

**3****ANCIENT INDIA**

Do you think that the culture of Indian people has been the same since the beginning? The answer is no. No culture remains the same. And this is true of India as well. It has gone through many phases of change. Do you know why these changes occur? This is because every dynasty, every invader who comes and settles down in the country leaves their marks on the culture of that country. In order to understand the present culture of Indian people, it is necessary to understand the process it has gone through in the past. Thus, in this lesson we will attempt to take a look at the life of the people of Ancient India. You will read about the various stages of ancient Indian history from the Harappan times through Vedic, Mauryan and Gupta periods. The emphasis is on the changing nature of Indian society with corresponding changes in society and culture. When we read history we can understand how the modern world has emerged over long centuries of development. It is important to appreciate what we have achieved in the past to make our future worthwhile.

**OBJECTIVES**

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- appreciate the importance and relevance of studying history;
- recognise the Harappan culture as the first known urban culture in India;
- examine the nature of Vedic society, religion and philosophy;
- explain reasons for the rise of Jainism and Buddhism;
- trace the early history of south India during this period;
- review significant cultural developments during the rule of successive empires; and
- examine the general dynamism of cultural developments in ancient India.



3.1 IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING HISTORY

I am sure you have often asked yourself why you are studying history. Studying history is one way of getting to know the past. History is an attempt to understand how and why our ancestors lived as they did, what difficulties they met with and in what manner they overcame them. It is important for you to be acquainted with the past to understand better what is happening in the India of today. After going through this lesson you will come to know the story of your country, which started many centuries ago.

History is no longer treated as merely a study of dates and events and that too largely only political events. Its scope has been widened to include many aspects of life. These include the study of patterns of life, which we call culture. Culture was once defined as that which relates to art, architecture, literature and philosophy. Now it includes all the activities of a society. Therefore the emphasis of history has shifted from the study of only the upper groups of society to all levels of society. It now covers information on kings and statesmen as well as on ordinary people who make history. It includes the study of art and architecture, of the evolution of languages in India, literature and religion. Now we do not look only at what was happening at the aristocratic level of society. We also try to reconstruct the interests and concerns of people at lower levels. This makes history more interesting and helps us understand our society for better.

The people that went into the making of our society, at both the aristocratic and the ordinary level, were not all indigenous to India, to start with. Many came from other regions and settled down in India. They married locally, intermixed with the existing people and became a part of Indian society. Our society, therefore, has a rich heritage of different kinds of people. Because of this large variety of people, there has been an equally large variety of religions, languages, and customs in our country.

The correct understanding of history depends on two things. One is a careful and critical use of source material given to us by historians defending certain statements which should be decided on rational analysis. Secondly, historical events have causes and these causes should be fully examined. Above all, even the past must be subjected to a critical analysis. It is only in this way that historical knowledge will advance.

The past of India goes back several thousand years. We learn about it from the evidence which our ancestors have left behind. For the near past we have written and printed records. For times when printing was not known, there are records written by hand on paper. But earlier still, when paper was not made, records were written on dried palm leaves, the bark of the birch tree and plates of copper and in some cases, they were inscribed on large rocks, pillars, stone walls or tablets made of clay and stone. There was a time still further back when even writing was unknown. Our knowledge of the life of people in those ancient days comes from the objects which they left behind, for example,



their pottery or their weapons and tools. These are things which are solid and which you can see and touch and these have sometimes to be literally dug out of the earth. They are all clues in the game of a historical treasure hunt but they form a part of our culture. But these clues can be of many kinds. The clues most commonly used are manuscripts. Manuscripts are ancient books, written either on dried palm leaves or the thick bark of the birch tree, or on paper. (Generally the latter kind have survived, though books written on paper are not as old as the others). Some of the languages in which the very old books are written are languages which we in India do not use in everyday life any more, such as Pali and Prakrit. Others are written in Sanskrit and Arabic, which we still study and sometimes use in our religious ceremonies although we do not use them at home. Another language Tamil, which is spoken in South India and whose literature goes to an early period in used even today. These are called 'classical languages' and the history of many parts of the world is recorded in various classical languages. In Europe, ancient manuscripts were often written in Greek and Latin; in western Asia, they were written in Arabic and Hebrew, and in China, classical Chinese was used.

3.2 ANCIENT INDIA

India has a continuous history covering a very long period. Evidence of neolithic habitation dating as far back as 7000 BC has been found in Mehrgarh in Baluchistan. However, the first notable civilization flourished in India around 2700 BC in the north western part of the Indian subcontinent, covering a large area. The civilization is referred to as the Harappan civilization. Most of the sites of this civilization developed on the banks of Indus, Ghaggar and its tributaries.

The culture associated with the Harappan civilization is the first known urban culture in India. The Harappans built the earliest cities complete with town planning, sanitation, drainage system and broad well-laid roads. They built double storied houses of burnt-bricks each one of which had a bathroom, a kitchen and a well. The walled cities had other important buildings such as the Great Bath, Granaries and Assembly Halls.

Agriculture was the main occupation of the Harappans who were living in rural areas. Those living in the cities carried on internal and external trade and developed contacts with other civilizations such as Mesopotamia. They were excellent potters. Various types of utensils, toys, seals, figurines have been excavated from different sites. Harappans also had the technical knowledge of metals and the process of alloying. The bronze sculpture of a dancing girl found in Mohenjodaro testifies the sculptural skills and aesthetic sense of the Harappans. Shell, ivory, bone and faience were used as material for different crafts and objects. Lothal was a dockyard situated in Dholaka Taluk of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. It was also a well planned wall city. It was an important centre of sea trade with the western world. Another important town in Gujarat was Dhaulavira while Kalibangam was in Rajasthan.



Numerous seals carrying the images of the one-horned rhinoceros known as unicorn, peepal leaves and a male god throw light on the religious beliefs of the Harappans. It appears that they worshipped plants and animals and the forces of nature. They worshipped a male god resembling Lord Shiva of later times and a mother goddess among others. They probably believed in life after death and also in charms and spells. Seals engraved with animal figures like the humped bull, elephant and rhinoceros suggest that these animals were considered sacred. 'Peepal' has been found depicted on many seals.

