

**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL**

MASTER OF ARTS-HISTORY

SEMESTER -I

**STATE IN INDIA (ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL)
CORE-102**

BLOCK-1

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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First Published in 2019



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FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavors.



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BLOCK-1 STATE IN INDIA (ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL)

Introduction to Block

Unit 1 Historiography: Broad Outline-(Some Definitions- Generalization, Causality, Objectivity, Ideology; Historiographical Currents-- Colonial Or Imperialist Historiography, Utilitarian Historiography, Evangelical Historiography, Administrative Historiography, Nationalist Historians, Marxist Historiography, Neo-Imperialist Studies, Subaltern Approach, Communalists Trends, Economic History, Peasantry And Working Class, Caste, Tribe And Gender, Religion And Culture, Environment, Science And Technology)

Unit 2 Later Vedic Chiefdoms And Territorial States In The Age Of Buddha-(Chiefdoms Of Later Vedic Period--Political Structure, Social Structure; The Vedic Age Vis-A-Vis Sixth Century B.C; Sources; Janapada; Rise Of New Groups; Mahajanapada; Territorial States In The Age Of Buddha)

Unit 3- Mauryan Polity: Nature And Functions-(History Of Pre-Mauryan Period; Rise Of Mauryas; Asoka The Great; Mauryan Administration; Regional And Local Executive; Relationship With Outside Powers)

Unit 4 Mauryan Polity: Theory And Practice-(Sources Of Information; Idea Of An Empire; Policy Of Dhamma; Asoka's Descendents; Factors For Disintegration Of Empire; Effect Of Asoka's Policies; Monetary Problems; Emergence Of Ruling House- Major Dynasties And Minor Dynasties)

Unit 5-Mauryan Dynasty: Socio-Economic Basis-(Economic And Social Basis Of Production; Agriculture And Land Revenue—Agrarian Economy, Land Revenue; Trade, Commerce And Township—Trade, Urban Economy, Socio-Economic Changes)

Unit 6-Gupta Polity-(Political Landscape; Emergence Of Guptas—Samudragupta; Chandragupta Ii; Kumaragupta I; Skandagupta; Decline Of Gupta Empire; Regional Heavyweights; Pushyabhuties; Harshavardhana; Post-Harsha Period)

Unit 7-Administration, Society And Economy:Guptas

(Administration, Economy, Society—Gupta Dynasty; Post Gupta Period- -Fall Of Trade, Dearth Of Coin, Fall Of Towns, New Design Of Agricultural Relations, Agricultural Extension)

UNIT 1 HISTORIOGRAPHY: BROAD OUTLINE

STRUCTURE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we have tried to deal with various tools and techniques necessary for writing. Our position is that they are very important part of historical work. Although there are many pros and cons attached to these terms but no writing is possible without using these general concepts. The also keep changing as the work progresses. However, at every stage, the historians have to use these concepts which provide the basis for understanding their facts and source material.

Modern Indian historiography began with the writings of the scholar-administrators of the English East India Company and they found history as an instrument to legitimise the colonial rule by putting some interpretations. Thus, emerge different school of thoughts or historiographical trends in Indian history, which has been discussed in this Unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of history as a scientifically developed discipline began only in the 19th century. It was only then that the historians tried to absorb the lessons of early historical writings and could develop new methods and techniques. It was during this venture to know the art of historical writing of the earlier period did historiography emerge as a part of history. Historiography simply means the history of the art of historical writing. In other words, it is the history of history or the history of historical thought. As we know the colonial modernity and knowledge brought a historical sense to Indians. Systematic historical writing began in India during the early period of British colonialism. The earliest and one of the positive results of British conquest was the recovery of ancient Indian history on modern lines of historiography. It was essential to them to know about the past, society and culture, and establish their authority over India. It was an outcome of the administrative necessity of the British also. The rulers encouraged those who shown interest in the past, resulted the investigation of the past and bringing up of new interpretations and perceptions on Indian history.

1.2 SOME DEFINITIONS

1.2.1 Generalisation

A generalisation is regarded as linkage of disparate or unrelated facts, in time or space, with each other. It is their grouping and rational classification. Basically, a generalisation is a connection or relationship between facts; it is an 'inference' or, as Marc Bloch puts it, 'an explanatory relationship between phenomena.' It is the result of the effort to provide an explanation and causation, motivation and effect/impact. More widely, generalisations are the means through which historians understand their materials and try to provide their understanding of facts to others. Analysis and interpretation of events is invariably done through generalisations. Generalisation is involved as soon as we perform the two most elementary tasks i.e. classify 'facts' or 'data' or 'phenomena' and compare and contrast them, or seek out similarities and dissimilarities among them and make any inference from them.

Thus we make a generalisation when we put our facts into a chronological series. For example, when we mention the caste or religion of a leader we are making a generalisation. By connecting the caste and the leader or writer we are suggesting that his or her caste was an important part of his or her personality and, hence his or her political or literary work. Or even the mention of his or her age/gender. More comprehensively, a generalisation occurs when we try to understand facts or make connection between data, objects, events, records of the past through concepts and convey them to other through concepts. Generalisations may be simple or complex, of low level or of high level.

A Low-level generalisation is made when we label a fact or event, or classify it or periodise it. For example, labelling certain facts as economic, or certain persons as belonging to a caste, region or religion or profession, or saying that certain events occurred in a particular year or decade or century. A middle level generalisation is made when a historian tries to find interconnections among the different elements of the subject under study; for example, when we are studying a segment of the social

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reality of a time, space or subject bound character. In this case – for example peasant movement in Punjab from 1929-1937 – the historian may at the most try to see the backward and forward linkages or connections but confining himself strictly to his subject matter. Themes such as class consciousness, interest groups, capitalism, colonialism, nationalism and feudalism cannot be tested in a research work except through middle level generalisations, such as relating to workers in Jamshedpur in the 1920s, growth of industrial capitalism in India in the 1930s, labour legislation in India in the 1930s.

Wide generalisations or systematising or schematising generalisations

These are made when historians reach out to the largest possible, significant connections or threads that tie a society together. These historians try to study all the economic, political, social, cultural and ecological linkages of a society in an entire era. The historian tries to draw a nation-wide or society-wide or even world-wide picture of these linkages even when he is dealing with a narrow theme. Quite often, even when a historian is studying a narrow theme, wide generalisations lie at the back of his mind. For example, quite often when a European scholar studies a specific social or religious aspect of an Asian or African society, a wider Orientalist understanding of Asia or Africa lay at the back of his mind. Similarly, when a British scholar studies the economic history of an Asian country for a specific period; a wider understanding of colonialism lies at the back of his mind. The widest form of wide generalisations is the study of a social system (e.g. capitalism), or stage of society (e.g. feudalism or colonialism) or above all the transition from one system to another (feudalism to capitalism or colonialism to post-colonialism). Some of the historians and sociologists who have undertaken such wide generalisations are Karl Marx, Max Weber, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Eric Hobsbawm, Immanuel Wallerstein, D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and so on.

1.2.2 Causality

Even though the event is taken to be unique and particular, historians nevertheless endeavour to explain its occurrence. The analysis of an event as a particular does not weaken either the effectiveness of the offered explanation or its claim to represent the reality. Like other social scientists, historians offer a complete explanation of the phenomenon under consideration and they do this by valuing what caused that event to happen. Search for causes is thus central to historical analysis. Until the 18th century philosophers and historians believed that the cause must be an antecedent event - one that occurred prior to the event that is being explained and that the antecedent event must be regularly associated with the effect. However, following upon the work of John S. Mill, the cause is no longer identified as an event that occurs before. Rather it is conceived as a condition or a set of conditions that are always present when the event Z occurs, and always absent when Z does not occur.

The cause is a condition that is both necessary and sufficient for bringing about the given event Z . It is said to be necessary because its absence implies the absence of the effect Z and it is sufficient because its presence yields the given output Z . If a study shows that individuals with Vitamin A deficiency suffered from night-blindness, and in all those individuals where Vitamin A was present in sufficient measure, night blindness did not occur, then it can be concluded that deficiency of Vitamin A is the cause of night-blindness. We can designate Vitamin A as the cause because its absence meant night-blindness and its presence meant the absence of night-blindness.

Three points need to be emphasised here. First, the relationship of necessity is significantly different from that of sufficiency. Second, the cause is considered to be a condition that is both necessary and sufficient and third that constant conjunction is not an adequate indicator of a causal relationship. If in a given instance cardiac arrest leads to the death of a person, we may assume that heart failure was a condition that was sufficient for the death of a person. However to assert that cardiac arrest was a necessary condition for the death of the individual we need to show that the absence of cardiac arrest would have meant absence of the

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effect i.e. death. If death could have occurred due to some other condition for e.g., liver failure or hemorrhage, then cardiac arrest may have been a sufficient condition but it cannot be assumed as a necessary condition for the occurrence of the event i.e. death of person. Since the person could have died due to the presence of other ailments, the absence of cardiac arrest would not have prevented the effect. Hence, it cannot be a pre-condition that is necessary for the event under consideration. What is being suggested here is that the connection of necessity is different from that of sufficiency and in philosophies of science the cause has been perceived as being both a necessary and a sufficient condition.

If the cause is a necessary and sufficient pre-condition, it means that it is regularly associated with the given effect i.e. it always exists when the effect Z occurs and always absent when the event Z is non-existent. Constant conjunction is thus an important observable quality of causation. Further, the causal condition is almost always a precursor to the effect. However, this does not signify that a condition that is regularly observed before the event Z takes place is the result of the latter. Constant conjunction and spatial contiguity are *sine-quo-non* of a cause-effect linkage but the cause cannot be identified on this basis alone. On a record, songs appear in a specific sequence. However, the song that comes first is not the cause of the one that comes later. Likewise, lightning may be regularly observed before we hear a thunder but this does not mean that it is the cause of the latter phenomena. It is possible that both lightning and thunder are the perceivable effects of an altogether different cause. What needs to be underscored here is that regular association is not by itself sufficient for proving that the condition that is observed first is the cause of that which comes later.

1.2.3 Objectivity

Objectivity has been the founding principle of the historiographical tradition in the West. Since the days of Herodotus, the historians believed in the separation of the subject and the object, in the distinction between the knower and known and in the possibility to recover the past. Peter Novick, a critic of the principle of objectivity, has clearly defined it in the following words: 'The principal elements of the ideal of [objectivity] are

well known and can be briefly recapitulated. The assumptions on which it rests include a commitment to the reality of the past and to the truth as correspondence to that reality, a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history is “found”, not “made”. Though successive generations of historians might, as their perspectives shifted, attribute different significance to the events in the past, the meaning of those events was unchanging.’ (Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge : CUP, 1988, pp. 1-2)

For this purpose, however, the historian has to be unprejudiced and non-partisan. He/she should be able to suspend his/her personal orientations and rely only on the truth of the evidences. Thomas Haskell, a historian, has questioned this conflation of objectivity and neutrality. In his article ‘Objectivity is not Neutrality’, he has argued that objectivity and neutrality are two separate things, even though in most of 19th century historiography they were equated with each other. He cites the cases of historians, particularly, Eugene Genovese, the American historian on slavery, whose history is objective, though not neutral.

We, therefore, now have two somewhat differing perceptions of objectivity; so far its relation with neutrality is concerned. However, in other areas such as objectivity’s position as the prominent principle of the historical profession, its distance from indoctrination and from sophistry, its reliance on evidence and rationality and its requirement for a minimum level of separation are common to all its definitions.

1.2.4 Ideology

Probably, the word ‘ideology’ was first used in France by logical philosophers to indicate what was then understood as the philosophy of the human mind. In English dictionary, ideology conveyed the meaning of the science of ideas. The analytical emphasis on empirical social ideas had an important role in the promotion of the Enlightenment philosophies

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which largely bestowed to the making of the French Revolution of 1789. This revolution faced numerous difficulties in achieving popular sovereignty. By the end of the following decade, there occurred the coup d'état of Napoleon Bonaparte, who disregarded the Enlightenment philosophers for disseminating metaphysics and a critical failure to adapt their socio-political ideas. Napoleon's attack imparted to ideology a sense of having unreal, impractical and even fanatical tendencies.

He blamed the ideologues, for they illusion the people by elevating them to a sovereignty where the same people were incapable of application. He rebuked the principles of enlightenment as ideology. An element of empiricism becomes a feature of ideology. It is neither rationalisation in the sense of direct action to better something nor in the sense of finding suitable theoretical paradigm to explain some rational observations. The ideologues support for popular sovereignty must have been based on their ideas about the people and their capacity. Napoleon's critique implies that the ideologues considered people more as what they would wish them to be and less to what those people were in actual reality. This is a kind of scienticism influencing the habit of mind prone to promote ideologies. In an important sense, Napoleon's emphasis on 'knowledge of the human heart and the lessons of history' also had an ideological distinction opposed to the position of the Enlightenment thinkers. This is a case of conflict between democratic and undemocratic sanctions about the nature of political power. Not that Napoleon's plea for singular man authority could justify itself on any historical criterion of universal excellence. He had to be a creature of pure and simple pragmatism. In some circumstances, realism may serve as the way out of an immediate problem. But even realism cannot rid itself of a rather dull ideological dictum enjoining that 'nothing succeeds like success'. As we have already noted, every ideology grows either in support or in opposition to an existing social order, its economy, politics, and culture. The different patterns of cognitive and moral beliefs embedded in different ideologies can then have a vital influence on the historical processes of action, reaction and change.

Let us highlight the two different cases in which the term ideology has been used in the evolution of human thought about history and society. It

may mean a set of beliefs belonging to any particular society. Such beliefs are likely to differ from one class to another, reflecting separate class interests and divide, which can be inimical or propitiatory. This is how an ideology comes to have the label of being 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian' etc. An ideology of a class cannot have the tendency of vindicating the particular interests thereof. The usual manner of such legitimation consists in projecting that the promotion of particular interests, under consideration, is in line to the general good of the entire society.

The other usage of the term ideology is negative. It means a delusion born of false usage and speculation, the sense in which Napoleon sharply criticised the ideologies of popular sovereignty. The critique implied a kind of difference between knowledge based on rational experience and ideology. In their early writings, criticising Hegelian idealism, Marx and Engels applied the term ideology in this sense. They had the same critical approach while exposing the drawbacks of Ludwig Feuerbach's materialism. Marx's critiques of the Hegelian philosophies of the *State* (1843) and *Right* (1843-44) and his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) made no substantive mention of ideology. The emphasis was on the transposition of Hegel. For example, the true relationship of *thought* to *being* is that *being* is subject and *thought* the predicate (Hegel). The Hegelian inversions led to countless uncertainties and mercurial conclusions. To cite a few of them, Hegel's apotheosis of an authoritarian absolute and despotic state did not fit in with his advocated course of history as the progress towards consciousness of freedom. Further Hegel's idea of God creating man means an inversion of the same kind. Ludwig Feuerbach, himself a radical Hegelian, rightly argued in his book *The Essence of Christianity* (1814) that God is a creation of man in his own image, invoking the human ideals of wisdom, will and love endowed with countless power.

In connection with this theme, Marx analysed the nature of religion, tracing its origin in the rebuff and anguish of the real world: 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.' (*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction*). In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Marx no longer travelled only in the

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world of philosophy. His criticism then expands to the economic connections in a capitalist society. This was Marx's first analysis of estranged labour and its severe refutation in the domain of private capitalist world.

We have noted that the use of the word ideology is extremely rare in Marx's later texts. Of the two senses of ideology, the strictly negative one had also been taken in conjunction with false consciousness in some writings of Engels. Even in its negative uses, ideology referred to manipulations with a view to veiling some refutation in reality. While capitalism abounds in contradictions and brings severe distress to the exploited, the bourgeois ideology, in Marx's words, presents the system as the 'very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule, Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham'. And so, the similarity of ideology and false consciousness may be an illusion without appropriate specificity of the contraries which are being concealed.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What is generalization?

2) Elucidate Objectivity.

1.3 HISTORIGRAPHICAL CATEGORIES

1.3.1 Colonial Or Imperialist historiography

It was the product of the British colonialism in India. In modern Indian history, the school or tradition of history writing which was influential in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Many intellectual influences co-existed in this tradition. The Indologists and Orientalists were the real force behind the development of such enquiry. They laid the foundation

for the development of the investigation on India's past and culture. These colonial writers upheld different ideologies in their writings that are the Utilitarians, the Evangelicals and the Administrative historians.

1.3.2 Utilitarian Historiography

The Utilitarian school of political philosophy was started by Jeremy Bentham in England. It was a by-product of the enlightenment of Europe. The Utilitarians stood for that the power vested within the hands of the rulers must be utilised for the benefit of the society and advocated maximum happiness to the maximum number of people. The utilitarian was another school headed by the James Mill who believed that the backwardness of the Indian society could only be fast forward through the introduction of enlightened despotism. His *History of British India* was the most dominant historical work among the British during the 19th century. It was published in the year 1828 and became a trend setter for the subsequent historical works produced by colonial writers and certainly most controversial one too. He never visited India and it was the first comprehensive history on India in the modern period. It covers the history of India from the beginning of the Christian era to the 19th century. He divided Indian history into three separate periods, namely, Hindu, Muslim and British. It was a deliberate attempt by him to highlight the ancient and medieval periods of Indian history as Hindu and Muslim. He skilfully avoided designating the modern Indian history as Christian, instead used the term British. This periodisation was used by the subsequent colonial historians. In fact it was the recognition of the policy of divide and rule pursued by colonial masters.

1.3.3 Evangelical Historiography

Indian history written by them should be seen in relation to their attitude to Indian religions, particularly Hinduism--one of hostility and one of sympathy. During the 19th century they were following or having hostility towards India but later their attitudes become accommodative. They were the missionaries came to India in order to convert Indians and they even believed that God had allowed them to conquer the country for this purpose. The main aim of their historical writing was criticism of all

things 'Indian' and an uncritical justification of all British rules. They believed that the people of India could only be changed progressively through Christianity and missionary education. Hence they stressed on the conversion of Indians to Christianity. Charles Grant was the prominent evangelical writer of this period and his work *Observation on State and Society* published in 1813 emphasis on the backwardness of this country was due to the Hindu religion.

According to him the only solution to put an end to this isolatedness was the acceptance of Christianity by the indigenous people. According to him by the introduction of English language, falsehood could be weakened and diversity can be flourished. To them Britain had an important obligation to fulfil in the history of India and it was a part and parcel of some divine plan. The industrial revolution and the spread of Protestantism were also the cause for the evangelism in India. William Wilberforce was pioneer of this movement. The new evangelism contributed two things that are combining religion with science and an emphasis on science. A large number of missionaries appeared in India after this. Christian missionaries extended the philosophy inaugurated by Grant. His work is entitled *Indian Antiquities*, 4 volumes, in which he tried to examine the general historical background of the Indian subcontinent from the early period itself. He attempted to combine Indian history with the dominant philosophy of the 19th century Europe, namely, the Hegelian dialectics. By this he was trying to relate Indian history with the general stream of the European philosophy and historical writings.

1.3.4 Administrative Historiography

The administrative historians were another category for the development of historiography in India. They wrote on as a part of official duty. So these writers were mainly used the official records and reports for their writing which presented a one sided view on history in general and hence prejudiced. The important administrative historians were Vincent Smith, who produced several works on India, Lord Macaulay, W. W. Hunter, B. Malleson, Henry Maine, J. Tallboys Wheeler, Alfred Lyall, W. H. Moreland, J. D. Cunningham, James Tod, Mark Wilks, Grant

Duff, Robert Orme, T. R. Holmes, M.S. Elphinstone, John Dawson, E.J. Stephenson, J. Strachy, Sir Wolsely Haig and Elliot etc. who opened up a new chapter in the historical writing in India as well as the European historical writing on India. Their approach and attitudes led to the rise of nationalist, a native historical writing in India, a reaction against the colonial distortion and manipulation of Indian history.

1.3.5 Nationalist Historiography

An important element in this approach was an effort to restore national self-prestige and glorification of India's past. Another element was the dissemination of economic nationalism through the elucidation of the pathetic economic consequences of British rule in India. Further, nationalist historiography tried to re-orient India for the modern Indian mind and promote political unification and anti-imperialist sentiments to further the generation of national consciousness in India. The nationalist history had to contend not only with the earlier imperialist prejudiceness in historiography but also a communal interpretation of history that began to gain influence from the early decades of the 19th century. Nationalist historiography played an important role in providing an ideological platform for the freedom struggle and in debating the economic consequences of imperialism.

The focus of nationalist attention was on external i.e. imperialist exploitation of India, not so much the internal i.e., class exploitation and class conflicts within the Indian society. The phrases nationalist school and nationalist history can only be understood in the background of the colonial domination and colonial historiography. History in its modern sense was not written in the pre-colonial India. The introduction of English education helped the Indian middle class to learn the value of historical knowledge and to get in touch with the history of India as well as the history of the world. Thus newly educated Indians began to study the writings of colonial historians. The nationalist historians started amending the historical writing of the colonialists. Hence they possessed some sort of prejudiceness on their writings. The phrase nationalist historians were first used by R.C. Majumdar, to denote those historians of India whose writings had nationalist leaning, especially during the period

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of colonial domination. In the course of time it received new flip from the country wide agitation for political upliftment and slowly became a part of the movement itself.

The nationalists also gave emphasis to the study of the religion or society of India. In other words they try to protect religion and society in their studies. The material side of Hindu culture was also protected with equal zeal against European criticism. Rajendra Mitra who started the nationalist writing in India with publication of some Vedic texts and the book entitled *Indo-Aryans* was proud of ancient Indian heritage and adopted a rationalist comparative approach of ancient Indian society. The writings of Mitra, Bhandarkar and some of the distinguished oriental scholars of Europe were brought together in three volumes entitled *Civilization in Ancient India*, by R C Dutt in closing years of 1880s. According to Majumdar, this may be regarded as the first nationalist history in the best sense of the term. R.K Mukharjee maintained that the religious and spiritual orientation among Hindus all over India and their ideal of an all-India empire were the basis of Indian nationalism in the past. K.P Jayaswal in his *Hindu Polity* also deals the thesis of oriental despotism.

Dadabhai Naoroji and R.C. Dutt in their criticism of the British government on economic grounds wrote the book on economic nationalism, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* and *the Economic History of India*. They popularised the drain of wealth theory and exposed the exploitative character of imperialism and hence revolutionised the national movement. They cleverly used history as an instrument for making India as a nation on different realms, even though they had some defects. R.G. Bhandarkar, H.C Raychoudhary, J.N. Sarkar, G.S Sardesai, S. Krishna Swami Ayyangar, Lalalajpath Roy, C.F. Andrews, Pattabhi Sittaramayya, Girija Mukharjee etc were other important nationalist writers. The trained or academic historians also followed this style of writing in the post independent era. They were B.R. Nanda, Tarachand, Amal Tripathi, Bishweshwar Prasad etc.

1.3.6 Marxist Historiography

By the Marxist writing, is not meant that the writers were all Marxists but that they more or less adopted materialistic interpretation as a method of understanding and a tool of analysis. Their interpretation derived from historical philosophy of Karl Marx, the dialectical materialism. The essence of this new approach lies in the study of relationship between social and economic organisation and its after effects on historical events. Instead of political history they gave more emphasis on the history of downtrodden.

The Marxist historiography on modern India was inaugurated by M.N. Roy with his work '*India in Transition*' published in 1922. It was followed by *India Today* of R. Palme Dutt in 1940 and '*The Social Background of Indian Nationalism*' of A.R. Desai in 1959. All the three were classical Marxists and treated Indian national movement as the representation of bourgeoisie class. India today was considered as an authoritative Marxist work for a long time. It became an important school of historiography in India. Dutt and Desai studied the pros and cons of Gandhi in the national movement. They highlighted the positive role played by him in converting the national movement as mass movement and by awakening the national consciousness of backward class. In the post independent period the historians like D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, Sumit Sarkar, Sushobhan Sarkar, Sunil Sen, Hiran mukharjee, K.N. Panikkar, Irfan Habib and many others have dedicated their life for the growth of historiography. The Marxist historians tried the transformation of India in the time of colonialism and looked it as a part of world capitalism and exploitative concerns of British imperialism.

1.3.7 Neo- Imperialist Historiography

These scholars belong to the universities of England, America and Germany also known as Cambridge Historians. They have unearthed several source materials in the form of official records, diaries, police reports etc with the purpose of providing a new orientation to the Indian national movement. Anil Seal and John Broomfield were the founders of this school. Anil Seal's '*Emergence of Indian Nationalism*'

and Broomfield's 'Elite Conflict in Plural Society; Twentieth Century Bengal' started this approach of historiography. After them John Galleghar, Gordon Johnson, Judith Brown, Ayesha Jalal, David Washbrook, C.J. Baker, C.A. Bayly, D. Rothermund and many other scholars made similar contributions.

The neo imperialist writers analysed the existence of colonialism in India viz political, social, economic and cultural structure. They had analysed nationalism too--the theories on nationalism, the causative factors and its evolution and the refutations in the national movement. They considered national movement as an elitist movement. To them caste and religion were the basis of political organisation and nationalism was a mere cover. The national movement represented the struggle of one group of elite against the other for the British favours.

1.3.8 Subaltern approach

The development of the historical writing in the 1960s was the beginning of this new style of enquiry. This new initiative was taken by the historians like Rodney Hilton, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rude, Sobul etc had a direct influence on writing by placing common people in the centre of their studies. They characterised this current as history from below, or people's history, or grassroots history etc. The appearing of this trend in the last two decades of the 20th century is known as the subaltern studies. Subaltern a term taken from the Antonio Gramsci's, the Italian socialist and thinker from his manuscript 'Prison Notebooks', meaning of inferior ranker, or common people; whether of class, caste, age, gender etc. It brings to light the downtrodden and vulnerable sections of the Indian society hitherto untouched by historiography.

A series of subaltern volumes were published on Indian national movement under the editorship of Ranajit Guha. He protests that the historiography of Indian nationalism is beset with a biased elitism of two kinds, the colonial approach and the nationalist approach. Thus he highlights the relevance of the subaltern approach and stated that the hitherto historiography of Indian nationalism has been dominated by elitism--colonial elitism and bourgeoisie elitism, both originated as the

ideological product of British occupation. The subaltern writers have produced several articles on untouched or virgin areas of research on different topics, titles, issues, events, incidents, rebellions, etc vis-a-vis history and society of India. The important subaltern writers are David Arnold, Gyan Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, Shahid Amin, Tanika Sarkar, Sumit Sarkar, Gayathri Spivak, Julie Stephens, Aravind Das, N.K Chandra, Stephen Henningham, Dipesh Chakraborthy, Goutam Bhadra, etc.

1.3.9 Communalists Trends

A communal interpretation of Indian history has formed the basis of communal ideology as a major instrument for the spread of communal consciousness. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the communal interpretation of history has been the main constituent of communal ideology in India. This has been particularly true of Hindu communalism. Muslim communalism too has used 'history' but it had depended more on religion and minority sentiment, which have been used to create a fear psychosis among them. To create a similar fear psychosis, Hindu communalists have tried to use an appeal to the medieval period of Indian history.

In particular, education in schools played an important role in the spread of communalism. Gandhiji, for example, pointed this out that 'Communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were being taught in her schools and colleges, through her textbooks.' Similarly the "Foreword" to the *Report of the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee*, appointed by the National Congress, pointed out in 1932 that the communal view of medieval history found in school and other history books 'is playing a considerable part in estranging the two communities' and that 'an attempt to remove historical misapprehensions is the first and the most unavoidable step in the real solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem.' The communal view of history spread through poetry, drama, historical novels, popular articles in newspapers and magazines, children's magazines, pamphlets and public speeches. The historical

proof of such popularly disseminated view of history was virtually nothing, but it passed as history in popular mind. We may also note that an integrated and conscious communal view of history at the level of higher education was rarely found among Indian historians before 1947 mainly because of secular orientation of national movement among the Indian intelligentsia. Communal forces gained significant intellectual points in India and Pakistan only after partition.

However, communal approach to history was openly preached by communal political leaders and found reflection in school textbooks and popular writing, etc., as we have pointed out earlier. Moreover, the proponents of the Hindu and Muslim communal views of history take up diametrically opposite and hostile positions, they inherent the same historiographic framework, premises and assumptions. The only difference in their approach is that the opposite religious community is treated as the evil.

1.3.10 Economic History

The emergence of economics as a discipline in the 18th century led in due course to the development of a new branch in history called economic history. The pioneers of economics were Adam Smith and other classical economists. India was very much in the vision of the classical economists, a group of thinkers in England during the Industrial Revolution. They advocated free trade and minimising of state intervention in the economy. Adam Smith, the foremost classical economist, criticized the East India Company in its new role as the ruling power in India. In his view, the Company's trading monopoly ran counter to the principle of the free market. In the classic work entitled *Wealth of Nations* (1776), he said, 'The government of an exclusive company of merchants is perhaps the worst of all governments for any country whatsoever.'

Economics underwent a theoretical transformation in the early 20th century under the influence of John Keynes, who advocated limited economic intervention by the government for promoting welfare and development. Keynes, too, thought deeply about India while developing his new economic paradigm, and his earliest major work, *Indian*

Currency and Finance (London 1913), illustrated his idea of good financial management of the economy. It is also noteworthy that the early classical economists, such as Ricardo, influenced the thinking of a group of Utilitarian administrators who set about reforming the administration of India in the 19th century. Above all, the influence of Adam Smith is noticeable in ending of Company's monopoly by the Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833.

Not surprisingly, therefore, historians have paid close attention to the connection between the evolution of economic thought in England and the question of reform of the colonial administration in India. This is evident in such works as Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford 1959); S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India*; and A. Chandavarkar *Keynes and India: a Study in Economics and Biography* (London 1989). Classical political economy in England laid the foundations for the *free trade* economics of the Raj in the 19th century. Keynesian economics, on the other hand, contained the seeds of the development economics of the mid 20th century. Both types of economics affected the state and the economy in India and stimulated arguments in the economic history of India.

1.3.11 Peasantry And Working Class

The Leftist movement in 20th century Indian politics brought the focus upon peasants, workers and their movements during the freedom struggle. Attempts to write the histories of these movements involved a closer study of class relations in Indian society, especially peasant-landlord relationship and worker-capitalist relationship. There had been earlier studies of related aspects, especially a mammoth historical literature on industry. The aim of radical historiography, however, was to treat the peasants and workers as historical entities in their own right. Soon, it became evident that the history of workers and peasants might not be understood fully without taking into account their evolving relationship with the superior classes. As these realisations came to fore, the new labour historians emphasised the importance of treating labour and capital together. By the very nature of the subject, moreover, the older colonial historiography had tended to

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treat agrarian relations as a whole, keeping in view the mutual relations of tenants and landlords in any investigation of the condition of peasants.

The terms 'peasant' and 'worker', it may be noted in this context, were somewhat novel terms in Indian history. Colonial historiography had usually used the terms 'tenant' and 'ryot' rather than the 'peasant'. The term 'ryot' was a distortion of the Persian term '*raiyyat*', which meant, literally, 'subject'. In Mughal times, all subordinate classes of villagers, including the tillers of the land who were liable to pay the land tax, were referred to as '*riaya*' (plural of *raiyyat*) or subjects. While the peasants were very much there in the pre-colonial period, the class of industrial workers did not exist then. The people who did exist were the artisans, farm servants, field labourers, tanners, distillers, and the miscellaneous class of the labouring poor including sweepers, scavengers, palanquin bearers and so on. The industrial proletariat was a new class that emerged along with the rise of large-scale industry in the later 19th century. Worker's history, in the stricter sense of the term, could not have existed before then. The viewing of the peasant as a separate class and the emergence of the workers as a distinct new class led to the emergence of peasants and workers history in the course of the 20th century. The Marxist concept of the class and the spread of the communist ideology in India constituted a factor in the emergence of the radical historiography vis-a-vis workers and peasants.

The leftist historiography of workers and peasants grew especially in the period after independence. A. R. Desai, a Marxist intellectual, edited *Peasant Struggles in India* (Bombay, 1979). Sunil Kumar Sen, a CPI historian and himself an active participant in the Tebhaga or Sharecropper Movement in late colonial Bengal, wrote an eye-witness historical account entitled *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47* (Calcutta, 1972), and later produced *Working Class Movements in India 1885-1975* (Delhi, 1994). Another Marxist account was written by Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India: History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1970* (Calcutta, 1977).

1.3.12 Caste, Tribe And Gender

When modern anthropological and historical writings on Indian society began, the closer relationship between caste, tribe and gender became

apparent. Colonial historians and anthropologists saw that the anomaly of Indian society lay in caste. They also saw that there was a section in Indian society--aboriginal tribes, which had not been brought into caste structure. The making of caste society varied from tribal society in many respects. Gender was one of the prominent aspect in which the organisation of a tribe differed from that of a caste. It is not merely that the tribal economy differed from that of castes. It is also true that the marriage systems differed radically in above mentioned societies. Outwardly, it was the sexual organisation of society which made it easy to categorize caste apart from the tribe. The polarity of purity and pollution, which characterised caste society, was non-existent among the tribes. The tribes were not a part of ritual hierarchy. Also, the gender system of the tribes differed from the marriage structure of caste society. In fact, a unique organisation of gender lay at the heart of the caste system. In general, it may be said that there is a hidden connection between gender, caste and tribe which must be kept in view when studying Indian's society and history.

The historical and anthropological literature on caste is mammoth and of long standing. There is also a new and burgeoning literature on gender studies and women's history. The tribes do not figure so importantly in Indian historical writing. There is, however, a considerable body of anthropological literature on the tribes which includes some historical material.

The dalits or untouchables or vulnerable sections of the society have become a prominent force in Indian politics. It is not a matter of surprise, therefore, that historical inquiries into their condition have attracted the attention of several researchers. The adivasi or aboriginal tribes do not have that sort of importance in politics, except in the North-East India. There are, consequently, fewer researchers in tribal history. Women, on the other hand, have attracted a growing number of historians. This is because of the feminist movement not only in India but all over the world. The movement has had the effect of putting women at the centre of core.

