyond mid-third century AD when the Kushāṇa rule became extinct largely on account of their defeat in the hands of the Sassanids of Iran. This idea of fixing the initial year of Kanishka's reign in AD 144, of late, has few takers.

In the recent years Falk's suggestion of locating the first year of Kanishka I's reign in AD 127 has gained considerable currency. In the astronomical text, the *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujidhvaja, Falk found the following the clue to determine the initial year of Kanishka I's rule in terms of the Christian/Common era.

The elapsed years of the Kushāṇas in combination with 149 (changed into) the time of the Śakas.[71]

Falk points out that the passage means that the beginning of the Kushāṇa era, obviously started by Kanishka I, is to be placed 149 years after the era of the Śakas. As the Śaka era started in AD 78 , 149 years after this time takes one to AD 227. Falk suggests that this is too late a date in view of the waning of the Kushāṇa power around the mid-third century AD. So, following the suggestions of van de Leeuw,[72] he considers that the date 227 actually speaks of the second century of the Kushāṇa era. The beginning of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era should, therefore, be placed 100 years before 227, i.e. AD 127. The significant point which emerges from the *Yavanajataka* is the distinction of the Śaka era from the Kushāṇa era. This questions the widely held notion that Śaka era was established by Kanishka himself and the Śaka era was identical with the Kanishka/Kushāṇa era. Falk is acclaimed for solving the riddle of the beginning of the Kanishka/Kushāṇa era; this solution is considered a 'definitive one (which) should henceforth provide the basis for converting epigraphic dates'.[73]

Based on Falk the Kushāṇa chronology from Kanishka I's accession appears like the following:

Kanishka I (yrs. 1–23) = AD 127–149–50
Huvishka (yrs. 28–60) = AD 155–187
Vāsudeva I (yrs. 64/67–98) = AD 191/194–225/227

This seems to have accounted for the uninterrupted use of the Kanishka era for the first century since its inception in c. AD 127 . With the beginning of the new (second) century of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era, the practice of recording the date in inscriptions was to drop the hundred. Van de Leeuw was the first to suggest this omitted hundred theory. The ruler Vaskushan/Vāsishka had the reign period from 24 to 28 which are interpreted as standing for 124 and 128 years since Kanishka's reign . There was a ruler known from coin legend, bearing the name Kanishki. His coins show the figure of Ardoxo

on the reverse. He is taken by several scholars, including Bivar, as Kanishka II.[74] The Kamra inscription of Vāsishka records the name of his son Kanishka who is separated from Kanishka II and therefore considered Kanishka III.[75] Kanishka III issued an inscription in yr 41 which is taken to mean year 141 of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era, i.e. AD 268 (127+141) . The last Kushāṇa king was probably Vāsudeva II who ruled, according to this chronology, in the last quarter of the third century AD. The chronological table of the post-Vāsudeva I phase, favoured by many of the recent scholars, thus stands as:

Vāsishka (1) 24– (1) 28=AD 251–255 AD
Kanishka II
Kanishka III (1) 41= AD 268
Vāsudeva II last quarter of the third century CE

The suggested and revised Kushāṇa chronology is not free from problems and scholarly controversy. Falk's and van de Leeuw's much vaunted theory of the omitted hundred in dating the Kushāṇa inscription faces a challenge in a Kushāṇa inscription, possibly from Mathura, recording the year 140 or 170, obviously of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era.[76] First it demonstrates that there was no need for omitting the unit hundred in recording dates in Kushāṇa inscriptions. If dated in the system of AD 127 this record takes us to AD 297, by which time it is nearly impossible to see any Kushāṇa political existence in view of their politico-military ouster in the hands of the Sassanids. On the other hand, if the year 170 refers to the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era beginning traditionally in AD 78, then one reaches the date of AD 248. This date of AD 248 tallies well with the very last phase of Kushāṇa rule that ended around or soon after AD 250.The Kushāṇa inscription of the year 170, more importantly, strongly argues against the assumed practice of omitting the unit hundred in the post-Vāsudeva I records. It may, therefore, still be thought that the years 24, 28 and 41 in the Kushāṇa inscriptions are actually dated without an omitted hundred. Falk's chronological table cannot explain how Vāsishka, ruling from AD 251 to 255, could have controlled a very extensive area including Kamra (in north-west Pakistan), Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh) and Isapur (near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh), just around the time of its collapse before the Sassanid army. One may still argue that the Kushāṇas somehow clung to power for some time around Mathura after having lost some territory in the northwestern borderland and Bactria. This may explain the logic of locating Vāsudeva II after AD 268.

Many of the Western scholars seem to have implied that the Guptas directly succeed the Kushāṇas, possibly in the light of the mention of a Kushāṇa chieftain (*Daivaputra Shāhi Shāhanushāhi*) ruling in the north-west in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (c. AD 335–375).[77] This position conveniently obliterates the Nāga rulers in and around Mathura in the post-Kushāṇa times and prior to the rise of the Guptas. These Nāga

kings figure in the Puranic dynastic lists, but more importantly some of their names did figure in the coins. Some of the Nāga rulers were ousted from Mathura and Gwalior during the north Indian campaign of Samudragupta in the first half of the fourth century AD.[78] It is almost impossible to brush aside at least four decades, if not more than half a century, of the rule of the Nāgas in and around Mathura. The Kushāṇa chronology proposed by Falk does not factor in the Nāga presence at Mathura for a considerable length of time after the Kushāṇa rule ended at Mathura and before Samudragupta's reign began. If the Kushāṇas were ruling over certain parts of north India well after c. AD 250 , it also does not take into account the presence of a few non-monarchical clans (*gaṇarājyas* like the Mālavas and Yaudheyas) who dominated the Punjab-Haryana-Rajasthan tracts during the second half of the third century AD and who were mentioned in Samudragupta's Allahabad pillar inscription. These non-monarchical clans rose to power only after the exit of the Kushāṇas. If the Kushāṇa rule is extended to the last quarter of the third century, then it is extremely difficult to locate these non-monarchical groups' presence in northern India before they accepted Samudragupta's suzerainty sometime after AD 335 . So, Falk's new dating, however exciting and scholarly, does not appear as 'definitive' as Bivar claims. The question of conclusively determining the beginning of Kanishka's era does not appear to have been decided yet, though it seems to have begun somewhere between the late first century AD and AD 128 .