Harappans knew how to write and most of their seals contain some form of script. But unfortunately no one has yet been able to decipher that script. As a result, our knowledge of the Harappan civilization is based on the archaeological evidence alone. The figures of men and women on various seals found in the excavations reveal that the people knew the art of spinning and weaving. They were perhaps the first people to cultivate cotton. A large number of Indus seals found in Mesopotamia which indicated of a possible trade between the Indus valley and Mesopotamian civilization.

By 1800 BC the Harappan civilization began declining. However, we do not know the exact reasons why this happened.

3.3 VEDIC CULTURE

A few centuries after the decline of the Harappan civilization, a new culture flourished in the same region and gradually spread across the Ganga-Yamuna plains. This culture came to be known as the Aryan culture. There were significant differences between this culture and the culture which preceded it.

Aryans settled on the banks of rivers Indus (Sindhu) and Saraswati (which is now non-existent). They composed many hymns in honour of the gods and goddesses they worshipped. These were compiled in four Vedas - the *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. The word veda means knowledge of the sacred spiritual knowledge. These vedas were considered infallible as they imparted the highest spiritual knowledge. Initially the Vedas were transmitted orally. Since our knowledge of the early Aryans is based on these Vedas, the culture of this period is referred to as the Vedic Culture. Scholars divide the vedic period into the earlier and later Vedic period. The earlier is represented by the *Rig Veda* while the latter by all other Vedic literature including the *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. Two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, though compiled much later, also throw light on the life and society of an earlier period. For this period archaeological evidence has also been found in some areas of Uttar Pradesh.

Rig Veda contains about 250 hymns in praise of Indra who is described as a destroyer of cities and there are 200 hymns in praise of God Agni. Do you know that Agni is looked upon as an intermediary between gods and humans?



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Society and religion

Though Aryan society was patriarchal, women were treated with dignity and honour. The family was the smallest social unit; several families (*kula*) made a village (*grama*) and several villages formed a *vis*. A number of villages formed a tribe or *jana* which was ruled by a chief called *rajan*. His chief function was to protect the tribe from external attack and maintain law and order. He was assisted by the members of two councils called *sabha* and *samiti*. The *Purohita* performed religious functions while the *senani* looked after military activities. There was no concept of the state or kingdom at this stage. Although the post of Rajan had become hereditary, he could be removed from power if found weak and inefficient or cruel.

Towards the later Vedic period, society was divided into four *varnas* - Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. This was also called the Varna-Vyavastha. To begin with it denoted categories of people doing different kinds of functions but with the passage of time this division became hereditary and rigid. The teachers were called Brahmins, the ruling class was called Kshatriyas, farmers, merchants and bankers were called Vaishyas while the artisans, craftsmen, labourers were called Shudras. Moving from one occupation to another became difficult. Simultaneously, the Brahmins also occupied a dominant position in the society.

Another important social institution of the time was the system of *chaturashrama* or the division of life span into four distinct stages i.e. *brahmacharya* (period of celibacy, education and disciplined life in guru's ashram), *grihastha* (a period of family life), *vanaprastha* (a stage of gradual detachment and *sanyasa* (a life dedicated to spiritual pursuit away from worldly life). However it should be noted that these stages were not applicable to women or to the people of lower *varnas*. Women were respected by the society, enjoyed freedom, had access to education and were often free to choose their partners through *swayamvara*. *Purdah* and *sati* was not prevalent. The ultimate aim of life was to attain *moksha* or salvation through the pursuit of *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*. *Karma* or performance of duty without any expectation or return was preached in the Bhagavad Gita.

The early Vedic people worshipped forces of nature and personified them as gods and goddesses. Indra, Agni, Varuna, Marut were some of their gods while Usha, Aditi, Prithvi were some of their goddesses. Some of the solar Gods and goddesses referred to in the Rig Veda are Surya, Savitri and Pushan. *Yajna* (sacrifice) was performed along with chanting of Vedic hymns. People poured *ghee* (clarified butter) and other ingredients into the fire to invoke the blessings of gods. Agni or fire was looked upon as an intermediary between Gods and humans. The vedic people prayed individually as well as collectively for the welfare of the *jana*.

There was a change in religious practices during the later Vedic period. The prominent Gods of the early Vedic period like Indra, Agni and Varuna lost their prominence and



popularity. Their place was taken by a new trinity of Gods where Brahma enjoyed the supreme position, while Vishnu became the preserver and Shiva completed the trinity. The religion became extremely ritualistic. Sanskrit mantras, which were the monopoly of Brahmins, became an essential part of all religious functions. This made the Brahmins very powerful and the Yajnas expensive. Participation in them was restricted to the upper three classes. The kings performed *Ashvamedha*, *Rajasuya* and *Vajapeya* sacrifices to establish their position. It is very interesting to know that some elements of the culture of the Vedic Age have survived over a period 3,000 yrs and continues to be a part of Indian culture even today. By the end of the latter Vedic age changes started occurring in the society. For the first time people started discussing certain beliefs such as creation of the universe, life after death and essence of life. These were questions which were dealt with in great detail in the Upanishads.

Material life and economy

The Aryans were primarily pastoral and agricultural people. They domesticated animals like cows, horses, sheeps, goats and dogs. They ate simple food consisting of cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, milk and various milk products. They drank a beverage called *Soma*. Games of chess, chariot racing etc. were their modes of entertainment.

In the early period there was no money transaction or taxes. *Bali* or voluntary donation was prevalent. Cows were the measure of wealth. As the time passed, extensive use of iron brought great changes in their material life. Iron axes enabled them to clear forests leading to the expansion of agriculture throughout the Gangetic plains. Iron tools resulted in varied crafts and technology. Use of iron weapons and horses enabled them to fight wars and defend themselves better against enemies. Increasing number of crafts, availability of surplus food and growth of population led to specialisation of skills and urbanisation. Towns and cities grew and territorial states emerged. High quality earthenware called 'Painted Grey Ware' and 'Northern Black Polished Ware' have been found in many areas. Coins came into circulation. Trade was carried on, both overland and through waterways, enhancing material prosperity.