1.3.13 Religion And Culture

The nationalist movement in colonial India led to an important revamping of the concept of history. History at the time was understood to be a history of the British state in India. The history of the pre-British era was understood to be a political account of the dynasties and their wars and alliances. For M.K Gandhi, this was a history of violence. There was no history of 'soul-force', or nonviolence. He put the matter quite explicitly in *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Rabindranath Tagore made the same point in a different manner. In his view, the true history of India was not a series and eulogy of its dynasties, warfare and the resultant bloodshed, but rather its inner history. It lay in its quest for the acceptances of different view points and in the amalgamation of diverse elements, including different religious beliefs. The history of India's unique culture, in his view, was evolution of peaceful coexistence out of varied beliefs and practises. Religious history was on this analysis paramount to the inner history of the country's culture. It was a history of fusion.

British Orientalism had also considered religious history as the most prominent part of India's cultural history. This is not a colonial view alone, for there was an earlier acknowledgement of the significance of religion in the cultural heritage of the country. Badauni's *Muntakha-ut-Tawarikh*, highlighting the reign of Akbar, devoted considerable time and space to religious doctrines and Sufi beliefs and practises.

There was also identification that not all of India's culture was a religious culture. British Orientalism had admiration of secular Sanskrit poetry, and earlier too Badauni had devoted many pages of his books to Persian poetry in India, not all of which was religious. However, Indian historiography was quick to realize that there was no hard and fast difference between the religious and the secular in the history of India. Even in the modern period, it was recognised that the Indian awakening had an important component of religious reform/ revival.

1.3.14 Environment, Science And Technology

In the history and the historiography of modern India, science, technology and environment are interrelated subjects. Massive demographic change facilitated by science and technology has changed

the landscape beyond recognition. Neither Babarnor Warren Hastings would be able to contemplate the present aspect of the country. Thisflux has recently attracted the attention of historians of India. It is not thattechnology, science and ecology as fundamental factors in Indian history escaped thenotice of the past generations of historians. Nevertheless, it is only in the 1990s that a fair number of historians in India took these themes up as independent topics of research.

However, there is no agreement among them about the effect of science and technologyon the well being of the population and the environment of the country. Their dissentreflect deep divide within public opinion, government and politics of thecountry. There is science lobby, an economics and planning lobby and an environmentlobby. There are far cries of coming catastrophe and hot repudiations that there is cause for concern.It is said that because of greenhouse effect due to industrialisation and other factors, the glaciers fromwhich our rivers descend are fast receding. Historians have been sensitised to theproblems of science and environment by these public discussions. From the 1990s,individual historical monographs on these subjects have begun to surface. Even prior to that, certain historical questions had figured in their discussions as regards science and technology. Was modern science and technology manipulated by thephenomenon of colonial rule? What were the state of the sciences and the level oftechnology before the establishment of British paramountcy? Such questions have beenresurfaced recently.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Describe Marxist Historiography.

2) What is Subaltern Historiography?

1.4 LET US SUM UP

The discipline of history, as other social sciences, constantly seeks new definitions which give rise to various phenomena. The search for these is crucial to historical analysis. These definitions provide both the necessary and sufficient ground for the occurrence of certain events. However, unlike in the natural sciences, the search for definitions in history cannot be conducted in a controlled atmosphere as in a laboratory. Instead, the social scientists look for similar and different conditions for the occurrence of events.

Historiographical trends set up high tradition of scholarship. They based their writings on hard empirical research and commitment. They carefully and meticulously footnoted all their statements. Consequently, their writing was very much rational and scientific. Their research advanced our knowledge and interpretation of the past. Simultaneously, most of them contributed to the positive aspects of the modernisation of our society. Many of them also unveiled new sources and developed new paradigms for elucidation of existing sources. They raised many new questions, produced dissensions and initiated active parleys. They also infused the idea that historical research and writing should have value for the present. Even when not going far in their own research and development, they accepted and disseminated the notion that the part common people play in history should be a major constituent of history writing.

1.5 KEYWORDS

- 1) **Utilitarian:** Designed to be useful or practical rather than attractive.
- 2) **Neo-Imperialism:** The practice of using capitalism, globalisation and cultural imperialism to influence a developing country instead of the previous colonial methods of direct military control (imperialism) or indirect political control (hegemony).
- 3) **Subaltern:** of lower status.
- 4) **Evangelical:** of or according to the teaching of the gospel or the Christian religion.

1.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Elaborate Ideology.
- 2) Write a short note on Utilitarian Historiography.
- 3) What is colonial historiography? Discuss some of the important works of historians who are generally associated with colonial historiography.

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) A generalisation is regarded as linkage of disparate or unrelated facts, in time or space, with each other. It is their grouping and rational classification. Basically, a generalisation is a connection or relationship between facts. It is the result of the effort to provide an explanation and causation, motivation and effect/impact. More widely, generalisations are the means through which historians understand their materials and try to provide their understanding of facts to others.

2) The assumptions on which Objectivity rests include a commitment to the reality of the past and to the truth as correspondence to that reality, a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all, between history and fiction.

Check Your Progress 2

1) By the Marxist writing, it is not meant that the writers were all Marxists but that they more or less adopted materialistic interpretation as a method of understanding and a tool of analysis. Their interpretation derived from historical philosophy of Karl Marx, the dialectical materialism. The essence of this new approach lies in the study of relationship between social and economic organisation and its after effects on historical events.

2) The development of the historical writing in the 1960s was the beginning of this new style of enquiry. This new initiative was taken by the historians like Rodney Hilton, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rude, Sobul etc had a direct influence on writing by placing common people in the centre of their studies. They characterised this current as history from below, or people's history, or grassroot history etc.

UNIT 2 LATER VEDIC CHIEFDOMS AND TERRITORIAL STATES IN THE AGE OF BUDDHA

STRUCTURE

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Chiefdoms of Later Vedic Period

2.2.1 Political Structure

2.2.1.1 Tribal Chieftains

2.2.1.2 Tribal Gatherings

2.2.1.3 Raja's Rule

2.2.1.4 Tribal Wars

2.2.1.5 Clergy

2.2.2 Social Structure

2.2.2.1 Varna

2.2.2.2 Gotra

2.2.2.3 Family

2.2.2.4 Three Stages of Human Life

2.3 The Vedic Age vis-a-vis Sixth Century B.C.

2.4 Sources

2.5 Janapada

2.6 Rise of New Groups

2.6.1 Gahapati

2.6.2 Merchants

2.6.3 Raja and Praja

2.7 Mahajanapada

2.7.1 Hamlets

2.7.2 Townships

2.8 Territorial States in the Age of Buddha

2.9 Let Us Sum Up

2.10 Key Words

2.11 Questions for review

2.12 Suggeste Readings and References

2.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to about the political and social structure of Later Vedic period, distinguish between the society of the sixth century B.C and that of the earlier period, learn about the emergence of new groups in the society during the sixth century B.C., and get detailed information about the various Janapadas and Mahajanapadas which came into prominence.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

By the later Vedic period some of Vedic tribes had moved from the 'Sapta Sindhava' region to the upper Ganga Valley and other adjacent regions. During the period of this shift a number of changes in their social, political, economic and religious structure took place. In this unit we shall be discussing the major political and social aspects of these changes.

The emergence of Janapadas signified the birth of geography in Indian history. With the settlements of agriculturists coming up, the settlers formed enduring ties with their surrounding landscape. They observed the hills and rivers, birds and animals and fruits that were found in that area. Not only this, this was the time when they learnt to call a particular geographical space as their own. This geographical space was separated from those of the other communities (Janapadas) who might be friendly or hostile to them. These Janapadas characterised by cohesion inside and separation from the outside world, proved to be a seminal development in ancient India. These units or Janapadas became the centres for the development of uniform language, customs and beliefs.

2.2 CHIEFDOMS OF LATER VEDIC PERIOD

The transition from a predominantly pastoral to a mixed farming economy had a great impact on the character of the Later Vedic society and polity. The main trends of changes were that the tribal identity of the Early Vedic society gradually gave way to territorial identity and consequently the nature of chief ship changed. The social structure which was based on relations within a clan and was largely egalitarian in the Early Vedic period became much more complex. This type of society is marked by inequality. Even the same clan was divided into groups, some of which could have high status in society and some low status.

2.2.1 Political Structure

Jana was used in the sense of people or tribe in the Rig Vedic period, but now the concept of janapada emerged. Janapada meant the area where the tribe settled. The word rashtra was also used for the first time in the Later Vedic texts. However, it was still not used in the sense of a state with well defined territories. The Kurus, who were formed from the union between two major Vedic tribes-the Bharatas and the Purus, are mentioned in texts as occupying the area in the upper portion of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Similarly, the Panchalas are mentioned as people who occupied the middle portion of the Doab, called the Panchala Desa. This indicates that tribal identities were merging with territorial identities. It is also stated that when the Kurus and the Panchalas came together, their authority over the upper and middle reaches of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab was complete. These changes in the relationship between the Jana and the area over which it wielded control helped towards the formation of the Janpadas and Mahajanapadas by the 6th century B.C.

2.2.1.1 Tribal Chieftains

When tribal groups came to be associated and identified with particular territories, it also brought about a change in the status and functions of the tribal chiefs. The rajan or the chief was no longer involved only in cattle raids but emerged as the protector of the territory where his tribesmen settled. The rajanya which already was a superior lineage during the Rig Vedic period now became the 'Kshatriya' i.e. those who held power over dominions, which is the literal meaning of the word

'Kshatriya'. The Kshatriya class based their power on their role as the protector of their tribes and the land over which their tribes settled. The visn had to pay prestations to the Kshatriya, in lieu of the latter's protection and thus the status of the viswas progressively subordinated to the Kshatriya lineage. Bali and Bhaga no longer meant prestations given at will, but gradually assumed the forms of regular tributes and taxes.

2.2.1.2 Tribal Gatherings

The change in the status of the Kshatriya or the warrior class is also reflected in the changing nature of the tribal assemblies. The sabha became more important than the samiti during this period. Reference to rajas in the assembly or the sabha suggests that they helped the king in his duties. The office of the raja or the chief was not based solely on birth but the choice of rajas restricted to the Kshatriyas.

2.2.1.3 RAJA'S Rule

In the absence of firmly established principles of heredity and primogeniture, consecratory rituals became very important for the ruler in order to assert this authority. Hence, ceremonial sacrifices like rajasuya, asvamedha and vajapeya were performed on lavish scale. In the Rigvedic period, the ashvamedha yajna was a small affair. But in this period, this was performed to subjugate other areas and legitimize the ruler's hold over alien lands. The other yajnas included prayers for the rulers' health and all three were in essence legitimizing methods, employed by the raja to proclaim his superiority and power. For instance the sacrificer was proclaimed as the raja in the course of the rajasuya. These sacrifices were found to be of relevance in later periods also when new kingdoms and new monarchs emerged. They used sacrifices to give religions legitimacy to their power.

2.2.1.4 Tribal Wars

The nature of the intra-tribal conflicts within tribes also changed. Fights were no longer mere skirmishes over cattle, now the acquisition of land was an important element in these disputes. The necessity of increasing territory can be connected with the growth of population within the tribes. Iron weapons and light wheeled chariots driven by horses raised

the efficiency of the fighters. The Mahabharata depicts intra-clan warfare between the Kauravas and the Pandavas of the Kuru clan.

2.2.1.5 Clergy

With the rising importance of the rajanya Kshatriya, the Brahmanas too became important since they legitimized the office of the ruler through the consecratory rituals. The redistribution of wealth through dana and dakshina on such occasions was primarily from the Kshatriya yajamana to the brahmana priests. The elaborate consecratory rituals suggest that initially the power of the raja was not so secure and hence he had to provide proof of his ability to rule. The status of the officiating priests became at par with the gods, in the later period. It was felt that the gods had to be propitiated with yajnas and the officiating brahmana had to be satiated with dana. Thus the channel of redistribution was between the two higherstatus groups, and political supremacy was slowly becoming the domain of the Kshatriya.

2.2.2 Social Structure

In this period there was the declining status of vis and the ascendancy of Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas. Society was thus composed of unequal groups. The symbolism which was projected during this period hymn's is that Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra are limbs of the society. However, these limbs did not have equal status.

The Brahman was compared to the head whereas the Shudra was compared to the feet. In social life Brahmins were considered the highest Varna because society could communicate with Gods with the help of Brahmins only. The Sudras on the other hand performed menial tasks and included slaves captured in wars.

2.2.2.1 Varna

The system of Varna had the following features:

- a) Status by birth
- b) A hierarchical ordering of the Varnas (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra) with Brahmana at the top and Sudra at the base).
- c) Rules of endogamy and ritual purity.

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The Varna system is further tied with the concept of Dharma i.e. universal law, and the Varna dharma was an attempt to establish a social law for a systematic functioning of the society. However, the Varnashram system was not properly developed in the Later Vedic society. The division of social groups was based on occupation alone, and society was still flexible, where one's occupations did not depend on birth.

Even in the later times i.e., post-Vedic, the Varna dharma described the ritual status of each group. Neither the Varna system prevented the non-kshatriyas from claiming kshatriya status and becoming rulers (examples being the Nandas and the Mauryas) nor brahmanas from claiming political suzerainty (e.g. the Sunga kings). Thus the theoretical model of the Varna system could never be rigidly enforced in the post-Vedic period.

It is likely that during the Later Vedic period, with the shift in the geographical focus, the Vedic people encountered many non-Vedic tribes and considerable interaction must have helped formation of a composite society. At least the Atharvaveda depicts a host of non-Vedic religious practices which were sanctioned by the priests. However, tribal endogamy through strict marriage rules was the aim in order to maintain the purity of the tribe. Also, the growing importance of the kshatriyas and the brahmanas in the society made it imperative to maintain their exclusive superior status, as compared to the rest. During the Later Vedic period however, the concept of Varna was rudimentary in nature. The notion of untouchability for instance is absent.

2.2.2.2 Gotra

The institution of gotra (literally meaning-cow pen) appeared during this period. As against tribal endogamy (marriage within tribe) people practised gotra exogamy (marrying outside the gotra). Gotra signified descent from a common ancestor and marriages could not take place between couples belonging to the same pen.

2.2.2.3 Family

The patriarchal family was well established and the grihapati acquired a special status. Since householding economy was gaining predominance,

the position of the householder too acquired economic importance. The rights on land were based on usage, and communal ownership of land prevailed. The grihapatis were wealthy and their ritual role was that of a yajamana (i.e. he who orders sacrifice). Their wealth did not come from gifts, but was produced by their own efforts. Through yajnas, which they were bound to perform to gain merit, a part of their wealth got channelled to the brahmanas. Despite the presence of some women philosophers and the references to a few queens participating in the coronation rituals, women were considered subordinate to men, and were not involved in any major decision making.

2.2.2.4 Three Stages Of Human Life

Three ashramas, i.e. stages of life were prescribed and these stages were represented by the brahmachari (studentship), grihastha (householder), vanaprasthi (partial retirement from householding life by living in the forest). It seems that the fourth i.e. the sanyasa (or complete retirement from the participation in the world) stage of life was not known till the time that the upanishada were written. The sanyasis or the ascetics in later periods were individuals who protested either passively or actively against the Vedic social structure.

2.3 THE VEDIC AGE VIS-A-VIS SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

When we talk about Janapadas, we have to refer to a number of things associated with the emergence of the Janapadas. Since the Janapadas are known from about the sixth century B.C we can say that in the regions in which the Janapadas of this period are found many changes took a concrete shape. Villages, towns and cities were the units where the people lived in a Janapada. Further, this was the time when kings and monarchs emerged on the stage of history. This was also the age of intense philosophical speculation. Buddhism, Jainism and many other heterodox sects emerged during this period. Monks, monarchs and merchants crowd the canvas of history. Thus in various respects the period that we shall be studying now (approximately 6th century B.C.)

will reveal to us the changes that continued to take place in Indian society.

2.4 SOURCES

We find information about the Janapadas and the Mahajanapadas from some Vedic and the Buddhist texts. The Brahmanas refer to a category of Vedic texts which deal with the methods of performing Vedic rituals. Similarly, the Upanishadas dealing with philosophical problems are also considered a part of the Vedic literature. These texts were composed from 800 B.C. onwards. They refer to many Janapadas and Mahajanapadas and provide us insights into the settlement of agricultural communities. Another category of sources providing us information about this period are the texts composed by the Buddhists. The Vinaya Pitaka dealing with the rules of the order, the Sutta Pitaka is a collection of Buddha's sermons and the Abhidhamma Pitaka discussing problems of metaphysics, tell us about the preachers, princes, rich, poor and towns and villages of that period. The Jatakas dealing with the stories of the previous births of the Buddha are part of the Sutta Pitaka. They give us graphic descriptions of the contemporary society. These texts have clear references to various regions and geographical divisions.

The archaeologists also contribute to our understanding of this period. They have dug up various places like Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, Kausambi, Ujjaini, Sravasti, Vaisali and many more which are mentioned in the texts of this period. They have discovered the remains of the houses, buildings, towns and objects used by the people. For example, the archaeological finds from this period indicate the use of a deluxe pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware. In the settlements of the previous period, the people either did not know the use of iron or used it sparingly. In the 6th century B.C. people were using iron tools on a large scale. Prosperous agricultural settlements and towns have also been reported in the excavations. Thus, the archaeological and literary sources put together provide us with a more complete picture of the Indian society around the 6th century B.C.

2.5 JANAPADA

The contemporary texts indicate that changes in society and economy were taking place in a well defined geographical space. The literature relating to the period that we are discussing refers to various kinds of units of settlement. They are referred to as Mahajanapada, Janapada, Nagara, Nigama, Grama etc. Let us first see what the Janapadas were.

Janapada, literally meaning the place where the people place their feet, is often referred to in the texts of this period. Jana in the Vedic society referred to members of a clan. In the early Vedic society the members of Jana were pastoral groups roaming in search of pastures. However in the later Vedic phase the members of Jana took up agriculture and began to settle down. These agricultural settlements were called Janapadas. In the initial phases these settlements were named after the dominant Kshatriya lineages settled in that area. For example, the areas around Delhi and upper Uttar Pradesh were known as the Kuru and Panchal Janapadas after the names of the dominant Kshatriya lineages. Once they settled down in one place there was an expansion of agriculture, especially with the use of iron axes and plough shares. These iron tools could clear the forests and dig deeper than the stone or copper tools available to the agriculturists of the preceding centuries.

The middle Gangetic Valley i.e. the area east of Allahabad was suited to wet rice cultivation. Rice yields are higher than wheat yields per acre. All this would lead to gradual agricultural expansion as also growth of population. The chiefs of the lineages, at war with each other, had more to loot and defend. This was because besides cattle, now agricultural and other products were available in larger quantities. Through the progress of agricultural expansion, war and conquest the Vedic tribes had come in closer contact with each other, and with the non-Aryan population. This in fact had led to the formation of larger territorial entities. For example, the Panchalas represented the coming together of five smaller tribes.

Some of the Janapadas were to develop into Mahajanapadas by the sixth century B.C. This happened as a result of a series of changes in the internal socio-political structure of the Janapadas. One such important change was the expansion of agricultural communities. This is indicated

by the fact that the contemporary texts list agricultural land as a very important economic asset. These texts discuss the varieties of rice in as much detail as did the Vedic texts discuss the varieties of cows. Let us see what the changes were.

2.6 RISE OF NEW GROUPS

One very important change was the emergence of new categories and groups of people in the society. Let us look at this aspect in some details.

2.6.1 Gahapati

A Gahapati was the master of an individual household which owned land. A Brahman Gahapati is said to have owned so much of land that he needed five hundred ploughs to get it cultivated. In the later Vedic society it was the 'Vis' which performed agricultural activities. Land was jointly owned by the lineage. With the emergence of agricultural society land became an important form of wealth. As such the ruling clans of the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas brought it under their control. Out of these groups emerged the Gahapati, who signified the disintegration of joint ownership and the emergence of big individual landowners. The Gahapatis got their land cultivated by slaves (dasa), hired labourers (karmakara) and Shudras. People captured during war were made slaves. The impoverished members of the tribe also joined the ranks of the labourers. The use of dependent labour was indicative of the emergence of a deprived class whose labour was being used to produce surplus food. The product of the land would not go to the Sudra or the dasa but to the master i.e. the Gahapati.

2.6.2 Merchants

It was possibly from the ranks of the Gahapatis that an important class of traders emerged. Through the sale of their produce they built up a certain amount of capital which was used for trading. The word frequently used for trader in the Buddhist sources is Setthi, meaning 'a person having the best'. It shows that the people who dealt with money matters had acquired considerable prestige and power. The Brahmanical sources

generally looked down on trading and the *vaisyas*, who were generally associated with trading. However, by the sixth century B.C. trade and merchandise became an independent sphere of economic activity. The traders lived in cities and their emergence is related to the emergence of towns and cities in the period. These merchants traded over very large areas. By trading among different principalities they created a possibility for kings to try and control larger areas visited by merchants. Thus by the sixth century B.C. a class of free peasants and merchants had emerged. They had freed themselves from clan obligations of sharing surplus food or wealth with the other members of the lineage as was the case earlier. Private property in farm animals, in land and its produce had emerged as the dominant economic reality of the time.

2.6.3 Raja And Praja

Combined with developments in the socio-economic field were changes in the nature of polity in the Mahajanapadas. In the preceding period the word Raja referred to the chief of a lineage. For example, Rama whose legends are related to this period is often referred to as Raghukularaja meaning one who rules over the Raghu clan. Similarly, Yudhishthira is called Kuru raja. They ruled over their lineage and the notion of a ruler ruling over a territory had not emerged. The taxes collected from the kinsmen were largely voluntary tributes. The king was considered a generous father figure ensuring the prosperity of the lineage. He did not have an independent taxation system or army. The references to kings in the sixth century B.C. on the other hand indicate his rule over a territory with a regular taxation system and an army. There are references to *Krsaka* i.e. peasants who paid taxes to the king. Now the peasant and the army were not linked in any kinship tie with the Raja. The distinction was now between Raja and Praja.

The Praja included people from the non-lineage groups also. A standing army implied control over local peasantry through force and an attitude of permanent confrontation with the people and kings of the neighbouring territories. The cattle raids of the preceding period were replaced by organised campaigns in which territory was annexed and agriculturists and traders were forced to pay taxes. Officials entrusted with the work of tax

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collection are repeatedly mentioned. An official called bhagadugha collected bhaga i.e. a share of the agricultural produce. Survey of the agricultural land was done by an official called Rajjughaka. The Jatakas mention royal officials measuring out grain to send it to the King's granary. The Mahajanapadas did not bear the name of the dominant Kshatriya lineage in most of the cases. For example Kosala, Magadha, Avanti and Vatsa were not named after any Kshatriya lineages. Thus we see that a new kind of political system had emerged by the 6th century B.C. The chief of the tribe who used to raid enemy territory and distribute the loot among his followers was transformed into a King having an army unfettered by tribal loyalties. The army was paid out of the revenues collected from the cultivators. The Vedic chief's desire for glory and sacrifices led to his breaking away from the lineage. The tribe would not be interested in fighting wars in distant areas and would oppose any regular tax for the maintenance of the army. This the King needed for his glory and power. The King's authority was not based on the distribution of wealth among the fellow tribesmen. It was based on breaking coherent lineage groups and recognising individuals and groups who would produce wealth. Some of this wealth was taken away from its producers in the form of taxes. In a lineage society where everyone was regarded as everyone else's relative such arbitrary taking away of wealth by the chief would not be allowed. The new King levied taxes and protected the peasants and merchants from internal and external aggression.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Throw a light on the sources of information of later Vedic period.

2) Write on the new groups that emerged in this period.

2.7 MAHAJANAPADA

A new type of society marked by the presence of the Gahapati; the merchant and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled was reflected in new kinds of politico-geographical units called the Mahajanapadas. The word Mahajanapada means large Janapadas like those of Magadha, Kosala etc. ruled by powerful kings or oligarchies. In fact many of the Mahajanapadas of the sixth century B.C. came up by incorporating Janapadas which were previously autonomous. For example Kosala Mahajanapada included the Janapada of the Sakyas and of Kashi. Magadha came to include the Janapadas of Anga, Vajji etc even before it grew into an empire. The new society which is reflected in the contemporary Buddhist texts can be seen in the story of Jivaka. Historians read these stories to understand the hopes, ambitions and struggles of men of those days and their contemporary social milieu.

2.7.1 Hamlets

In the Mahajanapadas the basic unit of settlement was the Gama (which in Prakrit and Pali Language is equivalent of Sankrit grama) meaning a village. Remember the Gram of the early Vedic times. It used to be a mobile unit of people and when two gramas came together it led to Sangrama (literally coming together of villages) i.e. battle. This was because they were mobile units and when two hostile gramas met it led to attempts at snatching away each other's cattle.

The villages of the sixth century B.C. were settlements where people generally pursued agricultural activities (this signifies a shift from a pastoral to agricultural activities). There were various kinds of small and large villages inhabited by a single household or many families. The households seem to have been part of an extended kin group, meaning that everyone was related to everyone else in the villages. However, with the emergence of families who had large landholdings and who employed the labour of dasas, karmakaras and porisas, villages inhabited by non-kinship groups also came into existence.

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There are references to land ownership and tenancy rights of varied kinds. Kassaka and ksetrika denoted the common peasants who were generally of the Sudra jati. The leaders of the villages were called Gamini. The Gamini are also referred to as soldiers, elephant and horse-trainers and stage managers. The trend towards increasing craft specialisation is evident from references to villages of cattlekeepers, ironsmiths, woodworkers, etc. These references to villages specialising in activities other than agricultural operations are indicative of increasing trade and prospering economy. This is because the villagers who were not producing their own food must have got their food from other villages. This suggests that regular exchange of goods had become an integral part of the economic life of the people. Also their specialisation in one craft is indicative of the fact that there was a large scale demand for the goods produced by them.

2.7.2 Townships

Towns and cities dominated by Kings and merchants but at the same time containing a heterogeneous population were the new kinds of settlement which came into existence during this period. They are variously referred to as Pura, Nigama and Nagara. The differences among these settlements are not clear. They probably referred to the size as well as varying features of the settlements. These towns and cities were substantially larger than the villages. Contemporary literature refers to big cities like Ayodhya and Varanasi covering anywhere between thirty to fifty square kilometres of area. These accounts are exaggerated as the excavations conducted in these cities show modest settlements in this period. In no period did the size exceed five square kilometres in circuit. However, this historic phase is associated with settlements using a deluxe pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). The settlements witnessed an increase in trade and population. Massive fortifications have been found around the cities of Kausambi, Ujjaini, Rajghat (Varanasi) and Rajgir. What is clear from the references in literature is the fact that the cities had emerged as the focus of power and control over the Mahajanapada. The Kings ruled from their cities.

The newly emerging merchant class controlled trade from these centres especially after the introduction of coinage.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Write a note on Gamini.

2) How does archaeology correct the literary evidence about the cities?

2.8 TERRITORIAL STATES IN THE AGE OF BUDDHA

In the previous section we discussed the literary and archaeological evidences for the presence of the basic units of settlement in the sixth century B.C. Now we shall discuss references to the sixteen Mahajanapadas in ancient literature. The Buddhist sources refer to the presence of sixteen Mahajanapadas in the period when the Buddha lived. The Mahajanapadas and their major settlements are found mentioned repeatedly when references to the Buddha are made in the Buddhist texts. The exact dates of the Buddha's life are still disputed by historians. It is however generally believed that the Buddha's life spanned parts of both 6th and 5th centuries B.C. and Buddhist texts referring to his life are therefore taken to reflect the society of this period. The list of Mahajanapadas varies from text to text. However we can get a fair idea of the political and economic conditions of various regions of India by studying these lists. These Mahajanapadas represented a conglomerate of thousands of villages and a few cities. These Mahajanapadas extended from the North Western Pakistan to East Bihar and from the sub mountain regions of the Himalayas to the river Godavari in the South. The

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Buddhist text Anguttara Nikaya which is a part of the Sutta-Pitaka gives the following list of sixteen Mahajanapadas in the time of Buddha:

- 1) Kashi 9) Kuru
- 2) Kosala 10) Panchala
- 3) Anga 11) Maccha (Matsya)
- 4) Magadha 12) Surasena
- 5) Vajji 13) Assaka
- 6) Malla 14) Avanti
- 7) Chedi 15) Gandhara
- 8) Vatsa 16) Kamboja

Another Buddhist work the Mahavastu gives a similar list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas. However it omits Gandhara and Kamboja which were located in the north-west. These are substituted by Sibi and Dasarna in Punjab and Central India respectively. Similarly the Jaina work Bhagavati Sutra gives a widely different list of the sixteen Mahajanapadas which includes Vanga and Malaya. The number sixteen seems to have been conventional and the lists varied because regions important to the Buddhists and the Jainas came to be included in their lists. The lists indicate a gradual shift of focus to the middle Gangetic Valley because most of the Mahajanapadas located in this area. Let us survey the history and geography of these Mahajanapadas.

1) KASHI

Of the sixteen Mahajanapadas Kashi seems to have been the most powerful in the beginning. Located in and around the present day Varanasi district its capital Varanasi is referred to as the foremost city of India situated on the confluence of the Ganges and the Gomati rivers and in the midst of fertile agricultural tracts. Kashi was famous for its cotton textiles and market for horses. Excavations at the site of Rajghat which has been identified with ancient Benaras have not yielded any impressive evidence for urbanisation in the 6th century B.C. It seemed to have emerged as a major town around 450 B.C. However, we know that the orange brown robes of the Buddhist monks were called Kashaya in Sanskrit which was made in Kashi. This indicates that Kashi had emerged as a cloth manufacturing centre and market by the time of

Buddha. Several Kings of Kashi are mentioned as having conquered Kosala and many other Kingdoms. Interestingly enough the earliest available version of the Rama story, the Dasaratha Jataka, mentions Dasaratha, Rama etc. as Kings of Kashi and not of Ayodhya. The father of Parsva, the twenty-third teacher (Tirthankara) of the Jains, is said to have been the King of Benaras. The Buddha also delivered his first sermon in Sarnath near Benaras. All important religious traditions of ancient India associated themselves with Kashi. However, by the time of the Buddha the Kashi Mahajanapada had been annexed by Kosala and was a cause of war between Magadha and Kosala.

2) KOSALA

The Mahajanapada of Kosala was bounded on the west by the river Gomati. To its east flowed the river Sadanira which separated it from the Videha and towards the north it skirted the Nepal hills while the river Syandika defined its southern boundary. Literary references indicate how Kosala emerged out of an assimilation of many smaller principalities and lineages. For example, we know that the Sakyas of Kapilavastu were under the control of Kosala. The Buddha calls himself a Kosalan in the Majjhima Nikaya.

But at the same time the Kosalan King Vidudhaba is said to have destroyed the Sakyas. It would only indicate that the Sakya lineage was under the nominal control of the Kosalas. The newly emergent monarchy established a centralized control and thus destroyed the autonomy of the Sakyas. Names of Kings like Hiranyanabha, Mahakasala Prasenajita and Suddhodana are mentioned as rulers of Kosala in the 6th century B.C. These rulers are said to have ruled from Ayodhya, Saketa, Kapilavastu or Sravasti. Probably in the early years of the sixth century B.C. the area of Kosala was under the control of many smaller chiefships ruling from small towns. Towards the end of the 6th century B.C. kings like Prasenajita and Vidudhabha managed to bring all other chiefships under their control. They ruled from Sravasti. Thus Kosala became a prosperous Kingdom having three big cities under its control i.e. Ayodhya, Saketa and Sravasti. Kosala also annexed the Kingdom of Kashi in its territory. The Kings of Kosala favoured both Brahmanism and

Buddhism. King Prasenajitawas a contemporary and friend of the Buddha. In the succeeding phases Kosala proved to be one of the most formidable adversaries of the emergent Magadhan Empire.

3) ANGA

Anga comprised the districts of Bhagalpur and Monghyr in Bihar. It may have extended northwards to the river Kosi and included some parts of the district of Purnea. It was located to the east of Magadha and west of the Rajamahals hills. Champa was the capital of Anga. It was located on the confluence of the rivers Champa and the Ganga. Champa has been considered one of the six great cities in the sixth century B.C. It was noted for its trade and commerce and traders sailed further east through the Ganga from here. In the middle of the sixth century B.C. Anga was annexed by Magadha. Excavations at Champa near Bhagalpur have yielded NBPW in large numbers.

4) MAGADHA

Magadha consisted of the areas around Patna and Gaya in south Bihar. It was protected by the rivers Son and Ganga on its north and west. Towards the south it reached up to the Chotanagpur plateau. In the east the river Champa separated it from Anga. Its capital was called Girivraja or Rajagriha. Rajagriha was an impregnable city protected by five hills. The walls of Rajagriha represent the earliest evidence of fortification in the historical India. The capital was shifted to Pataliputra somewhere in the fifth century B.C. They bear testimony to the power of the early Magadhan monarchs. In the Brahmanical texts the Magadhans were considered people of mixed origin and inferior type. This was probably because the people in this area did not follow the Varna system and the Brahmanical rituals in the early historical times. The Buddhist tradition on the other hand attaches great importance to this area. The Buddha achieved enlightenment in this area. Rajagriha was one of his favourite haunts. The Magadhan monarchs Bimbisara and Ajatsatru were his friends and disciples.

With its fertile agricultural tracts suited to wet rice cultivation, control over the iron ores of south Bihar and relatively open social system,

Magadha became the most important Kingdom in the subsequent history. Its control over the trade routes of the Ganges, Gandak and Son rivers could provide it substantial revenues. The Magadhan king Bimbisara is said to have called an assembly of the Gaminis of 80000 villages. The number might be fictitious but it indicates that Bimbisara's administration was based on the village as a unit of organisation. The Gaminis were not his kinsmen but representatives and chiefs of villages. Thus his power was based not on the goodwill of his kinsmen. Ajatsatru usurped the throne and starved Bimbisara to death. Magadha as a Kingdom kept prospering with the extension of its control over the Vajjis of Vaisali. This was to culminate in the Mauryan empire in the fourth century B.C.

5) VAJJI

Centred around the Vaisali district of Bihar, the Vajjis (literal meaning pastoral nomads) were located north of the Ganga. This Mahajanapada extended upto the hills of Nepal in the north. It was separated from Kosala by the river Gandak. Unlike the Mahajanapadas previously discussed, the Vajjis had a different kind of political organisation. The contemporary texts refer to them as a Ganasamgha, a term which has been variously translated as a republic or an oligarchy. The Ganasamghas of this period represented a rule not by an all powerful King but a joint rule by a group of Kshatriya Chiefs. This ruling class, members of which were called rajas, were now differentiated from different non Kshatriya groups.