VI

The Kushāṇa Empire at Its Zenith: the Reign of Kanishka I

From the discussions on the controversial issue of the beginning of the Kanishka/Kushāṇa era one can once again pay attention to the political expansion of the Kushāṇa realm during the reign of Kanishka I, the most famous and formidable of the Kushāṇa rulers. The Rabatak inscription, recording an official instruction in the very first year of his reign, informs us his commands were being obeyed in the following cities: Sagido, Kosmobo, Palibothro and Srotchompo.[79] The four cities are identified respectively with Saketa in the former *mahājanapada* of Kosala (in present Uttar Pradesh to the north of the Ganga), Kauśāmbī (the famous city near Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh), Pāṭaliputra (Patna in Bihar) and Champā or Sri-champa (near Bhagalpur in Bihar).[80] Saketa could have come under the Kushāṇa occupation already by the time of V'ima Kadphises, Kanishka's immediate predecessor. Kanishka's sway over this area will also be evident from his two inscriptions from Sahet-Mahet, where stood the famous Kosalan city of Śrāvasti.[81] Kanishka I's hold over Mathura is beyond any doubt, especially in view of his famous headless statue from Mat near Mathura. That he expanded the Kushā

na realm farther to the east of Mathura is clearly evident from his claim over the cities of Kausmabi, Pāṭaliputra and Champā. Kosam near Allahabad has yielded an inscription of Kanishka in year 3.[82] An image inscription from Sarnath near Varanasi, dated in his year 3, speaks of his rule in and around Varanasi.[83] Significantly enough the inscriptions from Sahet-Mahet, Kosam and Varanasi were inscribed in Brahmi, showing the Kushāṇa awareness of the currency of Brahmi in the Ganga valley, while the north-west was a Kharoshti-using zone. It is from Kausāmbī that he seems to have proceeded to Varanasi. The Rabatak inscription for the first time confirms his conquest of Pāṭaliputra, which, according to Chinese texts, Kanishka raided. Moreover, the Rabatak inscription for the first time establishes the inclusion of Pāṭaliputra in Magadha in Kanishka's empire. The mention of Srotchompo or Srichampa in eastern Bihar marks the easternmost expansion of the Kushāṇa empire which now stretched to the easternmost part of the middle Ganga plains. There are doubts whether the Kushāṇa control over areas to the east of Mathura continued for a long period, since no inscription of any successor of Kanishka I has so far been found from the areas to the east of Mathura.

Kanishka was certainly in possession over the north-western frontier areas of the subcontinent. In the Shah-ji-Dheri relic casket inscription the city of Purushapura (Peshawar in Pakistan) figures as Kanishkapura, obviously named after the Kushāṇa monarch.[84] The renaming of the city after the reigning Kushāṇa emperor strongly suggests that this was the premier political centre of Kanishka within his South Asian territories. The Kushāṇa occupation of Taxila is clear from the remains of the Kushāṇa city at modern Shaikhandheri.[85] Kanishka's control over extensive areas in the northwestern parts of the subcontinent becomes obvious from his inscriptions from Zeda, year 11 (near Und, Pakistan)[86] and Manikiala, year 18 (near Rawalpindi, Paksitan),[87] both in the present Punjab of Pakistan. That Kushāṇa control over the Indus valley continued uninterrupted during his reign is borne out by Kanishka's inscription from Suivihar, year 11 (in Bahawalpur, Pakistan).[88] Kanishka's rule over Kashmir figures in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of Kalhana, admittedly a late source, which spoke of cities named after Kanishka and Huvishka. It is likely that Kashmir or parts of it came under Kanishka's authority, but Kashmir has not so far yielded any Kushāṇa epigraphic record.

Bactria, firmly under Kushāṇa control, enjoyed primacy among different territories within the Kushāṇa realm. This is best evident from the Rabatak inscription which categorically refers to the replacement of Greek language with Bactrian (a middle Iranian language written in Greek script) from the very year 1 of Kanishka's reign.[89] From this time onwards Bactrian was the sole language employed to inscribe legends on Kushāṇa coins which were official issues by the Kushāṇa state. Besides Rabatak, Surkhkotal in

Afghanistan has yielded Bactrian records mentioning the construction of a dynastic sanctuary or a god house[90] (*bogolagno/ bogopouro* in Bactrian and equivalent to *devakula* in Sanskrit/ Prakrit) at Surkhkotal under the orders of Kanishka I.[91] Surkhkotal is also famous for its statue of Kanishka I, who in this image wore an attire like the loose salwar, ubiquitous in Afghanistan, and not the usual coat, trousers, boot of the Kushāṇas, commonly depicted in statutes and coins.[92] The Chinese texts give him the credit for controlling Niya and Khotan in the Xinjiang area of China; this indicates his control over parts of the southern Silk Road.[93]

Some other areas within the subcontinent could also have come under Kanishka I's possessions. If the year 22 figuring in a Sanchi inscription of Vaskushāna is considered as the actual date of the record and not referring to the 'omitted hundred' system, then it probably suggests the Kushāṇa occupation of eastern Malwa during Kanishka I's reign whose latest known regnal year is 23.[94] In that case Vāsishka or Vaskushāṇa was ruling over eastern Malwa as a junior co-ruler of Kanishka I. It is interesting to note that from AD 130 to sometime before AD 150 the area around Ujjaiyinī in western Malwa was under the rule the Western Kshatrapas. The Andhau inscription (c. AD 130) refers to the rule of the Śaka Kshatrapa Chashtana[95] who figures also in the Geography of Ptolemy (*c.* AD 150 as regia Tiastenes) ruling over Ozono or Ujjaiyinī in ancient Avantī. That the title Kshatrapa generally signified a subordinate political position (often as a provincial governor in a large realm) is beyond doubt from the epigraphic mentions of the Kshatrapas Vanasphara, Kharapallāna and Vespasi serving Kanishka I in dispersed areas of the Kushāṇa realm. There is a distinct possibility that Kshatrapa Chashtana too was a subordinate ruler under Kanishka I in the Avantī area, if Kanishka's year 1 is considered to have begun in AD 127. Around AD 150 Chashtana's grandson Rudradāman I assumed on his own accord the higher title of *mahākshtrapa*, implying thereby that he threw away his allegiance to the Kushāṇas around AD 150.[96] The extensive areas of western India under Rudradāman I's rule, including Gujarat and the Kathiawad peninsula, and over eastern and western Malwa, could well have been wrested by him from the Kushāṇas soon after the end of Kanishka I's regin (AD 150–51). Kanishka I thus could have held sway over a massive area in northern India, in addition to Bactria and other parts of Afghanistan touching the southern borders of Uzbekistan during his reign of nearly a quarter of a century. His conquest and occupation of sizeable areas to the east of Mathura paved the way for the Kushāṇa expansion into the Ganga valley. We have already indicated the strong possibility of his control over eastern and western Malwa,[97] if not over certain areas of Gujarat also. Going by the Chinese accounts it appears that Kanishka I suffered a defeat in the hands of his Han counterpart who is said to have sent a successful expedition under general Pan-chao against the Kushāṇas.

VII

Post-Kanishka I Rulers

Recent historiography prefers to place Huvishka (year 28– 60) as the direct successor to Kanishka I. This suggestion does not clearly explain the gap in the Kushāṇa genealogy, chronology and political history since there remains a gap of five years between the latest known date of Kanishka and the earliest one of Huvishka. Huvishka was indeed a worthy successor to Kanishka as his inscriptions and coins leave clear impressions of his power and authority. But if Vāsishka's regnal years are considered in terms of the omitted 100 theory, his reign is placed from AD 251 to 255 . Vāsishka's inscriptions are found from as dispersed areas as Isapur near Mathura, Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh and Kamra in the north-west.[98] It is not very easy to visualize a Kushāṇa king holding sway over so extensive a territory, as is evident from the distribution of his epigraphic records, in the mid-third century AD, precisely at the time when the very core of the Kushāṇa control was seriously threatened by the Sassanid rulers of Iran. The logic of political geography and political history may still have the ground for placing Vāsishka immediately after Kanishka I.