By sixth century BC, there were some sixteen large territorial states in North India and upper Deccan known as Mahajanapadas. Important among them were Anga, Magadha, Kosala, Kashi, Kuru, and Panchala.

3.4 POPULAR RELIGIOUS REFORMS

This period (B.C. 600 to B.C. 200) is important not only for political unity of the country but also for cultural unity. Ancient India saw the rise of two very important religions, Jainism and Buddhism which left a lasting influence on Indian life and culture. Vedic religion was



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earlier also known as Brahmanism because the Brahmins played a major role in it. Later it came to be called Hinduism. The Brahmins had developed a vested interest demanding large charities at the end of the scarifies. As a result, the sacrifices became very costly. Moreover, the Brahmins considered themselves superior to the other varnas and became arrogant. This led to the unpopularity of Brahminism and a need for reforms was felt.

Besides, there were other factors like the reaction of the Kshatriyas to the Brahmin claim for supremacy and the Vaisya's demand for an improved social position. The Vedic religion had become very complex and ritualistic. The reforms led by the Kshatriyas and aided by the poorer masses who could not afford the high cost of sacrifices, resulted in the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism around sixth century BC. These new religions that is Jainism and Buddhism also influenced the religious beliefs and several practices of Hinduism.

The founder of Jainism is believed to be *Rishabhadeva*, the first of the twenty four *tirthankaras* and as the last *tirthankara* Mahavira developed and gave final shape to the Jain doctrines.

The Jains lay great emphasis on severe penance and asceticism. Lord Mahavira asked them to take five vows - not to tell lies; not to injure life; not to own property; not to steal; and to maintain chastity (celibacy). He also asked the Jains to follow the three-fold path of Right belief, Right Conduct and Right Knowledge.

Later, the Jains were split into two sects the *Shvetambaras* (white clothed ones) and the *Digambaras* (the naked ones). Most of followers of Jainism belong to the trading community.

The other movement was led by Gautama Buddha (563 - 483 BC), a younger contemporary of Mahavira. He taught the Four Noble Truths. His path was the middle path. He believed that there is sorrow in this world and that desire is the cause of that sorrow and it can be conquered by following the Eight Fold Path (*ashtangika marga*). The eightfold path comprises:

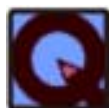
- (1) Right understanding,
- (2) Right thought,
- (3) Right speech,
- (4) Right action,
- (5) Right livelihood,
- (6) Right effort,
- (7) Right mindfulness
- (8) Right concentration.

Basically both these movements were against the orthodox and ritualistic Brahmanical religion. Both the reformers emphasised a good moral life and the importance of ethics.

Both of them founded an order of monks, established monasteries called *sthanakas* in Jainism and *viharas* in Buddhism.

Later, Buddhism was also split into two divisions- the Hinayana and the Mahayana to which a third called Vajrayana was added subsequently. Buddhism spread to a very large part of the world- Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Mongolia and Afghanistan. Even today a substantial population of these countries is Buddhist.

Hinduism underwent many changes in history. It gave rise to several religious sects within itself with varying beliefs and practices. Like Buddhism, some sects of Hinduism also spread outside India, particularly in the countries of South East Asia. Later Hindu tradition even accepted the Buddha as one of the incarnations (*avatara*) of Vishnu.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.1

Answer the following questions:

1. Where were the most of the sites of Harappan civilization found?

2. What was the main occupation of the people of Harappan civilization?

3. Where do you find evidence of neolithic habitation?

4. How do you say that a language existed in Harappan civilization?

5. How would you know that Harppans had sculpture skill?

6. Name some of the vedic literature of Aryans?

7. How does man attain Salvation or moksha?

8. How was vedic yajna performed initially?





9. Which were the yajnas performed by kings to establish their position?

10. What change did the later vedic period practice in their religious ceremonies?

11. What were the modes of entertainment of the Aryans?

12. Name some of the Mahajanapadas of sixth century BC of North India and upper Deccan?

13. In how many sects did Jainism split?

14. How many paths does the Ashtangika has?

15. What were monasteries called in Jainism and Buddhism?

16. Name the 3 divisions of Buddhism?

3.5 THE PERSIAN INVASION AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN CULTURE

In the first half of sixth century BC, there were a number of small tribal states in north west India. There was no sovereign power to unite these warring tribes. The Achaemenid *rulers* of Persia or Iran took advantage of the political disunity of this region. Cyrus, the founder of *the Achaemenid dynasty*, and his successor Darius I annexed parts of Punjab and Sindh. It was believed to be the most fertile and populous part of the Achaemenid empire. Indian subjects were also enrolled in the Achaemenid army.

The Persian rule in north western India lasted for nearly two centuries. During this period there must have been regular contact between the two regions. The naval expedition of Skylax probably encouraged trade and commerce between Persia and India. Some ancient Persian gold and silver coins have been found in Punjab.

Though the mountainous passes in the north western border were being used from very early times, it seems that Darius entered India through these passes for the first time. Later on, a section of Alexander's army traversed the same route, when he invaded Punjab.



The administrative structure of the Mauryan empire was influenced in some measure by that of the Achaemenid rulers of Persia. It may be mentioned here that the Persian title of *satrapa* (governor) continued to be used by the Indian provincial governors as *kshtrapa* for quite a long time.

The cultural effects of the contacts with the Persians were also significant. The Persian scribes brought into India a new style of writing. It is called *kharoshthi*. It was derived from the Aramaic script, which was written from right to left. Many of Asoka's inscriptions found in north western India are written in *kharoshthi*. This script continued to be used in north western India till about third century AD. The Persian influence may also be traced in the preamble of Asokan edicts. The Mauryan art and architecture were also greatly influenced by the Persian art. The monolithic pillar edicts of Asoka with their bell-shaped capitals are somewhat like the victory pillars of the Achaemenid emperors which have been found in Persepolis.

The Persian influence found in Chandragupta Maurya's court was in the form of the ceremonial hair bath taken by the emperor on his birthday. It was in typical Persian style. It is mentioned in the *Arthashastra* that whenever the king consults the physician or the ascetic, he should sit in a room where the sacred fire was kept. This indicates the influence of Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Iranians.