The Vajjis represented a confederacy of eight clans of whom the Videhas, Licchavis and the Jnatrikas were the most well known. The Videhas had their capital at Mithila. It has been identified with Janakpur in Nepal. Although the Ramayana associates it with the king Janaka, the Buddhist sources consider it a chiefship. Licchavis, the most well known of the ancient Indian Ganasamghas, had their headquarters at Vaisali. Vaisali is said to have been a large and prosperous city. The Jnatrikas were another clan settled somewhere in the suburbs of Vaisali. This was the clan which produced Mahavira, the Jain teacher. The other members of confederacy were the clans of the Ugras, Bhogas, Kauravas and

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Aiksavakas.Vaisali seems to have been the metropolis of the entire confederacy. They conducted their affairs in an assembly. Accordingly to a Jataka story the Vajjis were ruled by many clan chiefs. This Mahajanapada was a major power in the sixth century B.C. However, they do not seem to have possessed a standing army or a system of revenue collection from agriculture. The Magadhan king Ajatsatru is supposed to have destroyed this confederacy. He sowed discord among the chiefs with the help of his minister Vassakara and then attacked the Licchavis.

6) MALLA

The Mallas were another Kshatriya lineage referred to as Gana-samghas in ancient texts. They seem to have had several branches of which two had their headquarters in the towns of Pava and Kusinagara. Kusinagara has been identified with the site of Kasia in the Gorakhpur district of U.P. There is no unanimity among the scholars about the location of Pava. The Malla territories are said to have been located to the east and south-east of the territory of the Sakyas. They are supposed to have been ruled by five hundred chiefs. The Buddha died in the vicinity of Kusinagara and his last rites were performed by the Mallas.

7) CHEDI

The Chedi territory roughly corresponds to the eastern parts of the modern Bundelkhand. It might have stretched up to the Malwa plateau. Sisupala the famous enemy of Krishna was a Chedi ruler. According to the Mahabharat the Chedis seem to have been in close touch with the chiefs of Matsya beyond the Chambal, the Kasis of Benaras and the Karusas in the valley of the river Son. Its Capital was Sotthivati (Suktimati) probably located in the Banda district of U.P. Other important towns in this territory were Sahajati and Tripuri.

8) VATSA

Vatsa with its capital at Kausambi was one of the most powerful principalities of the sixth century B.C. Kausambi has been identified with modern Kosam or the river Yamuna near Allahabad. This means that the

Vatsas were settled around modern Allahabad. The puranas say that the descendant of the Pandavas, Nishakshu shifted his capital to Kausambi after Hastinapur had been washed away by floods. The dramatist Bhasa, has immortalized one of the Kings of the Vatsas named Udayana in his plays. These plays are based on the story of the romantic affair between Udayana and Vasavadatta, the Princess of Avanti. They also indicate the conflicts among the powerful Kingdoms of Magadha, Vatsa and Avanti. Vatsa, however, seems to have lost the ensuing struggle as the subsequent texts do not give them much importance.

9) KURU

The Kings of the Kurus were supposed to belong to the family of Yudhishthira. They were centred around the Delhi-Meerut region. The Arthashastra and other texts refer to them as Rajasabdopajivinah, i.e., carrying the titles of Kings. This indicates some kind of a diffused structure of chiefship. That they did not have absolute monarchy is also proved by references to many political centres in this area. Hastinapura, Indraprastha, Isukara are each mentioned as the capital of the Kurus having their own chiefs.

We all know about the Kurus through the epic Mahabharata. It relates the story of the war of succession between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The epic has enthralled generations of Indians with its superb interweaving of themes relating to love, war, conspiracy, hatred and the larger philosophical issues relating to human existence. Historians treat it more as epic literature than an actual description of events: Large scale wars started only with the emergence of the Mahajanapadas, earlier phase being characterised by cattle raids. The Mahabharata also mentions Greeks who came into contact with India only around the 5th century B.C. Thus, a war involving Greeks could take place only in the first millennium B.C. Probably the Mahabharata story relates to an internecine war between two Kshatriya lineages which became a part of the singing tradition of the bards. With the emergence of the early historic period the social, economic and political interaction increased among the Mahajanapadas. The singing bards and Brahmanas brought in every region of India in the story of Mahabharata. This pleased the

monarchs who could boast of an ancestor who fought in the Mahabharata war. Thus, the epic became a mechanism for the spread of the Brahmanical religious system. This is clear from the fact that in the prologue of the Mahabharata it is said that an earlier version having 24,000 stanzas was still current. The present epic has one lakh stanzas.

10) PANCHALA

The Panchala Mahajanapada was located in the Rohikhand and parts of Central Doab(roughly Bareilly, Pilibhit, Badaun, Bulandshahr, Aligarh etc.) The ancient texts refer to the presence of two lineages of the Panchalas i.e. the northern Panchalas and the southern Panchalas with the river Bhagirathi forming the dividing line. The northern Panchalas had their capital at Ahicchatra located in the Bareilly district of U.P. The southern Panchalas had Kampilya as their capital. They seem to have been closely linked to the Kurus. Although one or two Panchala chiefs are mentioned, we have very little information about them. They too are called a Samgha. By the sixth century B.C. they seem to have become an obscure power.

11) MATSYA

The Matsyas were located in the Jaipur-Bharatpur-Alwar region of Rajasthan. Their capital was at Viratnagara famed as the hiding place of the Pandavas. This region was more suitable for cattle rearing. That is why in the Mahabharata story when the Kauravas attacked Virat they took away cattle as booty. Obviously, Matsya could not compete with the powers that emerged on the basis of settled agriculture. It was absorbed in the Magadhan Empire. Some of the most famous edicts of the King Ashoka have been found in Bairat (Jaipur district), the ancient Virat.

12) SURSENA

The Surasenas had their capital at Mathura on the bank of the river Yamuna. In the Mahabharata and the Puranas the ruling family of Mathura is referred to as Yadus. The Yadava clan was divided into many smaller clans like the Andhakas, Vrishani, Mahabhojas, etc. They too had a samgha form of government. The epic hero Krishna is associated

with these ruling families. Mathura was located at the junction of two famous ancient Indian trade routes i.e. the Uttarapatha and the Dakshinapatha. This was because Mathura represented the transitional zone between the Gangetic plains having settled agriculture and the sparsely populated pasture lands jutting into the Malwa plateau. That is why Mathura emerged as an important city. However, because of the splintered political structure and varied landscape, the chiefs of this area could not carve out a powerful kingdom.

13) ASSAKA

The Assakas inhabited the banks of the river Godavari near modern Paithan in Maharashtra. Paithan has been identified with ancient Pratisthana, the capital of the Assakas. The Dakshinapatha or the southern route is supposed to have connected Pratisthana with the cities of the north. There are vague references to the Kings of the Assakas but our information regarding this region at this stage is very limited.

14) AVANTI

Avanti was one of the most powerful Mahajanapadas in the 6th century B.C. The core area of this kingdom would roughly correspond to the Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh, extending up to the river Narmada. It had another important city Mahismati which is sometimes mentioned as its capital. Several other small and big towns are mentioned as dotting the Avanti region. The Puranas attribute the foundation of Avanti to one of the clans of the Yadus called the Haihaya. Located in a very fertile agricultural tract and controlling the trade coming from south this clan of the Yadus here developed into a centralized monarchy. In the 6th century B.C., a powerful King named Pradyota was ruling over Avanti. He seems to have conquered Vatsa and even Ajatsatru was afraid of him.

15) GANDHARA

Gandhara was located between Kabul and Rawalpindi in North Western Province. It might have included some parts of Kashmir. Although it was an important area in the early Vedic period it lost its importance in the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of the later phases. The capital

Taxila was an important city where people from all the Janapadas went for learning and trading. In the 6th century B.C. Gandhara was ruled by a King named Pukkusati. He was friendly with Bimbisara. In the latter half of the sixth century B.C. Gandhara was conquered by the Persians. Excavations in the modern towns of Taxila show that this site was occupied by 1000 B.C. and some kind of township emerged subsequently. By the sixth century B.C. a city having similarities with the Gangetic Valley cities had emerged.

16) KAMBOJA

Kamboja was located somewhere close to Gandhara, probably around the present day Poonch area. Already by the 7th century B.C. the Kambojas were regarded as uncultured by the Brahmanical texts. The Arthashastra calls them *varta-sastropajivin Samgha* meaning a confederation of agriculturists, herdsmen, traders and warriors.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

We have summed up the chiefdoms of later Vedic period and reviewed the political conditions prevailing in India of the sixth century B.C. The Mahajanapadas which emerged as regions where new kinds of socio-political developments were taking place were located in distinct geographical zones. What seems to be very significant is the fact that seven of them i.e. Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Kasi, Kosala and Vatsa were located in the middle Gangetic Valley. This is a rice growing area whereas the upper Gangetic Valley is a wheat growing area. It has been observed that in the traditional agricultural system of India, rice output exceeded the wheat output. The rice producing areas had a greater density of population too.

Further, Mahajanapadas like Magadha had easy access to crucial resources like metal ores. These factors might be related to the emergence of the middle Gangetic Valley as the focus of politico-economic power. The fact that so many Mahajanapadas were contiguous to each other in this area meant that an ambitious leader could try and conquer prosperous neighbouring territories. Also it would be easier

to retain control over a neighbouring territory. The rulers of the Mahajanapadas of Punjab or Malwa would have to traverse empty geographical zones before they came across some prosperous territory. Thus, the flat terrain and the contiguity of settlements provided a better chance for a ruler in the middle Gangetic Valley to consolidate his power. No wonder Magadha, one of the powers in this zone, emerged as the most powerful Kingdom in the subsequent period.

2.10 KEY WORDS

Heterodox Sects: The religious movements which emerged during the sixth century B.C. They provided a challenge to the Vedic religion.

Pali: A language spoken in the areas of Magadha and Kosala. Buddhist literature was written in this language.

Prakrit: A language spoken at the time of Ashoka in Magadha. The first written material in historical India is found in this language.

Urban Settlements: Place where a significant proportion of population is engaged in activity other than food production.

2.11 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Write a note on polity of later Vedic period.
- 2) Describe the society of later Vedic period.
- 3) Write a note on Mahajanapadas of 6th century B.C

2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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2.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) We find information about the Janapadas and the Mahajanapadas from some Vedic and the Buddhist texts. The Brahmanas and Upanishadas refer to many Janapadas and Mahajanapadas and provide us insights into the settlement of agricultural communities. The Vinaya Pitaka, the Sutta Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka gave us graphic descriptions of the contemporary society as well as references to various regions and geographical divisions. The archaeologists also dug up various places like Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, Kausambi, Ujjaini, Sravasti, Vaisali and many more which are mentioned in the texts of this period.

2) A Gahapati was the master of an individual household which owned land. He signified the disintegration of joint ownership and the emergence of big individual landowners. It was possibly from the ranks of the Gahapatis that an important class of traders emerged. Through the sale of their produce they built up a certain amount of capital which was used for trading. The word frequently used for trader in the Buddhist sources was Setthi, meaning a person having the best.

Check Your Progress 2

1) The leaders of the villages were called Gamini. The Gamini are also referred to as soldiers, elephant and horse-trainers and stage managers.

2) Contemporary literature refers to big cities like Ayodhya and Varanasi covering anywhere between thirty to fifty square kilometres of area. These accounts are exaggerated as the excavations conducted in these cities show modest settlements in this period. In no period did the size exceed five square kilometres in circuit.

UNIT - 3 MAURAYAN POLITY: NATURE AND FUNCTIONS

STRUCTURE

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 History of Pre-Mauryan Period

3.3 Rise of Mauryas

3.4 Asoka The Great

3.4.1 Kalinga Battle

3.4.2 Maurayan Dynasty at Asoka's death

3.5 Mauryan Administration

3.5.1 Central Executive

3.5.1.1 King's Role

3.5.1.2 Ministers

3.5.1.3 City's Leadership

3.5.1.4 Armed Force

3.5.1.5 Intelligence

3.5.1.6 Law and Justice

3.5.1.7 Revenue Management

3.5.1.8 Public Well-Being

3.5.2 Regional and Local Executive

3.5.2.1 Provincial Executive

3.5.2.2 District and Village Executive

3.6 Relationship with Outside Powers

3.7 Let Us Sum Up

3.8 Key Words

3.9 Questions for Review

3.10 Suggested Readings and References

3.11 Answers To Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to:

Notes

- have a brief idea of the political history of Magadha during the two centuries preceding Mauryan rule
- trace the chief events leading to the establishment of Mauryan rule
- learn about the early Mauryan kings - Chandragupta and Bindusara - and their expansionist activities
- explain the context of the accession and coronation of Asoka the Great; the importance of the Kalinga War and identify the boundaries of the Magadhan empire at the death of Ashoka
- learn about the administration of Maurya's.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we take into account the political events throughout the period from the fifth to the third century B.C. The Magadhan Kingdom began to grow during the sixth century B.C. itself. However, this process accelerated considerably under the Nandas and the Mauryas. The location of Asoka's inscriptions indicates that a major part of the Indian sub-continent, excluding the eastern and southern extremities, had come under Magadhan suzerainty. However, after discussing the details of how this expansion took place, we shall introduce you to the view that the composition and texture of the Magadhan empire, in its various parts, was so diverse that to be able to hold it together, direct political control was probably very difficult. This may perhaps explain why Asoka endeavoured to resolve the inherent social tensions in the empire through the introduction of his policy of Dhamma.

Further as the empire expanded, the surplus production, extraction of surplus, its distribution or expenditure necessitated a complex form of administrative system in order to control or ensure various economic, social and political activities at various levels. For example if a strong army was needed to conquer other areas, a strong administration was needed to organise the army and cater to its requirements. Similarly if taxes were to be collected from traders or surplus was to be extracted from producers, an administrative set up was needed not only to frame rules for this but actually carry out the process of extraction. The Mauryan administration carried on its activities in an organised manner

and we shall discuss the various aspects related to them. Broadly speaking we shall discuss the central, provincial and local units of administration along with related aspects.

3.2 HISTORY OF PRE-MAURYAN PERIOD

Under Bimbisara who was a contemporary of the Buddha, Magadha emerged as a controller of the middle Ganga plains. Bimbisara was considered to be the first important ruler of Magadha. With political foresight he realised the importance of establishing dynastic relations through marriage with the royal house of Kosala. Through this alliance he acquired a part of the district of Kasi as dowry. He had cordial relations with the king of Gandhara. All these diplomatic relations can be considered as a sign of the strength of Magadha. To the east of Magadha lay the Kingdom of Anga whose capital Champa ruled over 80,000 villages. Tradition tells us that Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son Ajatasatru who is said to have starved him to death. This is reported to have taken place around 492 B.C.

Internal troubles and the succession of Ajatasatru to acquire the throne of Magadha did not change its fortune. In terms of expansionist policies the new Magadhan king followed a decisively more aggressive policy. He gained complete control over Kasi and broke the earlier amicable relations by attacking his maternal uncle Prasenajit, the king of Kosala. The Vajji Confederation whose Mahajanapada lay to the north of the Ganga was Ajatasatru's next target of attack. This war was a lengthy one and tradition tells us that after a long period of sixteen years he was able to defeat the Vajjis only through deceit by sowing the seeds of dissension amongst them. His invasion of the kingdom of Avanti, the strongest rival of Magadha at that time did not materialise though preparations are said to have been made for it. However, during his reign Kasi and Vaisali, the capital of Vajji confederacy, had been added to Magadha, making it the most powerful territorial power in the Ganga Valley.

Ajatasatru is said to have ruled from 492 B.C. to 460 B.C. He was succeeded by Udayin (460-444 B.C.). During Udayin's reign the Magadhan kingdom extended in the north to the Himalayan ranges and in

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the south to the Chhota Nagpur hills. Heis said to have built a fort on the confluence of the Ganga and the son. Despite the vastness of Magadha's territories, Udayin and the four kings who succeeded him were unable to effectively rule and the last of these is said to have been overthrown by the people of Magadha. Shishunaga, a viceroy at Banaras, was placed on the throne in 413 B.C. The rule of the Shishunaga dynasty too was of short duration and gave way to the rule of the Nanda dynasty headed by the usurper Mahapadmananda.

It was during the rule of the Nandas in Magadha and the Ganga Plains as a whole that the invasion of Alexander took place in north-west India in 326 B.C., often considered the beginning of the historic period in India. The Nandas are therefore, often described as the first empire-builders of India. It must however be underlined that they did inherit a large kingdom of Magadha which they then extended to more distant frontiers. In the later Purana writings Mahapadmananda is described as the exterminator of all kshatriyas. It was further suggested that he overthrew all the contemporary ruling houses. The Greek classical writings describe the might of the Nanda Empire when they tell us about their vast army which is said to have consisted of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 chariots and 3000 elephants. We also have some indication that the Nandas had contact with the Deccan and South India. Their control of some parts of Kalinga (modern Orissa) is indicated in the Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela, who ruled in Orissa from the middle of the first century B.C. Some very late inscriptions from the south Karnataka region also suggest that parts of the Deccan may have been included in the Magadhan Empire under the Nandas. Most historians suggest that by the end of the reign of Mahapadmananda the first phase of the expansion and consolidation of the Kingdom of Magadha had taken place. That the north-west was still under various small chiefdoms was attested by the Greek writings describing Alexander's invasion of the Punjab around this time. It is clear, however, that there was no encounter between the Kingdom of Magadha and the Greek conqueror.

The Nanda rule came to an end by 321 B.C. Nine Nanda kings are said to have ruled and by the end of their rule they are said to have become very unpopular. Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of this situation to

ascend the throne of Magadha. Despite all these dynastic changes, Madadh continued to remain the foremost kingdom in the Ganga Valley. Deeper reasons for the success of Magadha lay in its advantageous geographical location, its access to the iron mines and the control it had come to exercise over important land and river trade routes

3.3 RISE OF MAURYAS

It has been suggested by D.D. Kosambi that the most immediate and unexpected by product of Alexander's invasion of the north-west was that "it hastened the Mauryan conquest of the whole country." He has argued thus because since the tribes of Punjab had already been weakened, it was not difficult for the Magadhan army under Chandragupta to conquer the whole of Punjab. Most of the Gangetic Valley was already under the control of Magadha. According to Classical sources, Chandragupta is supposed to have even met Alexander and advised him to attack Magadha which was under the unpopular rule of the Nandas. Though this is difficult to verify, both Indian and Classical sources suggest that Alexander's retreat resulted in the creation of a vacuum, and, therefore, it was not difficult for Chandragupta to subdue the Greek garrisons left there. However, what was not clear was whether he did this after his accession to the throne of Magadha or before it. Some scholars date his accession to 324 B.C while now it is generally accepted as 321 B.C.

According to Indian tradition Chandragupta was assisted by the Brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, to rise to power. It is further suggested on the basis of a play of the sixth century A.D. which in its description of the overthrow of the Nandas by Chandragupta, hints that at his accession to the throne at twenty-five years of age, he was in fact a weak ruler and the real ruler of the empire was Chanakya. The Arthashastra is attributed to Chanakya who is said to have been well-versed in not only the political principles of warfare and aggrandisement but also deeply knowledgeable about the organization of the State and society to ensure that the empire did not collapse.

Though the early years of Chandragupta's reign are little known, most historians agree to assign either a 'low caste' or a tribal origin to the Maurya family. According to some accounts Chandragupta was the son

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of the last Nanda king by a "low born" woman called Mura; from her came the family name Maurya. The Buddhist tradition tells us that he was a member of the Moriya clan of Pippalivana and thus suggests that this dynasty was in some way linked to the tribe of the Sakyas to which the Buddha belonged. In this explanation the family name Maurya is said to have been derived from the name of the tribe. This also indirectly implies that as an old family of chiefs they were in some sense Kshatriyas. The Puranas do not link the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, though they too describe the latter to be Shudras. The Brahmanical perception about them is however based on its earlier idea that the Magadhan society generally being unrighteous and of mixed caste origin. The Classical sources which know of the last Nanda king also do not link these two dynasties, though Chandragupta, known to them as Sandrakottus, is described to be of low origin. It is also suggested that the name ending 'Gupta' in Chandragupta's name, and the later episode of Asoka's marriage to the daughter of a merchant of Vidisa, lend credence to the view that the Mauryas could have been of Vaishya origin. Though the caste affiliation of the Mauryas remains obscure, it is significant that the most important rulers of this dynasty turned to the heterodox sects later in their lives.

On the other hand, several sources that point to the role of the Brahmin Kautilya as the advisor and the motivating force behind Chandragupta cannot be ignored. The Puranas even suggest that Chanakya had appointed Chandragupta as the king of the realm. One can perhaps suggest that the Mauryas rose to power in a society which was never very orthodox. In the north-west there had been considerable contact with the foreigners and Magadha itself was looked down upon in Orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Besides, it was considerably exposed to the ideas of Buddha and Mahavira. It was thus amidst considerable turmoil—social and political—that Chandragupta was successful in ascending the throne of Magadha.

Many historians, who understand the Mauryan state as an empire primarily in terms of its territorial extent, attribute great importance to the role Chandragupta Maurya played in ruthlessly stemming the tide of foreign interference in the north-west and suppressing indigenous rulers

in west and south India. Source material on the exact nature of these military exploits is wanting and therefore, one has to construct these details on the basis of accounts which are available for his successors who inherited this empire.

Both Indian and Classical sources agree that Chandragupta overthrew the last of the Nanda kings and occupied his capital Pataliputra and this success is linked with his accession to the throne in around 321 B.C. As mentioned earlier, the political rise of Chandragupta was also linked to the invasion of Alexander in the north-west. The years 325 B.C. - 323 B.C. were crucial in the sense that many of the governors who were stationed in the north-west after Alexander's invasion were assassinated or had to retreat and this enabled Chandragupta to gain control of this region rather quickly.

Here, it needs to be stated that there is an uncertainty about whether Chandragupta routed the foreigners first or defeated the Nandas. In any case both these tasks were complete by 321 B.C. and the state was set for further consolidation. One of the first major achievements of Chandragupta Maurya on the military front was his contact with Seleucus Nicator who ruled over the area west of the Indus around 305 B.C. In the war that ensued Chandragupta is said to have turned out victorious and eventually, peace was established with this Greek viceroy in around 303 B.C. In return for 500 elephants Seleucus gave him eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus. The Satrapies thus called were Arachosia, Paropanisadae, Aria and Gedrosia. A marriage alliance was also concluded. Further, Seleucus sent an ambassador called Megasthenes who lived in the court of Chandragupta for many years. This achievement meant that the territorial foundation of the Mauryan Empire had been firmly laid with the Indus and Gangetic plains well under Chandragupta's control.

It is suggested by a majority of scholars that Chandragupta ultimately established his control not only in the north-west and the Ganges plains, but also in western India and the Deccan. The only parts left out of his empire were thus present day Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of North-eastern India. Details of the conquests in different parts of India are lacking. The Greek writers simply mention that Chandragupta Maurya

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overran the whole country with an army of 600,000. The conquest and subjugation of Saurashtra or Kathiawar in the extreme west is attested in the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman of the middle of the second century A.D. This record refers to Chandragupta's viceroy or governor, Pushyagupta by name, who is said to have constructed the famous Sudarshana Lake. This further implies that Chandragupta had under the control the Malwa region as well. With regard to his control over the Deccan too we have late sources. These are some medieval epigraphs informing us that Chandragupta had protected parts of Karnataka.

The Tamil writers of the Sangam texts of the early centuries A.D. make allusion to the "Moriyar" which is said to refer to the Mauryas and their contact with the south, but this probably refers to the reign of Chandragupta's successor. Finally, the Jain tradition informs us that Chandragupta having become a Jain, abdicated the throne, and went South with Bhadrabahu, the Jain saint. At Sravanabelgola, the Jain religious centre in south Karnataka, he spent the rest of his life and died in the orthodox Jain way by slow starvation.

Bindusara, the son of Chandragupta, was said to have ascended the throne in 297 B.C. There is comparatively little known about him from either Indian or Classical sources. To the latter he is known as Amitrochates. They also inform us that he had contacts with the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus I, whom he requested to send him sweet wine, dried figs and a sophist.

In a very late source of the sixteenth century, in the work of the Buddhist monk Taranath of Tibet, we are told of Bindusara's warlike activities. He is said to have destroyed kings and nobles of about sixteen cities and reduced to submission all the territory between the eastern and western seas. The descriptions of early Tamil poets of the Mauryan chariots thundering across the land probably refer to his reign. Many scholars believe that since Asoka is credited to have conquered only Kalinga, the extension of the Mauryan Empire beyond the Tungabhadra must have been the work of his predecessors. It can therefore be suggested that it was probably in Bindusara's reign that the Mauryan control of the Deccan, and the Mysore plateau in particular, was firmly entrenched.

Though Bindusara is called "slayer of foes", his reign is not very well documented, and, therefore, the extent of his conquests can only be arrived at by looking at a map of the empire of Asoka who conquered only Kalinga (Orissa). His religious leanings are said to have been towards the Ajivikas. Buddhist sources suggest the death of Bindusara around 273-272 B.C. After his death there was a struggle for succession among his sons for about four years. Ultimately, around 269-268 B.C. Asoka was crowned Bindusara's successor.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What are the various ways in which the caste origin of the Mauryan family can be explained?

2) How Chandragupta expanded the Mauryan Empire?

3.4 ASOKA THE GREAT

Till about 1837 A.D Asoka was not a very well known king. In that year James Prinsep deciphered a Brahmi inscription referring to a king called Devanampiya Piyadasi (Beloved of the Gods). This was compared with what was known from the Sri Lankan chronicle Mahavamsa and then it could be established that the king of the inscription was indeed Asoka. The fame of Asoka is due to the fact that he turned away from war and tried to establish a system of rule based on the principle of Dhamma. Below, we discuss some relevant details of his early life, the Kalinga War and the extent of the Mauryan Empire during his reign.

3.4.1 Kalinga Battle

During his father's reign Asoka served as a Viceroy at Ujjain and also at Taxila. It is suggested that he was sent to Taxila for a special purpose, namely, to quell a revolt. After being successful at Taxila, the Buddhist sources tell us, he was sent to Ujjain as Viceroy. The events in his personal life here, like his marriage to a Vidisha merchant's daughter and the birth of their two children Mahinda and Sanghamita were said to have had a great influence in turning Asoka towards Buddhism. Many of the details about his early life come from the Buddhist chronicles, and, therefore, certain ambiguities in them cannot be denied.

About the accession of Asoka too there are several versions, but there is some general agreement that he was in fact not the crown prince (Yuvaraja). Therefore, he was involved in a struggle against other princes before he ascended the throne. His portrayal as an extremely wicked king before his conversion to Buddhism is undoubtedly exaggerated in Buddhist accounts so as to enhance his piety as a Buddhist. It is necessary to point out that though Buddhism played a significant role in Asoka's later life, one has to discount those versions that depict him as a fanatic or bigot. An idea of the King's personality and beliefs comes through more clearly from his many inscriptions in which his public and political role are both described. They also suggest his conversion to Buddhism to have taken place after the Kalinga War.

Though Asoka's predecessors had intruded into the Deccan and the South and perhaps conquered parts of it, Kalinga, i.e., the present State of Orissa, still had to be brought under Mauryan control. It was of strategic importance as it controlled routes to South India both by land and sea. Asoka himself in Rock Edict XIII describes his conquest of Kalinga which is said to have taken place eight years after his consecration, around 260 B.C. In this war the Kalingans were completely routed and "One hundred thousand were slain, and many times that number died." Though on the battlefield Asoka was victorious, the inscription goes on to describe his remorse which ultimately turned him towards Dhamma. A policy of conquest through war was given up and replaced by a policy of conquest through Dhammavijaya. This was meant to work both at the

State and personal levels, and totally transformed the attitude of the king and his officials towards their subjects.

3.4.2 Maurayan Dynasty at Asoka's Death

The location of the various Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts through which Asoka preached his policy of Dhamma gives us a fair idea of the extent of the Magadha Empire during his reign. There are fourteen Major Rock Edicts, seven Pillar Edicts and some Minor Rock Inscriptions which give us this information. The Major Rock Edicts are located at Shahbazgarhi and Maneshra near Peshawar, Kalsi near Dehra Dun, Sopara in Thana district, Girnar near Junagarh in Kathiawar, Dhauli near Bhuvaneshwar and Jaugada in Gangam district of Orissa. In Karnataka, the Minor Rock Edicts appear among other places at Siddapura, Jatinga-Rameshwara and Brahmagiri. Other Minor Rock Edicts are found at Rupnath near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Sahasram in Bihar, Bairat near Jaipur in Rajasthan and Maski in Karnataka. The Pillars bearing Asoka's inscriptions are found in Delhi (originally located at Topara near Ambala and Meerut), Kausambi in Uttar Pradesh, Lauriya Araraj, Lauriya Nandagarh and Rampurva in Bihar; Sanchi, near Bhopal; Sarnath, near Benaras; and Rummidei in Nepal. The placement of the edicts also highlights the care with which they were located on important trade routes linking river and road traffic. Therefore, as suggested by recent writings on the subject, access to raw materials appears to have been the main motivation particularly in controlling the peninsula.

The Edicts also describe people on the borders of the empire and this confirms the delineation of the empire noted above. In the South are mentioned the Cholas, Pandyas, Sataputras and Keralaputras as people living outside the Mauryan Empire. Inside the empire too there were people of diverse origins and diverse cultures. For example, in the north-west are mentioned the Kambojas and Yavanas. They are mentioned along with other peoples like the Bhojas, Pitinikas, Andhras and Pulindas who can be located in parts of western India and the Deccan.

Apart from studying the locations of Asoka's edicts on a map, the exact extent of his empire can be ascertained, to some extent by distinguishing the 'Conquest territories' (Vijita) and 'royal territories' (Rajavishaya) from

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the bordering territories(pratyanta). Just as the territory of the Seleucid king Antiochus II lay outside his empire in the north-west, so were the territories of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Keralaputras and the Satyaputras, as also the island of Srilanka outside his empire in the south. In the east the empire of the Mauryas seems to have included north and south Bengal.

The Mauryan Empire thus reached its greatest territorial expansion under Asoka. However, simultaneously, there was also a conscious attempt to end all wars in his empire. The extension of the principle of non-violence to state policy was a unique experiment that was never repeated in the annals of the political history of India. Often, in writings of different historians, Asoka has been idealized as a benevolent despot. This tends to overlook the more enabled Asoka to ideologically control a vast empire which otherwise would perhaps have been difficult to rule. Finally, though the findspots of the Mauryan inscriptions are on well known trade routes, some of them bordering peripheral zones of the empire, it still remains to be conclusively decided whether the regions where no evidence of inscriptions is found, were controlled in the same way as those where they were found.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Write a note on why there was a change in the policy of conquest under Asoka?

2) Write a note on Ashokan Rock edicts and Pillar Edicts.

3.5 MAURAYAN ADMINISTRATION

By the third century B.C. the Mauryan state with its centre in Magadha was firmly established. It had a vast territory to control and had an administrative apparatus for doing it. This apparatus covered within its range various levels of administration; administration of the core region (Magadha) of the empire, regional centres, peripheral areas, cities, villages and so on. Besides sustaining the King's authority and order, the administration took into its fold a wide range of activities concerning justice, army, espionage, revenue collections, handicrafts, etc. These are the aspects which have been dealt with in this section. From a variety of sources like the text of Arthashastra, Greek accounts and the Asokan inscriptions we get a fairly good idea of the Mauryan administrative system.

3.5.1 Central Executive

The Mauryan Empire had many major administrative units like the centre and the regions which had various sub-units down to the village. All these units had their own administrative set up but they came under the central authority. The Central administration can be classified under following heads:

- i) The King
- ii) The Council of Ministers
- iii) City Administration
- iv) Army
- v) Espionage
- vi) Law and justice
- vii) Revenue Administration
- viii) Public Welfare

3.5.1.1 King's Role

The King was the supreme authority of the state. All basic policy matters as well as crucial decisions were taken by the King. The Arthashastra forthrightly mentions that if over an issue the traditional law (Shastra) holds a different point of view from that of the King's law, it was the King's law which prevailed. The Mauryan Empire, in fact, represents a centralised political system under which the monarchy had emerged victorious over the gana-samghas. The Arthashastra gives final

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authority to the King in all aspects of administration. It gives the King primacy among the seven components of the state viz minister, friend, army, territory, treasury and fort.

The argument in favour of King's central position in the Arthashastra was because it was the King who appoints or removes the ministers (Amatyas), defends the treasury and the people, works for the progress and welfare of the people, punishes the evil and influences the people (Prajā) through his morality. But not everyone was fit to be a King and the Arthashastra also mentions certain necessary virtues for the King like: birth in a high family (uchchakula), capability to keep under control various small kings and officials, sharp intellect, truthfulness, and upholder of Dharma, etc.

Arthashastra specifies certain subjects which the King should master in order to carry out his functions. He should undergo military training and have knowledge of various departments of economic life (Vartta), writing (Lipi) etc. The Arthashastra further goes on to explain his conduct and daily routine. The Arthashastra also lays down three basic pre-conditions for successful administration of the empire by the King: i) he should pay equal attention to all matters, ii) he should remain vigilant and active for taking action or corrective measure, and iii) he should always discharge his duties. Besides this he had to be constantly accessible to his advisors and officials. That the King did so is also evident from the account of Megasthenes and from the Asokan edicts.

By the time of Asoka the Mauryan Empire had consolidated its position. An important development in the King's position now was the emergence of a paternal attitude towards his subjects. In the Dhauli inscription Asoka states, "All men are my children and just as I desire for my children that they should obtain welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, the same do I desire for all men".

3.5.1.2 Ministers

The Arthashastra as well as the Asokan inscriptions refer to a Council of Ministers (Mantriparishad). The Arthashastra mentions that the work of the state cannot be carried out without assistance. It mentions that "as the chariot cannot move on one wheel hence the King should appoint

ministers and listen to their advice". Similarly the Girnar Rock Edicts of Asoka mention about the functions of the Council: Rock Edict III implies that the Parishad was expected to see that new administrative measures were carried out by different categories of officials. Rock Edict VI mentions that the ministers can discuss the King's policy during his absence; suggest amendments; and decide upon any important matter which the King has left to them. Yet the Council had to report its opinion to the King immediately.