Of the successors of Kanishka I the most powerful and prominent was Huvishka who ruled for more than three decades. Several inscriptions of his reign came from Mathura, but none to the east of that city. His control over the areas to the west of Kabul will be evident from his inscription at Wardak (year 51).[99] His Bactrian records from Surkhkotal leave no room for doubt about the firm Kushāṇa hold over Afghanistan.[100] The remains of Kushāṇa dynastic temples at Dalverdjin Tepe and Airtam are obvious markers of the Kushāṇa sway over Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan. Huvishka also issued the maximum varieties of gold coins, accommodating an impressive number of the images of divinities from the Indic, Iranian, Central Asian and Hellenistic pantheons.[101] The excellence of his gold pieces also bear testimonies to the wealth of the empire, derived, to a considerable extent, from long-distance overland trade.

The next ruler Vāsudeva also enjoyed a long reign of more than three decades (yrs. 64/67 to 98). He is the first ruler of the dynasty to have assumed a purely Sanskritic name, suggesting the importance of the South Asian factors in the Kushāṇa polity. His epigraphic records demonstrate the continuity of the Kushāṇa control over Mathura.[102]

The Ara inscription (near Attock, Western Punjab, Pakistan) of Kanishka (III ?), son of Vashiska, indicates the political sway of the Kushāṇas over the Punjab of Pakistan.[103] The last possible ruler of the dynasty was Vāsudeva II, probably corresponding to Po-t'iao of the Chinese texts. If Mukherjee's reading of the year 140/170 (of the Kushāṇa/Kanishka era) in a late Kushāṇa inscription[104] is taken into consideration, then the Kushāṇas were

likely to have held sway over Mathura till the very last phase of their political history. By the time of Vāsudeva II's rule the Kushāṇa realm probably shrank in size. However, the area comprising Kushanshahr (or the Kushāṇa realm), according to the Naqsh-i-Rustam inscription of Saasanid Shahpur I (AD 262), was still quite extensive. It embraced Pushkbur (Peshawar) and adjacent areas, Kashgarh, Sogdiana and Shashastan (Tashkent) in Central Asia[105] and certainly Mathura in north India. The loss of Bactria certainly hastened the process of the passing away of the Kushāṇa empire. The centrality of Bactria in the processes of the foundation, growth and decay of the Kushāṇa power can hardly escape our notice. The inevitable weakening of the Kushāṇa power, subsequent to the loss of Bactria, prepared the ground for the political prominence of a few non-monarchical entities in the Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and the Malwa plateau (e.g. the Malavas, the Yaudheyas, the Kunindas, the Ārjunāyanas and suchlike) many of whom pronounced victories in their seals (e.g. victory to the Malavas or *Mālavānāṁ jayaḥ*; *Mālavagaṇasya jayaḥ*). Nationalist historiography of India used to glorify the role of these non-monarchical groups of northern and central India in bringing about the downfall of the Kushāṇa empire. Implicit in such a position as this is the nationalist historian's agenda to establish precedents when 'foreign' rule in India was terminated by indigenous 'democratic'/'republican' forces.[106] This view gained currency during the upsurge of nationalist movements against the British Raj. Recent researches negate such an explanation and do not give centrality to these non-monarchical groups for the downfall of the Kushāṇas. The non-monarchical groups at the most began to enjoy some political prominence when the Kushāṇa empire had already been tottering on account of its losing Bactria. It is however not impossible that these non-monarchical groups could have represented 'autonomous spaces'[107] within the strong Kushāṇa monarchical polity. The last vestiges of the Kushāṇa rule are visible in the north-western frontier region, now a mere shadow of their past prowess, where a scion of the Kushāṇas, styled as *Daivaputra Shāhī Shāhānushāhī*, acknowledged the supremacy of Samudragupta (*c.* AD 335–75). It is unlikely that the early Gupta rulers like Chandragupta I and Samudragupta occupied the political scene, left vacant with the collapse of the Kushāṇa power, immediately after the fall of the Kushāṇas. There appears to have been a gap of nearly half a century between the fall of the Kushāṇas and the rise of the Guptas.

VIII

An Overview

The broad and hurried overview of the Kushāṇa times hopes to underline the significance of the Kushāṇa realm in the political history of the subcontinent and its northwestern borderlands. The above study of the politics and polity

of the Kushāṇa times attempts to highlight the complexities of political history beyond dynastic shifts, genealogy and chronology of a particular ruling family. Two processes have loomed large in our study. The first relates to the transformation of the Yuezhi or the Da Yuezhi community from a Central Asian horse-riding nomadic people to a sedentary polity. It was Bactria and the southern parts of Uzbekistan that witnessed this crucial transformation. The second process is that of the spectacular territorial expansion of the Kushāṇa realm into a massive empire covering Afghanistan, parts of Uzbekistan, parts of Chinese Central Asia (especially the area along the southern Silk Road), the north-western borderlands of the subcontinent, the Punjab of both Pakistan and India and considerable parts of the north Indian plains—definitely up to Mathura and at least once, far beyond Mathura as far as eastern Bihar in India. The Kushāṇa realm was indeed an empire, far larger than an ordinary kingdom. The label 'empire' also befits the Kushāṇa polity as it included in it not merely a vast territory, but accommodated immense diversities of ethnic and linguistic groups, religious beliefs and cultural practices. If the dominant political system was monarchical, there was the occasional presence of non-monarchical polities in the Punjab plains, Haryana and parts of Rajasthan. The management of these complexities within the framework of a polity of considerable longevity cannot but point to the prevalence of a super-ordinate political system which is typical of an empire.

A salient feature of this system is about the political integration of the Kushāṇa empire. The integration of Bactria, the central stronghold of the empire, with core areas like the Taxila-Peshawar zone in the north-western borderland and the Ganga-Yamuna doab area around Mathura, was done not by politico-administrative centralization with a view to ensuring a unitary polity. The system instead was to accommodate, within an apparently loose political structure, diverse regional features. Significantly enough, the maximum number of Kushāṇa Bactrian inscriptions (Greek script and a Middle Iranian language) come from Afghanistan, while the northwest witnessed the use of Prakrit language and Kharoshṭi script. Kushāṇa inscriptions from Mathura, Sahet-Mahet, Kosam and Sanchi were written in Brahmi script and Prakrit language. In the western most part of India Sanskrit appeared for the first time as a language of the court, for writing a political eulogy in the shape of the celebrated eulogy (*prasasti*) of Rudradāman I (AD 150). Over and above this multi-linguality and the plurality of scripts, the Kushāṇa coins, with their widespread circulation, had their legends invariably inscribed in Bactrian from the time of Kanishka I onwards. The coins also portrayed the Kushāṇa ruler in his full regalian glory, often as a nimbate figure, on the obverse; on the reverse of the coin appeared a wide variety of divinities from the Hellenistic, Indic, Iranian and Central Asian pantheons. As these coins with royal portraiture travelled far

and wide, these began to serve as tools of political propaganda—in addition to their primary function as the metallic medium of exchange—for showing the might and right of the Kushāṇa emperor. The construction of the *bogolagno/bogopouro/devakula* (dynastic sanctuaries/god-houses) immensely contributed to the making of the cult of the emperor, so far unprecedented in South Asian political experience. The Kushāṇa emperors were also able to design a distinct political iconography by dint of their visual depictions in the form of royal statues and figures of kings on coins as well. The cult of the emperor acted as the ideological bonding and an element of integration amidst a variety of cultural practices. Retention of these cultural practices did not stand in the way of political integration, but contributed to it instead.