3.6 THE GREEK (MACEDONIAN) INVASION AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN CULTURE

During the fourth century BC, the Greeks and the Persians fought for supremacy over West Asia. The Achaemenid empire was finally destroyed by the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander of Macedon. He conquered Asia Minor, Iraq and Iran and then marched towards India. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Alexander was greatly attracted towards India because of her fabulous wealth.

On the eve of Alexander's invasion, north western India was divided into a number of small principalities. Lack of unity among them helped the Greeks to conquer these principalities one after another. However, Alexander's army refused to march ahead when they heard about the vast army and the strength of the Nandas of Magadha. Alexander had to return. He died at Babylon at the young age of 32 on his way back to Macedon.

Alexander hardly had any time to reorganise his conquests. Most of the conquered states were restored to their rulers, who had submitted to his authority. He divided his territorial possessions covering parts of eastern Europe and a large area in western Asia into three parts and placed them under three Greek governors. The eastern part of his empire was given to Seleucus Nikator, who declared himself a king after the death of his master, Alexander.



Though the contact between the Macedonians and ancient Indians was for a brief period, its impact was fairly wide in range. Alexander's invasion brought Europe, for the first time, in close contact with India, as routes, by sea and by land, were opened between India and the West. A close commercial relation was also established. The traders and craftsmen used to follow these routes. Alexander asked his friend Nearchus to explore the sea coast from the mouth of the Indus to the Euphrates in search of harbours. The Greek writers have left many valuable geographical accounts of this region for us.

Alexander's invasion paved the way for political unification of north western India by conquering the warring tribes of this region. It seems that by his campaigns Alexander made Chandragupta Maurya's work of annexing this area easier. Soon after Alexander's departure, Chandragupta defeated one of his generals, Seleucus Nikator and brought the whole of north western India upto Afghanistan under his control.

The influence of Greek art is found in the development of Indian sculpture as well. The combination of the Greek and the Indian style formed the Gandhara School of art. Indians also learnt the art of making well-shaped and beautifully designed gold and silver coins from the Greeks. The Greeks had some influence on Indian astrology as well.

Many valuable information about the social and economic condition of northern and north western India of that time are known from the Greek accounts left by Arrian, admiral Nearchus, and Megasthenes. They tell us about the developed condition of many crafts, existence of a brisk trade with the outside world, and about the general prosperous condition of the country. Much has also been said in these accounts of carpentry as a flourishing trade in India. It seems the fleet which Alexander sent along the western coast of India under Nearchus was built in India.

Alexander's adventure also helped the West to know something about the Indian life and thinking. It has been said that the ideas and notions of Indian philosophy and religion which filtered into the Roman empire flowed through the channel opened by Alexander.

As the Greek writers left dated records of Alexander's campaign, it helped us a great deal to frame the chronology of ancient Indian history. The date of Alexander's invasion - 326 BC provides a definite 'marker' for arranging the sequence of historical events in India.

3.7 ASHOKA THE GREAT : REPRESENTING THE ACME OF INDIAN CULTURE

Ashoka occupies a unique place in the history of India. His policies of universal peace, non-violence and religious harmony find no parallel in the monarchs of the world.

Ashoka stands out as a monarch who combined successful kingship with idealism and philosophy. Like other rulers, Ashoka too began his reign with war - the conquest of



Kalinga. However, the mindless destruction of life and property in this war shattered him so greatly that he vowed never to wage any war again. Instead he adopted the policy of *Dhamma Vijaya* that is conquest through *dhamma*. In his thirteenth major Rock Edict, Asoka states that true conquest is by piety and virtue. Such a decision taken by a king, who lived in an era where military might was the measure of power, earned him a unique place in history.

Ashoka was a true humanist. His policies were oriented towards the welfare of his people. His *dhamma* was based on social responsibility. Besides giving importance to respecting brahmins, and servants, obedience to elders, abstention from killing living beings, *dhamma* also asked people to live in religious harmony. It combined in itself the good points of all sects. Ashoka proved to be a tolerant monarch who, although himself a Buddhist, never sought to impose his personal religion on his subjects. In his twelfth major Rock Edict, he states that in honouring of other sects lies the honour of one's own sect.

As a king, Ashoka set a very high ideal for himself. He saw himself as a father and the subjects as his children. He communicated his thoughts and philosophy to his people by inscribing them on stone pillars and rock surfaces. These edicts are remarkable examples of Mauryan architecture and also of engineering skills. They are the living monuments of his times.

Ashoka attempted to educate his subjects by pointing out the wastefulness of expensive rituals. He asked people to practice *ahimsa*. He himself gave up the practices of the royal hunt and pleasure tours and instead began *Dhamma Yattas* tours for the furtherance of *Dhamma*. By giving his empire a common *Dhamma*, a common language, and practically one script (Brahmi) he brought further political unification. India has been a secular country since the Buddhist age. Though he himself became a Buddhist he did not impose it on the others but followed a tolerant religious policy. He made gifts and grants to non Buddhist as well as anti-Buddhist.

Ashoka's fame also rests on the measures that he took to spread the message of peace amongst the different regions of the world. He sent ambassadors to the Greek kingdoms and the West. Indian culture spread to far-away lands. According to a Buddhist tradition, Asoka sent Buddhist missions to regions such as Sri Lanka and Central Asia. Buddhism spread to different parts of the world and although it is no longer a major force in India today, yet it continues to be popular in Sri Lanka and the Far Eastern countries.

The Varna system popularly known as the caste system which had arisen in the Vedic Age now became well established and gradually became the dominant form of social organization throughout India. Along with the new religions and philosophy the growth of cities, crafts and trade furthered the process of cultural unity in our country. Asoka unified the entire country under one empire and renounced the use of war as state policy. On the other hand he says that he strives to discharge the debt he owes to all living creatures.



3.8 ART AND ARCHITECTURE: MAURYAN BEGINNINGS

The Mauryan contribution to art and architecture was significant. Ashoka is known to have built 84,000 stupas to commemorate various events of Buddha's life. According to Megasthenes, Pataliputra's grandeur matched that of the cities of Persia.