The power of the Council might have varied from time to time; yet its primary role remained that of an advisory body. This was because the final authority vested with the King. There was no fixed number of ministers and Kautilya mentions that it should be decided according to the needs. But he opined that "a large council is beneficial for the King". He has also listed the issues on which the King should consult his ministers. These included: consultation on how to start the works which the state wants to undertake, to determine the manpower and finances involved in carrying out these works, to determine the areas where the works have to be carried out, and finding solutions to deal with calamities, etc. Kautilya mentions that the work should be carried out according to the majority verdict (Bhuvyist) in the council but in case the King feels that the majority verdict will not be able to achieve the goal, he should decide according to his own thinking.

3.5.1.3 City's Leadership

Megasthenes has given a vivid description of administration in Palibothra (Patliputra). This account, though different from that in the Arthashastra, helps us in understanding the city administration during this period. In this account the city council was divided into six sub-councils or committees and each committee had five members: 1) The first committee looked after industry and crafts. Its functions included inspection of such centres; fixing the wages, etc. 2) The second committee looked after the foreigners. Its functions included; arranging for their food, stay and comfort, security, etc. 3) The third committee's work was registration of births and deaths. 4) Looking after trade and commerce, the functions of the fourth committee included: inspection of

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weights and measures, controlling the market, etc.) The fifth committee inspected the manufactured goods, made provisions for their sale and a strict watch was kept to distinguish between new and second-hand goods. 6) The sixth committee collected taxes on the goods sold, the rate being 1/10th.

Interestingly enough, there is no mention of such committees in the Arthashastra in spite of the well defined plan of city administration. However, we do find in this planning almost all the functions mentioned by Megasthenes. For example, in Arthashastra the functions of the fourth committee are performed by the Panyadhyaksha; the collection of taxes (Sixth Committee) was the responsibility of Sulkadhyaksha and registration of births and deaths was the work of Gopa. The head of the urban administration was called Nagariaka. He was assisted by two subordinate officials - Gopa and Sthanika. Besides these there were a host of officials whose functions have been elaborately defined. For example: Bandhanagaradhyaksha looked after the jail. Rakshi i.e. the police was to look after the security of the people. Work in the centres where goods were manufactured was looked after by a host of superintendents like the Lohadhyaksha, Sauvarnika, etc.

The Arthashastra also refers to a variety of activities of city administration, regulations related to them and penalties on their breach. These included: Sanitation and water sources, checking adulteration, watch over inns, and precautions against fire, etc. The law enforcers were not above the law. For example in case the Rakshina (policeman) maltreated a woman, he had to face severe punishments. At the same time if the citizens broke any of the regulations they were subjected to penalties. For example if any citizen moved out during the curfew hours at night and his explanation for this did not come under the exempted categories, he had to pay a heavy fine. Thus, we can say that the city administration during this period was elaborate and well planned.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Discuss the relations between the King and the Council of Ministers.

2) On what basis we can say that the Mauryan city administration was wellorganised?

3.5.1.4 Armed Force

The Nanda kings had a strong army and it is interesting that the army which Kautilya and Chandragupta had raised to defeat the Nanda King consisted of mercenary soldiers. Both the Greek and Indian literary sources refer to this. Later on the size and organisation of Chandragupta's army became fair large. For example according to Ptolemy's account it consisted of 9000 elephants, 3000 cavalry and 6000 infantry. These may be exaggerated but the retreat of Seleucus, descriptive account of army administration in Arthashastra and the violent Kalinga war in Asoka's time point towards a large and well organised military set up under the Mauryas. According to Megasthenes the branches of the army consisted of: infantry, cavalry, elephants, chariots, transport, and admiral of the fleet. Each branch was looked after by a committee of 5 members. Kautilya has referred to Chaturangabala (i.e. infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants) as the main components of the army - each under a commander. Besides these he also mentions the officers and soldiers who were paid in cash.

Salaries of Army Officers:-

Senapati - 48000 Pana

Nayaka – 12000 Pana

Mukhyas - 8000 Pana

Adhyakshas - 4000 Pana

There was a separate department to look after the production and maintenance of a variety of armaments whose chief was known as Ayudhagaradhyaksha. There is a detailed description of the work of

various Adhyakshas. For example the Rathadhyaksha also had to look after the construction of chariots and the Hiastyadhyaksha looked after the elephant force. The Arthasastra also refers to the recruitment policy, war plans and fortifications, etc. There is no doubt that the state spent a large amount of revenue in maintaining its army, which in the long run might have adversely affected its treasury.

3.5.1.5 Intelligence

The Mauryan administration had a well knit system of espionage. A watch was kept practically on all important officials as well as on general public. The main tasks of the spies recruited involved: keeping an eye over the ministers, reporting on government officials, collecting impressions regarding the feelings of citizens, and know the secrets of foreign rulers, etc. For these activities they would seek the help of various people like cooks, barbers, etc. They would themselves adopt various guises like ascetics, students, etc to seek information. At times they even directly reported to the King on matters of importance.

3.5.1.6 Law and Justice

In order to maintain social order, smooth functioning of the administrative system and flow of revenues to the state an orderly legal system was established under the Mauryas. The Arthasastra is full of codes listing punishments for various offences. These included a vast range like violation of marriage laws, divorce, murder, adultery, wrong weights, etc. There were various kinds of courts to try the offenders of law or settle disputes at various levels. If the Gramika had judicial powers at the village level there were also courts at the level of Janapada and the centre. Two kinds of courts are mentioned in the Arthasastra:

- 1) Dharmasthiya i.e. courts which decided personal disputes.
- 2) Katakshodhanai.e., courts which decided upon matters related to individuals and the state. For example, the first kind of courts would settle issues related to disputes over Stridhana (wife's wealth) or marriages etc., and the second category of courts dealt with wages to workers, conduct of workers, murder, etc. The courts functioned under certain regulations.

Cases were properly registered and ample opportunity given to produce witnesses and plead on one's behalf. The sources of law, as mentioned by Kautilya, were:

- 2) Vyavahara i.e., current legal codes,
- 3) Charitra i.c., customs, and
- 4) Rajasasana i.e., the royal decree.

The king was the upholder of Dharma and held the supreme judicial power. According to Megasthenes the incidence of crime committed in Maurya's India was not very high but the range of punishments mentioned in the Arthashastra indicates that breach of laws and crime were not uncommon in the Mauryan social fabric. Hence, the need arose for a severe Penal code. However, due stress was laid on evidence and the witness. Cases were decided by a "body of arbitrators" with a system of appeal to the king. However, it is worth mentioning here that the penalties in Arthashastra were based on Varna hierarchies meaning that for the same kind of offence a Brahmana was punished much less severely than a Sudra.

3.5.1.7 Revenue Management

State revenues, during the Mauryan period were derived from various channels. Kautilya has listed different resources from where revenue flowed into the state treasury which was looked after by an official Sannidhata. All these resources had their own sources of collection in their areas. For example, the cities collected revenues in the form of fines, sales tax (Sulka), exercise on sale of liquor, a kind of income tax imposed on the rich, etc. (The Arthashastra lists 21 such taxes collected by the Durga). The revenues from the rural areas were appropriated by the state in the form of income from Crown lands (Sita), land revenue (Bhaga) from cultivators, taxes on orchards, ferry charges, etc. As all the mines were under the control of the state, the mineral wealth was a regular source of income for the state. Taxes were levied on merchants travelling by road or water ways, taxes on exports and imports etc.

There were certain collections made directly by the state from the concerned people. For example, the gamblers had to part with five per

cent of their winnings to the state and the merchants had to pay when their weights were tested and certified by the state officials. The state control over armament industry and salt trade increased its revenues. The state was also empowered to impose taxes in case of emergency for increasing its earnings. There were various departments to collect, regulate and manage the state revenues. Most of the revenue collections which went to the state treasury had their outflow in the form of expenditure on army, administration, salaries, king, etc. The King had the right of granting remission of land revenue for we find that Asoka had reduced the (Bhaga) (state's share in agricultural produce) of the village Lumbini to $1/8^{\text{th}}$ since it was the birth place of Buddha.

3.5.1.8 Public Well-Being

The Mauryan state took a keen interest in public works. The account of Megasthenes and the Arthashastra refer to these works. The state took considerable interest in irrigation because it could be a major source of revenue. Megasthenes has mentioned officials who supervised irrigation. In Arthashastra also there are references to various modes of irrigation like dams, ponds, canals etc. There were certain regulations regarding the use of water resources and breaking these was a state offence. The state also encouraged people for repairing dams at their own initiative and for this land, revenue remissions were granted. In the inscription of Rudradaman (written in the middle of second century A.D.) there is mention of the construction of a water reservoir (tadaga) called Sudarsana during Chandragupta's times. This was obviously built to facilitate the supply of water.

There are many references to medicine men of various kinds during this period like ordinary physicians (Chikitsakah), midwives (Garbhavyadhi) etc. From Asoka's inscriptions we know that medical treatment and medicines were available to both men and animals. The state also helped its citizens during natural calamities like floods, famines etc. The Arthashastra mentions that the King should look after orphans, old unattended women, etc. To what extent these were actually carried out we do not know. An important aspect of public works was the laying down and repair of roads and opening inns. Thus, we can say that

the state did spend a certain amount from its revenues on publicworks. This must have increased during the time of Asoka due to his concern for public welfare and paternal attitude towards his subjects.

3.5.2 Regional And Local Executive

We know that in the Mauryan state all powers were vested in the King and that the core area of the state was characterised by a highly centralised administrative system. But at the same time no administrative control could be effective in a vast empire unless it devised certain administrative means also to control the regional or local levels. After its territorial expansion the Magadha state established administrative control at the provincial and local levels.

3.5.2.1 Provincial Executive

The head of the Provincial administration was the Kumara (royal prince) who used to govern the province as the King's representative. For example, Asoka had been the Kumara of Ujjayini and Taxila before becoming the King. The Kumara was in turn assisted by Mahamatyas (Mahamatras during Asoka's period) and a council of ministers. From Asokan edicts we get the names of four provincial capitals viz. Tosali (in the east), Ujjain (in the west), Suvarnagiri (in the south), and Taxila (in the north). Certain areas within the province were administered by governors who may have been minor rulers of the areas. We can say this because the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman mentions Tushaspa, a yavna, as a governor of Junagadh area during the time of Asoka. The same inscription, however, says that during Chandragupta Maurya's time his representative in that area was a Vaisya Pushyagupta.

The council of ministers at the provincial level not only acted as a check on the Kumara but at times had direct relations with the King. Among the senior officials were the Mahamatras. The Arthashastra mentions them in the sense of ministers where as the Asokan edicts mention them as performing various activities like looking after the border areas, judicial work and Dhamma Mahamatras who looked after religion. Their appointment, it appears, could be made both by the King as well as the Kumara. Another category of high officials was that of Amatyas. This

category too must have held special powers for it was against their arbitrary actions that the people of Taxila revolted during the reigns of Bindusara and Asoka.

3.5.2.2 District and Village Executive

The administrative units included a set up at the district level consisting of a number of villages and at the same time each village had its own administrative unit. The officials listed at the level of district during this period were Pradeshta, Rajuka and Yukta, the former being the overall incharge of the district. Their functions included: survey and assessment of land, tours and inspections, revenue collection, and maintaining law and order, etc. At times, the King was in direct touch with these officers. For example in the 4th Pillar Edict, Asoka grants to the Rajukas "independent authority" to carry out some of his instructions in relation to public welfare. He also vested in them certain powers which they might not have had earlier. The Yukta was a junior officer giving secretarial kind of assistance to the other two. There were also checks and balances on the powers of each category of officials.

The Asokan edicts, however, do not throw much light on village level administration. But there are references to this unit of administration in the Arthashastra. It appears that the officials at this level were local people appointed and assisted by the villagers. The term mentioned for such officials is gramika. The set up at this level must have varied according to local conditions. But we do find Gopa and Sthanika, two types of officers, acting as intermediaries between the district and village level administrative units. Their functions included: demarcating village boundaries, maintaining records of lands used for various purposes, recording income and expenditure of people, recording taxes, revenues and fines, etc.

But the villages did have a certain amount of autonomy in administering their affairs. It is clear that the Mauryan state employed a large number of officials at all levels of administration. An important aspect worth noting for this period is the payment of salaries in cash. We have references to a commander-in-chief receiving 48,000 panas, a soldier receiving 500 panas and a labourer 60 panas. This indicates the

predominance of money economy and at the same time tremendous burden on the state treasury. This perhaps explains the obsession in the Arthashastra with the problem of extracting and generating revenues and taxes from land revenue to taxon gambling, etc.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Discuss the sources of revenues of the Mauryanstate.

2) List the main features of village administration.

3.6 RELATIONSHIP WITH OUTSIDE POWERS

From the time of Chandragupta till the Empire came to an end we can divide the foreign relations of the Mauryas into two distinct phases:i) the initial phase or the phase of expansionii) the latter phase or the phase of consolidation. We have a variety of sources which give information in this regard. The Asokan inscriptions, for example mention contemporary rulers in other parts of the world.

The initial phase was marked by a policy of securing trade routes and subjugating theGreek settlements in the north and north-west regions. After the encounter between Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus it appears thatthe Mauryas did not face trouble from that frontier. The incorporation ofcentral India gave them control over Dakshinapatha and brought them into the peninsula. It can be said that with the Kalinga War the initial phase of expansioncame to an end. However, it is evident that second phase was marked by an aggressiveforeign policy. It was through war and subjugation that hostile regions were broughtunder control.

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Once the Mauryan expansion reached its limits the emphasis shifted to consolidation and having friendly relations not only with immediate neighbours but also with far-off countries. But it has to be noted that the relations which the Mauryas established with other powers were based on diplomatic requirements, geographical proximity and trade needs.

Contacts had been established with the western world and during the times of Bindusara there was a regular exchange of messengers, Strabo's account mentions Demetrius as a successor to Megasthenes in the Mauryan court. These friendly relations are also demonstrated from the account of Athenaeus which mentions the Indian King's request of sending wine, figs and philosopher. In Rock Edict XIII Asoka has referred to five contemporary rulers:

Antiyoka (Antiochus II of Syria)

Turmayana (Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt)

Antikini (Antigonas of Macedonia)

Maka (Magas of Cyrene), and

Aleksudaro (Alexander of Epirus).

The reference to these rulers is in the context of dhammavijaya (victory by Dhamma) indicating that missions were sent to these rulers with the message of Dhamma. These missions must have successfully established friendly contact for the Edict mentions that the greatest victory i.e., victory by Dhamma had been achieved in these regions. But we must also remember here that by this period regular trade was carried with the Western world and the kind of exchanges that took place not only affected various cultural aspects but also laid the foundations for new schools of art and architecture.

The relations of the Mauryas with the powers in the south seem to have been cordial. No Asokan inscriptions have been discovered so far in the regions ruled by Cholas, Pandyas, Kerala putras and Satiya putras - the major independent powers in the south. But Rock Edict XIII mentions about dhammavijaya in these regions too. This further strengthens the argument about friendly relations and consolidation. Sri Lanka remained another friendly neighbour again due to the policy of Dhamma. Thus we see a marked shift in the relations of the Mauryas with other powers

i.e., from a policy of expansion and subjugation to a policy of friendship and moral conquest characterised by absence of military conquests.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have attempted to introduce to the chief events in the early history of Magadha before the rise of Mauryan rule, details pertaining to the origin of the Mauryan family and their early history, the expansionist policies of Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara, issues surrounding the accession of Asoka The Great and his activities upto the Kalinga War and the extent of the Mauryan empire at the death of Asoka.

We have seen in this Unit that the Mauryan administrative set up was highly organised at the central level. All powers were vested in the King but the council of ministers assisted him in various matters. The powers and functions of various officials were well defined and the Arthashastra mentions their qualifications also. A unique feature was the emergence of a paternal attitude of the monarchy at the time of Asoka and the various kinds of public works undertaken by the state. The state not only paid attention for surplus production but organised the methods to successfully extract the surplus. The administrative units at the levels of province, city or village were a part of this process. The taxation system was well regulated but the state spent a huge amount on army and salaries of various officials. Though the Mauryas had built up their administrative system on systems prevalent earlier they certainly brought about certain new administrative elements to strengthen the empire. The Mauryan foreign relations went through two phases of expansion and consolidation. Once expansion reached its limits through a policy of war and subjugation, the emphasis shifted to consolidation through friendly relations.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Aggrandizement: Aggression.

Autocratic: An absolute ruler whose authority is unchallenged.

Benevolent Despotism: Good or benign ruler but who exerts absolute control.

Chakravarti-Ksetra: The sphere of influence of a chakravarti or universal emperor.

Confederacy: League or alliance of states

Dhammarnhanna: Literally 'universal order' but in its use in Asokan inscriptions it is translated to mean 'piety'.

Satrapy/Satraoues: A term originally derived from an old Iranian institution, it referred to the provinces into which an empire was divided and which were placed under the charge of satraps.

Saptanga: Seven limbs or parts.

3.9 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Elaborate the political condition of Magadh in pre-Maurayan times.
- 2) Write a note on Ashoka The Great.
- 3) Describe Maurayan administration in detail.

3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Most historians agree to assign either a 'low caste' or a tribal origin to the Maurya family. The Buddhist tradition tells us that Chandragupta

was a member of the Moriya clan of Pippalivana and thus suggests that this dynasty was in some way linked to the tribe of the Sakyas to which the Buddha belonged. The Puranas do not link the Nanda and Maurya dynasties, though they too describe the latter to be Shudras. The Classical sources describe Chandragupta, known to them as Sandrakottus, to be of low origin.

2) Chandragupta Maurya stemmed the tide of foreign interference in the north-west and suppressed indigenous rulers in west and south India. Both Indian and Classical sources agree that Chandragupta overthrew the last of the Nanda kings and occupied his capital Pataliputra and this success is linked with his accession to the throne in around 321 B.C. The political rise of Chandragupta was also linked to the invasion of Alexander in the north-west. In the war between Chandragupta and Seleucus Nicator, the former seemed to be victorious and got eastern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the area west of the Indus. The Satrapies thus called were Arachosia, Paropamisadae, Aria and Gedrosia. He also established control in western India and the Deccan.

Check your Progress 2

1) In this war with Kalinga, though Asoka was victorious, it filled him with remorse which ultimately turned him towards Dhamma. A policy of conquest through war was given up and replaced by a policy of conquest through Dhammavijaya. This was meant to work both at the State and personal levels, and totally transformed the attitude of the king and his officials towards their subjects.

2) There are fourteen Major Rock Edicts, seven Pillar Edicts and some Minor Rock Inscriptions which give us this information. The Major Rock Edicts are located at Shahbazgarhi and Maneshra near Peshawar, Kalsi near Dehra Dun, Sopara in Thana district, Girnar near Junagarh in Kathiawar, Dhauili near Bhuvaneshwar and Jaugada in Gangam district of Orissa. In Karnataka, the Minor Rock Edicts appear among other places at Siddapura, Jatinga-Rameshwara and Brahmagiri. Other Minor Rock Edicts are found at Rupnath near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Sahasram in Bihar, Bairat near Jaipur in Rajasthan and Maski in Karnataka. The Pillars bearing Asoka's inscriptions are found in Delhi (originally located

at Topara near Ambala and Meerut), Kausambi in Uttar Pradesh, LauriyaAraraj, Lauriya Nandagarh and Rampurva in Bihar; Sanchi, near Bhopal; Sarnath,near Benaras: and Rummindei in Nepal. The Edicts also describe people on the borders of the empire and this confirms thedelineation of the empire noted above. In the South are mentioned the Cholas,Pandyas, Sataputras and Keralaputras as people living outside the Mauryan Empire.

Check Your Progress 3

1) The council of ministers can discuss the King's policy during his absence; suggest amendments; and decide upon any important matter which the King has left to them. Yet the Council had to report its opinion to the King immediately. The power of the Council might have varied from time to time; yet its primary role remained that of an advisory body. This was because the final authority vested with the King.

2) In this account the citycouncil was divided into six sub-councils or committees and each committee had five members:1) The first committee looked after industry and crafts.2) The second committee looked after the foreigners. 3) The third committee's work was registration of births and deaths.4) Looked after trade and commerce5) The fifth committee inspected the manufactured goods, made provisions for their sale and a strict watch was kept to distinguish between new and second-hand goods.6) The sixth committee collected taxes on the goods sold, the rate being 1/10th.

Check Your Progress 4

1) The cities collected revenues in the form of fines, sales tax (Sulka), exercise on sale of liquor, a kind of income tax imposed on the rich, etc. The revenues from the rural areas were appropriated by the state in the form, of income from Crown lands (Sita), land revenue (Bhaga) from cultivators, taxes on orchards, ferry charges, etc. As all the mines were under the control of the state, the mineral wealth was a regular source of income for the state. Taxes were levied on merchants travelling by road or water ways, taxes on exports and imports etc.

2) The main features included demarcating village boundaries, maintaining records of lands used for various purposes, recording income and expenditure of people, recording taxes, revenues and fines, etc.

UNIT 4 MAURAYAN POLITY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Sources of Information
- 4.3 Idea of an Empire
 - 4.3.1 Views on Interpretation of 'Empire'
 - 4.3.2 Idea of Chakravarti Ksetra
- 4.4 Policy of Dhamma
 - 4.4.1 Asoka's Dhamma Vis-a-Vis State
 - 4.4.2 Different Explanations
- 4.5 Asoka's Descendents
- 4.6 Factors for Disintegration of Empire
- 4.7 Effect of Asoka's Policies
- 4.8 Monetary Problems
- 4.9 Emergence of Ruling Houses
 - 4.9.1 Major Dynasties
 - 4.9.2 Minor Dynasties
- 4.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.11 Key Words
- 4.12 Questions for Review
- 4.13 Suggested Readings and References
- 4.14 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain:-

- learn about the sources which the historians use to write for this period.
- understand the notion of an Empire in the early periods of History
- the way Dhamma figures prominently in Asokan Edicts,
- the essence of Asoka's policy of Dhamma as explained by him and as manifested in his welfare activities, paternal attitude, etc

- the distinction between Asoka as an individual-a believer in Buddhism and Asoka as an emperor initiating a state policy, and
- to what extent Asoka's successors are held responsible for the disintegration of the empire,
- how various other political factors are viewed as contributing to the weakening of the empire,
- how Asoka's policies in general are considered responsible for the decline of the empire,
- the economic problems that the Mauryan empire believed to have faced, and
- the emergence of local polities in north and south India, following the decline of the Mauryan Empire.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we do not intend to highlight only the achievements of the Mauryan kings in expanding the territorial frontiers of the empire but also discuss the notion of an 'empire' in the pre-modern context at two levels:

- i) Various meanings of the term 'empire' which does not simply mean a territorially vast kingdom, and
- ii) The early Indian notions of state and empire.

By discussing these various definitions, it would be possible to understand the various views of scholars on the characterization of the Mauryan Empire.

The word Dhamma is the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word Dharma. Dhamma has been variously translated as piety, moral life, righteousness and so on, but the best way to understand what Asoka means by Dhamma is to read his edicts. It must be clearly understood that Dhamma was not any particular religious faith or practice; so we should not translate Dhamma (or its Sanskrit equivalent Dharma) as religion. It was also not an arbitrarily formulated royal policy. Dhamma related to norms of social behaviour and activities in a very general sense and in his Dhamma Asoka attempted a very careful synthesis of various norms which were current in his time. To understand why and how Asoka formulated Dhamma and what he meant by it, one has therefore to

understand the characteristics of the time in which he lived' and to refer to Buddhist, Brahmanical and various other texts where norms of social behaviour are explained.

Mauryan rule was the first experiment in imperial government in India. Chandragupta Maurya, Bindusara and Asoka were successful in establishing the imperial authority of the Mauryas over a large number of Janpadas or Kingdoms, and they were able to introduce a new concept in the governance of a large territory. However, the imperial authority of the Mauryas began to weaken with the death of Asoka (232 B.C.) and finally collapsed in 180 B.C. What brought the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire is a very complicated question and it cannot be explained by any single factor. There was more than one factor which led to the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire. In this Unit we will discuss the responsibility of Asoka's successors for the disintegration of the empire and then deal with Asoka's policies, economic problems of the Mauryan state and the collapse of the administration of the Mauryas. Finally the growth of local polities will be taken care off in explaining the process of disintegration of the Mauryan Empire.

4.2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The events and traditions of the middle Ganga plains where Magadha was prominently located are well preserved in the early Buddhist and Jain literature. Some of the texts of the Buddhist tradition are compiled as the Tripitikas and the Jatakas. Those pertaining to the early Jain tradition are the Acaranga Sutra and Suttrakritanga which are considered earlier than the others. All these were however written or compiled well after the sixth century B.C., at different times. For particularly the early events of a political nature, Buddhist and Jaina traditions represent them more authentically and directly than do the later Brahmanical accounts of the various Puranas which attempt to provide histories of royal dynasties to the period of the Guptas.

Later Buddhist chronicles like the Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa compiled in Sri Lanka were significant sources for the events related particularly to Asoka's reign. These, along with the Divyavadana (which is preserved

outside India in the Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist sources) not being contemporary to the period under discussion, have to be used cautiously as they developed in the context of Buddhism's spread outside India.

Foreign sources of information which are considerably more relevant and are near-contemporary, are accounts gathered from classical writings in Greek and Latin. These are impressions of travellers who visited India around that time, and the name of Megasthenes, who visited the court of Chandragupta Maurya is famous in this respect. Megasthenes was, however, known to us only through quotations in later Greek writings of Strabo and Diodorus of the first century B.C and Arrian of the second century A.D. Since North-West India from about the sixth century B.C till about the fourth century B.C was under the sphere of foreign rule some of the information on the phase of Achaemenian (Persian) rule and later, on the invasion of Alexander, comes to us from the Persian inscriptions and Greek sources like Herodotus account.

Ever since its discovery in 1905, the Arthashastra of Kautilya has been considered an important sources of information for the Mauryan period. Today, several new views on the date of the Arthashastra have emerged, some of which suggest that it shouldnot be considered in totality a text written in the Mauryan period. Thus, it issuggested on the basis of a statistical method that some of the chapters of theArthashastra should be dated to the first two centuries of the Christian era. However,many other scholars would like to use a major portion of this text for the Mauryanperiod. They suggest that the text was originally written by Kautilya, the minister ofChandragupta, and commented upon and edited by other writers during a subsequentperiod.

Both inscriptions and coins as important sources of information for understanding theearly history of India become significant during the Mauryan period. The coins ofthis period however do not bear names of kings and they are called punch-markedcoins because different symbols are punched on them separately. Though this typeof coin was known from roughly about the fifth century B.C., the Mauryan punch-marked series were significant in that they were probably issued by a central authority as was indicated by the uniformity of the symbols used.

Notes

In contrast to the coins, the inscriptional material for particularly Asoka's rule was extremely significant and unique in content. There are fourteen major edicts, seven minor rock edicts, seven pillar edicts and other inscriptions of Asoka located at prominent places near towns and trade routes in various parts of the Indian sub-continent. They markedly stand out as a physical testimony to the length and breadth of the Mauryan Empire at the close of Asoka's reign.

Archaeology as a source of information has, in recent years, yielded considerable data on the material cultures of the Ganga Valley. We know that the archaeological phase associated with the Northern Black Polished Ware was the period when cities and towns emerged, and during the Mauryan period, as archaeology suggests, there were further changes in the material life of the people. From Archaeology we also know that many elements of material culture started spreading to areas outside the Ganga Valley and that they came to be associated with Mauryan rule.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Describe the important sources for reconstructing the history of Mauryas.

4.3 IDEA OF AN EMPIRE

Before we talk of the Mauryan Empire, let us try to understand what an 'empire' means. This is necessary because we often indiscriminately use the term empire in relation to all types of kingdoms or states. Further, we somehow seem to think that ancient, medieval and modern empires were all identical in nature. Obviously, the nature of the British empire of modern times or even the Central Asian Mongol Empire of the medieval times could not have been identical with the nature of the Mauryan Empire. There were important differences between empires in different periods of history, and when we study the history of an ancient empire, it

is important that we understand what essential elements constituted an empire.

4.3.1 Views On Interpretation Of 'Empire'

Most often 'empire' is understood to designate a political system which has under a central control a vast expanse of territories not all of which are necessarily culturally homogeneous. The centre in this definition is embodied either in the person of the king or emperor or, in the political institution which is organised to hold together the territories under one control. The term 'Imperial' comes from the Latin word *imperium*. This indicates relative concentration of authority at the centre. The centre controls territorially contiguous units which ultimately attain some symbols of common political identity. Generally, the Roman Empire in the ancient world is taken as the classical example to which all others, including the Mauryan, are then compared.

This definition, however, should not be understood as connoting sovereign nation states some of which built vast empires in modern times. The nature of the central authority in early empires was either dependent on the charismatic personality of rulers and leaders and their exploits and most importantly, their upholding of a certain order of things which are sanctioned by tradition. The Common view about the Mauryan Empire was that it could best be understood as a centralized bureaucratic empire. This kind of an 'empire' was prevalent in other parts of the world as well. Centralized bureaucratic empires were usually established through the military and other exploits of individuals, generally in periods of turmoil, strife and unrest of various kinds, and thus the establishment of their rule is considered to have brought about peace and order. At the same time it would be natural for such empires to have enemies because in their rise to power they must have either usurped or challenged various interest groups. In new territories their policy of aggrandizement nurtures animosity. The rulers have therefore, to make allies, passive or active, to implement their aims through either matrimonial or diplomatic alliances.

In terms of political goals such empires visualize a unified centralized polity in which decision making is monopolized. This means that they

replace earlier traditional or local tribal authorities. In the rise and success of such empires geo-political factors are usually said to shape their activities. It was absolutely essential for such empires to be able to mobilize various resources, those of economic raw materials and manpower in particular. For active political support these empires were usually dependent on urban economic, cultural and professional groups and in a passive sense, from the wider social strata of peasants and urban lower classes. Recruitment from upper class groups ensured the proper functioning of administrative bodies. In the ultimate analysis the administration thus evolved was expected to work for exploitative purposes. In other words, in the early empires, there was a high degree of inequality in society, permitting the privileged groups and the privileged regions to exploit the resources produced by others.

4.3.2 Idea of Chakravarti-Ksetra

In understanding the Mauryan Empire, or indeed, any other 'empire' of ancient India, it may be useful to know how an ideal emperor was viewed in ancient literature. The idea of an emperor was expressed through the Sanskrit term Chakravarti and the sphere of his 'imperial rule' by the term chakravarti-ksetra. Though in early Brahmanic texts kings performed many sacrifices like Ashvamedha and Rajasuya, it is only in the Arthashastra that a clear idea was given of what chakravarti-ksetra comprised of. It is said to be the land which extended north to south from the Himalaya to the seas (of the Indian Ocean) and measured a thousand yojanas. There is no doubt that the Chakravarti ideal reflected conventional ideas about Indian ruler's sphere of influence and in fact it was an ideal never achieved, except perhaps by Asoka. On the other hand, this aspiration of universal conquest is constantly emphasized in exaggerated terms in both literary and epigraphically. Historians have often taken these reflections to indicate the actual achievement of large territorial conquests by kings and thus misreading the ideal for the actual achievements.

The Arthashastra, and several other texts, also list the different limbs (angas) which together made a rashtra (state). Of the seven limbs of the

State mentioned in the Arthashastra, the king, is made out to be the most powerful. The seven elements (saptanga) of the State in the general texts on ancient Indian polity are stated to be ministers (mantri), ally (mitra), taxes (kara), army (sena), fort (durga), land or territory (desh) and to these, the Arthashastra significantly adds an eighth element, the enemy (shatru). In defining the king as the most powerful being in the State, Kautilya the author of Arthashastra also expects him to have exceptional qualities. Some of these ideas about state and empire as defined above have led historians for some time to consider Magadha under the Mauryas to have become a despotic state with the king controlling all regions of the empire through a centralized administration. One can, however, clearly say that the success of Mauryas marked the triumph of a monarchical form of political organisation over other, such as gana-samgha forms of political organisation.

4.4 POLICY OF DHAMMA

The principles of Dhamma were so formulated as to be acceptable to people belonging to different communities and following any religious sect. Dhamma was not given any formal definition or structure. It emphasised on toleration and general behaviour. Dhamma stressed on dual toleration--it emphasised on toleration of people themselves and also on toleration of their various beliefs and ideas. There was a stress on the notion of showing consideration towards slaves and servants; there was stress on obedience to elders; generosity towards the needy, Brahmanas and Sramanas etc. Asoka also pleaded for tolerance of different religious sects in an attempt to create a sense of harmony. The policy of Dhamma also laid stress on non-violence, which was to be practised by giving up war and conquests and also as a restraint on the killing of animals.

In order to make all aspects of Dhamma clearer, we will see how the policy chronologically developed by examining the contents of some of the Edicts.

Major Rock Edict I declared prohibition of animal sacrifice and holiday of festive gatherings.

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Major Rock Edict II relates to certain measures of social welfare which are included in the working of Dhamma. It mentions medical treatment for men and animals, construction of roads, wells, tree planting, etc

Major Rock Edict III declares that liberality towards Brahmanas and Sramanas is a virtue, respect to mother and father etc.

Major Rock Edict IV is a very important statement of the policy of Dhamma. The edict comments that due to the policy of Dhamma the lack of morality and disrespect towards Brahmanas and Sramanas, violence, unseemly behaviour to friends, relatives and others and evils of this kind have been checked. The killing of animals to a large extent should also be stopped.

Major Rock Edict V refers to the appointment of Dhamma-mahamattas for the first time in the twelfth year of his reign. These special officers were appointed by the king to look after the interests of all sects and religions and spread the message of Dhamma in each nook and corner of the society. The implementation of the policy of Dhamma was entrusted in their hands.

Major Rock Edict VI is an instruction to Dhamma-mahamattas. They are told that they could bring their reports to the king at any time, irrespective of whatever activity he may be engaged in. The second part of the Edict deals with speedy administration and transaction of smooth business.