In South Asia the Kushāṇa power took roots in two core areas of the Punjab including Gandhara and the region of Mathura in the western portion of the Ganga valley. Both these areas in the post-Mauryan times underwent the process of what political anthropologists would mark as 'secondary state formation'. Both these zones in the pre-Mauryan times had already experienced the *mahājanapada*-like territorial polity; both the areas became parts of the Mauryan empire.[108] The demise of the Maurya empire did not create any political crisis in these two areas which once again emerged as important political zones drawing upon the political features of the erstwhile empire. The process of secondary state formation often goes in tandem with the process of secondary urbanization. While primary urban centres had first emerged mostly in the middle Ganga plains, which acted as the epicenter for emitting urban impulses elsewhere in the subcontinent, the blossoming of both Purushapura and Mathura replicated many features of primary urban formation. Trade, particularly long-distance trade, is suggested to have played a crucial role in the making of the secondary state society and also the secondary urbanization.[109] This once again has a bearing on the Kushāṇa politics which derived immense mileage out of the-then far-flung commerce. The Kushāṇa realm thus first experienced in Bactria a major transformation to sedentarized politics from their original nomadic pursuits; the second transition arrived as and when the Kushāṇa polity became involved in the process of secondary state formation in the South Asian context. The sedentarization of the Kushāṇa polity and the formation of the empire were not entirely rooted to agrarian experiences and resources—as many ancient states did so— but was considerably oriented to the gains out of controlling vital trade routes in the vast territory. The Kushāṇas certainly founded and maintained an empire of considerable duration. However, the Kushāṇa polity and politics were neither modeled on the Mauryan system, nor was it emulated by the Gupta rulers (*c.* AD 320–550), both being prime exemplars of early Indian empires. The foundational flaws in, and the inadequacy of, the perception of the periodic alterity between the forces of extroversion and those of introversion, as argued by Falk, are quite

apparent. This essay on the Kushāṇa political history, therefore, primarily attempts to render a better historiographical visibility to the Kushāṇa realm, another empire that occupied a position intermediate 'between the empires'.

Notes

1. Broad overviews of this period, including the political, socio-economic and cultural scenario, are available in Romila Thapar, *Early India from the Origins to c. AD 1300*, London: Allen Lane, 2002; Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, New Delhi: Pearson, 2008; J. Harmatta ed., *History of Humanity*, vol. III, Paris: UNESCO, 1996 situates the history of the subcontinent in the context of Eurasian developments.
2. Patrick Olivelle ed., *Between the Empires*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
3. This sustained search for empires are marked in H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* with a Commentary by B.N. Mukherjee, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996(8th edition); also R.C. Majumdar ed., *The Age of Imperial Unity*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966.
4. The basic assumption *is* that the presence of a paramount power ensures political unification which is propped up by a centralized administration. A centralized polity brought about peace and order which are seen as prerequisites for a stable society and efflorescence in economic and cultural life. For a critique of the notion of a shift from a centralized order to the crisis of a decentralized polity (and therefore, the fall of the golden age to the dark period) see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structures of Polity in Early Medieval India: Problems of Perspectives', in Hermann Kulke, *The State in India 1000–1700*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.
5. Harry Falk, 'Tidal Waves in the Political History of Ancient India', in Oliville ed., *Between the Empires*:145–66. Falk considered the Maurya realm as an instance of his political extroversion as the Mauryas were heavily Westernized and influenced by Hellenistic traits. Barring Asoka's use of Greek in some of his edicts in Afghanistan and Taxila and his sending envoys to the courts of five Yavana rulers, it is difficult to find the role of Hellenistic elements in the Mauryan empire. The Mauryas seem to have been inspired by the model of the Achaeminid empire, the most formidable power in West Asia immediately preceding the Mauryas. Falk rarely recognizes that the emergence of the pan-Indian Mauryan power was the culmination of a political process which had begun with the emergence of competing territorial polities (*mahajanapadas*) in north India in c. 6th century BCE. The emergence of the state from the lineage society sets in motion the political process that eventually transformed Magadha under the Mauryas as a super-ordinate power on a subcontinental scale. See Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1984; also idem, 'The First Millennium BC in North India', in Romila Thapar ed, *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995. The formation of the Mauyra empire need not be explained in terms of external stimuli, as Falk erroneously argued.

6. Vincent Smith, *Early History of India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913, for instance, marked Alexander's invasion of India in the late fourth century BCE as the 'sheet-anchor of Indian chronology'.
7. See D.C. Sircar's chapter on Kushāṇas in Majumdar, ed., *The Age of Imperial Unity*; Bela Lahiri, *Indigenous Powers in North India 200 BC-AD 320*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1974
8. B.N. Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall of the Kushāṇa Empire*, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1989; also the relevant section of B.N. Mukherjee's Commentary on Raychaudhuri, *PoliticalHistory of Ancient India* (vide footnote 4).
9. Most Indian scholars favour the identification of the Śaka era of 78 CE with the Kanishka era. J.M. Rosenfield, *Dynastic Art of the Kushans*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, proposed the date of 144 CE for the beginning of Kanishka era. In recent times Harry Falk places the beginning of the Kushāṇa era in AD 127. Relevant discussions are made in a separate section of this essay. For the earlier positions on assigning the initial year of the Kanishka era see A.L. Basham ed., *Papers on the Date of Kanishka*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968.
10. Xinru Liu has in recent times has offered an illuminating narrative of this major political transformation. Xinru Liu, 'Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies', *Journal of World History*, XII, 2, 2001: 261–92. We have heavily drawn on her work for writing the section III of this essay.
11. B. Watson,trn. *Sima Qian, Records of the Grand Historians of China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961; some of the relevant sources in English translations are conveniently accessible in Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads, A Brief History with Documents*, Boston, New York: Bedford St. Martin, 2012.
12. For the Tushāras or Tukhāras in the Puranic accounts, see F.E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Dynastic Tradition*, London: Oxford University Press, 1922.
13. *Geographikon* of Strabo (c. late first century BCE), trn., H.L. Jones, Cambridge (Mass.): Loeb Classical Series, 1942. The Trogus source has been used to study the history of the Greek kingdom in Bactria. See W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951 (second ed.).In Trogus account the Tocharoi has a marginal presence as they were instrumental, among other nomadic groups, for the collapse of the Bactrian Greek kingdom.
14. This text leaves disapproving comments on the riches of the Tocharians of Kushāṇas, and also chastises the promiscuous tendencies among the Tocharians.
15. G.A. Pugochenkova, *Khalchayan*, Tashkent, 1966.
16. Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, London, 1958 for the importance of the Begram excavations and its archaeological treasures.
17. John Marshall, Taxila, 1951.
18. For an archaeological overview of Mathura, see A. Ghosh, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, I, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989; also Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Oxford Companion of Indian Archaeology*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.
19. Sten Konow, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, II, 1929; a list of major Kushāṇa inscriptions is available in D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian Hisotry and Civilization.*, I, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965. K.L. Janert, ed., *Mathura Inscriptions* by H. Luders, Gottingen, 1961 has a number of