Ashokan edicts were inscribed on stone pillars that were made of single columns of polished sandstone and had capitals on their top. The best preserved of all Ashokan edicts stands at Lauriya Nandangarh (Bihar). This thirty-two feet tall column has an almost fifty ton seated lion capital placed on its top, an engineering feat worth admiring. The bull capital from Rampura is also another fine example of Mauryan sculpture. The most famous capital is the one at Sarnath, which shows four lions and the *Dharmachakra*. You must be familiar with this as this has been adopted as the national emblem of the Republic of India.

Besides pillars, few Mauryan figures have also come to light. The most well known of these is the Yakshi from Didarganj. The beauty of these figures lies in the exactness of their workmanship and in the fact that they appear to be made from one single stone. Like the pillars, these figures are polished with a unique surface gloss (now called Mauryan polish). You will be amazed to know that despite all these centuries this gloss has not lost its shine. Besides the language that has been used in nearly all the inscriptions and Prakrit which appears to have become the lingua franca of the country and in the Brahmi script the earliest known Indian script.

Another noteworthy aspect of Mauryan architecture is the rock cut caves. The Lomash Rishi (with its impressive entrance) and the Sudama caves are examples of such architecture. These caves cut from solid rock were provided by Ashoka for non-Buddhist monks. These caves marked the beginning of the rock cut architecture which was patronised by later rulers too. His rock edicts were inscribed in the local language and the local script.

3.9 POST - MAURYAN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Although the Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, and Kushanas were foreigners, they were slowly absorbed into the local population. Since they were warriors, the law givers assigned them the status of *Kshatriyas*. It should be noted that such a large scale assimilation of foreigners into the Indian society took place only in the post-Mauryan times. We can say roughly from about 200 BC to about 3rd century A.D. profound changes took place in the economic and political life and vital developments in different aspects of cultural life of our country i.e. religion, art and science as well as technology. There was a significant advancement in foreign trade both by land and by sea, besides emergence of various crafts.

Many foreign rulers adopted Vaishnavism. In the Besnagar Pillar inscription, Heliodorus (the Greek ambassador of the Indo-Greek king Antialkidas) describes himself as a *Bhagavata* i.e. worshipper of Vishnu. Similarly some coins of Kanishka also show the



figure of Siva on them. You will recall that one of the Kushan rulers was called Vasudeva, clearly indicating his *vaishnava* faith. Do you know the importance attached to the year of Kanishka's accession i.e. 78 A.D.. Well, it marks the beginning of the Saka era.

The interaction among different foreign ethnic groups and the Indians played an important role in their choice of one or the other Indian religions. Some foreign rulers also turned to Buddhism, as this did not create the problems of fitting into the caste system. Menander converted to Buddhism. Kanishka too is remembered for his services to this religion. However this increasing popularity of Buddhism brought about a major change in the religion. Buddhism in its original form was too abstract for the foreigners. They therefore advocated a simpler form through which they could satisfy their religious cravings. Around the same time Buddhism split into two schools: the *Mahayana* or the Great Wheel and the *Hinayana* or the Small Wheel. The former believed in image worship, rituals and *Bodhisattvas*, (incarnations of Buddha) while the latter continued the practices of the earlier Buddhism.

The *Mahayana* received royal patronage from Kanishka, who convened the fourth Buddhist Council to finalise its teachings. He also set up many stupas in memory of the Buddha.

Art and Sculpture

Central Asian invasions led to further development of Indian art and sculpture. Close contacts with the western world introduced many new forms in Indian art. The most significant development was the growth of the Gandhara school of art. This school borrowed features from both the Greek and Roman art forms. Many images of the Buddha from the Kushan period have Apollonian faces, their hair is in the Graeco-Roman style and their draperies arranged in the style of a Roman *toga*. This assimilation of artistic features was probably because many artisans from different countries trained in different schools came together under the Kushan rule.

Mathura, which was the centre of the indigenous school of art, was also influenced by the invasions. A number of images from here of terracotta and red sandstone, which have definite Saka-Kushan influence, have survived. The most famous is the headless statue of Kanishka from Mathura. While the earlier Buddhists had used only symbols to depict the Buddha, the Mathura school became the first to make faces and figures of the Buddha. Folklores such as the *Jatakas* were drawn out in long panels on rock faces. Besides the images of Buddha, which were made in large numbers, statues of Mahavira were also produced.

Deccan and South India

The Satavahanas in the Deccan held an important position under the Mauryas. After the death of Ashoka, they assumed total independence. They became very powerful and made their capital at Paithan or Pratisthan on the river Godavari. The Satavahanas soon entered into conflict with the foreign satraps, especially the Shakas. It was under



Gautamiputra and his son Vasishthiputra Satkarni that the Satavahanas became very powerful. They extended their kingdom, cleared forests, made roads and administered their State well. New towns came up and trade was carried on with far off countries like Persia, Iraq and Combodia.

Kharavela of Kalinga

Another kingdom which rose to a position of importance after the Mauryas was Kalinga. Kalinga included modern Orissa and parts of Northern Andhra. Its most important ruler was Kharavela. The Hathigumpha Inscription in a Jain cave at Udaigiri hills would give us a detailed account of his reign, but unfortunately it is not easily decipherable. It is definitely known that he was a great administrator as well as a brave warrior. He carried out works of piety and public utility, like building roads and gardens.

South India

The area which lies to the south of the river Krishna and Tungabhadra is called South India. It was the region of the Cholas, Cheras and the Pandyas who were constantly at war with each other.

Sources

The main source of information about these kingdoms and the life of the people is the Sangam literature. That is why this period from the beginning of the 1st century B.C. to the end of 2nd century A.D. is called the Sangam period of the history of South India.

Cholas

Karikala was the most important ruler of this kingdom. He defeated the combined forces of the Cheras and the Pandays. He succeeded in pushing back an invasion from Ceylon. Karikala has been credited with many welfare activities. He got many canals dug so that water from the river Cauvery could be used for irrigation purposes. Karikala patronised works of literature and art. He was a follower of the Vedic religion.