Major Rock Edict VIII states that Dhammayatras (tours) would be undertaken by the emperor. The earlier practice, of the emperor, of going out on hunting expeditions was given up. Dhammayatras enabled the emperor to come into contact with various sections of people in the empire.

Major Rock Edict XI is a further explanation of the policy of Dhamma. Emphasis is on respect to elders, abstaining from killing animals, and liberality towards friends.

Major Rock Edict XIII is again an appeal towards toleration among sects. This edict reflects the anxiety the king felt due to the conflict between sects and carries his plea for harmony. Major Rock Edict XIII is of paramount importance in understanding the Asokan policy of Dhamma. The Rock Edict pleads for conquest by Dhamma instead of War. This

edict mentions about the Kalinga conquest of Asoka as well as his relations with foreign countries.

4.4.1 Asoka's Dhamma Vis-A-Vis State

Asoka's Dhamma was not simply a collection of high sounding phrases. He very consciously tried to adopt it as a matter of state policy for he declared that "All men are my children" and 'whatever exertion I make, I strive only to discharge the debt that I owe to all living creatures". It was a totally new and inspiring ideal of kingship. Previously in the Arthashastra the King owed nothing to anyone and his only job was to rule the state efficiently.

Asoka renounced war and conquest by violence and forbade the killing of many animals. Asoka himself set the example of vegetarianism by almost stopping the consumption of meat in the royal household. Since he wanted to conquer the world through love and faith, he sent many missions to propagate Dhamma. Such missions were sent to far off places like Egypt, Greece, Sri Lanka, etc. The propagation of Dhamma included many measures for people's welfare. Centres for the medical treatment of men and beasts were founded inside and outside the empire. Shady groves, wells, fruit orchards and rest houses were laid out. This kind of charity work was a radically different attitude from the king of Arthashastra who would not incur any expenses unless they brought more revenues in return.

Asoka also prohibited useless sacrifices and certain forms of gatherings which led to waste and indiscipline and superstition. As mentioned earlier, in order to implement these policies he recruited a new cadre of officials called Dhamma Mahamattas. Part of this group's duties was to see to it that people of various sects were treated fairly. Moreover they were especially asked to look after the welfare of prisoners. Many convicts, who were kept in fetters after their sentence had expired, were to be released. Those sentenced to death were to be given a grace for three days. Asoka also started Dhamma yatras. He and his high officials were to tour the country in order to propagate Dhamma and establish direct contact with his subjects. It was because of such attitudes and

policies that modern writers like Kern called him "a monk in a king's garb."

4.4.2 Different Explanations

The Asokan policy of Dhamma has been an issue of intense controversy and debate amongst scholars. Some scholars have suggested that Asoka was a partisan Buddhist and have equated Dhamma with Buddhism. It has also been suggested that it was the original Buddhist thought that was being preached by Asoka as Dhamma and later on certain theological additions were made to Buddhism. This kind of thinking was based on some Buddhist chronicles. It was believed that the Kalinga war was a dramatic turning point where Asoka out of remorse for the death and destruction of war, decided to become a Buddhist. The Buddhist records also credit him with the propagation of Buddhism in India and abroad. One cannot, however, lay the charge of being partisan against Asoka. There are two strong arguments to prove that Asoka, as an emperor, did not favour Buddhism at the expense of other religious faiths.

i) Asoka's creation of the institution of the Dhamma Mahamattas convincingly proves that Asoka's Dhamma did not favour any particular religious doctrine. Had that been the case, then there would have been no need for such an office, as Asoka could have utilized the organisation of Samgha to propagate Dhamma.

ii) A careful study of the Rock Edicts depicts that Asoka wanted to promote tolerance and respect for all religious sects and the duty of the Dhamma Mahamattas included working for the Brahmanas and the Sramans.

These two points made it clear that the policy of Dhamma was not the policy of a heretic but a system of beliefs created out of different religious faiths. There has been some discussion among historians about the results of Asoka's propagation of Dhamma. Some historians believe that Asoka's banning of sacrifices and the favour that he showed to the Buddhists led to a Brahmanical reaction. This in turn led to the decline of the Mauryan Empire. Others believe that the stopping of wars and emphasis on non-violence crippled the military might of the empire. This led to the collapse of the empire, after the death of Asoka.

It has been shown by Romila Thapar that Asoka's Dhamma, apart from being a superb document of his essential humaneness was also an answer to the socio-political needs of the contemporary situation. That it was not anti-Brahmanical was proved by the fact that respect for the Brahmanas and Sramans was an integral part of his Dhamma. His emphasis on non-violence did not blind him to the needs of the state. Thus, addressing the forest tribes he warned them that although he hates to use coercion he may be required to resort to force if they continue to create trouble. By the time Asoka stopped war, the entire Indian sub-continent was under his control.

In South he was on friendly terms with the Cholas and Pandyas. Sri Lanka was an admiring ally. Thus, Asoka's no to war came at a time when his empire had reached its natural boundaries. The plea for tolerance was a wise course of action in an ethnically diverse, religiously varied and class divided society. Asoka's empire was a conglomerate of diverse groups. There were farmers, pastoral nomads and hunter-gatherers, there were Greeks, Kambojas and Bhojas and hundreds of groups having divergent traditions. In this situation a plea for tolerance was the need of the hour. Asoka tried to transcend the parochial cultural traditions by a broad set of ethical principles. Asoka's Dhamma could not survive him. As such it was a failure. However, we should remember that he was not establishing a new religion. He was simply trying to impress upon the society the need for ethical and moral principles.

Check Your Progress 2

1) On the basis of the definitions given above about what constitutes an empire, how would you describe the Mauryan Empire?

2) Explain the main principles of the policy of Dhamma.

4.5 ASOKA'S DESCENDENTS

It is generally believed that Asoka died in 232 B.C. However, the Mauryan rulers continued to rule for about half a century after his death. Several literary texts like the Puranas, the Avdanas and the Jain accounts give different details of Asoka's successors. It is suggested that after the death of Asoka the empire was divided among the surviving sons. Some of the names of Asoka's successors that we find in different texts are: Kunala, Dasharatha, Samprati, Salishuka, Devavarman, Satadhanvan and Brihadratha.

However, it is difficult to ascertain their exact period. But it appears that after Asoka the empire got fragmented and that there was quick succession of rulers. The quick succession of rulers weakened the imperial control over administration. The early three kings, Chandragupta, Bindusara and Asoka had organised the administration in such a way that it needed strict supervision. The quick succession of kings made this difficult as none of the rulers could actually settle down and be in the control of things. Linked to this is the fact that dynastic empires depend much on the ability of its rulers. But the successors of Asoka failed in this respect. Each one of them ruled only for a short period of time and therefore could not formulate either new policies of governance or maintain the old ones. Despite the fact that full details for individual kings and their reigns are difficult to get, we get the picture of post-Asokan Mauryan India as one in which a lasting stability of even political control was impossible to achieve. One can generally say that these successors politically weakened the empire and therefore lost administrative, economic and military control of it. The partition of the empire was in itself enough to show that the process of disintegration had begun immediately after the death of Asoka.

4.6 FACTORS FOR DISINTEGRATION OF EMPIRE

The disorder that emerged in the administrative machinery after the death of Asoka is regarded as one of the important factors for the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire. The immediate problem for Asoka's successors was whether to continue his policy of Dhamma and its predominance in the government. This had truly been an unconventional way of governance and not a very easy way of comprehending the functioning of government. Asoka had been successful because he had the unique vision of understanding the complex social problems of a society and also he had accepted the importance of the principle of Dhamma in all its dimensions. It was not clear whether despite Asoka's personal exhortations his successors attached the same kind of importance to Dhamma as he himself had done.

Another related feature of the political importance of Dhamma was the existence of a large body of officials of the State called Dhammamahamattas. It has been suggested by some historians that they had become very powerful and oppressive during the latter half of Asoka's reign. Asoka himself in the First Separate Edict to the Mahamattas, stationed at Dhauili and Jaugada, asked them to ensure against oppression and to be just and humane. Though there is no doubt that Asoka was in firm control of the administration, this cannot be said of the later kings.

It was not simply the question of the direct contact with the Dhammamahamattas to ensure that they did not misuse their powers, but that of controlling the whole of the Mauryan bureaucracy that was at stake. The nature of the Mauryan State necessitated a king of strong abilities. It was a system which required the king to be in direct touch with all aspects of the State's functionaries. Since these functionaries were ultimately held together by a power structure with the king at its centre, once the king became weak the whole administration naturally weakened. Once the centre became weak, the provinces too started breaking away.

The officials of the State were personally selected by the king and owed loyalty only to him. Once weak rulers came, and ruled for short durations of time, it resulted in an overwhelming number of new officials constantly emerging and owing only personal loyalty to their respective

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kings and not to the State. This norm of personal loyalty had the danger of the officials either forcefully supporting the new king or opposing him. The later Mauryan kings were probably constantly faced with this situation. In fact, it was local rulers and princes that found it easy to emerge with these traditional ties to support them, as important centres of power. The provincial governments under the later Mauryas thus increasingly began to question the Centre's authority. Though one cannot accept the notion that there were popular uprisings wrecking Mauryan State control, one can strongly suggest that the social basis of the Mauryan bureaucracy was under stress and strain resulting in an inefficient administration unable to maintain social order in general.

Whereas under the first three Mauryas the extremely complex system of spies employed for filtering in information on erring officials had worked efficiently, under the later Mauryas it collapsed. There was thus no means through which the king could either gauge the public opinion in the empire or check on the corruption which had inevitably set in once weak rulers were in power at the centre.

A conscious loosening of military control on behalf of the Mauryan kings has also been suggested by some scholars as a major political reason for their decline. Since this is largely attributed to a conscious decision taken by Asoka on this matter, we shall discuss it below in the next section. At this stage we need to emphatically state that the decline of the Magadhan empire cannot satisfactorily be explained by merely stating that there were weak successors or, that there was military inactivity or, that there were popular uprisings. Each of these was in fact, fundamentally linked to the particular nature of the Mauryan imperial bureaucratic set-up and once this started cracking up the whole political structure was at stake.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What in your opinion was the crux of the problem in the administrative system of the Mauryas that caused disintegration under the later kings?

4.7 EFFECT OF ASOKA'S POLICIES

Many scholars have opined that either Asoka's political decisions or the effects of these decisions were responsible for the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire. Their arguments generally focus on the drawbacks of Asoka's religious policy. These arguments have two strands:

i) First, there are those scholars who maintain that Pushyamitra Sunga, who killed the last Mauryan emperor represented a strong Brahmanical reaction against the pro-Buddhist policy of Asoka and the pro-Jain policy of some of his successors. Moreover, the Satavahanas who rose to power in the Deccan after the Mauryas were also said to have been Brahmanas. These scholars list a series of acts done by Asoka himself which may have antagonized the Brahmanas. For example the ban on animal sacrifices is considered one which was especially resented, since this action was taken by a Shudra King (according to the Purana accounts the Mauryas are listed as Shudras). They suggest that the Dhammamahamattas, special officers of Dhamma appointed by Asoka, destroyed the prestige of the Brahmanas. These officials disallowed Brahmanas to continue their traditional laws of punishment and other Smriti injunctions.

However, there are no direct evidences to support the above arguments. These are broad inferences which can be equally questioned. For example, the Asoka inscriptions clearly say that the Dhammamahamattas were to respect the Brahmanas and the Sramans alike. It is, however, possible that in the later years these officials may have become unpopular among the people. This can be deduced on the basis of stories in the Buddhist sources. As officials meant for the establishment of Dhamma they undoubtedly had special powers and sanctions of the king and were therefore, feared by the people as a whole. Once they began to wield great control, it prevented Asoka's direct contact with the people. But this does not mean that these officials were

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specifically antagonistic to the Brahmanas. Thus, to argue that the interests of the Brahmanas were harmed by Asoka's policy and that Pushyamitra, a Brahman general engineered a revolt cannot be accepted for the simple reason that if Asoka's policies were so harmful, this should have happened immediately after his death. In fact, Pushyamitra Sunga's action should at best be understood as a palace coup d'etat made at an opportune time, having assessed the weak nature of the king's power, rather than looking for any deliberate anti-Brahman policy of either Asoka or his successors.

ii) According to another group of scholars emphasis should be given to Asoka's pacifist policies as a factor for Mauryan decline. They think that this was responsible for undermining the strength of the empire. This explanation focuses on Asoka's policy of ahimsa or non-violence. The harmful effects of this policy were provinces that had become oppressive and ought to have been controlled. Citing examples from Buddhist stories in the Divyavadana, this argument goes on to say that the empire could not withstand the Greek invasions. Non-violence on the part of the king also meant that he no longer exerted his control over officials particularly in the provinces who had become oppressive and ought to have been controlled. Citing examples from Buddhist stories in the Divyavadana, this argument goes on to show that revolts in the provinces had been taking place.

The above image of Asoka is far from correct. Just as the theory of anti-Brahmanical activity under Asoka's reign has been discounted as a factor for Mauryan decline, so also the impression of an over pacifist Asoka, lacking in vigour and determination to rule has to be discarded. It is true that Asoka believed in non-violence as vital to Dharma. There was however, no extreme stand on this issue. A dislike for killing of animals for food and sacrifice did not in fact terminate the policy of the palace to continue killing animals for food, though on a reduced scale. Also in governance and criminal justice, death penalty should have been done away with but this was not so.

Further, we have no evidence of the army having been demobilized, nor, even a hint in the inscriptions to such a policy being intended. The evidence one has is that only one campaign conducted against Kalinga

which had ended in a ruthless defeat of the latter. Had Asoka been such a pacifist he should have reinstated Kalinga as an independent kingdom but, as a practical ruler, he maintained the supremacy of Magadha over it. There are innumerable other indications of Asoka's assertion of his control over the different people of his empire, particularly his warning to the tribes. He had made it very clear that the misconduct of the tribes living within his empire would be tolerated up to a point only and not beyond that. All these steps were taken by Asoka to see that the empire was kept secure.

Thus to conclude, the policy of Ahimsa in no way weakened the army and administrative machinery of the Mauryan empire. Pushyamitra Sunga was after all general of the Mauryan army and even half a century after Asoka he is said to have prevented the Greeks from entering Madhyadesa. According to Romila Thapar even an entire generation of pacificism cannot weaken an empire and lead to its disintegration, "Battles and territorial acquisition are not alone responsible for the creation and destruction of empires. The causes must be sought in other directions as well".

4.8 MONETARY PROBLEMS

D.D. Kosambi stressed on the economic problems that the Mauryas faced. These contributed substantially to the decline of the Mauryan Empire. His arguments centre around two themes indicating that there were financial constraints on the Mauryan economy:

- a) that the State took excessive measures to increase the taxes on a variety of things, and
- b) that the punch-marked coins of this period show evidence of debasement of the currency. The latter argument is based on his statistical analysis of the punch-marked coins of the period. Some of Kosambi's views which have now generally been accepted as crucial factors in bringing about major changes in the Magadhan empire and thereby, its ultimate decline are briefly as follows:
 - i) It is suggested that gradually the State monopoly of metals was being lost. The demands on iron, so crucial for the expanding agrarian

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economy, could no longer be met by Magadha alone. In fact, there were attempts to locate and develop new sources of it in the Deccan. Though such pockets of iron ore were found in Andhra and Karnataka, the Magadha State found it a costly operation to tap these pockets. Of the many problems they faced in this connection was also the protection of the mining areas from intrusion by the local chiefs.

ii) The other point which is stressed is that expansion in cultivation, extensive use of forest wood and deforestation in general may have led to floods and famines. There is in fact evidence of a big famine in north Bengal in the Mauryan period. Thus many factors may have combined to bring down drastically the amount of the state revenue. In years of famine, the state was expected to provide relief on a substantial scale.

In a centralized administrative system, the problem of not having enough revenues created many other acute difficulties. To enhance the revenues, the Arthashastra suggested that taxes should be imposed even on actors, prostitutes and so on. The tendency to tax everything that could be taxed emerged out of the necessity of the treasury needing more funds or the currency having become debased due to inflation. The Arthashastra measures to be adopted in times of emergency are interpreted in this light. Further, the decreasing silver content of the punch-marked coins attributed to the later Maurya rulers indicate that debasement had actually taken place to meet the needs of a depleted treasury. The burden of expenditure had also increased. This can be seen in the large amounts of money spent under Asoka for public works. Also his tours and those of his officials meant using up the surplus wherever it was available. The earlier stringent measures of the State's control on its finances had thus begun to change even during Asoka's reign.

Romila Thapar has further commented on these issues. According to her the debasement of coins need not necessarily have meant a pressure on the general economy. In fact, it is difficult to say precisely when and where the debasement of coinage took place. In positive terms she argues that for many parts of the Indian sub-continent the general picture of the economy on the basis of the material evidence in fact indicates an improvement. This is particularly seen in the use of better quality materials which indicates a technical advance. There may have

beendebasement of coinage but in her opinion it was not because of a decline in material standards, but rather, because of extreme political confusion, particularly in the Ganges Valley. This must have led to hoarding of money by merchant classes and debasement of coinage. However, she concludes: "There is no doubt of the economic prosperity that prevailed with the political decline of the Mauryan Empire."

4.9 EMERGENCE OF RULING HOUSES

If the material and technical advance of the country was not hampered by the political decline of the Mauryas, it can then be said that the material basis of many of the local polities/kingdoms was strong enough for them to emerge with renewed strength in the post-Mauryan period. The Mauryas in fact had directly governed only the major and vital areas of the empire, the centre of which was Magadha. It is most probable that its governors/officials administering the core areas were selected from amongst the local peoples. These officials were often very powerful and acted as a check on the Viceroy or representative of the kings. As mentioned earlier, the political loyalty of these officials was crucial for the imperial structure to continue. A change of king meant a re-alignment of these loyalties. If this happened often, as it did in the post-Asokan period, fundamental weaknesses would begin to inevitably creep in and prove the system unsuccessful. The half a dozen kings that had succeeded Asoka had made no basic change in the policy of governance adopted by the first three Mauryas. It has also been suggested that some of these kings probably ruled more or less concurrently over several parts of the empire. This indicates a segmentation of the empire even under the Mauryas.

4.9.1 Major Dynasties

The disintegration of the Mauryan Empire was followed by the rise of a number of kingdoms in different parts of India. Immediately after the Mauryas, Pushyamitra established the Sunga dynasty and the Sungas were able to control only a part of the erstwhile Mauryan Empire. The Sunga family had held the Viceroyship at Ujjain in western Malwa or the

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neighbouring region of Vidisha in eastern Malwa under the Mauryas. The Sungas tried to revive Vedic practices and sacrifices which may have perhaps been necessary to face the new invaders, namely the Greeks and to establish their strength after their first king had usurped the throne. The Sungas were followed by the short-lived rule of the Kanvas. The Greeks, however, in due course of time became exceedingly successful in most parts of north-west India. Their rule could only be terminated by the Sakas who had settled along the Indus. The Parthian or Pahlavas also made inroads in north-western India. But, the most successful foreign intrusions were made from the first half of the first century A.D. with the establishment of the Kushana Empire.

In the Ganga valley, Rajasthan, eastern India and the Deccan many ruling families came to power. It is clear that under the Mauryas the maximum settlements of villages had been in the Ganges Valley. The hills and plains of Assam and Bengal still remained to be opened up. Similarly, the south and south-east of India had contact with the Mauryan Empire but a large scale agrarian economy had yet to come up in these regions. After the decline of Mauryan rule many local rulers started ruling in regions like Vidarbha, eastern Deccan, Karnataka and western Maharashtra. Gradually, the family of the Satavahanas built up an empire in the Deccan by bringing together many local centres.

At about the same time when the early Satavahanas were establishing themselves, Kharavela of Kalinga emerged as a powerful king in the Mahanadi region. In an inscription written during his reign and found at the Hathigumpha cave of Udayagiri hill near Bhubaneswar, Kharavela claims that he was the third ruler of the Mahameghavana family of Kalinga and that this family was a branch of the ancient Chedi family. He is said to have raided a major part of the country including Magadha and the Satavahana and Pandya countries. He was an ardent follower of Jainism.

In the extreme South the three important chiefdoms that continued to be prominent from the Maurya period were the Cheras who controlled the Malabar area, the Cholas who held sway on the south-eastern coast and the Kaveri Valley and the Pandyas whose power centre lay around the tip of the Peninsula. The Sangam texts of this period give us a considerable

amount of information on the society, ecology, polity and economy of the region these three kingdoms ruled. The above outline briefly discusses the geographical areas and the political complexion of the major foreign and indigenous kingdoms which became powerful for varied periods of time in the immediately post-Mauryan period.

4.9.2 Minor Dynasties

Numerous local or sub-regional powers also grew in this period either under the stimulus of the advancing agrarian economy or, in some regions under the stimulus of trade. Various Indian literary sources, like the Puranas, mention of such tribal names as Naga, Gardabhila and Abhira during this period. They were being ruled by their kings. Thus four Naga kings, seven Gardabhila kings, thirteen Pusyamisra, ten Abhira kings of the post-Mauryan period were listed. The Gardabhis probably emerged from the large Bhila tribe (the Bhils) of the forests of central and western India. Some of the Abhis are known to have developed into Ahir castes, some of them famous as pastoralists. Along with these we have other tribes who underwent change during this period and were known through the coins they minted in their own names or with names of their janapadas. The Yaudheyas were famous even in the time of Panini as professional warriors and during this period were said to have been suppressed by Rudradaman, the Saka king. Their territory was said to have comprised the land between the Sutlej and the Yamuna. Similarly, to the south-east of Mathura, the Arjunaya had established their autonomy towards the end of the Sunga rule.

In the Punjab, occupying the land between the Ravi and the Beas we have mention of the Audumbaras. The Kunindas were said to have become prominent between the Beas and the Yamuna around the foothills of Sivalik hills. Other tribal republics, as they were popularly known, for this period were those of the Sibis, Malavas, Trigartas and so on. These janapadas interspersed the region of northern and north-western India and at the same time independent principalities like Ayodhya, Kausharnbi, Mathura and Ahichchhatra also re-asserted their power having earlier succumbed to the Mauryas.

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For the Deccan we have some information mainly derived from coins of many minor local rulers and ruling families over whom the Satavahanas were able to establish their supremacy. For example, the families of Maharathis, Kuras and Anardas are known from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra. Besides, many local chiefs of the Deccan who issued coins emerged during this period. For the extreme south we know that the chiefs of the three main chiefdoms (Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas) were constantly at war with the minor chiefs of the less developed regions. The Velirchieftains, for instance, were famous as they controlled important outlets to the Roman trade on the south-east coast. Though attempts were made in the post-Mauryan period by various dynasties to build empires, there were several instances of each of them contending the other. Further sub-regional powers could not totally be suppressed. Whereas, on the one hand, the political decline of the Mauryas created a situation for many of these local powers to arise, on the other, the economic expansion witnessed in the Mauryan period continued unabated. The crisis under the Mauryan Empire was thus one of organisation and control of its resources and not a lack of them.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed about the sources of information for the Mauryan Empire as well as the 'notion' of the empire. Further, our sources of information about Asoka's Dhamma are his inscriptions on the basis of which we can say that Asoka preached non-violence, toleration and social responsibility. He followed these precepts in his administrative policy. It has to be noted that Dhamma cannot be equated with Buddhism. It was a set of principles gleaned from various religious traditions and was implemented to hold the empire together.

In this Unit we have also analysed the various factors for the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire and the rise of local polities in its wake. The successors of Asoka failed to maintain the integrity of the empire which they inherited from Asoka. The partition of the empire after Asoka and quick succession of rulers no doubt weakened the basis of the empire. But more important is the fact that the inherent

contradictions in the Mauryan imperial set up accentuated the crisis. The highly centralised bureaucracy with its loyalty to the king and not to the state made the administration completely individual based. And the change of king meant the change of officials and this had a very adverse effect on administration after Asoka. We have seen that how some of the views of the earlier scholars that hold Asoka and his policies responsible for the decline of the Mauryas are not acceptable in the light of the contemporary evidence. The attempt by some scholars to explain the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire in terms of economic problems has also been taken into consideration. Finally, we have also highlighted the growth of local polities both in the North and South which accelerated the process of disintegration of the Mauryan Empire.

4.11 KEY WORDS

Bureaucracy: System of government by officials responsible to an authority.

Coup d'etat: A violent or unconstitutional change in government.

Exploitation: An act of using for selfish purposes at the expense of others.

Local: Pertaining to a particular place or area.

Pacifist: Opposed to war or one who believes all war is wrong.

Regional: Characterized in a particular way referring to a tract of country or area or district. **Commercial Classes:** Section of society engaged in the activity of trade and exchange as distinct from those who are engaged in activities of production.

Dhammayatras: Asoka's predecessors used to vihara-yatras for hunting and other royal pleasures. After his visit to Bodhgaya Asoka gave up vihara-yatras and took up dhammayatras. Dhammayatras or 'excursions of Dhamma' gave him opportunities to expound Dhamma and come into direct contact with different sections of people to spread the ideas of Dhamma.

4.12 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Mention the factors which led to the disintegration of Mauryan Empire?
- 2) List the views of those scholars that advocate Asoka's policies being responsible for Mauryan decline.
- 3) Would you agree with Kosambi that the major factors for the decline of Mauryas were the economic problems that the empire faced?
- 4) Outline the major political changes in north and south India in the post-Mauryan period.

4.13 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Some Buddhist texts such as the Tripitikas and the Jatakas and those pertaining to the early Jain tradition such as the Acaranga Sutra and Sutrakritanga, are considered valuable for information on Mauryas. Later Buddhist chronicles like the Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa compiled in Sri Lanka were significant sources for the events related particularly to Asoka's reign. Foreign sources of information, Arthashastra of Kautilya, inscriptions, coins and archaeology as a source of information has, in recent years, yielded considerable data on Mauryans.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The Common view about the Mauryan Empire was that it could best be understood as a centralized bureaucratic empire. Centralized bureaucratic empires were usually established through the military and other exploits of individuals, generally in periods of turmoil, strife and unrest of various kinds, and thus the establishment of their rule is considered to have brought about peace and order. At the same time it would be natural for such empires to have enemies because in their rise to power they must have either usurped or challenged various interest groups hence the rulers have to make allies, passive or active, to implement their aims through either matrimonial or diplomatic alliances.
- 2) It emphasised on toleration and general behaviour. Dhamma stressed on toleration of people themselves and toleration of their beliefs and ideas. There was a stress on the notion of showing consideration towards slaves and servants, obedience to elders; generosity towards the needy, Brahmanas and Sramanas etc. Besides giving emphasis on non-violence, Dhamma calls for tolerance of different religious sects in an attempt to create a sense of harmony and amity.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The immediate problem for Asoka's successors was whether to continue his policy of Dhamma and its predominance in the government. This had truly been an unconventional way of governance and not a very easy way of comprehending the functioning of government. Another related feature of the political importance of Dhamma was the existence of a large body of officials of the State called Dhammamahamattas. It was not simply the question of the direct contact with the Dhamnamahamattas to ensure that they did not misuse their powers, but that of controlling the whole of the Mauryan bureaucracy that was at stake. The nature of the Mauryan State necessitated a king of strong abilities which the later Mauryans found wanting.

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UNIT 5 MAURYAN DYNASTY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASIS

STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Economic and Social Basis of Production
- 5.3 Agriculture and Land Revenue
 - 5.3.1 Agrarian Economy
 - 5.3.2 Land Revenue
- 5.4 Trade, Commerce and Township
 - 5.4.1 Trade
 - 5.4.2 Urban Economy
 - 5.4.3 Socio-Economic Changes
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Key Words
- 5.7 Questions for Review
- 5.8 Suggested Readings and References
- 5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this unit is to introduce to you one of the most important aspects of Mauryan history, namely, the organisation and changes that took place in the economy of India during this period. Though our focus will be on the Mauryan heartland, the Ganges Valley, we also intend to draw your attention to significant changes that were initiated in this period in other parts of India. After going through this unit you should be able to understand how different types of resources which are necessary for sustaining an empire were utilised, understand the main features of agrarian economy, agrarian expansion and land revenue during this period, explain how trade was organised and how it expanded, opening up new areas of activity, understand the nature of urban economy as also how towns and cities grew in the period, discuss improvements in

technology that occurred during this period and analyse how the above developments led to significant socio-economic changes.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we will familiarise you with the economy of the Mauryan period. We shall start with a general discussion on material and social basis of agricultural and non-agricultural production. Study of agrarian economy is very crucial because the bulk of the population was involved in agriculture. We shall also familiarise you with the organisation of land revenue collection. We shall also take into account the impact of agrarian economy on other spheres of economic activity. This impact was more evident in craft production and commercial activities. Growth in these areas led to improvement in technology, increased circulation of coined money and growth of urban centres.

One more important question which deserves our attention is the role of the state in the overall economic activity. We shall therefore examine to what extent the state intervened in the economy? Did this intervention help the growth of economy or hamper it? Such and related questions would be discussed in the course of this Unit.

5.2 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BASIS OF PRODUCTION

A substantial surplus of agricultural produce was created during the Mauryan times. This surplus not only transformed the material basis of society, but also gave rise to new social groups. Many of these new social groups began living in the newly emerging towns.

The Greek writer Arrian stated that it was not possible to record with accuracy the number of cities because of their immense numbers. This can be taken to indicate that there may have been an increase in the number of towns in this period. Descriptions by Megasthenes of the well organised administration of towns indicate large concentration of population in these centres. For living in these towns regulations were apparently stringent. Excavations have however, failed to produce any

substantial evidence of city planning in this period and the remains of Mauryan architecture are few. That many of the building structures were made of burnt bricks can be deduced from the fact that they have been found in large quantities from excavations in sites spread over Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Houses were made also of timber because Megasthenes speaks of wooden structures at the Mauryan capital Pataliputra. At Kumrahar (modern Patna) excavations also revealed some structures which have been identified as a pillared hall of a Mauryan palace. In terms of structures, one of the most important finds of this period was a large number of ringwells which were probably used to supply water for domestic purposes. They became widespread in other parts of the country in the subsequent ages. The hallmark of the structural development was thus the extensive use of ringwells and burnt bricks. They imply the easy availability of timber for them to be made. Use of burnt bricks and finds of Northern Black Polished Ware sherds and other remains help us gauge how widely towns were distributed in several parts of the Mauryan Empire. We shall take up these for discussion later in this Unit.

In the Ganges Valley the existence of towns with the above mentioned material remains implies a significantly strong technological base. Thus, it has been emphatically argued in the writings of D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma that this was provided by the widespread use of iron. It was well known that the Magadhan/Mauryan kingdom was located near the rich iron ore areas of southern Bihar and had access to important river and land routes. During excavations different types of iron tools like socketed axes, sickles and possibly ploughshares have been found. These tools must have made the task of clearing the thick forests of the Eastern Ganges Plains easy and also facilitated the efficiency of agriculture. Numerous small heaps of iron slags have been found scattered all over the iron belt of South Bihar. Such refuse material left behind indicates that iron smelting may not have been of a very high quality. Local furnaces which have been discovered may suggest that ordinary people probably had access to the use and manufacture of iron. Sophisticated techniques of making different kinds of iron were also known, as can be gleaned from the Arthashastra.

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The use of iron did not, however, diffuse from the Ganges Valley to other parts of the country. Independent evidence for its use and availability has been found in excavated material dated to both pre-Mauryan and Mauryan times in other parts of India as well. However, it is clear that in the Ganges Valley at least, the soil being heavy and loamy, the necessity of heavy iron tipped ploughs and plough-shares was most essential to make intensive agriculture possible. The use of iron for agricultural purposes cannot be over emphasized. That this was recognised by the State is evident from the Arthashastra which advocates that the King should maintain a monopoly over certain kinds of mining. This was perhaps also suggested because of the crucial need of metals for military progress.

Apart from sound technology, most expanding agrarian societies require a regular and cheap supply of labour for production of food grains and other commodities. How this labour is controlled and maintained was of crucial importance to understand the social basis of production. We have already indicated above that a new kind of cultivation had become important in the middle Ganges Valley, namely, paddy cultivation. This was labour-intensive and required more than the peasant family's labour at particular seasons of transplanting and harvesting. This kind of cultivation had become popular during this period. We also find that great stress was laid on bringing new land under cultivation. In these newly settled tracts shortage of labour was expected and from the Arthashastra we learn how the State could make special attempts to settle the new areas.

In this context it is suggested that the Sudras were to settle these areas. They in any case formed the bulk of agricultural and other types of manual labour. Settling new groups could be done by transferring them from overpopulated areas or deporting them from the defeated kingdoms. The latter was probably the case with the 150,000 people who were deported after the Kalinga War. The Arthashastra suggests that new villages could be formed also by inducing foreigners to immigrate to them. Other groups like carpenters and merchants were also probably settled in a similar manner.

The Sudra settlers were expected to be given some fiscal concessions and also a supply of cattle and seeds along with implements. This was probably an encouragement to enable them to cultivate virgin soil. Decaying or ruined settlements were similarly to be repopulated because with a rehabilitated settlement only agricultural production be augmented. In many cases the newly settled areas formed part of the crown lands, known as the Sita lands. On occasions they were granted to ex-village officials for cultivation. In these cases the failure on the part of the farmers to cultivate would lead to their transfer to someone else. Since these villages were a part of crown lands, obviously the King and his officials exercised strict control over them.

Thus, during the Mauryan period the two major pre-requisites namely the use and control of raw materials and manpower made it possible for agrarian expansion to take place. We next turn to take a more detailed look at the material and economic expansion, in particular in the Ganges Valley, and on a general level, in other parts of India under the Mauryas.

Check Your Progress 1

1) List the material changes that took place in the Ganges Valley under the Mauryas?

2) Explain why iron was able to transform the nature of agrarian growth?

5.3 AGRICULTURE AND LAND REVENUE

In this section we will discuss the general features of agrarian economy and land revenue organisation.

5.3.1 Agrarian Economy

In the earlier section we have seen that settlement of permanent villages was recognised in the Arthashastra as a method for the expansion of agrarian economy. These settlements ensured a sound and stable resource base for the State to extract taxes and the land tax formed the bulk of it. This process of settlement was called *janapadanivesa*, but the extent of how this was done is not clearly known. According to R.S. Sharma it would be reasonable to presume that most of the Ganges basin was brought under cultivation in this manner and some efforts may have been made in the outlying areas as well.