55. Sims-Williams, 'Bactrian Historical Inscriptions'. Sims-Williams, however, proposes to identify the ruler in the Dasht-i-Nawur record with V'ima Taktoo. Also see A.D.H. Bivar, 'The Kushāṇa Trilingual', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 39, 1976: 330–40. Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall of the Kushāṇa Empire*, seeks to identify him with V'ima Kadphises and places the record in terms of the Parthian era of 247 BCE, i.e. dated to 32 CE.
56. For a discussion on this image see J.M. Rosenfield, *Dynastic Art of the Kushans*, Berkeley: University of Berkeley, 1967.
57. Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall of the Kushāṇa Empire*.
58. *Hou Han-shu*, cited in Watson, *Grand Historians of China*.
59. Lionel Casson trn, *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, sections 38–39. Also see Ranabir Chakravarti ed., *Trade in Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005 (paperback ed.):64–67.
60. B.N. Mukherjee, *The Economic Factors in Kushāṇa History*, Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, 2004 (second ed.); also Ranabir Chakravarti, *Warfare for Wealth: Early Indian Perspective*, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1986: 92–93.
61. Gobl, *System und Chronologie der Munzpragung*. The growing power of the Kushan ruler, along with his deriving economic benefits, is evident in the epithets of V'ima in his coins. He is hailed as the overlord of all beings (*sarvalogisvara*), lord of the earth (*mahisvara*), kings of kings (*rajatiraja*). See Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 129, also available there is the Greek legend on V'ima's coin.
62. Sims-Williams and Cribb, ' A Newly Discovered Bactrian Inscription of Kanishka the Great'; Sims-Williams, 'Bactrian Historical Inscriptions', shows that the Rabatak inscription recorded events of the regnal year 5 and 6 of Kanishka.
63. Bivar, 'Kushan Dynastic History'; Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall of the Kushāṇa Empire*.
64. On Śaka era see D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1965; Richard Saloman, *Indian Epigraphy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
65. For the coins of Kanishka III and Vāsudeva II, see Gobl, *System und Chronologie der Munzpragung*; Mukherjee, *Kushāṇa Coins in the Land of Five Rivers*.
66. Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, Munchen: Beck, 1984: 371; the relevant extract is also available in Nihar Ranjan Ray, B.D. Chattopadhyaya, V.R. Mani and Ranabir Chakravarti, *A Sourcebook of Indian Civilization*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman: 554.
67. B.N. Mukherjee, *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XXII, 1987: 28–29. This record is actually an image inscription from a San Fransisco museum.
68. See Mukherjee's Commentary to *Political History of Ancient India* (by Raychaudhuri).
69. Rosenfield, *Dynastic Art of the Kushans*
70. R. Ghirshman, *Iran*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1954.
71. Harry Falk, 'The Yuga of Sphujidhvaja and the Era of the Kushāṇas', *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, VII, 2001: 121–36.
72. J.E. Lohuizen van de Leeuw, *The Scythian Art*, for the theory of the omitted hundred in dating the Kushan epigraphic records.
73. Bivar, 'Kushan Dynastic History'.
74. Bivar, 'Kushan Dynastic History'.
75. For Kamra inscription see B.N. Mukherjee, 'Kamra Inscription of Vajheshka (Vāsishka)',*Indian Museum Bulletin*, VII, 1973: 111–17.

76. Mukherjee, *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XXII: 28–29. Also see the critique of Falk's dating of the Kanishka era to AD 128 on the basis of the *Yavanajataka* in B.N. Mukherjee, *Kushāṇa Studies New Perspectives*, Kolkata: Firma KLM, 2004: 395–405. Like many other specialists in the Kushāṇa history, Bopearachchi too (see footnote 54) seems to have been deeply interested in genealogy and chronology of the early Kushāṇa rulers till Kanishka I, but less involved in examining the nature of the Kushāṇa political authority which obviously had Bactria as its principal stronghold but which was also considerably interested in controlling vast areas in the Punjab and the Ganga-Yamuna doab up to Mathura. How the new chronology of Kanishka I's reign affects the chronology of the Kushāṇa empire in terms of their territorial possessions over the Punjab and the Ganga-Yamuna doab up to Mathura is not regularly delved into by Kushanologists
77. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 262–68 for the text of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription.
78. Nāga rulers like Nāgasena, Ganapatinaga and Achyuta figure in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription as having been defeated by Samudragupta. Kuveranaga, queen of Chandragupta II (c. 375–414) was surely born in the Nāga royal family.
79. See Sims-Williams and Cribb, 'A Newly Discovered Bactrian Inscription of Kanishka the Great'; Mukhejee, 'The Great Kushāṇa Testament'. Relevant extracts with some discussions are available in Ray, Chattopadhyaya, Mani and Chakravarti, *A Sourcebook of Indian Civilization*: 599–600. That the identifications of Sagido and Srotchompo respectively with Saketa and Srī-Champā (Champā near Bhagalpur) were first suggested by Ranabir Chakravarti, is acknowledged by Sims-Williams, p. 82 see footnote
80. The identifications of Sagido and Srotchompo were first suggested by Ranabir Chakravarti which is acknowledged by Sims-Williams, 'A Newly Discovered Bactrian Inscription of Kanishka the Great':83. (see footnote 47)
81. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 144–45.
82. *Select Inscriptions*, I: 135–36.
83. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 136–38.
84. B.N. Mukherjee, 'The Shaji-ki-Dheri Casket Inscription', *British Museum Quarterly*, XXVIII,1964: 39–46.
85. Marshall, Taxila, *An Illustrated Account of the Archaeological Excavations Carried out at Taxila under the Orders of the Government of India between the Years 1913 and 1934*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
86. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 140–41Kanishka I in this inscription has the epithet *marjhaka* which comes close to the word *gahapati* in Pali texts. The *gahapati* of the Pali text was no ordinary householder (*grihapati* in Sanskrit), but an enormously rich person with a pre-eminent status. The epithet seems to indicate the fabulous riches Kanishka probably amassed. For *gahapati* see N. Wagle, *Society at the Time of Buddha*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966; Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of 'Ancient' India*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2006.
87. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 142–43.
88. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* I: 139–40.
89. It goes to the credit of W.B. Henning for designating this middle Iranian language as Bactrian. It also demonstrates how Bactria experienced the absorption of

both Iranian and Hellenistic cultural elements. The relevant passage in English translation reads: "And he issued a Greek edict and then he put it into Aryan". Sims-Williams and Cribb, 'A Newly Discovered Bactrian Inscription': 78. The term Aryan denotes Bactrian here.