Pandays

The Pandyan empire was founded by a woman king. She maintained a huge army. She also encouraged trade and patronised art as well as literature.

Life and Culture

The people during this period lived a simple life. They were fond of music, dancing and poetry. Many musical instruments like drums, flutes, pipes, etc. were popular.

Most of the people lived in valleys and a majority of them were farmers. Others were herdsmen. There were artisans and craftsmen also who mainly lived in towns. There were merchants specially in the coastal areas and trade was carried on by sea.



Society

The Greeks, Kushanas, Shakas and Parthians were called Yavanas. They soon merged with the Indian society and adopted Indian names and inter-married. Even their coins started carrying the images of Indian gods like Vishnu, Ganesha and Mahesha. The fact that they had adapted to the Indian society easily may explain why foreign rulers patronised Buddhism.

The Age of Harshvardhana

King Harshvardhana decided that he must subdue the petty warring rulers and bring them under his domain. He devoted six important years of his life to do so. Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese traveller and Bana Bhat, his court poet, have given detailed accounts of Harsha's reign. According to Hiuen Tang, King Harshvardhana had an efficient government. He further tells us that families were not registered and there was no forced labour,

Harsha's religious activities

Do you know that Harsha built many hospitals and rest houses? He also gave grants to many religions especially Buddhism and Hindu Religion. Later in his life Harsha became more inclined towards Buddhism.

Harsha's literary activities had some important plays e.g. Nagananda Ratnavali and Priyadarsita. He collected learned men around him as is evident from the report of Hiuen Tsang and Bana Bhat. Bana wrote Harsha's famous biography, Harshcharita as well as the literary piece Kadambari.

Kingdoms of the Deccan and the South: You have read about the Satavahanas who controlled the Deccan for a long time. After their decline, many small kingdoms came up in the Deccan. The first one among them was that of the Vakatakas, who tried to build a strong state, but they did not last long

After the Vakatakas came the Chalukyas of Vatapi and Kalyani. Pulakesin was a powerful ruler of the Chalukya dynasty. The Chalukyas kept fighting with the Rashtrakutas (towards the north) and the Pallavas (towards the south). The Chalukya rule came to an end in 753 A.D. when the Rashtrakutas defeated them.

The capital city of Vatapi was a prosperous one. There were trade relations with Arabia, Iran and the Red Sea port to the west, as well as with South-East Asia. Pulakesin II sent an ambassador to king Khusrao II of Persia. The Chalukyas patronised art as well as religion. They build temples and cave shrines in the deccan hills. Many of the sculptures of the Ellora caves were created at this time under the patronage of the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas.



Notes

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.2**

Answer the following questions:

1. What were the sources of information about the social and economic conditions of the people of northern and north-western India in fourth century BC?

2. What is Dhamma vijaya according to king Ashoka?

3. State the views of Ashoka in his twelfth major rock edict?

4. Where do you find edicts of Ashoka?

5. Where is the national emblem of India taken from?

6. What were the features borrowed by Gandhara school of art from Greek and Roman art forms?

7. Describe the uniqueness of Mathura school of art?

3.10 CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE GUPTA PERIOD

The last phase of ancient Indian history starts in early fourth century A.D. and ends in about the 8th A.D. The Guptas built a strong and powerful kingdom and under the political unity and state patronage that was provided by them, cultural activities increased manifold. You will recall that following the Greek invasion, various art forms in India had been markedly influenced by Graeco-Roman styles. This art mainly depicted the Buddha or Buddhist thought. But during the Gupta period art became more creative and Hindu gods and goddesses also came to be portrayed.

The artistic achievement of the age is exhibited in the delicate workmanship and the variety of designs shown in different kinds of Gupta coins. The general scheme that was followed was to exhibit the portrait of the king on one side of the coin or an appropriate goddess



with her associated symbols on the other side. The king is shown in many positions - shooting a tiger or a lion, playing a musical instrument seated on a high backed couch etc. On the reverse in most cases was Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and in some cases Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and arts.

Besides coins, Gupta art found adequate expression in monuments and sculptures. The skilled artists of this age used their tools and skills to express the ideals and philosophical traditions of India through various art forms. They decorated even the niches and corners of religious places with statues of gods and goddesses. The images of gods were treated as symbols representing attributes associated with the gods. Hence the gods were shown having four or eight arms in each carrying a symbol or an *ayudha* (weapon) although they were depicted in human forms. Stone, terracotta, and other materials were used to construct the abodes of gods and goddesses.

Examples of the Gupta art can be seen at the *dashavatara* temple at Deogarh and the cave temples in Udaigiri hills. However, the most famous examples of Gupta art that still remain are the numerous seated and standing images of Buddha from Sarnath.

The school of art that thrived at Sarnath provides us with some of the most pleasing and graceful images of the Buddha. Besides stone, Gupta artists were also skilled in bronze. A two metre high bronze image of Buddha has been discovered at Sultanganj (near Bhagalpur in Bihar). Examples of sculptures in caves created during this period are traced to the famous Ellora Caves.

Architecture

The Gupta architecture has survived in a few shrines, rock cut caves (Ajanta) and temples, such as the *Dashavatara* temple at Deogarh. These structures were mainly made of stone and bricks. Some references in the works of Kalidasa give us a glimpse of Gupta architecture. The poet has given a vivid picture of a well-planned town with a network of roads, market places, big sky-touching palaces and mansions with terraces. The palaces had many inner apartments. They had court-yards, prisons, court-room and *sabhaagriha*. Their verandahs opened on roofs lit with moon-beam at night. The pleasure garden which was attached to palace contained all sorts of seasonal flowers and trees.

Archaeological evidence about Gupta architecture is however poor. However, examples of Gupta shrines have been discovered in the jungles of Central India, especially in the Bundelkhand region. These include the one at Bhitargaon in Kanpur district.

Painting

Painting as an art form reached a high degree of perfection during the Gupta times. The wall frescoes at the Ajanta caves (Aurangabad) and the one at Bagh caves (near Gwalior) bear evidence of this. Although Ajanta paintings belong to the period between the first to the seventh century AD yet most of these were produced during the Gupta time. These



paintings depict various scenes from the life of the Buddha. The skill with which the human, animal and plant figures have been drawn shows the refined and sensitive nature of Gupta art. The conception of beauty was a characteristic of Gupta art. Expression through art was given importance as it was regarded as a means for the attainment of spiritual joy.