Growth of agriculture meant that the cultivator began to assume an increasingly important role. Megasthenes in his account of the Indian society and its division into seven classes mentions the farmers as the second class, next only to the philosophers who are mentioned as the first class and followed by the soldiers who are mentioned as the third class. Though his perception of the division of Indian society was not absolutely correct, the farmers drew his attention because they were numerically a large class devoted to land. The Classical sources specifically mention that the cultivators were without arms. Megasthenes also maintains that the peasants were left untouched during war. This seems difficult to believe as the example of the Kalinga War and the figures quoted in the Asokan inscriptions of those dead and deported must have included a fair number of peasants.

We have already seen that some lands were *Sita* or crown lands. In these areas the King's and the State's rights of possession, cultivation, mortgage and sale were naturally superior. In fact, in the Arthashastra a *Sitadhyaksa* or superintendent of agriculture was mentioned who probably supervised the cultivation works here. These areas were in all probability fertile and suited to high productivity. It was difficult to identify the origin of these State farms. It was possible that their origin lay in large estates owned by individual landowners in pre-Mauryan times. These were also areas where slaves were deployed working under direct State supervision. The advanced knowledge of agricultural

techniques, described in depth in the Arthashastra, also probably refer to these lands.

Agriculture in other areas of the Mauryan State, known as Janapada territories, was in all probability, carried on privately. In the Jataka stories there are frequent references to gahapatis and grammbhojakas. These groups are said to have employed hired labourers on land indicating their capacity to do so as a land-owning gentry. In contrast, the labourers are described to be in a pitiable condition and sometimes slaves are also mentioned. The King could own land in his personal capacity in both Sita and Janapada areas though direct references to this for this period are lacking.

Thus though it is not possible to discuss the full complexities of the land ownership pattern for the whole of India in detail, for the Ganges Valley alone one can suggest that different types of it existed. This naturally entailed varied systems of cultivations and also different levels of agricultural development. The Arthashastra references to different types of agricultural operations supervised by officials thus refer to land owned by either the State or King. However, a small section of the text deals with the sale of land and buildings. This suggests that individuals could own small areas of cultivable land which they could cultivate themselves. The most important reason for the success of agriculture in the state owned lands was the facility of irrigation provided by the State. There were rules for the regulation of water supply for the benefit of agriculturists. Megasthenes informs us that a number of officers were employed who measured the land and inspected sluices by which water was distributed into the branch channels. That irrigation facilities existed in other areas as well is indicated by the mention of an irrigation cess amounting to a fifth, a fourth or a third of the produce in the Arthashastra. Since this cess was levied only on irrigated soil it can be deduced that the State regulated irrigation facilities in areas where rainfall was scarce. In these areas a regular supply of water could ensure a normal yield of crops. Pushyagupta, one of the governors of Chandragupta Maurya, was said to have built a dam for creating a reservoir of water near Girnar in Saurashtra. This was known as Sudarshana tadaga (water tank). This

reservoir became so famous that its history can be traced to the middle of the fifth century A.D for a period of about eight hundred years.

5.3.2 Land Revenue

The Classical writers state that some villages were exempted from taxation. They were probably rare exceptions and in fact, it has been suggested that this was so because these villages may have provided soldiers to the State. It is also suggested by scholars that in order to bring virgin soil under cultivation in some villages' remission of taxes was allowed for a period of time. The essential resources needed for the Mauryan State could only be got from land revenue. Therefore, the land revenue collection had to be efficiently organised so as to expropriate the maximum possible surplus from the people. It is generally stated that the Mauryan rule constitutes a landmark in the history of the improvement of the system of taxation in ancient India. The Mauryas in fact attached great importance to the assessment of land revenue and the highest officer in charge of this was the samaharta. The sannidhata was the chief custodian of the State treasury. Since the revenue was also collected in kind, providing storage facilities was also the duty of the latter.

The classical writers mention that $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the produce were paid in tax by the peasants. They also suggest that a tribute was paid by them. Land tax (bhaga) was the main item of revenue. According to the texts, it was levied at the rate of $\frac{1}{6}$ th of the produce. But it is possible that in the Mauryan period it was quite high and levied at the rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the produce. The Lumbini Edict of Asoka says that when he visited Lumbini the birthplace of the Buddha, he exempted the village from the payment of bali and reduced the payment of bhaga to $\frac{1}{8}$ th. Even Asoka's great respect for the Buddha did not prompt the emperor to exempt the village totally from the payment of taxes.

Sharecropping was another way by which the State collected agricultural resources. The sharecroppers were in the first place provided with seeds, oxen, etc., and received arable land for cultivation. In this kind of situation the peasants probably gave half of the produce to the State. The above taxes were further supplemented by a large number of customary dues that the peasants had to pay. The Mauryas also introduced some

new taxes and made already existing ones more effective. The peasants paid a tax called pindakara paid by husbandmen, which was assessed on groups of villages. This was also customary in nature. Often the villages had to supply provisions to the royal army passing through their respective territories and this naturally increased their burden. The exact nature of hiranya is also not known, but it was probably a tax paid in cash because hiranya literally means gold.

Bali, the traditionally known levy from the Vedic times, continued under the Mauryas, and all the above taxes which are described by Kautilya in the Arthashastra must have burdened the peasantry considerably. Nonetheless, he continues to recommend that in case the State still falls short of its needs, several other fiscal measures for periods of emergency could be made use of. For example one such measure was the levy of pranaya which literally meant a gift of affection. This is a tax first mentioned by Panini but elaborated upon for the first time in the Arthashastra. It amounted to $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ or $\frac{1}{4}^{\text{th}}$ of the produce according to the nature of the soil. It was usually interpreted as a voluntary gift but once put into practice, in reality it must have become obligatory. Further, in times of emergency the cultivators could be forced to raise two crops. The importance of these measures was constantly emphasized as the country did face famines, and during these bleak periods the level of revenue collection must have naturally fallen.

As land revenue was the backbone of the Mauryan economy, the Arthashastra was careful in designing the revenue system of the State. It was particular in defining the different types of villages to be taxed as the fertility of soil varied from place to place. There is also attention paid to special categories of revenue collectors and assessors. Undoubtedly then, the Mauryan State, at least in its major areas, must have ensured a substantial land revenue collection without which the government machinery and the army would have been difficult to maintain.

Check Your Progress 2

1) List the fiscal measures which were expected to be adopted by the State during periods of emergency.

2) List the main taxes and revenue officials of the Mauryan period.

5.4 TRADE, COMMERCE AND TOWNSHIP

The non-agrarian economy of the Mauryan empire revolved around two interrelated developments: i) expansion of trade and commerce, and ii) establishment of new towns and markets. The development of the agrarian economy had given a solid economic basis to the Mauryan Empire particularly in the Ganges Valley: However, it was the expansion of commercial economy that enabled it to extend its resource base to other parts of the country.

5.4.1 Trade

Trade did not suddenly develop during this period. It was part of the larger process of economic change which had begun much before the Mauryan times. The Jataka stories have frequent references to caravan traders carrying large quantities of goods to different parts of the country. The security provided by Mauryan rule enabled internal trade to blossom. Major trade routes to West Asia and Central Asia passed through north-west India. The main trade routes in northern India were along the river Ganges and the Himalayan foothills. Major centres like Rajagriha in Magadha and Kausambi, near present-day Allahabad, were connected in this way. Pataliputra, the capital of the Mauryas, had a particularly strategic location and was connected by river and road in all four directions. The northern route going to such sites as Sravasti and Kapilavastu was connected through the city of Vaisali. From Kapilavastu this route linked up Kalsi, Hazara and eventually led up to Peshawar. Megasthenes also talked of a land route connecting the north-

west with Pataliputra. In the south it was connected to Central India and in the South-east to Kalinga. This eastern route turned southwards to finally reach Andhra and Karnataka. The other part of the eastern route continued down to the Ganges delta to Tamralipti which acted as an exit point for the south and south-east. From Kausambi moving westwards another route led to Ujjain. This continued either further west to the coast of Gujarat or west south across the Narmada and was regarded as dakshinapatha (southern route). The overland route to countries of the West went via Taxila near Islamabad.

The opening up of communications in various parts of the Indian sub-continent was the direct result of the expansion of settlements, as it facilitated movement from one place to another. This naturally fostered trade. Internal trade was considerably benefited because river transport had been improved once the forests around the valleys had been cleared under State initiative. The State's policy particularly under Bindusara and Asoka to have peaceful and friendly relations with the Greeks gave fillip to foreign trade as well.

Trade was carried on in different ways. It was intrinsically linked to the methods of production and its organisation. Primarily in north India craft production was organised on guild (sreni) lines. This was so in the pre-Mauryan period as well. Under the Mauryas when the number of artisan groups had increased we find guilds organised in different towns, inhabiting particular sections of them. These guilds generally worked and lived together in a closely knit relationship. Craft was necessarily hereditary and in most cases specialization was handed down from father to son. These guilds became very powerful in the post-Mauryan period as is evident from a number of inscriptions. Megasthenes also mentions the artisans as one of these seven castes/classes he noticed during his stay in India. The well-known guilds of the period were those of metallurgists of various kinds, carpenters, potters etc. Making of Northern Black Polished Ware is a good example of craft activities. It became a specialized kind of pottery-making craft and its availability outside the Ganges Valley was limited. This indicates that it was a technique developed in this part of the country and was perhaps dependent on a particular type of clay available here.

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Like the artisans, the merchants were also organised along guild lines. Certain kinds of merchants were connected to particular artisan groups which made distribution of goods easier. They too inhabited identifiable parts of the cities which came to be associated with their professions. It is however, important to note that the State administration under the Mauryas also took up the organisation of trade. This administrative control on production and distribution made it more efficient. This did not mean that it directly interfered with and changed the guild organisations. On the other hand, it increased its control on the distribution of their goods and itself became a producer. At another level, it gradually converted some crafts into some sort of small scale industries. The State did this by directly employing some of the artisans like armourers, shipbuilders, builders in stone, etc. They were exempt from payment of tax because they rendered compulsory labour service to the State. Other artisans like spinners, weavers, miners etc., who worked for the State were liable to tax.

The above mentioned steps to organise trade and commodity production were part and parcel of State policy. This policy was aimed at augmenting its efficiency in economic spheres of activity and its revenues. Megasthenes mentions a superintendent of commerce whose duty was to fix prices of goods and also to interfere if there was a glut in any commodity. He is also mentioned in the Arthashastra as panyadhyaksa. This text lists the various officials that were in charge of the different economic activities. The office of the samsthadyaksa that looked after the markets was in fact to check the wrong practices of the traders. The pautavadyaksa or superintendent of weights and measures exerted a strict control on maintaining standard weights and measures. State boats that facilitated transport were put under the charge of a navadyaksa. He helped in regulating river transport and collecting ferry charges. All traders had to pay taxes and custom dues ranging from $1/5^{\text{th}}$ to $1/25^{\text{th}}$ of the value of goods. These were supposed to be collected by a superintendent of tolls called the sulkadyaksa.

Where the State produced goods, different categories of officials looked after particular departments. These goods were called rajapanya. The State was careful to choose those areas of commodity production and

trade that were essential for its functioning and yielded good revenues. Sometimes State goods could also be sold by private traders as their network of distribution was more well-organised and widespread. Despite the above changes it would be right to conclude that the majority of artisans either continued to work individually or within the complex structure of the guilds. The guilds continued to serve the very important purpose of cohesively organising petty producers and most importantly, controlling them. Even the artisans found it advantageous to join them since this eliminated the expenses of working alone or competing with others of the same profession. From the State's point of view the guilds facilitated the collection of taxes. Finally since they concentrated locally and also specialized in particular crafts there was a strengthening of that particular trade. We need however, to conclude with the point that guilds were not found to flourish in all parts of India during this period. Particularly in the extreme South, even in the post-Mauryan period it is difficult to find mention of them. The major pre-requisite for guilds to flourish was of course an urban milieu to which we now turn our attention.

5.4.2 Urban Economy

The process of urbanism which had begun in the pre-Mauryan period witnessed further growth in the Mauryan period. Two major sections of population inhabited the towns, namely, artisans and merchants and the officials of the government. The urban economy characterised by the activities of the manufacturers of goods and of merchants as also by a system of exchange began to spread from the Ganges Valley to other areas of Western and central India, Deccan and South India. Proliferation of rural settlements and the prosperity of the gahapatis enabled the social base of urban centres to expand further. In many cases it was the rich rural families that developed contacts with towns and provided financial support needed particularly by merchant groups.

We introduced this Unit with a discussion on the material remains of the Mauryan phase to show that the urban centres had definitely increased during this period. It is however impossible to measure this growth. Going by Kautilya's Arthashastra we learn that through a process of

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durganivesa or durgavidhana, the State founded walled towns. These towns were said to be peopled by priests, nobles, soldiers and also merchants, artisans and others. There are also detailed descriptions in this text on the protection of towns and their layout so that economic regulations could be carried out properly. Indeed, the Arthashastra viewed towns (durga), as it viewed the janapadas, as an important source of revenue. The taxes received from towns paid rich dividends to the State and therefore, development and administration of towns was given much importance by the Mauryas. In fact, when mention was made of taxing guilds located in the capital or durga, we get an impression that those in the countryside enjoyed exemption. This may have been because town population was easier to regulate and organise.

Megasthenes' detailed description of the Mauryan capital gives us some idea about how towns were administered and which areas of urban economy were regulated in the interest of the State. He tells us that Pataliputra was administered by thirty officials who were divided into six Committees of five members each. Of these six Committees four were related to economic activity. These were Committees dealing with industrial arts, trade and commerce, the supervision of the public sale of manufactured goods and the collection of tax on articles sold. The other two committees were concerned with the welfare of foreigners and the registration of births and deaths. The general administration of law and order in the cities was thus important to ensure the proper functioning of its economic activities.

The above description may apply to other similar big and developed cities in the heartland of the Mauryan Empire. In the absence of enough information it was not possible to describe the exact nature of the administration of small cities, port towns and pilgrimage centres. What was however, important to emphasize was that the development to the Mauryan economy in general made it possible for towns of various kinds to flourish. Population mobility and interaction between social groups was necessary for the urban economy to remain healthy and prosperous. This could be ensured by a certain degree of political stability in the metropolitan and core areas of the empire.

Another significant aspect of the urban economy was that it created the situation for the development of transactions in cash and the circulation of coined money. Though the use of currency began in an earlier period, it became fairly common during the Mauryan period because of the development of commerce. Its use in trade was self-evident but the importance of cash in the economy can be gauged from the fact that it was probably used to pay salaries of the officials. The Arthashastra lists for us the range of salaries expected to be paid and this varied from 48,000 panas to 60 panas annually. For such a powerful cash economy to function the minting of coins and the supply of metals like silver and copper required to do so were of prime importance. That these were harnessed by the Mauryas is evident from the innumerable punch-marked, mostly silver, coins which were assignable to this period. Of these the majority are stated to be from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which constituted the core area of the empire.

For the kind of urban economy that envisaged substantial State control, the State also had to maintain a monopoly in certain important spheres of activity. Thus, the Arthashastra provides for a superintendent of mines called *akaradhyaksa* whose chief function was to look for new mines and reopen old ones. Like mining metals another area of State monopoly was mining salt. The importance of different kinds of metals not only for minting coins but for such important commodities as making weapons cannot be underestimated. Thus, we find the mention of a superintendent of iron called *lohadhyaksha* in the Arthashastra. Apart from equipping soldiers with arms, the government was probably also concerned about supplying implements for agriculture. The concern for keeping a monopoly over mining and trading in mineral products thus secured for the Mauryan State the most crucial raw materials. Proper utilization of these in turn secured for them a greater return in both agrarian and non-agrarian sectors.

Once economic control of urban centres was established and their administration well regulated, control over various *janapadas* through these towns also increased. Due to an increase in commercial transactions, the centres of exchange and trade had also increased in number. In the next sub-section we shall discuss the different avenues

through which socio-economic changes reached out to different parts of Mauryan India. Again as in other spheres of economy, the Mauryan control of such centres varied from one region to another.

5.4.3 Socio-Economic Changes

From the above discussion it appears that the most distinguishing feature of the Mauryan economy was the emphasis on State control in agriculture, trade and industry. We have shown that it was necessary for the State to levy a variety of taxes. The requirements of resources for the Mauryan State were very high. The taxes realised from the region of Magadha and adjoining areas were not enough to meet this demand. Therefore, attempts were made to control resources in other parts of the country as well. For example, Kalinga, the Karnataka plateau and Western India where Asokan inscriptions are found, were such areas. To regulate certain types of economic activities in such far off regions, the Mauryas worked out different strategies. This depended on the nature of resources the particular region offered.

The conquest of Kalinga, for instance, offered control of an agriculturally rich area as well as the control of important trade routes that passed through it to the mineral rich areas of South India. Thus the main motive behind acquiring such regions as Karnataka seems to have been that they were rich in gold and other precious materials. What about those areas where Mauryan inscriptions are not found? It had been recently argued by Romila Thapar that it was difficult to gauge the political or economic control of the Mauryas in such regions. Northern Deccan, the Punjab and Sind and Rajasthan may be cited as examples of such areas. What was the extent of their influence on the economies of the areas where their presence was indicated? Here it may be suggested that no large scale restructuring was done even in these areas. The main interest of the Mauryas was the exploitation of resources of these areas and they depended on influential sections of population in these areas for doing this. It may be pointed out that most regions outside the Ganges Valley were at different levels of economic development in this period. Because of this uneven development, radical change and restructuring of all these regions was very difficult.

The Arthashastra and the inscriptions of Asoka tell us about the tribes (atavikas, aranyacaras) that inhabited the various parts of the empire. They often separated the more developed areas from the less developed areas. Kautilya's advice to the State was to win them over to a settled agrarian life. He devotes a full chapter to how tribes could be systematically broken up and several methods, fair or unfair, were deployed to do this. This was necessary in order that groups of five to ten families could settle down permanently for bringing more land under cultivation. Asoka's attitude towards the tribes was paternalistic, but he too warns them that in case they failed to conform or disobeyed orders of the Mahanratras, stern action would be taken against them. Controlling of the forest tribes was important from two points of view:

- i) Firstly, it was necessary for new agrarian settlements to be secure as disturbances from tribes would interrupt their economic development.
- ii) Secondly, trade routes often bordered or passed through tribal regions and these had to be made secure.

It was difficult to have an exact idea of how many tribal groups were thus converted to peasants, but, that the process was encouraged by the State was significant to take note of. Archaeological evidence for many parts of India shows habitation sites that were not fully developed as urban centres during this period. The case of the innumerable megalith sites, dated to the third century B.C or so in many parts of the Deccan and South India indicate simple farming or pastoral communities with only a limited knowledge of craft production.

It was impossible to totally change the cultural pattern of a vast country like India in the third century B.C but at the same time Mauryan rule did initiate some major changes in the material and socio-economic setting which bore fruits in the subsequent centuries.

Some of these changes may be briefly highlighted. In many areas of the Mauryan empire such as north and west Bengal, Kalinga, the Deccan and also in the neighbouring south, the beginning of early historical cultural pattern dated to only Mauryan or post-Mauryan periods. This means that, impressive human settlements like towns and cities in which different social groups lived, use of coins, use of scripts, use of sophisticated objects on a significant scale--all began in these regions

only from the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods. This change in material culture implies that there were not only changes in technology and material life in general but also in social organisations and in ideas. Society started becoming organised in a much more complex manner, resulting in separation between social groups and ultimately in the institution of the State. The fact that we find local states appearing in many of the regions after the Mauryas suggests that the process of major socio-economic change associated with the production of surplus in society began in many parts of India through contact with the important regions of the Mauryan Empire.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed various aspects related to economic changes in India during the Mauryan period. With the help of recent writings on the subject we have introduced you to the view that the Mauryas did not exert direct economic control in equal measure in all regions of India. Their interest in establishing economic contacts with different parts of the empire essentially varied. In the major regions of the empire, the degree of control was certainly greater and more direct. In this Unit you have studied: the material and social basis of production which was fundamental for economic growth, the main elements of agrarian expansion and the patterns of land ownership, how the State appropriated the agrarian surplus through the levy of various land taxes, the dynamics of trade and its organisation and the extent to which the State interfered in this sphere of economic activity, and the various aspects of the urban economy and technology.

5.6 KEY WORDS

Cess: Tax.

Classical Sources: Refers to the Greek sources for example the *Indika* of Megasthenes. **Diffusion:** Spread from a centre of origin.

Fiscal: Economic and financial measures.

Gahapati: Head of rich land-owning family.

Megalith: Megaliths as a general term refer to burials in which big (mega) blocks of stone (liths) are used. The megaliths could be of different phases of culture, and even now megaliths are built in some areas of India. In the context of the present Block, the megaliths more specifically relate to the cultures of regions like Vidarbha, the Deccan and the south, where Megalithic culture phase preceded the emergence of early historical culture characterised by the use of permanent structures, cities and towns, use of scripts and coins, and of kingdoms.

Samaharta: Assessor of land revenue.

Sannidhata: Treasurer.

Sedentary: Settled permanently.

Sita Lands: Lands owned/controlled directly by the King.

Varna: Generally translated as 'caste' or 'class' indicating the traditional division of Brahmanical society into four groups.

5.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Outline important trade routes in Mauryan India.
- 2) To what extent did the Mauryan State interfere in commodity production and trade?

5.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) A substantial surplus of agricultural produce was created during the Mauryan times. This surplus not only transformed the material basis of society, but also gave rise to new social groups. Many of these new social groups began living in the newly emerging towns. The hallmark of the structural development was thus the extensive use of ring wells and burnt bricks. They imply the easy availability of timber for them to be made. Use of burnt bricks and finds of Northern Black Polished Ware sherds and other remains help us gauge how widely towns were distributed in several parts of the Mauryan Empire.

2) During excavations different types of iron tools like socketed axes, sickles and possibly ploughshares have been found. These tools must have made the task of clearing the thick forests of the Eastern Ganges Plains easy and also facilitated the efficiency of agriculture. However, it is clear that in the Ganges Valley at least, the soil being heavy and loamy, the necessity of heavy iron tipped ploughs and plough-shares was most essential to make intensive agriculture possible.

Check Your Progress 2

1) The peasants paid a tax called pindakara paid by husbandmen, which was assessed on groups of villages. Often the villages had to supply provisions to the royal army passing through their respective territories and this naturally increased their burden. The exact nature of hiranya is also not known, but it was probably a tax paid in cash because hiranya literally means gold. Bali, the traditionally known levy from the Vedic times, continued under the Mauryas, and all the above taxes which are described by Kautilya in the Arthashastra must have burdened the peasantry considerably.

2) Akaradhyaksa, Panas, Panyadhyaksa, Rajapanya etc.

UNIT 6 GUPTA POLITY

STRUCTURE

6.0 Objectives

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Political Landscape

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6.2.2 West and Central India

6.2.3 Deccan and South India

6.3 Emergence of Guptas

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6.4 Chandragupta II-Vikramaditya

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6.6 Skandagupta-Kramaditya

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6.9 Pushyabhuties--Thaneshwar and Kanauj

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6.11 Post-Harsha Period

6.12 Let us Sum Up

6.13 Keywords

6.14 Questions For Review

6.15 Suggested Readings and References

6.16 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to know about the political conditions in India at the beginning of the fourth century A.D, familiarise yourself with the circumstances that led to the rise of Gupta power, know about the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta empire, understand

the order of succession of the Gupta rulers and their military exploits and understand the process that led to the decline of Guptas.

Further you will also learn about the political changes that took place after the disintegration of the Gupta empire, know about the emergence of various political powers which were gradually gaining importance, discuss the origin and growth of the power of the Pushyabhutis of Thaneshwar and Kanauj, know about some of the events during the reign of King Harsha, enlighten yourself about the administrative system of Harsha and know about the political condition of north India after Harsha's death.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, after briefly discussing the political situation of the fourth century A.D we go on to analyse the historical situation which led to the rise of the Gupta dynasty. The attempt here will be to give you a political outline of the period. We take into account the controversies relating to the succession of Gupta kings and at the same time discuss some of their achievements which made possible the formation and consolidation of the empire. Kings like Samudragupta, Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta and Skandagupta figured very prominently in the history of the empire. The Unit also takes into account some of the problems faced by the Gupta kings and the factors responsible for the decline of Gupta rule.

In the sixth century A.D. the disintegration of the Gupta Empire gradually paved way for the growth of many smaller kingdoms. In certain regions new kingdoms emerged and in other areas the dynasties which had earlier accepted Gupta suzerainty now declared their independence. For example, kings like Yasodharma and political powers like the Maukharis, the Hunas and the later Magadhan Guptas were the new powers. Besides these the Pushyabhutis, the Gaudas, the Varmans and the Maitrakas also grew in importance. This Unit attempts to give a brief sketch of the political history of these kingdoms. It also takes into account certain other aspects like the nature of the administrative system under Harshavardhana of the Pushyabhuti family, political patronage to Buddhism, etc.

6.2 POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

In the beginning of the fourth century A.D. no large State structure existed in India. You have read previously that in the post-Mauryan period two large state structures had emerged in north India and in the Deccan. These were the Kushana State of the north and the Satavahana State of the Deccan. But although the Kushanas and Saka chiefs continued to rule even in early fourth century A.D., their power had become considerably weak and the Satavahana state had disappeared before the middle of the third century A.D. This does not however mean that there was complete political vacuum. There was no major political power but there were minor powers and new families of rulers were emerging. It was in this situation that the Guptas, a family of uncertain origins began to build up an empire from the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Before we take up the history of this empire, we present an outline of the political situation of this period by taking up different regions separately.

6.2.1 North West and Northern India

Before the middle of the third century A.D. the rule of the Sassanians had been established in Iran and the Sassanian rulers started claiming overlordship over Kushana kings. The mighty Kushana kings of north-western India were reduced to the position of subordinates and the Sassanian authority also extended to Sindh and certain other areas. However, a large number of coins which were based on earlier Kushana coins and were found in Afghanistan and Punjab suggest that several branches of rulers, some Kushana continued to rule in the region. There were also the coins of Kidara Kushana and his successors, in Afghanistan, Kashmir and western Punjab and it was possible that some of these rulers were contemporaries of the early Gupta rulers.

In other parts of the Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, old coins again point to the existence of a number of republican states. These were states which were not ruled by a single king but possibly by several chiefs; it was only occasionally that one finds a chief claiming the status of the King of a clan. The Madras, mentioned in connection with the exploits of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta, was located in the Punjab; the Yaudheyas

were extremely powerful with their centre in present day Haryana and the Malavas were located in Rajasthan. There were many other republican states like these and some of them were even mentioned in the Gupta records. Several branches of the Nagas who became very powerful in Mathura and other centres after the decline of Kushana power in north India were also known. Some of the north Indian rulers who were defeated by Samudragupta were definitely of Naga origin.

6.2.2 West and Central India

You have read previously that a branch of Kshatrapa rulers established themselves in Western India in the post-Mauryan period. The line of Chastana, to which the well-known Saka Kshatrapa Rudradaman belonged, continued to rule till 304 A.D and then a new line of rulers began to rule. However, Kshatrapa rule came to an end towards the close of the fourth century A.D. when Gupta ruler Chandragupta II conquered and annexed their territories.

In the region of ancient Vidarbha, the core of which was Nagpur in northeast Maharashtra, a new power had emerged by the middle of the third century A.D. This power was that of the Vakatakas, a new line of rulers started by Vindhyasakti. Vakataka power soon became formidable and a branch was also established at Vatsagulma (modern Basim in Akola district). The Vakataka family later on came into close contact with the Guptas, particularly after a matrimonial alliance was formed between the two families.

6.2.3 Deccan and South India

The decline of the Satavahana State of the Deccan was followed by the emergence of a number of new royal families in different parts of the Deccan. In coastal Andhra, there was a succession of families like the Ikshvakus, the Salankayanas and others. In Karnataka, the most important ruling family was that of the Kadambas. The Kadamba power was founded by Brahmin Mayurasarman whose Talagunda inscription gives some interesting details of the circumstances leading to the establishment of the kingdom and also some idea regarding its extent. The ruling family of the Pallavas, which became a formidable power in Tamil Nadu till the

ninth century was known from their records to have started ruling from the middle of the third century A.D. The inscriptions of the early Pallava rulers were written in the Prakrit language and were in the form of copper plates. They are generally assigned to the period between century 250-350 A.D. Sivaskandarasman of this family, who ruled in the beginning of the fourth century A.D. was a powerful ruler and his kingdom included parts of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Kanchi or Kanchipuram in the Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu became the capital of the Pallavas and when Gupta ruler Samudragupta led an expedition to the south, he encountered Pallavan king Vismigopa at Kanchi. It must however be noted that in many areas like Bengal, Orissa, forest regions of Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere kingdoms were emerging for the first time. This was a new trend and was very significant for the later course of political history.

6.3 EMERGENCE OF GUPTAS

The ancestry and early history of the Gupta family were little known, and have naturally given rise to various speculations. Names ending in Gupta, such as Sivagupta which occurs in a Satavahana inscription were sometimes taken to suggest their ancestry. But these suggestions were rather far-fetched. Different scholars also place the original home of the Guptas differently. Some would place it in north Bengal, some in Magadha in Bihar and some in U.P. on the basis of the following arguments it may, at the moment, be suggested that the original core of the Gupta territory lay in eastern U.P. Allahabad pillar inscription, the earliest inscription recording the achievements of an early Gupta ruler, Samudragupta, comes from this region. The nature of the coin-hoards of the Guptas, found in this region, suggests this. The description of early Gupta territories in the *Puranas* may also point to this. It is possible that in the closing decades of the 3rd century A.D. the Guptas were subordinates of a branch of the later Kushanas ruling in north-western India. However, literary and archaeological sources indicate that they became independent in the second decade of the fourth century A.D. Inscriptions tell us that Srigupta was the first king and Ghatotkacha

was the next to follow him. Chandragupta I was the first independent king with the title Maharajadhiraja. After declaring his independence in Magadha, he with the help of a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis, enlarged his kingdom. We know about this alliance from a special category of coins. These coins have Chandragupta and his queen Kumaradevi engraved on the obverse and a seated goddess on the reverse with a legend Lichchhavayah (i.e. the Lichchhavis). These coins were made of gold and this fact in addition to the fact that the Guptas followed the weight system of Kushana gold coins suggests that the Guptas had been in contact with the Kushana territories.

There were no concrete evidences to determine the boundaries of Chandragupta's kingdom. But it was assumed that it covered parts of Bihar, U.P. and Bengal. Chandragupta I was said to have also started a new era from 319-320 A.D. It was not clear from any records that he started this era which came to be known as Gupta Samvat, but since Chandragupta I is mentioned as a Maharajadhiraja he was credited with the founding of the era. It was during the times of his son Samudragupta that the kingdom grew into an empire.

6.3.1 Samudragupta-The Indian Napoleon

An inscription engraved (at a later date) on the Asokan pillar at Allahabad (known as Prayagaprasasti) gives us information about Samudragupta's accession and conquests. Harisena, an important official of the state, had composed 33 lines which were engraved on the pillar. The inscription mentions that Maharajadhiraja Chandragupta I in a highly emotional tone declared his son Samudragupta as his successor. This caused joy among the courtiers and heart-burning among those of equal birth. It can be presumed that other princes might have put forward their contending claims which were put to rest by this declaration.

Further, the discovery of some gold coins bearing the name of Kacha has generated a controversy relating to this. The controversy has arisen because:

i) in many respects Kacha's coins were similar to the coins of Samudragupta,

ii) the name of Kacha did not appear in the official lists of Gupta rulers, as they were available in the Gupta inscriptions.

Various interpretations have been given in this regard. According to one interpretation Samudragupta's brothers revolted against him and placed Kacha, the eldest brother, on the throne. However he died in the war of succession.

Another view mentions that these coins were issued by Samudragupta in the memory of his brother. A third view mentions Kacha as the initial name of Samudragupta and the later name was adopted only after the conquest of south. There was no solution to the controversy as each view has arguments in favour or against. We could only say that since the number of Kacha coins found so far was somewhat limited his hold over the throne would have been for a very short duration. Also that Samudragupta, in spite of Chandragupta's abdication, did face problems in relation to accession to the throne but ultimately he emerged victorious.

6.3.2 Proliferation

For the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta power Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests. This initiated a process which culminated in the formation of the Gupta Empire. However, we have to take note here of the fact that in certain regions particularly in the South-- he let the kings, whom he had defeated, rule over their regions. Of course, they accepted his suzerainty and paid tributes. Such a policy adopted in relation to the far flung areas might have paid dividends in solving problems of communication and ineffective control, hence bringing about stability for the time being. Let us briefly discuss the aggressive campaigns taken by Samudragupta in various regions. We may mention again that we come to know about all the campaigns of Samudragupta only from one record, the Prayagaprasasti of Harisena.

1) Campaigns of Aryavarta

Some historians were of the view that Samudragupta carried his victorious campaign of Aryavarta at one time. However, some other historians, assuming that the Prayagaprasasti mentions the conquests of Samudragupta in a chronological order, have opined that there were two campaigns in north India. This was because the prasasti first mentions

three Aryavarta kings, then it goes on to mention his southern campaign and again mentions nine Aryavarta kings. It appears that taking advantage of the war of succession, which Samudragupta had to face, certain rulers attempted to establish their dominance. It might be in this context that Samudragupta defeated Achyuta, Nagasena and Kota-Kulaja. There were no details regarding these conquests or regarding the identity of the specific regions over which they ruled. However, historians have identified Achyuta as ruling over Ahichchatra, Nagasena over Gwalior area and Kota-Kulaja as ruler of the Kota family in east Punjab and Delhi. Though differences continue to prevail over these identifications it was clear that Samudragupta, after defeating them, established firm control not only over the Ganga Valley but also over some adjacent regions.