90. The English expression 'god house' as an equivalent to the word *devakula* figures in Irfan Habib, *Post-Mauryan India 200 BC-AD300*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2012.
91. Sims-Williams, 'Bactrian Historical Inscriptions'. This record from Surkhkotal was actually inscribed during the reign of Huvishka, but it recorded certain important event of the reign of Kanishka. The relevant section in English translation tells us: "This citadel (is) the temple of Kanishka, the Victorious, which was named(?) by the Lord, King Kanishka'. Sims-Williams, 'Bactrian Historical Inscriptions': 78.
92. Rosenfield, *Dynastic Art of the Kushans* for the Kanishka images from Surkhkotal. The portrayals of royal figures in the Kushan numismatic art are discussed (with relevant illustrations) by B.N. Mukherjee, *Numismatic Art of India, II*, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2007: 115–119. Suchandra Ghosh, 'Revisiting Kushan Dynastic Sanctuaries', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 72 session (Patiala, 2011), 2012: 213–19,has argued that Kanishka was deliberately depicted in the Surkhkotal sculpture with a *salwar* like garment with a view to emphasizing the Kushāṇa ruler's adaptation to the common male attires in Afghanistan. The Kushāṇa coins, meant for circulation over a wide territory, presented the Kushāṇa royal figures in the typical Central Asian attires of coat, boot, belt and shoes.
93. Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall of the Kushan Empire*.
94. Mukherjee, *The Economic Factors in Kushan History*.
95. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 173–75.
96. This claim of Rudradāman I figures in his famous Junagarh Rock Inscription. See Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 175–80. As Rudradāman I figures as a *kshatrapa*, along with his grandfather Chashtana in the Andhau inscription of AD 130 , it seems likely that the grandfather and the grandson were jointly serving a Kushan overlord. Rudradāman's assumption of the title *Mahakshatrapa*, evidently a higher one than mere *kshatrapa*, thus suggests that he and his grandfather served the Kushan overlord from AD 130 to 150 . In AD 150 Rudradāman probably became independent of the Kushāṇa suzerainty.
97. Eastern and Western Malwa figure respectively as Akara and Avantī (*purvapara Akaravanti*) not only in the Junagarh inscription of Rudradāman I, but also in the Nasik Prasasti of Gautamiputra Satakarni of the Sātavāhana family (of the Deccan; see Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 203–07 for the Nasik *prasasti*). The name Akara literally means a mine. Eastern Malwa was designated as Akara, probably for the mineral wealth available there in the form of diamond mines close to the Panna diamond fields in the present Madhya Pradesh. The Kushan interests in conquering the area around Sanchi in eastern Malwa could have been prompted by the motive of capturing the diamond mines there. See, Mukherjee, *The Economic Factors in Kushāṇa History*.
98. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 149–50 and 150–51 respectively for Vāsishka's inscriptions from Isapur and Sanchi. His Kamra inscription has been studied by B.N. Mukherjee, *Indian Museum Bulletin*, XXII, 1973.
99. Konow, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, II: 170

100. This inscription belongs to the year 31 and speaks of the reconstruction of a dynastic ,sanctuary, originally established during the reign of Kanishka. Sims-Williams, 'Bactrian Historical Inscriptions': 78–79. The citadel of Kanishka suffered from the lack of water and Huvishka's officer Nukunzuk repaired the temple and caused the construction of a well to ensure the regular supply of water to the shrine.
101. Gobl,
102. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 161–63, for the Vāsudeva's Mathura inscriptions.
103. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I: 154–55.
104. B.N. Mukherjee, *Indian Museum Bulletin*, 1987.
105. R.N. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*: 371.
106. See for example, K.P. Jaiswal, *Hindu Polity*, Calcutta, 1915.
107. For the concept of 'autonomous space' see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.
108. For this process see Thapar, *From Lineage to State*; idem, *Early India*; idem, 'The State as Empire', H.J.M Claessen and Peter Skalnik eds., *The Early State*, The Hague: Mouton, 1981: 409–26
109. Sudarsan Senaviratne, 'Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State Formationin Early India', in Claessen and Skalnik eds., *The Early State*: 321–38. The intimate connection and correlation between secondary state formation and secondary urbanization is discussed by B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*. The close correspondence between the spread of the state society and proliferation of urban settlements figures prominently in F.R. Allchin, Bridget Allchin, R. Conningham and D.K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. On the specific importance of trade in Kushan politics see, B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Dynastic Patterns of the Northern Subcontinent: Commercial and Cultural Links (c. 200 BC –AD 300), in *History of Humanity*, III, Paris: UNESCO, 1996: 368–77; also John Thorley , 'The Roman Empire and the Kushans', *Greece and Rome*, second series, XXVI, 1979: 181–90.

APPENDIX II

Visitors from India to the Island of Socotra

Epigraphic Evidence

Covering about 20 percent of the planet's total maritime space, the Indian Ocean is the only enclosed ocean in the world. Another inescapable geographical fact regarding the Indian Ocean is the almost central location of the Indian subcontinent (along with Sri Lanka) in the Indian Ocean, which has a very long history of seafaring—spanning across nearly five millennia—with two strong commonalties, particularly before the advent of steam navigation. These are (1) the more or less predictable alterations of the monsoon wind system and (2) the widespread use of seagoing vessels made of wooden planks that were 'stitched' or 'sewn' with coconut coir. Frank Broeze has cogently argued that a long-range view would project Asia and not Europe as the leading maritime zone of the world. There is also little doubt that the Indian Ocean dominates the sea-face of Asia.[1] One also cannot turn a blind eye to an unmistakable aspect of Indian Ocean maritime history i.e. the prolonged tradition of seafaring across this maritime space at least from the third millennium BC.

In view of the obviously long pre-modern past of India's seafaring activities in Indian Ocean, what is striking is the relative lack of nomenclatures of this sea space in the vast and rich Sanskrit literature. While the *Purāṇas* gave the celebrated image of Bhāratavarsha as bounded in the north by the Himalayas and in the south by the great sea, the literary and epigraphic texts offered only stereotypical terms like the eastern (*pūrva/prāk*) and western (*paschima/apara*) seas (*samudra/jaladhi*). On the other hand, the earliest expression to connote the Indian Sea, a forerunner of the nomenclature Indian Ocean, is in the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny (late first century AD), which designated it as the *mare Indicum*. This designation would continue in Classical texts as late as the fourteenth century. The other renowned term *Erythraean Sea*, first coined by Agatharchides in the late second century BC, denoted first the Red Sea, but then was used in the late first century AD text,the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, to denote largely the western Indian Ocean, minus the Persian Gulf. The first Classical writer to give a distinct designation to the eastern Indian Ocean was Ptolemy (mid-second century AD) when he used

the appellation Gangetic Gulf, identified with the present Bay of Bengal. The Arabic and Persian geographers from ninth to the fourteenth centuries AD knew this space as the sea of Hind (*bahr al Hind*), incorporating in it Bahr Larvi (the Arabian Sea) and Bahr Harkal (the Bay of Bengal). No less striking is the name Vaṅgasāgara, the sea of Vaṅga, found in a Sanskrit inscription of *c.* AD 971, clearly showing the indigenous base of the present name of the Bay of Bengal. In spite of the regular commercial and cultural networks with China, particularly from the onset of the second millennium AD, the Chinese accounts merely knew the Indian Ocean as Hsihai, or the Western Sea. In view of Ingo Strauch's erudite work on the island of Socotra, yielding intimate and in-depth images of seafaring in the Indian Ocean before 1500 AD, the above overview of the historical nomenclatures of the Indian Ocean of the pre-modern times may help us situate the scenario in a more concrete and fruitful manner.[2]