3.11 THE PALLAVAS AND THE CHOLAS

Any account of ancient India is incomplete without referring to the two dynasties of South India i.e. the Pallavas and the Cholas and their contribution to art, architecture, administration and conquests. Quite a few dynasties rose in the South from the early centuries of the Christian era. Among them the Pallavas were great patrons of art and architecture. The 'ratha' at Mahabalipuram style of temples built by them were fine examples of rock-cut temples. The Pallavas also built structural temples like the Kailashanath and Vaikunthperumal temples at Kanchipuram. The Kailashanath temple is a huge structure with thousands of images and is said to be the "largest single work of art ever undertaken in India". There is also a set of *bas* reliefs found at Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) which is attributed to the pallava period. The Pagodas built at Mahabalipuram go back to the first century AD.

Temple building activity flourished in India from the 5th century AD onwards. While the North Indian temples were built in the *Nagara* style consisted of the shikaras (spiral roofs), the garbhagriha (sanctum) and the mandap (pillared hall), the temples in the South were built in the *Dravida* style completed



Group of monuments at Mahabalipuram near Chennai



Sun Temple, Konarak, Odisha



with vimana or shikhara, high walls and the gateway topped by gopuram. After the Pallavas (6th to 8th century AD) the tradition of building temples was further developed by the Cholas (10th – 12th century AD) in the south.

Do you know that the temple was the central place in the village? It was the gathering place for the villagers who would come here everyday and exchange ideas and discuss all matters of common interests. It served as a school too. During festival days dances and dramas were also performed in the temple courtyard.

The achievements of the Cholas also lie in their conquests across the seas and developing democratic institutions for governance at the village level. The village panchayat called *sahha* or *ur* had extensive powers. It had control over finances too. This body included several committees which looked after various aspects of village administration. A very detailed account of the functioning of the *sabhas* is available from one of the Chola inscriptions. The Chola rulers were also great builders. The Dravida style of temple architecture reached its zenith under the Chola rulers. One of the finest example of this style is the Rajarajeshwar or Brihadeshwara temple. During this period one also notices great achievements in the field of sculpture.

Great progress was made in literature both religious and secular. Sanskrit also became the language of the courts in many parts of the country. Tamil literatures also made great progress. The Alvars and the Nayanars, the Vaishnavite and Shaivite saints made lasting contributions to it. In spite of the dominant position of Sanskrit in most parts of the country, this period marks the beginning of many Indian languages as well as distinct scripts in different parts of the country. In short, we can say that by the time, the ancient period of Indian history came to an end, India had developed a culture which was marked by features that have characterized it ever since.

3.12 TRANSFORMATION OF VEDIC BRAHMANISM INTO PURANIC HINDUISM

The transformation of the ancient brahmanical faith into modern Hinduism can be regarded as the most distinguishing feature from the Gupta period onwards. Buddhism no longer received as much royal patronage as it did earlier. Brahmanism had come to the forefront. The Gupta rulers especially provided filling to the Bhagavata Sect of Hinduism. They called them selves *Bhagavatas*, worshipped Lord Vishnu performed *Asvamedha* yajnas, gave large donations to brahmanas, and built many temples. The Puranas were finally compiled in this age. Vishnu emerged as the god of devotion and came to be represented as the preserver of *dharma*. Numerous legends gathered around him and a whole Purana called *Vishnu Purana* was compiled in his honour. Similarly a law book called the *Vishnumriti* was also named after him. Above all, by the fourth century AD there came into being a famous Vaishnava work called '*Shrimadbhagavad-purana*' which taught devotion to Lord Krishna. A few Gupta kings also were worshippers of Shiva, the god of



destruction. Bhagavatism which was a contemporary to Buddhism and Jainism in origin and owed its birth to the stream of thought which began with Upanishads reached its zenith and became the most popular sect during this age. The theory of Ten *Avatars* or incarnations of the supreme god Vishnu came to be accepted and among them, Krishna was considered the most important.

Besides Vishnu, Brahma, Surya, Kartikeya, Ganesha, Durga, Lashmi, Saraswati and others were also worshipped as were lesser gods like Indra, Varuna, Yama etc. The snakes, the yakshas, and the Gandharvas also continued to be revered. Even animals, plants, rivers and mountains were looked upon with reverence and cities like Banaras and Prayag became places of pilgrimage. Idol worship became popular. Thus the prominent features of modern Hinduism took shape during the Gupta period.

Although Buddhism was on its decline, yet it continued to have its following. Besides the artistic creations of Ajanta and Ellora, the images of Sarnath Buddha belonging to this time show that Buddhism was also quite popular. Even Jainism commanded some following during the Gupta period.

3.13 NALANDA'S EMERGENCE AS A GREAT CENTRE OF LEARNING

Nalanda became a great centre of learning during Harsha's reign. Students from different parts of the world came here to imbibe learning. Although all the remains mounds of Nalanda have not yet been excavated, yet the evidence of a huge complex of buildings has been uncovered. Some of these were as many as four storey high. According to Hiuen Tsang, Nalanda housed as many as 10,000 students. It was supported by the revenues of 200 villages.

Although this huge monastic-educational establishment was primarily a centre for learning of Mahayana Buddhism, yet the curriculum included secular subjects as well. Grammar, logic, epistemology and sciences were taught here. Students were encouraged to develop a spirit of enquiry and reasoning. Active discussions and debates were taking place. Harsha is said to have invited a thousand learned monks of Nalanda to take part in the philosophical assembly at Kanauj. In his account, Hieun-Tsang has given a detailed account of Nalanda.

Thus university continued to be the centre of intellectual activity till the twelfth century.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.3

Answer the following questions:

1. What were the features of Gupta coins?



2. Where is Dashavatara temple located?

3. What are cave temples in Udaigiri hills famous for?

4. How high was the bronze statue of Buddha found at Sultangaj (near Bhaglpur)?

5. Where do you find the Gupta art form of painting?

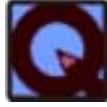
6. Where was a philosophical assembly during Harsha reign took place?