2) Campaign of South India

The Prayagaprasasti mentions twelve rulers from dakshinapatha or south India who were defeated by Samudragupta. These were:

Mahendra of Kosala (Raipur, Durg, Sambalpur and Bilaspur districts)

Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Jeypore, forest region of Orissa)

Mantaraja of Kaurata (Probably Sonpur area in Madhya Pradesh or Plain country to the north-east of Mahendra hill)

Mahendragiri of Pishtapura (Pithasuram, East Godavari district)

Svamidatta of Kottura (Ganjam district)

Damana of Erandapalla (Chicacole or West Godavari district)

Vishnugopa of Kanchi (Chingleput district)

Nilaraja of Avamukta (Godavari Valley)

Hasti-varman of Vengi (Cellor in the Krishna-Godavari delta)

Ugresena of Palakka (Nellore district)

Kubera of Devarastra (Yellamanchiti in Visakhapatnam district)

Dhananjaya of Kushthalpura (possibly in North Arcot district in Tamilnadu)

However, again there were differences among historians as to the specific identifications of these kings and their kingdoms. The Prayagaprasasti says that Samudragupta showed favour to the Dakshinapatha kings by first capturing them (grahana) and then releasing them (moksha). He pursued a completely different policy with

regard to the kings of Aryavarta or north India. He not only defeated them but also annexed their territories which became integrated into the Gupta Empire. The north Indian kings defeated by Samudragupta were: Rudradwa, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarma, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Archyuta, Nandi, Balavarmna and others. It was impossible to identify all of them but it was certain that they were ruling in different parts of northern India. Some of them were obviously Naga rulers who had been powerful in several regions before the Guptas. Rulers like Chandravarma who ruled in West Bengal represented new ruling families. The Prasasti further says that Samudragupta reduced all states in the forest regions to the position of servants.

In another category were mentioned the frontier kingdoms like Samatata (in southeast Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Nepala (Nepal) and others and the republican states of the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, etc. They paid him tributes of all kinds, carried out his orders and paid him homage. Rulers of another category of states acknowledged his sovereignty in a different way. They pleased him by self-surrender, offering (their own) daughters in marriage, and a request for the administration of their own districts and provinces. This means that they remained independent but their independence had to be approved by Samudragupta. In this category were included the foreign rulers of north-western India like the later Kushanas and the Saka chief and residents of different island countries including Simhala or Sri Lanka. Many of the claims made by Harisena, the composer of Prayagaprasasti were highly exaggerated but many of the claims were also genuine. The military foundations of the Gupta Empire were laid by Samudragupta and his successors built upon these foundations.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss in the efforts made by Samudragupta for the expansion of Gupta Empire.

2) List five minor powers in north India at the beginning of fourth century A.D.

6.4 CHANDRAGUPTA II-- VIKRAMADITYA

The Gupta inscriptions mention Chandragupta II as Samudragupta's successor. But on the basis of literary sources, some copper coins and inscriptions it was suggested that the successor was Samudragupta's other son Ramagupta. Visakhadatta's drama *Devichandraguptam* mentions that Chandragupta II killed his elder brother Ramagupta. He did this because Ramagupta was facing defeat at the hands of the Sakas and in order to save the kingdom, he had agreed to surrender his wife to the Saka king. Chandragupta protested, and went to the Saka camp in the disguise of the queen Dhruvadevi. He was successful against the Saka king but as a result of the subsequent hostility with his brother he killed him and married his wife Dhruvadevi.

Certain other texts like the *Harshacharita*, *Kavyamimansa*, etc. also refer to this episode. Some copper coins bearing the name Ramagupta have also been found and inscriptions on the pedestals of some Jaina images found at Vidisa bear the name Maharaja Ramgupta. Similarly, Dhruvadevi was described as mother of Govindagupta (Chandragupta's son) in a Vaisali seal. We can say that Chandragupta ascended the throne at a time when there were problems emerging again and he had to lead military campaigns to establish Gupta supremacy once again. He entered into matrimonial alliances with the Nagas by marrying princess Kuberanaga whose daughter Prabhavati was later on married to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka family. Though there was no record like the *Prayagaprasasti* to describe the events of his reign we do get information about Chandragupta's campaigns and successes from certain inscriptions, literary sources and coins.

He defeated the Saka king Rudrasimha III and annexed his kingdom. This brought an end to Saka Kshatrapa rule in western India and added the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and west Malwa to the Gupta Empire. The details of Chandragupta II's campaigns against the Sakas were not known. His matrimonial alliances with the Vakatakas and the Nagas must have been of tremendous significance in his preparations for the campaigns. Two inscriptions at the Udayagiri caves near Sanchi and one inscription at Sanchi, all referring to Chandragupta II and to his subordinate rulers and military officials, also suggested that he was present in eastern Malwa for some time preparing for the campaigns.

That his conquest of the territories of the Sakas was complete is proved beyond doubt because we no longer find any Saka coins minted after this period, although Saka coins were being minted without a break for almost four hundred years previously. The Guptas, from the time of Chandragupta, started minting Saka type silver coins for this region. They only added their own distinct symbols on these coins; otherwise, the coins were like Saka coins in circulation till then. This definitely shows that the Saka areas came within the control of Chandragupta II. The success of Chandragupta II against the Sakas seems to have developed later on into the tradition of Sakari Vikramaditya, that is, of Vikramaditya, who was an enemy of the Sakas. 'King Chandra' whose exploits had been mentioned in the Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription, which is located in the Qutab-Minar complex in Delhi was identified by many scholars with Chandragupta II. According to this inscription Chandra crossed the Sindhu region of seven rivers and defeated Valhikas (identified with Bactria). Some scholars identify Chandragupta II with the hero of Kalidasa's work Raghuvamasa because Raghu's exploits appear comparable with those of Chandragupta. The Mehrauli inscription also mentions Chandragupta's victory over enemies from Vanga (Bengal).

On the basis of these evidences it can be suggested that Chandragupta II was able to extend the frontiers of the Gupta Empire to western, north-western and eastern India. An important incident which took place during this period was the visit of Fa-Hien, a Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in search of Buddhist texts. In his memoirs he had given a vivid description of the places he visited and certain social and administrative

aspects related to them. However, he did not mention the name of the King in his accounts. But he spoke highly of the King of Madhyadesa, the region which was directly ruled by the Gupta monarch, under whom the people were prosperous and happy. Chandragupta II was also known for his patronage to men of letters and he ruled till about 415-16 A.D.

6.5 KUMARAGUPTA I- MAHENDRADITYA

Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta. We get information about him from certain inscriptions and coins. For example: The earliest known inscription of his period was from Bilsad (Etah district) which was dated 415 A.D. The Karamdanda (Faizabad) inscription of Kumaragupta's minister (436 A.D.) mentions his fame having spread to the four oceans. A stone inscription from Mandsor (436 A.D.) mentions Kumaragupta as reigning over the whole earth. The Damodarpur Copper Plate inscriptions (433 A.D. and 447 A.D.) refer to him as Maharajadhiraja and show that he himself appointed the governor (Uparika) of Pundravardhana Bhukti (or province) being the biggest administrative division in the empire. The last known date of Kumaragupta was from a silver coin dated 455 A.D. (Gupta Era 136). The wide area over which his inscriptions were distributed indicates that he ruled over Magadha and Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west. It has been suggested that towards the last year of his reign the Gupta Empire faced foreign invasion which was checked by the efforts of his son Skandagupta. He maintained cordial relationship with the Vakatakas which had been established through matrimonial alliances earlier.

6.6 SKANDAGUPTA-KRAMADITYA

Skandagupta, who succeeded Kumaragupta-I, was perhaps the last powerful Gupta monarch. To consolidate his position he had to fight the Pushyamitras and the country faced Hunan invasion from across the frontiers in the northwest. However, Skandagupta was successful in throwing the Huns back. It appears that these wars adversely affected

the economy of the empire and the gold coinage of Skandagupta bears testimony to that. In comparison to the gold coins of the earlier rulers the types of gold coins minted by Skandagupta were limited. In addition to following the earlier system of weights, he introduced a new, heavier weight system for gold coins but generally his coins had less gold in them than earlier coins. Moreover, he appears to have been the last Gupta ruler to mint silver coins in western India. However, the Junagadh inscription of his reign tells us about the public works undertaken during his times. The Sudarsana Lake (originally built during the Maurya times) burst due to excessive rains and in the early part of his rule his governor Parnadatta got it repaired. This indicates that the state undertook the task of public works. The last known date of Skandagupta was 467 A.D. from his silver coins.

Rise and Growth of Gupta Rulers after Skandagupta

It was not very clear in what order the successors of Skandagupta ruled. Skandagupta himself may not have been the rightful heir to the throne and therefore he had to fight other contenders. This may be the reason why a seal inscription traces a line of Gupta rulers after Skandagupta from Kumaragupta-I and his son Purugupta and not Skandagupta. Secondly, it was probable that the division of the Gupta Empire into many parts already began towards the close of Skandagupta's reign. Thus an inscription from western Malwa, recorded in the last year of Skandagupta did not refer to him but to some other rulers beginning with Chandragupta II.

Some of the successors of Skandagupta, mentioned in inscriptions, were Budhagupta, Vainyagupta, Bhanagupta, Narasimhagupta Baladitya, Kumaragupta II and Vismigupta. It was unlikely that all of them ruled over a vast empire, as Chandragupta II and Kumaragupta I had done in an earlier period. The Guptas continued to rule till about 550 A.D. but by then their power had already become very insignificant.

6.7 DECLINE OF GUPTA EMPIRE

In this section we deal with some of the factors that contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta Empire.

1) Huna Attacks

From the time of Kumaragupta-I the north-west borders had been threatened by the Hunas a Central Asian tribe which was successfully moving in different directions and was establishing pockets of rule in north-western, northern and western India. But their attacks were repulsed during that period. However, towards the end of the fifth century A.D. the Huna chief Tormana was able to establish his authority over large parts of western India and in central India. Mihirakula, his son, further extended the dominions. Thus, the Huna attacks caused a major blow to the Gupta authority particularly in northern and western regions of the empire.

2) Administrative Fragility

The policy adopted by the Guptas in the conquered areas was to restore the authority of local chiefs or kings once they had accepted Gupta suzerainty. In fact, no efforts were made to impose a strict and effective control over these regions. Hence it was natural that whenever there was a crisis of succession or a weak monarchy within the Gupta Empire these local chiefs would re-establish their independent authority. This created a problem for almost every Gupta King who had to reinforce his authority. The constant military campaigns were a strain on the state treasury. Towards the end of the fifth century A.D and beginning of sixth century A.D, taking advantage of the weak Gupta emperors, many regional powers re-asserted their authority and in due course declared their independence.

Besides these, there were many other reasons which contributed to the decline of Guptas. For example, it had been argued that the Guptas issued land grants to the Brahmana donees and in this process surrendered the revenue and administrative rights in favour of the donees. Further, it was believed that the Samanta system in which the Samantas or minor rulers, who ruled as subordinates to the central authority, started to consolidate itself in the Gupta period. This was also believed to be the reason why Gupta administrative structure became so loose. There was diversity of opinion as to how the system originated

and regarding the details of the system, but the presence of many Samantas within the empire does show that they wielded power almost independently of the Gupta authority. There was no doubt that division within the imperial family, concentration of power in the hands of local chiefs or governors, loose administrative structure of the empire etc. contributed towards the disintegration of the Gupta Empire.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the military campaigns of Chandragupta II.

2) Discuss the factors which brought about the disintegration of Gupta Empire.

6.8 REGIONAL HEAVYWEIGHTS

In the absence of a strong power there emerged quite a number of regional powers. These powers, representing different dynasties, established their kingdoms and were often at war with each other. Here we briefly mention some of these powers:

6.8.1 Yasodharman-Janendra

During the reign of Kumaragupta I his feudatory Bandhuvarman ruled over Mandasor as it was a major Centre of western Malwa. He belonged to the Aulikara family which perhaps ruled there up to the beginning of the sixth century A.D. Two stone pillar inscriptions from Mandasor in Madhya Pradesh, one of which is dated in 532 A.D., refer to a powerful king Yasodharman. One of these inscriptions reports the victories of Yasodharman. The inscription described him as the victor of all those lands which had not been subdued even by the Guptas. But the names of

the defeated powers have not been mentioned except that of Mihirkula. It appears that Yasodharman rose to power in about 528 A.D and continued to rule till 532 A.D (the date of Mandasor inscription) but by 543 A.D. his power must have eclipsed.

6.8.2 Maukhari Dynasty

The Maukharis were an old family as we find references to them in Patanjali's work and in other early documents. The Maukharis must have started gaining political power towards the end of 5th century A.D as the Harsha inscription of 554 A.D mentions the rise of Yajnavarman from Gayaduring this period. We also get the names of three Maukhari kings mentioned in the Barabar and Nagarjuni inscriptions who ruled in Gaya, about 150 years earlier than their successors at Kanauj. The first three Maukhari kings are Yajnavarman, Sardulavarman and Anantavarman. Some of these kings held simply the title of Samanta which indicates that they were acting as kings under the over-lordship of the Guptas. From the Asirgarh Copper seal we get the names of (1) Harivannan, (2) Adityavarman, (3) Isvaravarman, (4) Isanavarman (5) Sarvavarman, who had ruled over Kanauj in U.P. The first three kings had the title of Maharaja whereas Isanavarman is called Maharajadhiraja.

It was perhaps Isanavarman who set up an independent kingdom. The early Maukhari kings had established family ties with the later Guptas. However, Isanavannan's declaration of his independence must have spoilt the relations between the later Guptas and the Maukharis for the Apsad inscription tells us of the victory of Kumaragupta the fourth king of the Later Gupta family of Magdha, over Isanavannan. But the dynasty seems to have continued its rule. Sarvavarman, the second son of Isanavannan, was successful in retrieving the lost prestige of the Maukharis by defeating Damodaragupta of the Later Gupta dynasty. The last of the Maukhari kings was Grahavannan who was married to Rajyasri, the daughter of Prabhakaravardhan of Thaneshwar and sister of the famous ruler Harshavardhana. The Malava king Devagupta attacked Kanauj and killed Grahvarman bringing the Maukhari kingdom to an end. The Maukharis held sway over modern U.P. and parts of Magadha. However,

the innumerable wars which they lost and won kept changing their boundaries.

6.8.3 Dynasty of Later Guptas

From around the middle of sixth century A.D till about 675 A.D the kings who ruled Magadha were known as Magadha Guptas or Later Guptas. However, it was not clear what connection they had with the Imperial Guptas of the earlier period. The Apsad inscription from Gaya gives the names of 8 Gupta Monarchs: (1) Krishnagupta (2) Harshagupta (3) Jivitagupta (4) Kumaragupta (5) Damodaragupta (6) Mahasenagupta, (7) Madhavagupta and (8) Adityasena.

The Later Guptas entered into matrimonial alliances with other contemporary ruling families. For example, Harshagupta married his sister to a Maukhari king. Throughout this period the Later Guptas remained engaged in battle with one enemy or the other. For example, Harshagupta had to fight the Hunas; his son Jivitagupta fought against Lichchhavis of Nepal and Gaudas of Bengal and Jivitagupta's successor king Kumaragupta defeated Maukhari King Isanarvarman. The next king Damodaragupta, son of Kumaragupta, was defeated and killed by Maukhari king Sarvavarman and lost a portion of Magadha. For some time the successors of Damodaragupta retreated to Malwa because of the Maukharis but they again established their supremacy in Magadha.

Their most powerful ruler was Adityasena, who ruled in Magadha in 672 A.D, a date which seems to occur in one of his inscriptions. The Later Gupta power survived the empire of Harshavardhana and Adityasena signalled his accession to power by the performance of a horse sacrifice. According to the Apsad inscription, his empire included Magadha, Anga and Bengal. It was just possible that his kingdom included a portion of eastern Uttar Pradesh. He was a Parama-Bhagavata and got a temple of Vishnu constructed.

The Later Gupta line came to an end with the expansion of the power of the Gaudas of Bengal westward. But the Gaudas themselves were subdued by Yasovarman of Kanauj. Besides the abovementioned dynastic powers the other important states that emerged in the post-Gupta period were those of the Maitras of Valabhi in Gujarat, Gurjaras in

Rajputana and Gujarat, Gaudas in Bengal, Varmans in Kamrup (Assam) Mana and Sailodbhava families in Orissa.

The Maitraka kings of Valabhi had initially been under the overlordship of the Imperial Guptas and they gradually established their own supremacy. The founder of the Gurjara kingdom was Harichandra whose three successors ruled till about 640 A.D. Gauda, the region of north and north-west of Bengal was ruled by Sasanka, a contemporary and archrival of Harshavardhana, as an independent kingdom in the early seventh century A.D. The Prayagaprasasti recording the achievements of the Gupta ruler Samudragupta refers to two kingdoms in Assam, Kamarupa and Davaka. Kamarupa became an important political region in north-eastern India from the middle of the fourth century A.D. Pushyavarman probably founded, around this date, the first historical royal family of Assam. This family ruled for twelve generations till the time of Bhaskaravarman who was a contemporary and an ally of Harshavardhana of Kanauj and ruled in the first half of the seventh century A.D.

Although there is evidence that some local rulers of Orissa owed allegiance to Imperial Gupta rulers towards the end of Gupta rule, two autonomous kingdoms emerged in Orissa in the second half of the sixth century A.D. One was the Mana kingdom which extended from Balasore to Puri district and the other was the kingdom of the Sailodbhavas of Kongoda, which extended from Chilka Lake to Mahendragiri mountains in Ganjam district. Both kingdoms suffered setbacks because of the rise of Sasanka of Bengal and Harshavardhana of Kanauj.

6.9 PUSHYABHUTIS--THANESHWAR AND KANAUJ

A variety of sources inform us about the rise of the family of Pushyabhutis which first ruled from Thaneshwar in Haryana and later from Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh. These sources include the text Harshacharita of Banabhatta, accounts of Hiuen Tsang and some inscriptions and coins etc. Banabhatta informs us that the founder king of this dynasty at Thaneshwar was Pushyabhuti and that the family was

known as Pushyabhuti vamsa. However, the inscriptions of Harsha make no reference to him. The Banskhera and Madhuvan plates and royal seals mention five earlier rulers among whom the first three were given the title of Maharaja. This may indicate that they were not sovereign monarchs. The fourth king Prabhakarvardhana has been described as a Maharajadhiraja which makes us infer that he was an independent monarch and had established matrimonial relations with the Maukharis by marrying his daughter Rajyasri with Grahavarman. Thaneshwar, during this time (about 604 A.D.) was threatened by the Hunas from the western side. Banabhatta has described Prabhakarvardhana as "a lion to the Huna deer".

According to him an army under Rajyavardhana was sent to defeat the Hunas but due to the sudden illness of his father he had to come back. With Prabhakarvardhana's death the family had to face troubled times for a while. The Malava king killed Grahavarman and took Rajyasri prisoner. It appeared that the Malava and the Gauda kings entered into alliance and even Thaneshwar was threatened. Rajyavardhana defeated the Malavas but was killed through treachery by Sasanka, the Gauda king. Now it was Harsha's responsibility to seek revenge and in due course he was able to establish a strong empire.

6.10 HARSHAVARDHANA—THE LAST GREAT KING OF ANCIENT INDIA

Harsha ascended the throne of Thaneshwar around 606 A.D. and immediately marched against the Gaudas. He also entered into an alliance with Bhaskarvarman—the king of Pragjyotisha (Assam) as both had a common enemy in Sasanka, the king of Gauda (Bengal). We have no information whether Harsha entered into battle with Sasanka but he was able to save his sister Rajyasri and the kingdoms of Thaneshwar and Kanauj were combined with Harsha now ruling from Kanauj. In fact Hiuen Tsang's account mentions him and his predecessors as rulers of Kanauj. Both Bana and Hiuen Tsang refer to Harsha's vow of defeating other kings. Subsequently, he fought the rulers of Valabhi and Gurjaras

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in the west; Chalukyas in the Deccan; and Magadha and Gauda in the east.

The Maitrakas of Valabhi had emerged as a strong power in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Valabhi was generally identified with Wala, 18 miles from Bhavnagar in Kathiawar. We found the names of five Valabhi kings who were contemporaries of Harsha. Hiuen Tsang has mentioned the Valabhi king Dhruvasena II Baladitya as Harsha's son-in-law who also attended the religious assembly called by Harsha at Prayaga. This indicates that Harsha's hostilities with Valabhis ended through an matrimonial alliance. However, through the inscriptions of Gurjara kings we know that their king Dadda II, had supported the Valabhis. The Valabhis remained a strong power during the reign of Harsha.

From Bana's account we know that the Gurjaras were hostile to the Vardhanas. A family of Gurjara rulers was ruling at Nandipuri in the Broach region of Gujarat in this period. This might have continued during the period of Harsha. It appears that the Gurjaras accepted the suzerainty of Chalukyas of Badami in Karnataka as a safeguard against Harsha, for the Aihole inscription mentions Lata, Malava and Gurjara as feudatories of Pulakasin II, the Chalukya ruler. A eulogy or prasasti of Pulakasin II, placed on a temple wall at Aihole, also mentioned Pulakesin's military success against Harshavardhana. Hiuen Tsang's account mentions that in spite of his victories over many kingdoms he was not able to defeat Pulakasin II, the Chalukya ruler of Badami in Karnataka. We have no details of the battle and where it was fought but this was clear that Harsha could not achieve success against Pulakesin II. Harsha was successful in his eastern campaigns. A Chinese account mentions him as the king of Magadha in 641 A.D., we had already mentioned his alliance with Bhaskaravarman the king of Assam and it was possible that they jointly conducted campaigns in Bengal and other parts of eastern India. Harsha had diplomatic relations with the Chinese for his contemporary T'ang emperor sent three embassies to his court. The last of these, under Wang Hiuen Tse, arrived in India in 647 A.D. when Harsha was no longer alive. Harsha himself had sent a Brahmana

envoy to China in 641 A.D. Harsha ruled for a period of 41 years and was said to have died about 647 A.D.

The administrative set-up under Harsha was in some ways a continuation of the system prevalent under the Guptas. Hiuen Tsang mentions that Harsha used to take up tours throughout his kingdom. The king remained the supreme authority, assisted by his ministers and other officials of different categories. For example, the Madhuban copper plate mentions the names of various officials like uparika (provincial governor), Senapati (Army chief), Dutaka (informer), etc. However, his inscriptions, Bana's Harshacharita and Hiuen Tsang's account leave no doubt that the stability of the administration and of the empire had come to depend much on the support of allies and feudatories (samantas and mahasamantas).

The officials, it appears, were not paid salaries in cash. Instead, they were given land as payment for their services. The law and order situation seems to have slackened during this period as Hiuen Tsang himself had to face plunder by dacoits. The Banskhera, Nalanda and Sonapat Inscriptions of Harsha describe him as a worshipper of Siva. However, later on he became a Buddhist and convened a conference at Kanauj. Here the doctrines of Mahayana were propagated with utmost precision. This assembly, according to Hiuen Tsang, was attended by eighteen kings and three thousand monks and continued for eighteen days. Another such event during Harsha's reign was the Quinquennial distribution ceremony at Prayaga. Harsha performed five such ceremonies in his last thirty years. He used to distribute all the treasures accumulated during the last five years in these ceremonies. Learning and education got royal patronage during this period and Nalanda University had more than ten thousand students. Harsha had given hundred villages in donation to this University.

6.11 POST-HARSHA PERIOD

The empire built up by Harshavardhana had a very loose structure; after his death even this structure collapsed. The events immediately following the death of Harsha have been described at some length by Wang-Hiuen-Tse who had been deputed as an ambassador by the Chinese emperor.

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But as he reached the borders of India, the news of Harsha's death reached him. He tells us that Arjuna (Ti-no-fo-ti) sent an army to check the entry of the Chinese ambassador. Somehow Wang-Hiuen Tse escaped and came back to fight Arjuna with an army of one thousand from Tibet and seven thousand from Nepal. Arjuna and his army were defeated and captured. Later the queen of Arjuna continued the fight but was defeated. Wang took Arjuna to China and presented him to his King. However, the authenticity of this account was doubted by certain scholars.

Various Dynasties

Among the post-Harsha rulers the Nidhanapur inscription of King Bhaskaravarman mentions about his rule in Karnasuvarna in the Murshidabad district of Bengal and nearby places. Similarly, the Apsad inscription mentions Adityasena's rule over Magadha. In Kashmir Durlabhavardhan established a dynasty known as Karakota. His grandson Chandrapida checked the entry of the Arabs in Kashmir. Another king of this dynasty, Lalitaditya Muktapida, attacked Kanauj and defeated Yasovarman. It appears from Chinese accounts that Muktapida did not annex the kingdom but entered into an alliance with him. After about 75 years of Harsha's death Yasovarman rose to power in Kanauj. He defeated the Gaudas and also won Magadha. Yasovarman, besides being a great warrior, was a great patron of scholars. His court was graced by Vakapati and Bhavabhuti. Vakapati wrote Gaudavaho in Prakrit, while Bhavabhuti wrote Malatimadhava, Mahaviracharita and Uttara-Ramacharita in Sanskrit.

Although the rule of many of these royal families lasted only for a short period, we should remember that in many regions of the Indian subcontinent this period saw the beginnings of stable state structures. These were not all India empires, but they represented the beginnings of regional political structures. We have already referred to the Kashmir valley where, in spite of many dynastic changes, we find for the first time the functioning of a local state system. In Bengal, the emergence of Pala power from the middle of the eighth century A.D and its duration for several centuries marked a new phase in the political history of the region. Similarly, in Western India, covering both Rajasthan and

Gujarat, emerged many new ruling families like the Gurjara Pratiharas, Guhilas, the Chahamanas and others who came to be considered as different clans of the Rajputs who dominated the political scene of western India for centuries. Thus, the decline of Gupta power and the collapse of Harsha's empire did not mean beginnings of political anarchy. After the end of these empires, the regional powers consolidated themselves and played important roles in the history of subsequent periods.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Write about the relation of Harsha with other powers.

2) What was the political condition in north India in the post-Harsha period?

6.12 LET US SUM UP

In the beginning of the fourth century A.D North India was divided into many small kingdoms and chiefdoms. These kingdoms in different regions often fought with each other. It was in such a political situation that the Gupta dynasty gained power and gradually established an empire. The kings of this dynasty undertook extensive military campaigns in different regions. It was under Samudragupta and Chandragupta II that the imperial power was properly consolidated. The Guptas remained a strong force till the time of Skandagupta but after him the process of disintegration started. Various factors like foreign invasion, dissension within the ruling family, reassertion of power by local chiefs, administrative weakness, etc. hastened the process of disintegration.

In the post-Gupta period many kingdoms came into existence. These kingdoms were not as large as the Gupta kingdom. The political fortunes of the dynasties which ruled these kingdoms fluctuated with time. Some of the powerful kings like Harsha managed to bring almost the whole of northern India under their control, but their kingdoms were short-lived. However, simultaneously we find that in many regions new political powers emerged which lasted for many centuries. The beginnings of many regional states can be traced to this period. Although the rule of many of these royal families lasted only for a short period, we should remember that in many regions of the India subcontinent, this period saw the beginnings of stable state structures.

6.13 KEYWORDS

- 1) **Disintegration:** The process of losing cohesion or strength.
- 2) **Saasanian:** Relating to a dynasty that ruled Persia from the early 3rd century A.D until the Arab Muslim conquest of 651 A.D.
- 3) **Kshatrapas:** The Sakas introduced Satrap system of government along with Parthians that was similar to that of the Achaemenid and Seleucid systems in Iran. Under this system, the kingdom was divided into provinces each under military governor Mahakshatraps (great satrap).
- 4) **Samvat:** Era.
- 5) **Prasasti:** Eulogistic inscriptions issued by Indian rulers from 1st millennium B.C onwards. Written in form of poetry or ornate prose, the prashastis were generally composed by the court poets.
- 6) **Samanta:** Vassal to an Emperor.

6.14 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) List the main & minor powers and the regions they ruled in north India in the sixth century A.D.
- 2) Write a note on the problems faced by Harshvardhana.
- 3) Post-Gupta age saw the seeds of foreign invasion. Elaborate.

6.15 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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6.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) For the expansion and consolidation of the Gupta power Samudragupta adopted an aggressive policy of conquests through his Campaigns in Aryavarta as well as his dakshinapathabhiyan. The Prayagaprasasti says that Samudragupta showed favour to be Dakshinapatha kings by first capturing them (grahana) and then releasing them (moksha). In Aryavarta, he not only defeated them but also annexed their territories which became integrated into the Gupta Empire. The Prasasti further says that Samudragupta reduced all states in the forest regions to the position of servants.

2) Yaudheyas, Malavas, Abhirs, Nagas, Madras, Later Kushanas etc.

Check Your Progress 2

1) He defeated the Saka king Rudrasimha III and annexed his kingdom. This brought an end to Saka Kshatrpa rule in western India and added the regions of Gujarat, Kathiawad and west Malwa to the Gupta Empire. His matrimonial alliances with the Vakatakas and the Nagas must have been of tremendous significance in his preparations for the campaigns.

2) Hun invasions, administrative weaknesses (see sec. 6.7)

Check Your Progress 3

1) Harshvardhana had cordial relation with the kingdom of Vallabhi which he secured through matrimonial alliance. The Gurjars, Sasanka

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(ruler of Assam) and Pulkeshin II did not have smooth relations with Harshvardhana. Pulkeshin II even fought a war on banks of river Narmada with Harshvardhana in which latter was defeated.

2) We found that in many regions new political powers emerged which lasted for many centuries. The beginnings of many regional states can be traced to this period, although the rule of many of these royal families lasted only for a short period (see sec. 6.11)

UNIT 7 ADMINISTRATION, SOCIETY AND ECONOMY:GUPTAS

STRUCTURE

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Administration--Guptas

7.2.1 King-Fountain Head of Justice

7.2.2 Mantriparishad—Council of Ministers

7.2.3 Armed Force

7.2.4 Revenue Management

7.2.5 Province, District, Village—Hierarchy and Executive

7.3 Economy--Guptas

7.3.1 Agronomy

7.3.2 Crafts and Trade

7.4 Society

7.5 Post Gupta Period

7.5.1 Fall of Trade

7.5.2 Dearth of Coins

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to know about the administrative set-up of the Guptas, the economic conditions under the Gupta and post Gupta period in relation to agriculture, crafts production and trade and the various aspects of social life during this period.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

There were a variety of sources which tell us about economic, social, administrative and cultural aspects of this period. These sources of information were: (i) inscription written on different materials like copper plates, stone, clay seals; (ii) coins issued by rulers of different dynasties; (iii) material from excavations; (iv) contemporary literature; and (v) accounts left by foreign travellers like Fa-Hien. In this Unit we shall tell you about the administrative set-up adopted by the Guptas. It will also deal with the economic and agrarian activities of Gupta and post Gupta period and with different sources of state revenue. The Unit also discusses the social conditions during this period.

7.2 ADMINISTRATION--GUPTAS

The Gupta kings did not interfere in the administration of those regions where the kings had accepted their suzerainty. However, this does not mean that the Guptas were ruling only through their feudatories. They had an elaborate administrative system which was in operation in areas which were directly controlled by them.

7.2.1 King-Fountain Head of Justice

The King remained the central figure of administration. However, there was a considerable change in the character of monarchy. We find that the Gupta monarchs adopted high sounding titles like: Paramabhataraka, Parama-daivata, Chakravarti, Paramesvara, etc. For example, the Allahabad Prasasti of Samudragupta describes him as "equal to the gods: Dhanada (Kubera), Varuna (Sea-God), Indra and Antaka (Vama), who had no antagonist of equal power in the world ..." Like the King who has been given a divine status in the Smriti scriptures, the Gupta monarchs

too came to be considered a divinity on earth. However, in the spirit of Smriti literature and that of Kalidasa we find Skandagupta in his Bhitari Pillar inscription eulogized as a person who "subdued the earth and became merciful to the conquered people, but he became neither proud nor arrogant though his glory was increasing day by day." His father, Kumaragupta, "followed the true path of religion".

Such references to the monarchy indicate that in spite of the supreme powers that vested in the King he was expected to follow a righteous path, and had certain duties. It was the King's duty to decide the policy of the state during war and peace. For instance, Samudragupta was prudent enough to reinstate the monarchs of dakshinapath in their original kingdoms. It was considered a prime duty of the monarch to protect his countrymen from any invasion. The King was to lead the army in case of war. This was demonstrated through the campaigns of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II. The King was also expected to support the Brahmanas, Sramanas and all others who needed his protection. He was also supposed to venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help.

As the supreme judge he looked after administration of justice according to religious precepts and existing customs. It was the duty of the King to appoint his central and provincial officers. The Prayag prasasti as well as the Apratigraha type coins of Kumaragupta I point to the appointment of successor to the throne by the reigning King. An important political development of this period was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King. And the Gupta King would not interfere with the administration of such regions.

7.2.2 Mantriparishad-Council of Ministers

The Gupta inscriptions were not very clear about the hierarchy of ministers. However, there was no doubt that the King used to take counsel of his ministers and issue written instructions to officials on all important matters.

The minister's office was perhaps hereditary. For example, the Udayagiri inscription of the time of Chandragupta II informs us that Virasena Saba,

the minister for war and peace, was holding the office by inheritance. Though the supreme judicial powers were vested in the King, he was assisted by the Mahanandanayaka (Chief Justice). In the provinces this work was entrusted to the Uparikas and in districts to the Vishayapatis. In villages, the headman and the village elders used to decide the petty cases. The Chinese traveller Fa-Hien states that capital punishment was not given at all. There were some other high officials. For example, the Mahapratihara was the chief of the palace guards; the Pratihara regulated ceremonies and granted the necessary permits for admission to the royal presence. There existed an espionage system as in the earlier period. The land grant inscriptions often mention Dutakas who were associated with the task of implementing gifts when gifts of land were made to brahmanas and others.

7.2.3 Armed Force

The Guptas must have had a big army organisation. At the time of war the King led his army but ordinarily there was a minister called 'Sandhi-Vigrahika' (Minister in charge of peace and war) who was helped by a group of high officials. The official title Mahabaladhikrita occurs in many inscriptions. Officials like Pilupati (head of elephants), Asvapati (head of horses), Narapati (head of foot soldiers) possibly worked under him. The army was paid in cash and its needs were well looked after by an officer-in-charge of stores called Ranabhandagarika. Amongst other duties this officer was to look after the supply of offensive and defensive weapons such as battle-axes, bows and arrows, spear pikes, swords, lances, javelins, etc.