The stage may now be set to familiarize readers with the path-breaking researches by Ingo Strauch and his colleagues and collaborators (Christian Julien Robin, Mikhail Bukharin, Nicholas Sims-Williams, Maria Gorea, Bharati Shelat, Julian Jansen Van Rensburg and Hedi Dridi) on the Socotra island[3] in the western Indian Ocean, situated 'at a distance of approximately 300 km./186 miles from the coasts of Arabia (RasFartak) and 240 km./150 miles from RasAsir (Cape Gardafui) in Africa'.[4] The Socotra Archipelago now belongs to the Republic of Yemen. Needless to say, Socotra stands at a crucial location at the opening of the Gulf of Aden, leading to the access to Aden and farther into the Red Sea. It also stands in close proximity to the Horn of Africa. From Cave Hoq on the Socotra island, Strauch and his team have found an astonishing corpus of epigraphic records: Indic, South Arabian, Aksumite, Palmyran and Greek. The diversity of languages and scripts as well the chronology of the inscriptions, ranging mostly from AD first century to fifth/sixth centuries (though there are Gujarati inscriptions from seventeenth century as well), cannot but underline that Socotra was functioning for at least five centuries as a hub of early maritime network in the western Indian Ocean, emerging, thereby, as a point of convergence of seafarers from disparate regions. To this, Strauch has admirably integrated the textual accounts of the island (called Dioscorides) in early Classical texts. To Strauch goes the credit of providing a literary lens to the epigraphic texts; the combined textual and epigraphic data remarkably enhance our visibility of this island, particularly from a South Asian perspective. Strauch's meticulous analysis of the available gamut of textual data also demonstrates that the name Socotra has nothing to do with the Sanskrit term Sukhadhārā (stream of bliss), as is often erroneously assumed.

While seafaring activities from the Mediterranean world into the Indian Ocean zone loom large in the burgeoning historiography from textual, epigraphic and field-archaeological materials in recent decades, the most remarkable epigraphic corpus consists of the Indic inscriptions from

Socotra, far superior numerically to the other inscriptions. Strauch places before his discerning readers as many as 200 Indic inscriptions, mostly in Brahmi script. This leaves little room for doubt about the regular visits made by seafarers from western India to Socotra. This is so far the largest and the richest known corpus of Indic inscriptions bearing on seafaring. The inscriptions on paleographic grounds are datable from AD first to AD fifth or sixth centuries. No less striking is the regular use of Sanskrit in these records, since the majority of epigraphic records from the subcontinent, belonging to the first three centuries of the Christian era, were written in Prakrit. One of the most striking features of these records is that these are very brief inscriptions, but neither donative inscriptions, nor royal administrative documents, nor political eulogies (*praśastis*).

These stone inscriptions, on the contrary, are mostly visitors' records wherein one comes across the written statements of those who arrived (*prāpta/āgata/pragata*) at Socotra. The visitors, sometimes referring to their family and parentage and also occasionally to the places they hailed from, mostly chose to record their names. These are largely secular epigraphic records, though Strauch has attempted to deduce their religious affiliations by analysing their personal names. For instance, names such as Buddhamitra, Buddhanandin, Śakaśramaṇa, Saṁghadāsa, Saṁghanandin, Saṁgharaṅgin and Śramaṇa are pointers to their Buddhist leanings.A notable point is the presence of a voyaging *śramaṇa* at Socotra. It speaks of the positive attitude of Buddhism to the sea, in sharp contrast to the Brahmanical perception of the crossing of the sea as a polluting act. Did the Śramaṇa venture to the sea for preaching or for business purposes? Socotra has not yet revealed any Buddhist remains to suggest that it could be a destination for propagation of Buddhist creed. On the other hand, Schopen's insightful analysis of the *Mūlasarvāstivādi-vinaya* demonstrates the Buddhist monks' participation in commerce and money-lending.[5] Similarly, names such as Vishṇusheṇa, Vishṇubhaṭṭi, Vishṇupati and Śivamitra and Śivaghosha would speak respectively of the Vaishṇava and Śaiva affiliations of these persons. [6]

Continuing with the personal names and epithets, one has to pay attention to the use of epithets such as Devaputra and Kshatrapa occurring among the inscribed names of visitors at Socotra. Both are well-known political epithets connected with the Kushāṇa and Śaka rulers respectively. It is pertinent to raise the question here whether some scions of these two ruling houses, without being an actual ruler, participated in the crossing of the Arabian Sea to reach Socotra. The interests of the rulers of Barbaricum and Barygaza in sea-borne commerce are well attested by the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*[7]. The possible association of the faraway northwestern borderland of the subcontinent with the sailings to Socotra is further evident from the Kharoshṭī and Bactrian inscriptions (although only one specimen each for these two scripts) at Socotra. When the Socotra epigraphic materials are situated along with the Classical texts, it becomes evident that the Indic

travellers to Socotra started their journeys from some western Indian port(s). This is plainly visible from the explicit epigraphic references to Bharugachchha or Barygaza, (the premier port on the Gujarat coast), celebrated in both Classical and early Indian literary sources. The port of Hastakavapra, identified with Astaca(m)prain in Ptolemy's *Geography* and also known from a large number of seals of the Maitraka times (thanks to the discoveries by Subhra Pramanik), also figures in the inscriptions from Socotra. The epigraphic mentions of Bhrigukachha and Hastakavapra in the Socotra inscriptions up to AD fifth century have other implications. As these Gujarati ports were certainly active till at least fifth century, if not longer for another century, their prosperity did not, therefore, stem merely from the maritime contacts with the Roman empire with which the South Asian linkages began to dwindle after *c.* AD 250. The importance of Hastakavapra in the seafaring in the western Indian Ocean may also question whether the material milieu in western India under the Maitrakas of Valabhī is to be studied only in terms of the land-grant economy.[8]

This largest corpus of epigraphic records of seafaring in the Indian Ocean in the first half of the first millennium AD will be of outstanding value to take a stock of the trade and cultural contacts in the western Indian Ocean. Future research on Indian Ocean maritime history will certainly have to integrate the textual, numismatic and field-archaeological findings with the epigraphic treasures from Socotra. The maritime orientation of some of the visitors from the subcontinent to Socotra is writ large in the mentions of the *nāvika* and the *niryyāmaka*.Both the terms, to my surprise, have been taken by Strauch in the sense of 'captain'. The two Sanskrit terms are perhaps not synonymous. While the *nāvika* should denote a mariner, the *niryyāmaka*, in the light of the Buddhist and Jaina literature,[9] is more likely to have been a navigator, maybe even a captain (comparable to the term *śāsaka* in the *Arthaśāstra*), and therefore distinct from a mariner in general. Significantly enough, the presence of a shipowner at Socotra is furnished by a Greek inscription, thereby highlighting the significance of Socotra in the early maritime network.