3.14 CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

According to tradition, christianity was brought to India by Saint Thomas in the first century A.D. According to legends, the Parthian king Gondophernes (C. 19- 45 A.C.) sent a messenger to Syria to look for a skilful architect who would build for him a new city. The messenger returned with St. Thomas, who converted him and many members of his court to Christianity. The truth of the legend is doubtful. It was most probably the frequent trade and movement between India and the west which was responsible for bringing this disciple of Lord Christ to India. The merchants, traders and even craftsmen frequently travelled along popular land and sea routes. St. Tomas preached christianity in many parts of India. He was killed at Mylapore (near Madras). The tomb of St. Thomas is still to be found at the same place. A large community of christians known as Syrian Christians continue to reside in Kerala even today.

The Christian Church has two major divisions-the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant church. The holy book of the Christians is the Bible. The Bible contains two parts: the old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible today is available in all major languages spoken in our country.

Today, we have over one and a half crore Christians in India. Several charitable institutions under their patronage are flourishing in all parts of our country. Perhaps the most famous Christian social worker, he has contributed a great deal for the welfare of the poor and home less in our country.

**Notes****INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.4**

Answers the following questions

1. How did Christianity come to India?

2. What are the divisions of the Christian Church?

3. Who was mother Teresa?

4. Name the two structural temples built by Pallavas at Kanchipuram?

5. What were the different style in temple architecture during the Pallavas and the Cholas?

6. Name the temple built by Cholas?

7. What was the style of sculpture in the Chola period called?

8. What style of work do you find at Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram)

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- India has a continuous history covering a very long period dating as far back as 7000 BC;
- The Harappans built the earliest cities complete with town planning, sanitation, drainage system and broad well-laid roads;
- Agriculture was the most important occupation of the rural people.
- The vedic people have contributed immensely in various fields such as literature, religion and philosophy;

- Towards the latter Vedic people society was divided into four varnas Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.
- Important religions i.e. Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism evolved and interactions between them resulted in a synthesis in Indian culture.
- The early Vedic people worshipped forces of nature and personified them as Gods and goddesses.
- The Mauryans set up the first great empire in North India and under the rule of Ashok the Great it reached great height in many fields;
- The Mauryan contribution towards art and architecture was significant.
- Temple architecture reached its pinnacle of glory under the Pallavas who were great builders.
- Examples of the Gupta art can be seen at the Dashavtara temple at Deogarh and the cave temples in Udaigiri temples.
- King Harsha came to the throne of Thaneswar after he had lost his family in tragic circumstances.
- Two persons have given detailed accounts of Harsha's reign. One is Hiuen Tsang—a Chinese pilgrim; the other is Bana Bhat—his court poet.
- Harsha was an efficient and benevolent ruler. He indulged in many welfare activities. He gave endowments for great public servants, rewarded people who did work of a high intellectual calibre and encouraged religious activities by giving gifts to various sects. He built many hospitals and rest houses. Nalanda became a great centre of learning during Harsha's reign.
- Harsha was also a literary person. He himself wrote plays and collected learned men around him.
- The achievements of the Cholas also lie in their conquests across the seas and developing democratic institutions for governance at the village level.

**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. How do you differentiate the culture of Aryans with the Harappans?
2. State the circumstances which leads to the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism in the sixth century BC?
3. What were the impact of Persian invasions on Indian culture?
4. What were the outcome of the Macedonian invasion on ancient Indians?



**Notes**

5. How did the transformation of vedic brahmanism into puranic Hinduism take place in ancient India?
6. Describe the development of Indian culture during the rules of successive empire?

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****3.1**

1. On the banks of Indus, Ghaggar and its tributaries.
2. Agriculture
3. In mehergarh in Baluchistan dated back to 7000 BC.
4. The seals contained some form of script.
5. One horned rhinoceros known as unicorn appeared on seals. A bronze sculpture of a dancing girl was found in Mohanjadaro. This testifies the sculpture skill of these people.
6. Veda – Rig, Atharva, Sama, Yajur and Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishada.
7. By dharma, artha and kama
8. It was performed along with chanting of Vedic hymns.
9. Ashramedha, Rajasuya, Vajapeya Yajnas
10. It was became more ritualistic. Instead of Indra, Agni, Varuna gods a new trinity of gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva were worshipped.
11. Games of chess, chariot racing etc.
12. Anga, Magadha, Kosala, Kashi, Kuru, Panchala.
13. Two – Svetambaras (white clothes ones), Digambaras (the naked ones)
14. 8 (Eight)
15. Sthanakas in Jainism and Viharas in Buddhism.
16. Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana

3.2

1. Greek accounts left by Arrian, Admiral Nearchus and Megasthenes.
2. True conquest is a conquest by piety and virtue i.e. welfare of people.
3. The honour of one sect lies in honouring other sects.
4. At Lauriya Nandangarh (Bihar)

5. From the famous Ashoka pillar, capital at Sarnath.
6. (i) Apollonian faces (ii) Hair style (iii) Draperies arrangement
7. (i) They started faces and figures of Buddha
(ii) Folklore were drawn out on long panels and rock faces.
(iii) They build statues also.

3.3

1. One side the portrait of king in different positions and the other side contained the goddess with her associated symbols.
2. At Deogarh
3. Gupta art
4. 2 metre high
5. (i) Wall frescoes of the Ajanta caves (Aurangabad)
(ii) Bagh caves (near Gwalior)
6. At Kanauj

3.4

1. St Thomas a skilful architect was a Christian. He was accidentally called by the Parthian king Gondaphernes in C-19/45 AD as an architect. St. Thomas converted many members into Christianity.
2. (i) The Roman Catholic Church
(ii) The Protestant Church
3. A famous Christian social worker who did a great work for poor and homeless.
4. Kalidashanath and Vaikunthaperumal.
5. Nagara style and Dravida style
6. Rajarajeshwar/Brihadeshware Temple
7. The Dravida Style
8. Bas Reliefs