7.2.4 Revenue Management

Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. In Samudragupta's time we hear of an officer Gopasramin working as Akshapataladhikrita. His duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues from the sureties of servants, to check embezzlement and recover fines for loss due to neglect or fraud. Another prominent high official was Pustapala (record-keeper). It was his duty to make enquiries before recording any transaction. The

Gupta kings maintained a regular department for the proper survey and measurement of land as well as for the collection of land revenue. Kamandaka in the *Nitisara* suggests that a King should take special care of his treasury, for the life of the state depends solely on it.

Both Kalidasa and the author of the *Narada-Smriti* state that one-sixth of the produce should be claimed as the royal revenue. Besides this there was the *Uparikara* which was levied on cloth, oil, etc. when taken from one city to another. The organization of traders had to pay a certain commercial tax (*Sulka*), the non-payment of which resulted in cancellation of the right to trade and a fine amounting to eight times of the original *Sulka*. The King had a right to forced labour (*Visthi*), *Bali* and many other types of contributions. The King's income from royal lands and forests was considered as his personal income. Besides this, the King's treasury had a right to treasure troves (treasures in the form of coin-hoards, jewels or other valuable objects, discovered from below the earth accidentally), digging of mines and manufacture of salt.

7.2.5 Province, District, Village—Hierarchy and Executive

The whole empire was divided into *Desas*, or *Rashtras*, or *Bhuktis*. The inscriptions provide us with the names of certain *Bhuktis*. In Bengal we hear of *Pundravardhara Bhukti* which corresponded to north Bengal. *Tirabhukti* corresponded to north Bihar. The *Bhuktis* were governed by *Uparikas* directly appointed by the King. In areas like western *Malwa* we find local rulers like *Bandhuvarman* ruling as subordinate to *Kumaragupta-I* but *Parnadutta* was appointed a governor in *Saurashtra* by *Skandagupta*. The Province or *Bhukti* was again divided into districts or *Vishayas* under an official called *Ayuktaka* and in other cases a *Vistiyapati*. His appointment was made by the provincial governor. Gupta inscriptions from Bengal show that the office (*Adhikarana*) of the district head associated with itself representation from major local communities: the *Nagarasresthi* (head of city merchants), *Sarthavaha* (Caravan-leader), *Prathama-Kulika* (head of the artisan community) and *Prathama Kayastha* (head of the *Kayastha* community). Besides them, were the *Pustapalas*-officials whose work was to manage and keep

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records. The lowest unit of administration was the village. In villages where there was a headman called Gramapati or Gramadhayaksha. However, the Gupta inscriptions from north Bengal show that there were other units higher than the village. In some cases we find references to Astakuladhikarana. Different categories of villages mentioned as Gramikas, Kutumbis and Mahattaras sent representatives to these offices which on various occasions functioned above the level of the village.

Besides agriculturists, there were certain other groups in the villages who followed such professions as carpentry, spinning and weaving, pot-making, oil extraction, gold smithery, and husbandry. All these groups must have constituted local institutions or bodies which looked after the affairs of the village. The village disputes were also settled by these (bodies) with the help of Grama-vriddhas or village elders.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Write in about about the revenue administration of Guptas.

2) Write the powers and duties of the King during Gupta's times.

7.3 ECONOMY--GUPTAS

Agricultural crops constituted the main resources which the society produced and that the major part of the revenue of the state also came from agriculture. This of course did not mean that agriculture was the only occupation of the people or that people lived only in villages. There were other occupations like commerce and production of crafts which had become specialized occupations and in which different social groups were engaged. This also means that, as in earlier periods, people lived

inforests, in agrarian tracts, in towns and in cities, but certain changes had started taking place in the pattern of economic production and consequently in relations between different social groups. We shall highlight some of these changes in the course of this and the next section.

7.3.1 Agronomy

Let us begin with the pattern of agricultural production. The concern of the society with agricultural production was clear from the way various aspects associated with agricultural operations were mentioned in the sources of the Gupta period. Various types of land are mentioned in the inscriptions; land under cultivation was usually called Kshetra. Lands not under cultivation were variously called as Khila, Aprahata, etc., and inscriptions give the impression that uncultivated land was being regularly brought under cultivation. Classification of land according to soil, fertility and the use to which it was put was not unknown. Different land measures were known in different regions, although one cannot be certain what exact measure was denoted by a term. In some areas Nivartana was the term used for a measure of land whereas in the inscriptions of Bengal terms like Kulyavapa and Dronavapa were used. It was not possible to classify the regions precisely according to the crops grown, but all the major categories of crops--cereals like barley, wheat and paddy, different varieties of pulses, grams and vegetables as well as cash crops like cotton and sugarcane were known long before the Gupta period and continued to be cultivated. Of course you should not assume that crops like maize or vegetables like potatoes or tomatoes were known to the farmers of the Gupta period.

The concern of the society with agricultural production was also reflected in the importance given to irrigation. In the earlier Blocks you have already read about the Sudarsana reservoir (Tadaga) in Saurashtra in Gujarat. Originally built in the Maurya period, this reservoir was thoroughly repaired when it was extensively damaged in the time of Mahakshatrapa Rudradaman (middle of the second century A.D.). It was again severely damaged in the time of Skandagupta. Parnadatta, his newly appointed governor of Saurashtra and Parnadatta's son Chakrapalita, undertook the repair of the reservoir this time. Another

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method for irrigation was to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels. A mechanism possibly known before the Gupta period, was to tie a number of pots to a chain; the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the well, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it. This mechanism was known as ghati-yantra as ghati was the name used for a pot. This type of mechanism also came to be known as araghatta.

In the *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta, which was of course written in the seventh century A.D. there was a very charming description of how cultivated fields, producing crops like sugarcane, were being irrigated with the help of ghati-yantra. In regions like Bengal, rainwater was collected in ponds and other types of reservoirs; in peninsular India, tank irrigation became gradually the norm. There were thus different systems of irrigation and the role of the state was only marginal in providing irrigation facilities to farmers. The farmers of course depended mainly on rainfall and the importance of rainfall was underlined not only in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya but also in the texts written in the Gupta period.

The sources of the Gupta period suggest that certain important changes were taking place in the agrarian society. The inscriptions from Bengal refer to sale of land by district-level administration to individuals who bought them by paying cash and made gifts of purchased land to brahmanas who were expected to perform Vedic sacrifices or to Buddhist or Jain religious establishments. But land was not only purchased and gifted; the practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common by now. Even otherwise, remuneration for serving rulers in different capacities was received in the form of land by officials of different categories. Of course, all this was not absolutely new. But by now the number of ruling families had vastly increased and thus the number of persons who received land but did not cultivate themselves went on increasing. The virtues of giving land were highly praised and those who took away gifted land were threatened with many evil consequences. All this led to the appearance, in society, of a class of

people who enjoyed superior rights over land and by virtue of these rights and by belonging to higher varnas had high economic and social status.

Of course, land rights did not belong only to those who received land. The Gupta inscriptions refer to different types of village residents like Gramikas, Kutumbis and Mahattaras who must have been village landholders, and their participation in land transactions indicates that they too were important members of rural society. Compared with the recipients of land from the rulers and the influential categories of landowners in villages, the condition of ordinary cultivators may be considered to have been rather bad. It is believed by some historians that because of the practice of land grants, the peasant population as a whole were reduced to a very low position in society. This was not entirely true. It was the ordinary cultivators, known by various terms such as Krishibala, Karshaka or Kinass who had low economic and social status. Among the actual cultivators there were those who filled the lands of others and received only a share of the produce. There were also slaves who worked on the fields of their masters. Even domestic female slaves were cruelly exploited, and a text like the Kamasutra, which was probably written in the Gupta period, told us how much hardship they had to go through at the hands of their masters.

There were other reasons why the condition of the ordinary cultivators declined considerably. One was that in many areas the appearance of small kingdoms of new rulers and their officials and sections of people who did not take part in agriculture created great inequalities in society and imposed great burden on actual tillers of the soil. The number of taxes imposed by the state on the producers also increased in this period. Further, the practice of imposing *vishti* or unpaid labour was also in vogue, although we do not know for certain how much essential it was for agricultural production. All in all, the condition of the ordinary cultivators seems to have become worse than in the earlier periods.

7.3.2 Crafts and Trade

Crafts production covered a very wide range of items. There were items of ordinary domestic use like earthen pots, items of furniture, baskets, metal tools for domestic use and so on; simultaneously a wide variety of

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luxury items including jewellery made of gold, silver and precious stones; objects made of ivory; fine clothes of cotton and silk and other costly items had to be made available to the affluent sections of people. Some of these items were made available through trade; others were manufactured locally. Descriptions of many luxury objects, of which no trace was generally found in archaeological excavations, may be found in the literary texts or inscriptions of the period. These sources also give us interesting hints regarding the status of different categories of craftsmen. For example, different varieties of silk cloth, called Kshauma and Pattavastra were mentioned in the texts of this period. An inscription of fifth century from Mandasor in western Malwa refers to a guild of silk-weavers who had migrated from south Gujarat and had settled in the Malwa region. Texts like Amarakosha and Brihat Samhita which were generally dated to this period, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.

However, for an idea of the quantity and variety of objects manufactured in this period one has to go through reports of what have been found at various archaeological sites. Many important sites like Taxila, Ahichchhatra, Mathura, Rajghat, Kausambi and Pataliputra in the Ganges Valley and other sites in other geographical regions have yielded many craft products like earthen wares, terracottas, beads made of different stones, objects of glass, items made of metals, etc. It seems that in comparison with crafts production in the preceding Saka Kushana period, crafts production in the Gupta period suffered some setback. It has, however, not yet been possible to make a very satisfactory comparative study between these two periods from this angle.

All items were not available at all places; the movement of items for trade from one place to another, therefore, continued as in the earlier periods. You have read earlier that India had extensive trade links with Central, West and Southeast Asia and with the Roman world in the preceding period, and trade routes connecting different regions within the country had been developing over centuries. That commercial activities continued in the Gupta period were evident. Like their Kushana predecessors the Gupta rulers too minted coins of different types, and the

gold coins of the Gupta rulers show excellent qualities of craftsmanship. The Guptas also issued coins in copper, silver and lead. These coins were obviously used for purposes of commercial exchange and in some regions of the Gupta Empire at least, the merchants held a high position in society. For example, two types of representatives of merchants—the Nagarasresthi and the Sarthavaha—were associated with the administration of the district headquarters in north Bengal. The seals of the Gupta period, found at Vaisali in north Bihar, suggest that the merchants constituted an important section of the population of the city of Vaisali. Literary texts of the period too show that in cities like Pataliputra and Ujjayini commercial activities were carried on briskly and people from different countries were present in them. Merchants were important communities also in these cities.

There were organizations which facilitated the functioning of both craftsmen and traders. The ancient term which was generally used for these organizations was Sreni, and the State was expected to provide the guilds protection and to respect their customs and norms. Similarly, members of the Sreni were also expected to follow the norms of the organization; otherwise, they were liable to punishment. The term Sreni was often interpreted as guild but there are different interpretations of the term and in terms of many details, we were still not quite sure what the Srenis were really like. Although Crafts production and commercial activities were brisk in the Gupta period, there are two points we should especially remember:

1) There were many types of craftsmen and they were not all identical either in wealth or in social status. For example, there was vast difference between a goldsmith and his family with a shop in a city like Ujjayini and a family of basketmakers in a village. This was reflected to some extent in the Dharmasastras written by the brahmanas in this period. The Dharmasastras assign different ranks to different groups of craftsmen, although in their scheme the craftsmen and artisans held a status lower than that of the brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaisyas. The Dharmasastras also suggest that each group of craftsmen formed a jati or caste. For example, the Kumbhakaras or potters formed one caste, the Suvarnakaras or goldsmiths formed another caste and so on. Although

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the system of caste was not really so simple, generally the trend among craftsmen was that persons following one craft formed a jati or a caste.

II) Crafts production and commercial activities perhaps started declining from the Gupta period onward in most regions and according to some historians, this resulted in the decline of towns and cities and in greater dependence of society of agricultural production.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Mention the methods adopted for irrigation during this period.

2) Discuss the sources which refer to crafts and craftsmen.

7.4 SOCIETY

You have already read that according to the scheme of society conceived by the brahmanas, society was divided into four varnas (Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra), with each varna performing the set of functions prescribed for it and enjoying whatever rights were given to it. This was the ideal social order and the state was expected to preserve it. This means that when even a small state emerged in some corner of the country, the King of that state was expected to recognize this as the ideal social order. The Brahmanas came to exert considerable influence on the kings from the Gupta period and this was quite clear from the way they received land from the kings and others. The kings, officials and others gave land not only to individual brahmanas but also some times incited big groups of brahmanas to come and settle in remote areas. Thus, the number of brahmana settlements variously called Brahmadiyas, Agraharas and so on started increasing and they started spreading, among other things, the idea of a Varna divided social order.

However, Varna order was an ideal order and there were many groups in society whose Varna identity could never be determined. Secondly, it was assumed that the Varnas would perform their duties; in reality, they may not have done so. These suggest that real society was different from the ideal society and this was also recognized by the brahmana writers of the dharmashastras. They therefore tried to determine the status of various castes or jatis in society by giving fictitious explanations of their origins. They suggested that various jatis or groups originated through varna-sankara or inter-marriage between various varnas. The various foreign ruling families of pre-Gupta period, of Greek or Sicythian origin, were given the semi-kshatriya status (vratyā Kshatriya) because they could not be considered to be of pure Kshatriya origin. Similarly, fictitious origins were thought of for tribal groups who came to be absorbed into the Brahmanical society.

The Dharmasastras also speak of apadharmā or conduct to be followed during periods of distress. This means that the Varnas take to professions and duties not assigned to them when they found it necessary to do so. In matters of profession also the Dharmasastras thus recognized that the real society was different from their ideal society. The changes of course originated much before the Gupta period, but with the spread of the Brahmanas to different parts of India, the social culture came to be very complex. The new society had to absorb many social groups thus the actual social structure came to vary from region to region, although certain ideas were common to them.

The Brahmanas came to be recognized as the purest and therefore the highest varna. Since they were associated with Sanskrit learning and performed priestly functions, they came to be closely connected with royal power. Even when the rulers were supporters of Buddhism, Jainism or particular religious sect, they continued to patronize brahmanas, particularly those of high learning. This remained one of the major reasons for the economic prosperity and prestige of the Brahmanas.

Ideally, although there were four varnas these were various groups who were kept out of this scheme. They were the antyajas or untouchables. They were considered impure; even their touch was considered impure

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and their physical presence in areas where higher Varnas lived and moved was not allowed. The Chandalas, the Charmakaras and similar groups were considered impure and outcasts. Thus in the Brahminical order of society the condition of a number of social groups remained miserable throughout.

The position of woman of higher Varnas was low. Although we hear of personalities like the Vakataka queen Prabhavati Gupta who wielded considerable power, not all women were so privileged. The Brahmana texts set down norms which women were expected to follow and women were expected in the family, to function mainly as an ideal wife and ideal mother. In many Brahmana texts, women were even considered, for various reasons, to be of the same category as the Sudras. It was significant that although Brahmanas were given land grants regularly we did not come across evidence of land being given to Brahmana women.

Another aspect of social life was that there existed great difference between the ways of life of the rich city-dwellers and people living in villages. The ideal city-dweller was the *narayaka*, i.e. the urbanite who, because of his affluence, lived a life of pleasure and refined culture. There are interesting descriptions of this way of life not only in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* but also in other literary texts of the period. Of course it would be wrong to presume that all classes of people who lived in cities could afford this way of life.

Check Your Progress 3

2) Discuss the changes in the Varna system.

7.5 POST GUPTA PERIOD

7.5.1 Fall Of Trade

One of the conspicuous economic changes in the Gupta and post-Gupta period was the decline of trade, both internal and external. Indian foreign trade registered a peak during the post-Mauryan period, when India traded

with the Roman Empire, Central Asia and South-East Asia. However, commercial decline set in during the Gupta period, and it became more pronounced by the middle of the sixth century A.D. The inflow of Roman coins into India stopped after the early centuries of the Christian era. Other evidences suggesting contact with the western world were also absent. Further, the Roman Empire itself broke up at a later date. The emergence of the Arabs and the Persians as competitors in trade did not augur well for Indian merchants. Some Byzantine coins ranging up to the sixth century have been found in Andhra and Karnataka. But numerically they cannot be compared to the rich hoards of the early Roman coins. Silk and spices were important items in the Indo-Byzantine trade. The Byzantium, however, learnt the art of growing silk worms in the middle of the sixth century A.D. Consequently the silk trade was badly affected. The migration of silk weavers from Gujarat and their taking to other vocations acquires meaning in this context. Gupta ties with Central Asia were also weak. Whatever little remained of the contacts with Central Asia and Western Asia were completely wiped off by the Huna invasions.

7.5.2 Dearth Of Coins

Decline of commerce is demonstrated by the paucity of coins in the post-Gupta period. Gold coins which were so abundant during the periods of the Kushanas and of the Guptas went out of circulation after the sixth century. The absence of silver and copper coins also attracts attention. It may be mentioned that the percentage of gold in the Gupta gold coins was constantly falling and that the gold content of the later Gupta coins was only half of that of the Kushana coins. Further, in terms of quantity the coinage of the Gupta period does not compare well with those of the early Christian centuries. The epigraphic references to coins during this period did not amount to much in the absence of actual finds. The coins of Harshavardhana were too meagre and the Rastrakutas and the Palas who came to power in the Deccan and Bengal respectively, in the eighth century, issued no coins. Metallic currency was absent in most parts of northern India, Bengal, Orissa, Central India and the Deccan. What was true of these regions also holds good for South India. Various studies

also indicate the almost total absence of coin moulds and commercial seals in the said period. However, in contrast to the general situation in most parts of the country, the Punjab region and north western part of the subcontinent has yielded numerous coins up to 1000 A.D. Besides, coin finds have also been reported from Kashmir.

It had been argued by some historians that earlier coins served the purpose of currency in later period and rendered the issue of fresh coins unnecessary. However, the period under discussion was characterised by unprecedented agrarian expansion and this alone would have normally necessitated more metallic money. Further, coins were an expression of sovereignty. Unless the compulsions were serious enough no rulers would have willingly forgone the privilege of minting coins in their own name. The decline of trade and the grant of land to high functionaries in lieu of money payments did away with the need for coins. Moreover, there was evidence for barter and the use of cowries as a medium of exchange in daily transactions.

7.5.3 Fall Of Towns

Decline in trade, paucity of coins and absence of coin moulds and commercial seals indicate economic decline and fall in demand for finished products. In this period the towns which were active centres of craft production in the post-Mauryan period experienced decay and desertion. The pre-Kushana and Kushana towns in northern India and those associated with the Satavahanas in the Deccan began to decay from the middle of the third or the fourth century. What was true of northern India, Malwa and the Deccan was equally true of southern India. Actually, urban decline took place in two phases. The first coincided with the rise of the Guptas. During this period sites such as Sanghol, Hastinapur, Atranjikhhera, Mathura, Sonkh, Sravasti, Kausambi, Khairadih, Chirand, Tamluk, etc., in the Upper and Middle Gangetic plain experienced decline. Early prosperous centres such as Ujjain, Nagar, Pauni, Ter, Bhokardan, Nasik, Paithan etc., and spread over Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra witnessed similar trends. Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu and the Satavahana urban centres in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were no exception to this phenomenon.

The habitation deposits of the fourth-sixth centuries at all such sites were thinner compared to those of the earlier centuries and yield poorer and lesser material remains. The Gupta layers at many sites exhibit the reuse of raw materials, like bricks, from earlier deposits. The spatial spread of urban centres and the available civil amenities were nowhere near what it was earlier during the Kushana period. Numerically, very few sites like Pataliputra, Vaishali, Varanasi and Bhita survived the first phase of decay. These towns were in the heartland of the Gupta state and that possibly accounts for their survival. The second phase of urban decay set in after the sixth century and these centres ceased to be towns thereafter.

In a situation of general decline of crafts and commodity manufacture, the making of stone beads, manufacture of shell objects and of ivory and glass objects registered overall collapse. These objects were very scantily found in post-fifth century habitation deposits. Post-Gupta pottery likewise shows no artistic skill and was largely of ordinary variety. The decline of towns and cities was reflected in contemporary literature and inscriptions as well. Up to the sixth century inscriptions and seals refer to the importance of artisans, craftsmen and merchants in the life of the towns. Inscriptions from Bengal suggest that they played an important role in urban administration. However, after the sixth century such information was not forthcoming.

The change in the meaning of certain terms in the post-Gupta times also indicates the changing conditions. For example, the term *Sreni* which stood for guilds came also to mean caste and the term *nigama* came to mean villages. Varahamihira's *Brihat Samhita*, a work belonging to the first half of the sixth century, speaks of the decline of crafts, towns and trade. The decline of Buddhist towns in northern India was attested by the account of Hiuen Tsang who visited India during the time of Harshavardhana. Unlike the robust urban life so vividly depicted in Vatsyana's *Kamasutra*, post-Gupta literature such as the *Kuttanimatam* of Damodaragupta (7th century) was concerned with life in the countryside. All settlements, however, were not rural. In the post-Gupta period non-agriculturist settlements appeared as seats of administration, military garrisons and religious or pilgrimage centres. Military camps were referred to as *skandhavara* in inscriptions of the fifth-eighth

centuries. There was evidence to suggest that certain towns continued to survive as a result of their conversion to centres of pilgrimage. All these non-agriculturist settlements, variously known as pura, pattana, nagara and rajadhani, were centres of consumption and not production.

7.5.4 New Design Of Agricultural Relations

We shall now discuss the main features of agrarian relations which developed in the Gupta and post Gupta period.

7.5.4.1 Land Grants

Land grant charters bestowed the beneficiary with superior rights over and above those of the inhabitants in the donated villages. The donee was entitled to collect all kinds of taxes. He could collect regular and irregular taxes and fixed and unfixed payments. The list of taxes in the inscriptions end with the expression *adi* meaning *et cetera* which could be used to the advantage of the landlord, when necessary. The donees enjoyed these exceptional advantages in addition to such regular taxes as *bhaga*, *bhoga*, *kara*, *uparikara*, *hiranya*, *udranga*, *halikakara*, etc. In fact, the peasantry in early medieval India was subjected to an ever increasing tax rent burden. The Vakataka grants list fourteen types of dues. The Pallava records specify eighteen to twenty two of them. By the turn of the first millennium A.D. the number of taxes increased enormously.

The superior rights of the beneficiary in land were clear in the charters belonging to northern Maharashtra, Konkan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in the Gupta and post-Gupta times. The donees were empowered with the right to evict the peasantry at will and to replace them with new peasants. From the seventh century onwards grants give away water resources, trees, bushes and pastures to the donee. The transfer of these resources to the donee not only affected the peasantry of the donated villages adversely but also strengthened the power of the donees. Forced labour was referred to in the Skanda Purana. Inscriptions too suggest that by the fifth-sixth centuries *vishti* was a well entrenched practice in western, central and southern India. In addition, the clause appeared in the land grant charters asking the peasants to carry out the orders of the

donee. In regions such as Chamba, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Eastern India the condition of the peasants clearly suffered a decline.

7.5.4.2 Rise of Landlords

Yajñavalkya and Brihaspati, authors of Smṛiti works, mention four grades of land rights in the same piece of land. According to them holders of rights of different grades were the Mahipati (the king), Kshetrasvamin (the master of the land), Karshaka (cultivator) and the sub-tenant. Land grants led to hierarchical rights over land and sub-infeudation. The practice gave rise to a hierarchy of landlords, which lived off the surplus produced by the actual cultivators. The religious establishments in eastern India and the south with their enormous donations in land, cash, livestock etc. emerged as landed magnates at Ramagiri in Orissa and at Nalanda in Bihar were recipients of large scale land donations. The Nalanda monastery enjoyed the gift of 200 villages. Moreover, land and villages were given away to the temples in south India during the reign of the Pallavas. The Chola records, in the succeeding period, more frequently refer to such devadana (literally 'given to gods') gifts of land. From the Pallava period onwards temple servants were remunerated through assignments of land. The implications were obvious. Religious establishments became landed beneficiaries and in turn they gave plots of land to their dependants such as petty officials, artisans, musicians, attendants etc. Such assignments could be subleased to the actual tiller of the soil. Likewise, temple land was leased out to tenants for cultivation. Grants of land to temples from the Pallava period onwards resulted in the growth of a complex system of land tenure. Intensification of the process, especially from the eighth century onwards, created a class of peasantry which was overburdened with taxes and which was subsistent to a class of dominant landlords with superior rights in land.

7.5.4.3 Self-Sufficient Economy

Gupta and post Gupta economy experienced the rise and growth of a number of rival settlements which were not linked to exchange networks and long-distance trade. Although the exchange networks did not entirely collapse, the transfer of settlements to various categories of donees had

created a congenial atmosphere for the emergence of self-sustaining, closed units of production and consumption. Local needs came to be met locally.

The movement of soldiers for wars, pilgrims to religious centres and brahmanas for the acquisition and enjoyment of land grants were possibly the only forms of spatial mobility. The Dharmasastras restricted the movement of the brahmanas. In order to keep their Vedic and domestic fires burning they were not expected to travel long distances. Sea voyages were prohibited. Similarly, marriages in neighbouring areas were preferred. All this fostered strong local identities. The growing sense of localism and the self-sufficiency of the villages were reflected in expressions such as gramadharama, gramacara, and sthanacara all referring to village or local practices in contemporary Puranic literature.

7.5.5 Agricultural Extension

The epigraphic evidence that we had from the Gupta and post-Gupta period suggests agrarian growth and rural expansion on an unprecedented scale. The patronage extended by kings, princes and chiefs to agriculture, improvement in irrigational facilities, increasing knowledge of agricultural sciences etc. were some of the causative factors which strengthened the rural economy.

Decline of towns may have led to the migration of a number of skilled artisans into the countryside. Some of them even changed their vocations. The dispersal of technical skill along with artisans and craftsmen into the countryside stimulated agrarian growth. Land grants in tribal frontiers brought virgin land under cultivation. About fifty ruling powers were in existence in the fifth to the seventh centuries, in the Deccan and Central India. They were spread over Maharashtra, Eastern Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Orissa and Bengal. The various new ruling dynasties in this region issued their own land grants which indicate the existence of officials, army men etc. in their kingdoms. Each of these states depended on revenues from land and agriculture. In fact, in post-Gupta times agriculture constituted the basis of the state. Thus, the rise of states in such areas in which states were absent earlier presupposes agrarian expansion and the spread of village economy.

Numerous villages with Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit names came up in this period. Contemporary literature presented a vivid account of village life and reflects the richness of rural settlements. The Skanda Purana mentions numerous villages region wise. Similarly, texts belonging to a later period deal with the establishment and spread of rural settlements in western and southern India. The land grant charters themselves record innumerable village names in post-Gupta times; these include names of older settlements. However, new ones too emerged on a large scale. We come across village names not only when such villages were donated but also when other villages were mentioned as boundaries of donated villages.

7.5.5.1 Agricultural Proficiency

The increasing concern with agriculture could be seen in the detailed instructions regarding agriculture in the Brihat Samhita, Agni Purana, Vishnu Dharmottara Purana and Krishiparasara. The importance of manure for crop cultivation was clearly laid down in the Harshacharita. It was mentioned that cow dung and refuse were used for manuring the fields. The Harshacharita also speaks about different types of cultivation - plough cultivation, spade cultivation and slash and burn cultivation. The attention paid to agriculture by rulers and landed beneficiaries can also be seen in the detailed descriptions of the plough and the improvement in irrigation techniques. The popularity and wide prevalence of the land measure called hala during this period underlines the significance of the plough. The Kashyapiyakrisisukti, a text whose core was placed in the eighth-ninth centuries, deals with all aspects of agriculture at length.

From the last centuries of the first millennium A.D. onwards we have texts which suggested different methods for the treatment of plant and animal diseases. The Harshacharita speaks of some irrigation facilities in the region around western Uttar Pradesh. It mentions such devices for irrigation as the Udghataghati and the ghatiyantra. Inscriptions from Bengal mention rivers, rivulets and channels in the context of rural settlements and their boundaries and we also come across the expression 'devamatrika' (watered by rain) suggesting the dependence of agriculture on rains and rivers.

7.5.5.2 Agricultural Production

Varieties of cereals, including rice, wheat and lentil; legumes, vegetables and fruits are mentioned in the Amarakosha which was dated to the Gupta period. People possessed the knowledge of fruit grafting as was evident from the Brihat Samhita. Hieun Tsang mentions varieties of rice, mustard, ginger, numerous vegetables and fruits. The Harshacharita similarly provides a good account of crops and plants. We come across references to different types of rice, sugarcane, mustard, sesame, cotton, wheat, barley and pulses. Various kinds of spices such as turmeric, clove, black pepper and ginger were also grown. Vegetables such as gourd, pumpkin, cucumber, beans, garlic etc. were produced. Among fruits one may mention coconut, arecanut, jackfruit, oranges, mahua and mango. Betel leaf was also grown. Some of these plants and fruits were also recorded in the inscriptions of the period.

Bana's Harshacharita had a wide geographical canvas and in addition to the Upper and Middle Gangetic plains it included descriptive details about Assam, Bengal and Central India. Therefore, we come across references to bamboos, cotton plants, loads of flax and hemp bundles in Central India, and cane, bamboo and silk in the context of eastern India. In the Pallava and Chalukya territories roughly spread over Tamil Nadu, the Western Deccan and parts of Karnataka rice, millets, gingerly and sugarcane were cultivated. The fruits that were grown included plantain, jackfruit, mango and coconut. Unmistakably, the number and variety of crops, fruits and vegetables were striking. The presence of brahmanas and artisans in rural settlements, land reclamation, certain changes in technology and the expansion of irrigation facilities stimulated the proliferation of crops and plants. The consequence of all these developments was unprecedented growth of rural economy.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Write a short note on decline of towns in Gupta and post Gupta period.

2) Analyze new patterns of agrarian relations in Gupta and post Gupta period.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, after going through the various aspects of Gupta administration, economy and society we find that considerable changes had taken place when compared to the earlier periods. An important aspect related to kingship was the continuity of various kings in their regions once they had accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta King. There was considerable concern towards agricultural production and this was reflected from the way irrigation got priority during this period. The practice of gifting land to religious donees had become quite common and the brahmanas exerted considerable influence over the King. There was differentiation amongst the cultivators and compared to the rich, the condition of ordinary cultivators declined considerably. Similarly, the wealth and social status of different types of craftsmen also varied. Though commercial activities continued during this period it appears that there was a decline in crafts production. The Varna system continued in society. However, various foreign ruling families were assimilated in the Varna system. At the same time various groups were kept out of the Varna scheme and were considered untouchables. There was also a considerable decline in the position of women in society.

7.7 KEYWORDS

Acculturation: Adopt to a new culture

Barter: Exchange of goods for other goods

Benefice: Gifted landed property held by Brahmanas, etc.

Beneficiary: receiver of benefits

Charter: deed conveying grant of rights

Donee: recipient of gift

Exotic: introduced from abroad

Itinerant: travelling from place to place

Pedlar: travelling salesperson

7.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) Write a note on administration of the Guptas.
- 2) Mention the certain changes that took place hadin the pattern of economic production and consequently in relations between different socialgroups.
- 3) How agrarian expansion took place in Gupta and Post Gupta period?

7.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Land revenue was the main source of the state's income besides the fines. InSamudragupta's time we hear of an officer Gopasramin working as Akshapataladhikrita.His duty was to enter numerous matters in the accounts registers, recover royal dues fromthe sureties of servants, to check embezzlement and recover fines for loss due to neglect

or fraud. Another prominent high official was Pustapala (record-keeper) who enquires before recording any transaction. One-sixth of the produce should be claimed as the royal revenue. 2) The King remained the central figure of administration. It was the King's duty to decide the policy of the state during war and peace. The King was to lead the army in case of war. The King was expected to support the Brahmanas, Sramanas and all others who needed his protection. He was also supposed to venerate the learned and religious people and give them every possible help. As the supreme judge he looked after administration of justice according to religious precepts and existing customs. It was the duty of the King to appoint his central and provincial officers.

Check Your Progress 2

1) The concern of the society with agricultural production was also reflected in the importance given to irrigation. First method of irrigation was through the reservoir (lake: Sudarsana). Then the peasants used to draw water from wells and supply the water to the fields through carefully prepared channels. They also tie a number of pots to a chain; the chain with the pots reached down to the water of the well, and by making the chain and the pots rotate, it was ensured that the pots would continuously fill with water and empty it. This mechanism was known as ghati-yantra as ghati was the name used for a pot. This type of mechanism also came to be known as araghatta.

2) Texts like Amarakosha and Brihat Samhita which were generally dated to this period, list many items, give their Sanskrit names and also mention different categories of craftsmen who manufactured them.

Check Your Progress 3

1) The Dharmasastras spoke of apadharma or conduct to be followed during periods of distress. This means that the Varnas take to professions and duties not assigned to them when they found it necessary to do so. For example, the Brahmanas came to exert considerable influence on the kings from the Gupta period and this was quite clear from the way they received land from the kings and others. To manage the land, they were given fiscal and administrative rights.

Check Your Progress 4

1) In this period the towns which were active centres of craft production in the post-Mauryan period experienced decay and desertion. The pre-Kushana and Kushana towns in northern India and those associated with the Satavahanas in the Deccan began to decay from the middle of the third or the fourth century. Actually, urban decline took place in two phases. The first coincided with the rise of the Guptas. During this period sites such as Sanghol, Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, Mathura, Sonkh, Sravasti, Kausambi, Khairadih, Chirand, Tamluk, etc., in the Upper and Middle Gangetic plain experienced decline. The second phase of urban decay set in after the sixth century and these centres ceased to be towns thereafter.

2) Land grant charters bestowed the beneficiary with superior rights over and above those of the inhabitants in the donated villages. The donee was entitled to collect all kinds of taxes. He could collect regular and irregular taxes and fixed and unfixed payments, empowered with the right to evict the peasantry at will and to replace them with new peasants. From the seventh century onwards grants gave away water resources, trees, bushes and pastures to the donee. The transfer of these resources to the donee not only affected the peasantry of the donated villages adversely but also strengthened the power of the donees.