At Socotra not only are seen the epigraphic references to mariners and navigators/captains, but the Hoq cave has also yielded etchings/drawings of ships. There are at least three such images of sea-going ships. These, of course, are not accurate representations of the actual vessels, nor are they done by qualified artists. These were drawn by visitors to underline the point that they reached their destination—Socotra—or left Socotra by ships. The images themselves are important visual sources for shipping technologies, since the portrayals of ancient sea-voyaging crafts are a rarity in South Asian sculptures and paintings. One image of the ship found in the cave Hoq depicts a single masted ship. Strauch has ably demonstrated that there were two other images of ships with more than one mast; in one case at least there is a distinct possibility of the ship shown with three masts and double oars.[10]

The last one must have been larger than the one-master and was apparently meant for overseas voyages. Following Strauch, one may search for parallels in the depiction of ships in near contemporary Indian art. The two obvious candidates for comparison are the ships depicted on the Sātavāhana and the famous painting of the sailing ship in Ajanta. The important point here, according to Strauch, is that all the above specimens are connected with the Deccan. The ships depicted in the Hoq cave in Socotra are likely to have had strong similarity with the ship-designs in Sātavāhana coins and the Ajanta paintings. The ships plying between western India/western Deccan and Socotra were most likely ships of Indian origin.[11] This point gains greater credence in the light of their distinctiveness of shape and design from the representations of ships in the Red Sea area, as seen from the one found from the excavations at Berenike and also another depicted on a pottery yielded by the excavations at Alagankulam in the Vaigai delta (Tamil Nadu).

When contextualized in the broader situation of the maritime network in the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean world under the Roman empire, the Socotra epigraphic corpus offers a surprise. There is no inscription recording a Tamil name among the visitors to the island, although Tamil names and Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions are known in context of the Red Sea network. If one puts together the very rich archaeological data from Berenike, the sailing practices in the *Naturalis Historia* and the sailing of the ship Hermapollon from Muziris to a Red Sea port (either Bernike or Myos Hormos), one gets the feeling that sailing between the Malabar coast and the Red Sea area did not require a stopover at Socotra, while those voyages to and from Barygaza or Barbaricum preferred to stop, sojourn or take provision at Socotra. In other words, the improved sailing with the southwestern monsoon winds could perhaps quicken a direct voyage between Muziris and Ocelis on the Red Sea in 21 days.[12] The very impressive foreland and hinterland of Muziris probably explain why it had already been celebrated by the time of Pliny (late first century AD) as the premier port of India (*primum emporium indiae*), perhaps overshadowing Barygaza.[13] Socotra continued to be regularly visited by Indic seafarers up to fifth and sixth centuries AD. Strauch's masterly epigraphic research has indeed underlined the role of Socotra as a stopover, a sojourning and provisioning place. Interestingly enough Strauch seems to suggest that the maritime network between western India and Socotra can be seen as distinct from the trade between the Roman empire and India, the study of which has a dominant position in the Indian Ocean historiography. The possibility that ports on the western sea-board participated in maritime contacts with areas other than the Roman world has been indicated in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*. This has now gained much stronger validity by the wonderful inscriptions from Socotra.[14] Strauch's stupendous epigraphic discoveries and studies will surely 'broaden the knowledge about this crucial period in global history—a period which was characterised by an extremely high degree of intercontinental communication and exchange on cultural, economic and political levels. Given these features, the corpus of Hoq can also be determined as one of the earliest witnesses of a globalized world—a true moment of globalization before gloablisation.'[15]

Notes

1. Frank. Broeze (ed.), *Brides of the Sea*, Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 1989: p. 8.
2. These issues have been discussed by Ranabir Chakravarti, *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society* New Delhi: Manohar, 2007.
3. Ingo Strauch, *Foreign Sailors on Socotra: The Inscriptions and Drawings from the Cave Hoq*, Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2012. Some of the major findings from Socotra are also available in Ingo Strauch and Michael D. Bukharin, 'Indian Inscriptions from the Cave Hoq on Suqutra (Yemen)', *Annali*, 64, 2004: 120–38.
4. Ingo Strauch, *Foreign Sailors on Socotra*: 13.
5. Gregory Schopen, 'Doing Business for the Lord: Lending on Interest and Written Loan Contracts in the *Mūlasarvāstivādīvinaya*', *JAOS*, 114.
6. Though no donative records are found from Socotra and the inscriptions mostly recorded the presence of vistors from the subcontinent, occasional drawings of the *triśūla, nandyavarta, pūrṇaghaṭa, svastika, stūpa* and wheel (*Dharmachakra*?) give some hints of the beliefs of the visitors. See Strauch, *Foreign Sailors on Socotra*: 361–63.
7. Ranabir Chakravarti, *Warfare for Wealth*, ch. IV.
8. See Marlene Njamasch's article in D.N. Jha ed., *The Feudal Order*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000.
9. A.N. Bose, *The Social And Rural Economy of Northern India*, vol. II Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1967.
10. Strauch, *Foreign Sailors on Socotra*: 364–65.
11. D. Schlingloff, *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings*, New Delhi: Books and Books, 1988; also Jean Deloche, 'Iconographic Evidence of Ship-building and Navigation', in Himanshu Prabha Ray and J.F. Salles eds., *Tradition and Archaeology*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1996.
12. Lionle Casson, 'Ancient Navaal Technologies', in Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel de Puma eds., *Rome and India, the Ancient Sea Trade*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.
13. K.P. Shajan, R.Tomber, V.Selvakumar and P.J. Cherian, 'Locating the Ancient Port of Muziris: Fresh Findings from Pattanam', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 2011: pp. 312–20. An excellent overview of all available literary accounts and archaeological data regarding Muziris is available in Rajan Gurukkal and Dick Whittaker, 'In Search of Muziris', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 2001: pp. 335–52. The immense importance of the Red Sea network, especially in the light of the presence of two major ports, Berenike and Myos Hormos, is writ large in the growing volume of archaeological finds and researches. W.Z Wendrich , R.S. Tomber, S.G. Sidebotham, J.A. Harrell, R.T.J. Cappers and R.S. Bagnall, 'Berenike Crossroads: The Integration of Information', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XLVI, 2003: pp. 46–87; also Steven E Sidebotham and Willemina Z. Wendrich, 'Berenike: Archaeological Fieldwork a

a Ptolemaic-Roman Port on the Red Sea Coast of Egypt, 1994–98', *Sahara*, 10, 1998: pp. 84–96; Steven E. Sidebotham and Willemina Z. Wendrich, 'Berenike: Archaeological Fieldwork at a Ptolemaic-Roman Port on the Red Sea Coast of Egypt, 1999–2001', *Sahara*, 13, 2001–02: pp. 23–50. I am most grateful to Professor Sidebotham for kindly sending me these two papers. Also see Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Examining the Hinterland and Foreland of the Port of Muziris in the Wider Perspective of the Subcontinent: Long Distance Trade' in K.S. Mathew ed., *Imperial Rome, Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris: New Perspectives on Maritime Trade*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2015: 307–38.

14. The strategic location of this island will be appreciated in the 14th century Latin Crusade tract, *Tractus quomodo Sarrceni sunt expugnandi*, translated into English (*How to Defeat the Saracens*) by Giles Constable, with annotations by Ranabir Chakravarti, Olivia Remie Constable, Tia Colbaba and Janet Martin, Washington DC: Dumberton Oaks, 2012.
15. Ingo Strauch, *Foreign Sailors on Socotra*: 544.

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